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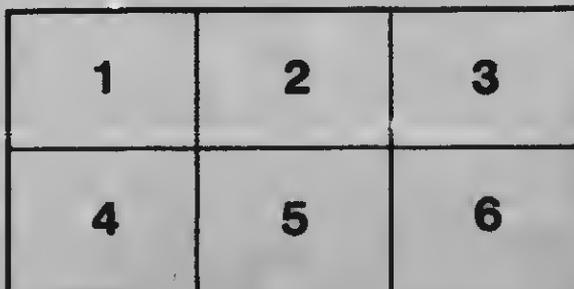
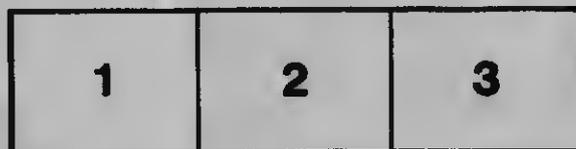
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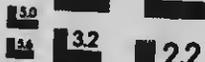
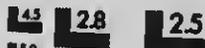
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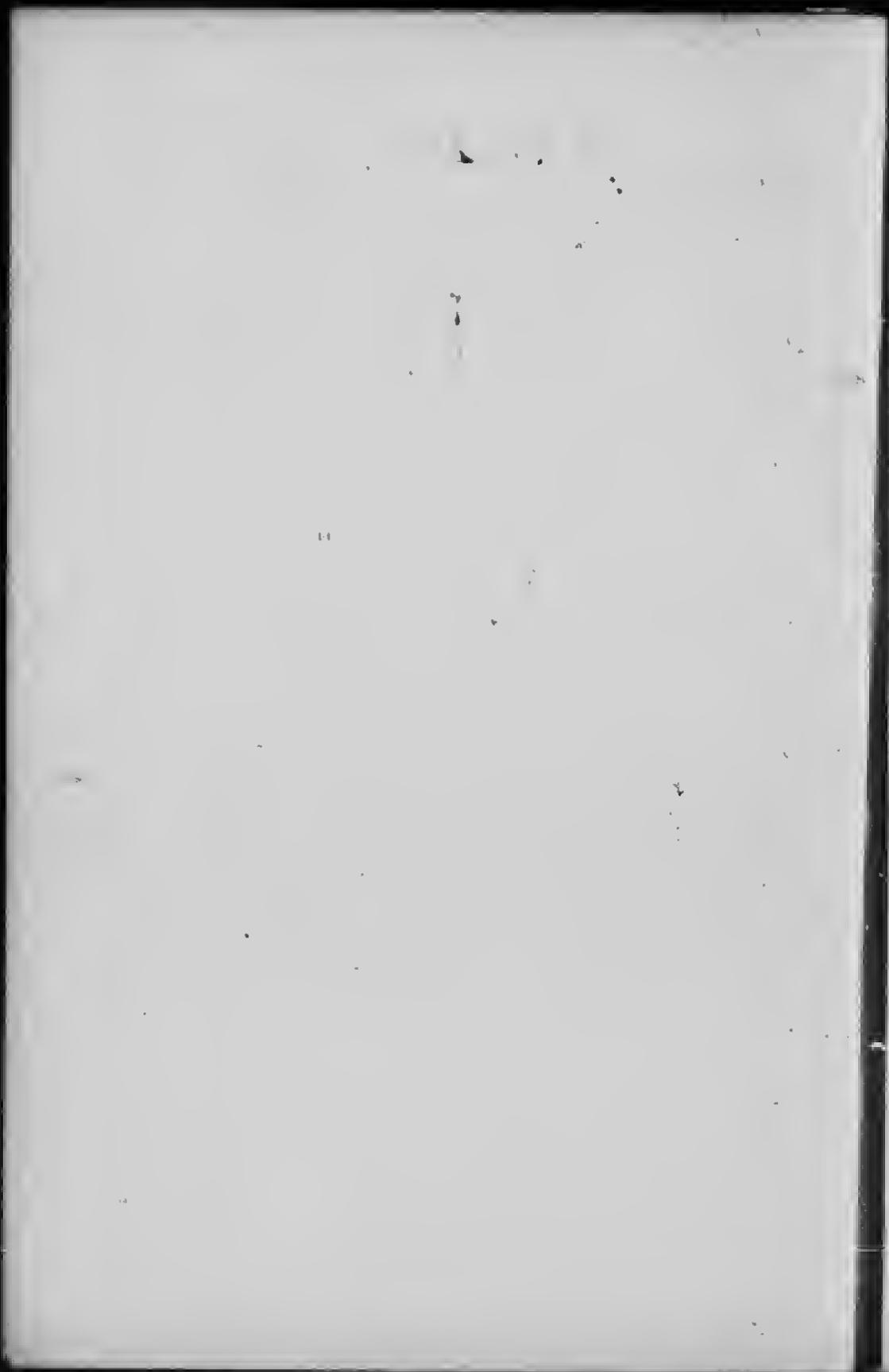
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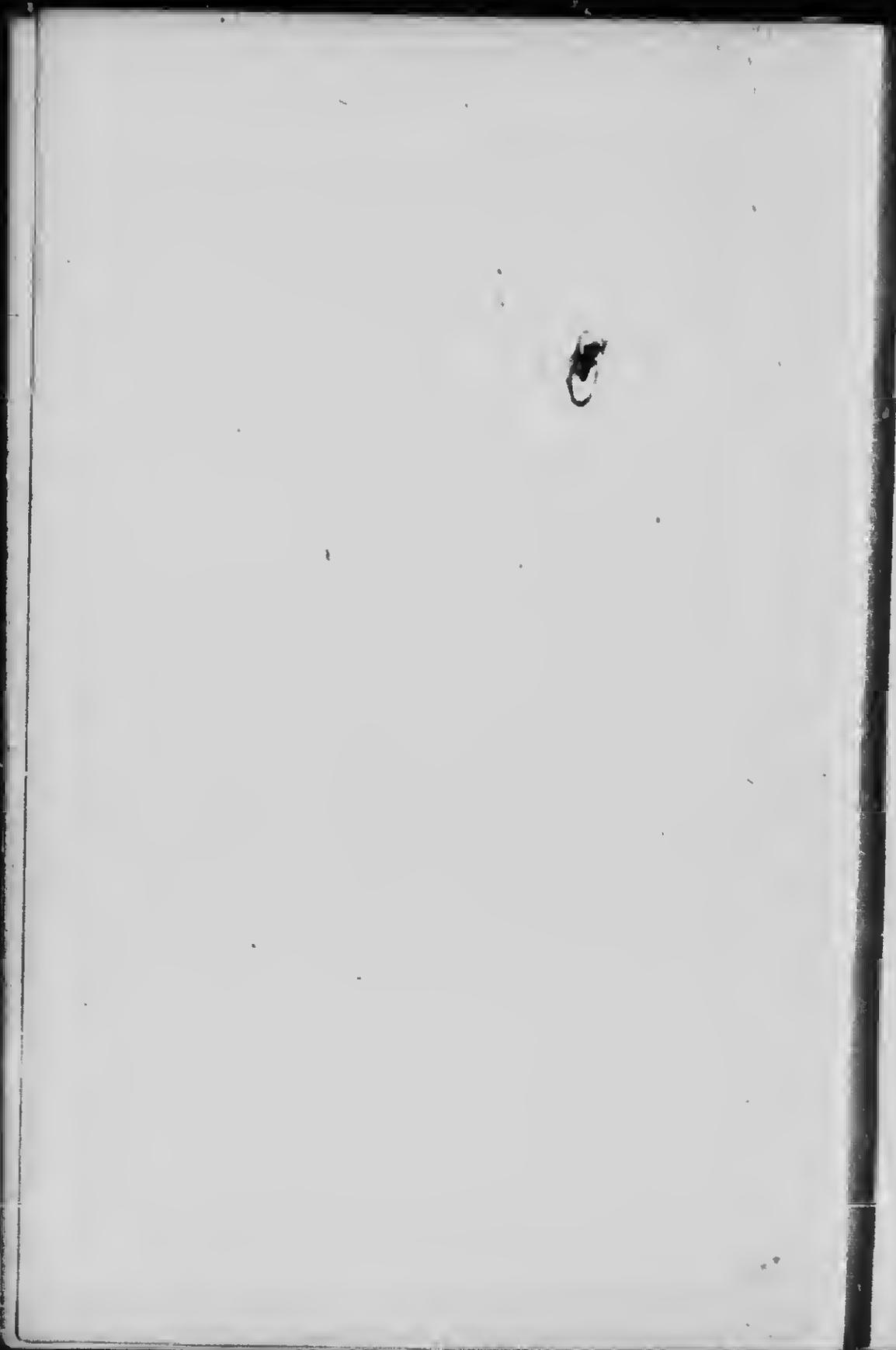
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THE REFUGEE





Roland had seized his wrist, and again the shot went wide

THE REFUGEE

THE STRANGE STORY
OF NETHER HALL

BY
CAPTAIN CHARLES GILSON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY ARTHUR BECHER



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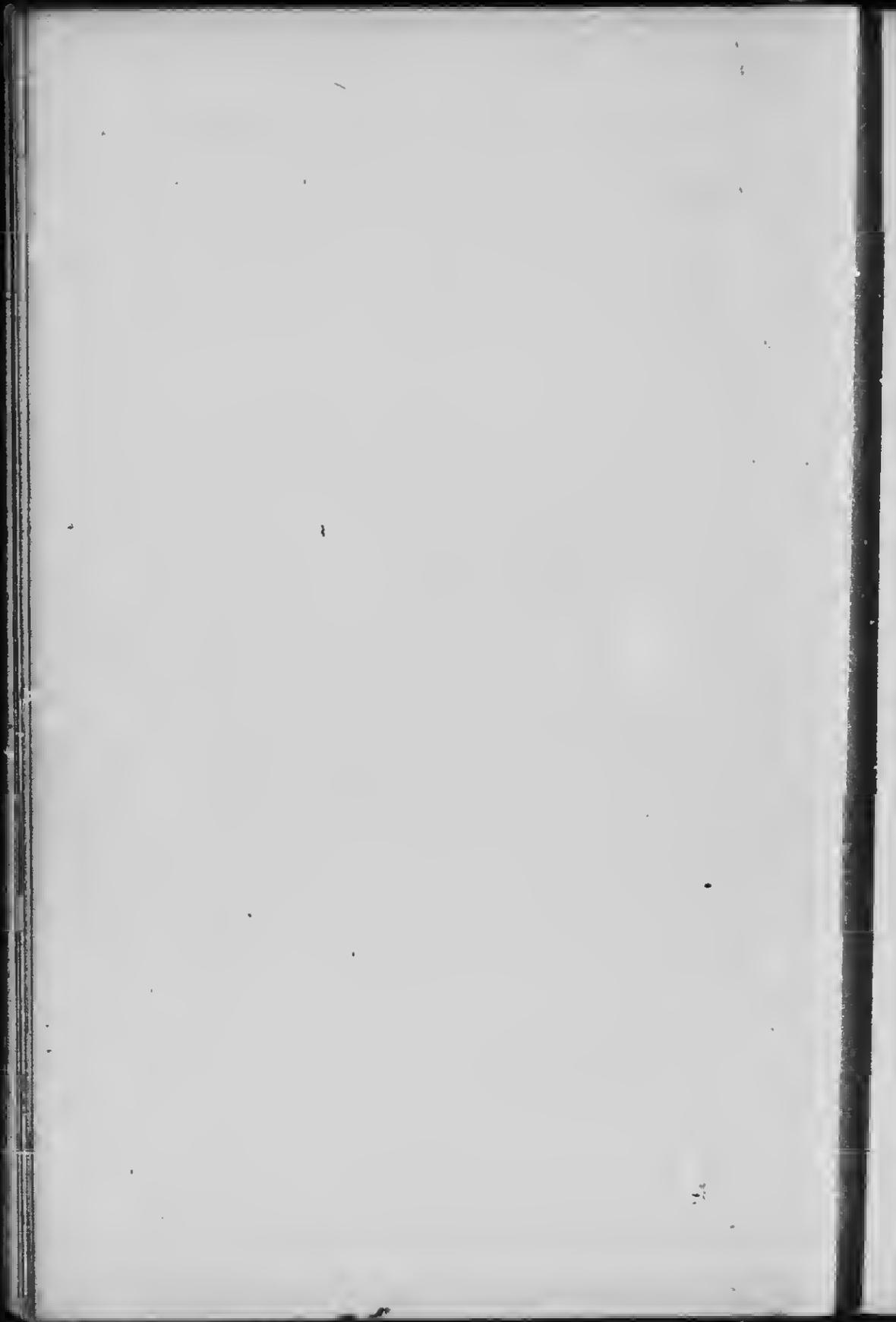
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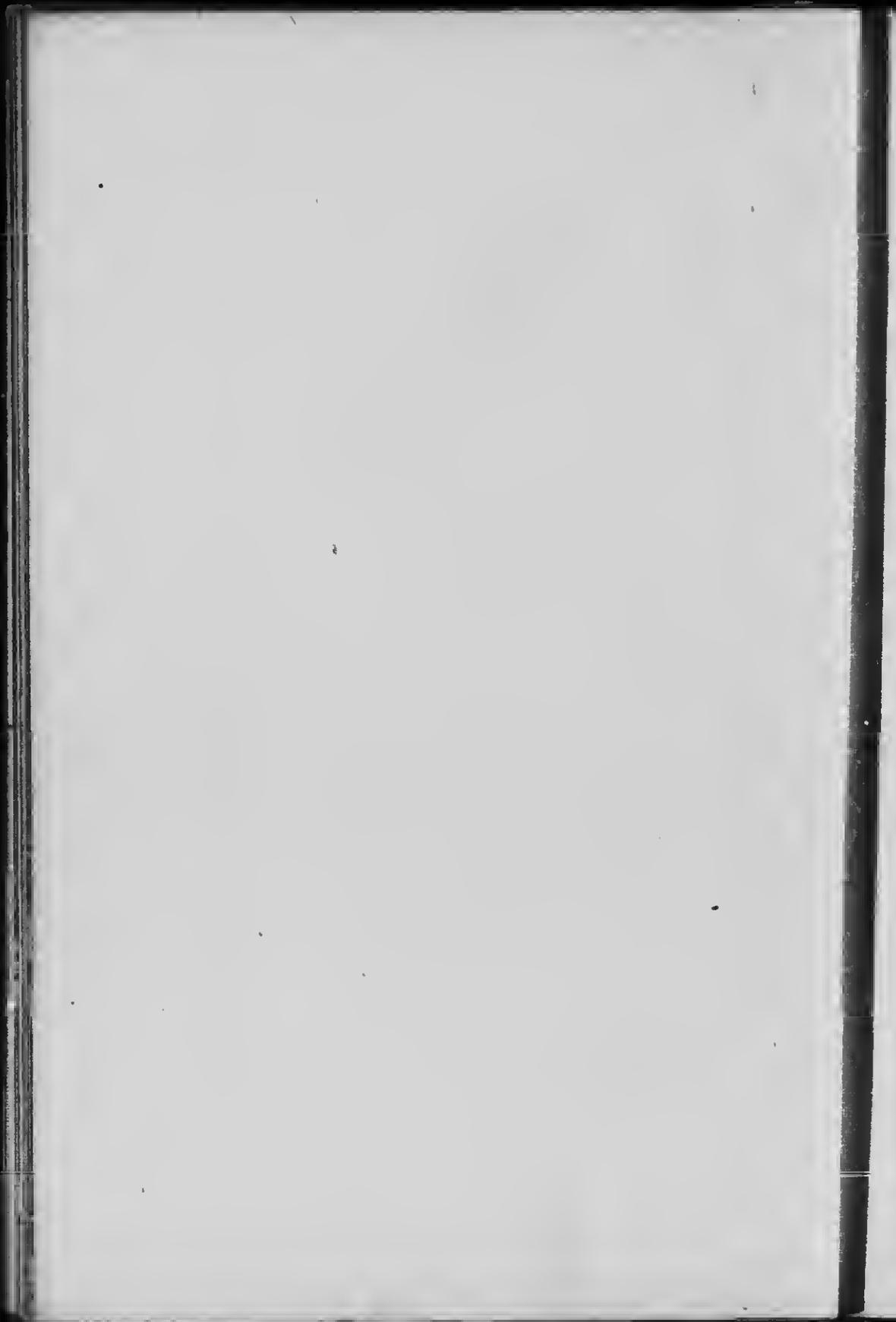
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TO
EILEEN ASHWIN



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CHAPTER I

THE VICOMTE LANDS

A SEAFARING man, who had come from Ipswich by the London coach and walked to Dedham from Stratford St. Mary, had openly boasted in the tap-room of the Sun Inn that he knew every inlet on the North Sea coast between Mersey Island and the port of Hull. At this, both Master Anthony Packe, then in his fifteenth year, and John Constable, two years the other's senior, were prodigiously impressed, then and there putting him down for a smuggler, which, as a matter of fact, he was.

These suspicions were by no means decreased when, shouldering a stick to which he had tied all his portable belongings done up in a red bandana handkerchief, the man left the village at

sunset and set off along the tow-path in the direction of Flatford Mill.

A quick word passed between the boys. John vouched he had caught a glimpse of the heel of a pistol-butt; and Anthony was even ready to swear that he had seen the stain of blood on the stranger's hands. Whereupon, off they went in his tracks, holding back under cover of the willows that fringe the banks of the Stour.

The man, with his short seaman's coat with brass buttons on the sleeves, and his short, stubbly beard as black as ink, looked a desperate blade, and into the bargain as strong as Hercules. He was near as broad as he was high, with a chest as deep as a churn.

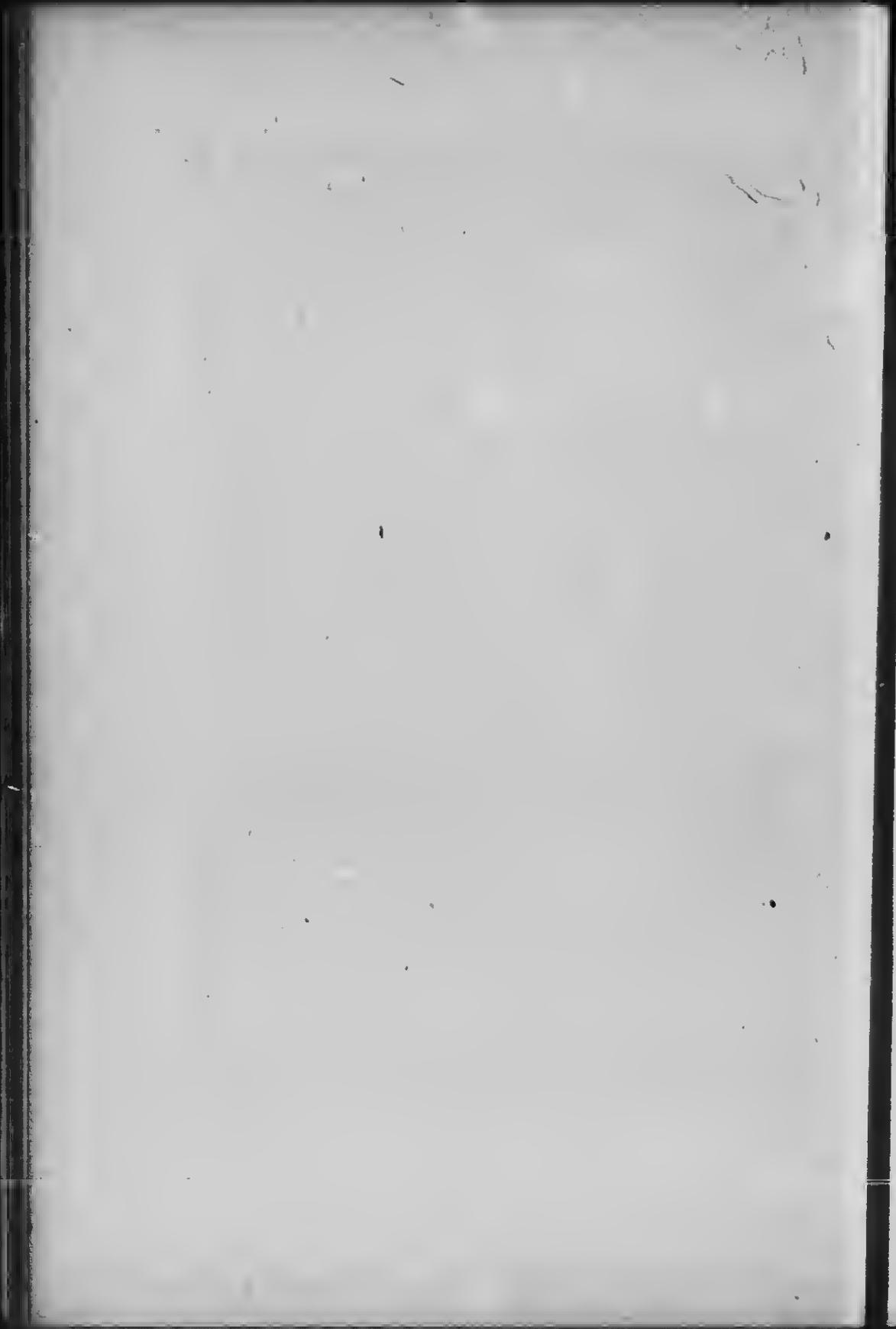
Altogether, there was an element of adventure in the air—so much so, in fact, that at Flatford the boys, deeming it expedient to reinforce their party, called for Willie Lott at his now famous house by the Mill, and told him they were on the track of a dangerous man. Lott listened, and observed that he had best get hold of a bit of a stick. He then turned into the cottage and came out again with a bludgeon that could have felled an ox.

"Are you armed yourselves?" asked Lott.

They both felt in their pockets. Anthony



The man boasted in the tap-room of the Sun Inn that he knew every inlet on the North Sea Coast



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produced a catapult, but John Constable could do nothing better than a sketch-book and a box of crayons.

"No matter," laughed Willie, as yet as bold as brass. "I reckon the three of us will be as much as he'll care to manage."

And at that they set off together, still keeping to the riverside.

Owing to the delay they had temporarily lost sight of the man, but on quickening their footsteps they soon caught the sound of his boots sucking and cheeping in the mud, though he himself was entirely lost to view; for, by then, the sun had set and a mist was risen in the valley that was only topped by the tall white poplars and the crest of Jupe's Hill above the osier-bed to the south.

Between Dedham and Flatford the country is laid out in rich pastures, bounded by leafy, tortuous lanes, with here and there a hayrick or a barn. But at Jupe's and the Valley Farm this Arcadia, that in after years John Constable, the great landscape painter, was to make so famous, comes abruptly to an end; and in the year of grace seventeen hundred and ninety-two he who ventured farther set foot on No Man's Land. It is a stretch of open marsh, as level as the sea.

The poplars no longer tower into the air; and even the crooked, dripping willows are few and far between.

As the three boys picked their way across the marsh, they felt their pulses quicken; for it was an ugly place at any time, and most of all at nights. There are many weird legends of the Essex flats, of ghosts and will-o'-the-wisps, and even in quite recent years there were smugglers in the creeks. And barefaced ruffians they were, who made no secret, but rather boasted openly, of their crimes, breaking into the inns at Brantham in the small hours and shouting loudly for rum, with their pistols smoking and the powder on their thumbs. They were none of your forest outlaws or peeping fugitives in caves: they carried their cutlasses in their belts and their lives in their horny hands, by day and night, in the lowlands or out on the open sea. They knew the dikes and the osier-beds as only the otters and the foxes knew them; they were as quick as the first and as cunning as the latter; and they put their trust in no man, least of all their friends.

Yet this was not the whole of it. There were other dangers by the score. There were the dikes and bogs and, last but not least, there was

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Judas Gap—a wooden gate, surmounted by a bridge, that separates the water of the river from that of a wide and silent pool.

This spot lies in the marshland between Flatford and Brantham locks. The pool itself is about a hundred feet across. No man yet has ever found its depth; and if you throw a stone into the center, it goes in with a dull splash, something like to that of a bullet into a bank of clay. Perhaps, a moor-hen starts up from the reeds and makes off up one of the creeks, the only sign of life that is anywhere to be seen. Then it is that you may stand upon the Gap and watch the rings upon the surface, rippling toward the bank, so quick and close upon each other that it is not possible to count them. You stand in patience, waiting for them to end. But the rippling circles only laugh at you; you have filled the place with life, and as they softly lap the woodwork at your feet, each time it is as if it were the traitor's kiss.

Judas Gap is against the river-bank on the Essex side; and the gate is green with slime and warped with many years. Yet, should a dog go down to the pool to drink, he quickly turns away, for the water is salt though the sea is miles away.

The truth of the matter is, that there is a long and narrow creek, which, twisting and turning as the river does, in general direction runs parallel to the Stour, and carries the sea-water from the estuary up to Judas Pool. When the river is swollen, the fresh water pours down and mingles with the salt; and at twelve o'clock, when the moon is full and the spring tides rise across the marshes, it is the creek that is flooded, and the saltwater bursts into the river at the Gap.

When the man boasted in the Sun Inn that he knew every inlet on the coast, a significant look passed between the boys. Though they never spoke they understood each other; for the look meant "Judas Gap!" Instantaneously, both their eyes went back again to the man; and it was then that Constable thought he saw the pistol-butt; and Anthony, the blood upon the stranger's hands.

At the meeting of the Old River with the Stour the stranger turned to the south, toward the cattle bridge that leads to the open marsh. In the silence, the boys heard his heavy boots ring out upon the planking, like the blows of a hammer on a coffin lid. There was something ghostly in No Man's Land at night.

With fast-beating hearts they crossed after

him on tiptoe. As they reached the center of the bridge a water-rat slid into the black, weedy water, and made up the stream. Each of the boys involuntarily drew back his hands and clutched his neighbor's sleeve.

Across the bridge, they stopped to listen. The man had turned to the north.

"Zooks!" uttered Lott in a trembling whisper.

"He 's making fair for Judas Gap!"

He said the name with a touch of horror in his tone; and John Constable caught the mood.

"Let 's go back," he faltered.

"No, no," said Master Anthony; "keep on."

And thus they were put to shame by the youngest of them all; and not for the first time by any means. Each of the elder boys had always held Anthony in open admiration. They boasted freely of his friendship, not because he was the only son of the fine gentleman who lived in Nether Hall—for, though the age of fealty was passed, that of snobbery was not yet come—but because his foolhardiness was matter for common talk. John Constable had taken some of his reflected glory to himself when he stood in the Grammar School playground, the center of an admiring group, and related how he had gone up to Tall Trees with Anthony Packe, and seen

him jump from one tree to the other, fifty feet from the ground.

For all that, on this occasion they could have spared him half his spirit; for both were loath to go on, and willing enough to let Anthony lead the way.

At Judas Gap he halted; and the three paused to listen, crouching low in the long, coarse grass, while the water drew in about their knees.

They remained thus for some time, during which the stranger could never have moved, else they had heard his boots in the mud; and previously he had taken little care of how he went, never suspecting that there were followers on his track.

The whole place was inordinately still. They heard only a pewit cry and the rising tide in the creek gently stir the reeds. There was not a breath of air when the moon rose and caught the standing water on the marsh.

Suddenly a long whistle, soft at first, but swelling as it gained a higher note, broke out upon the silence of the night. It came from Judas Gap.

Then a silence, during which the boys hardly dared to breathe. The whistle was repeated. And then from far across the marsh came an

answering call, like an echo faint and broken in the distance.

Lott's teeth began to chatter, but he closed his jaw with a snap, and laid a tighter hold upon his club. Constable was low down in the grass; and despite the water that trickled in at the top of his boots, he never moved. Anthony alone had raised himself. His eyes were peering eagerly in the direction of the Gap.

How long they remained there they could not afterward say. It seemed an interminable time.

At last they caught the sound of the wash of oars; a boat was stealthily approaching up the creek. Time and again a bird rose from the rushes; and they heard an otter take the river to their left.

The moon now lit up the valley, and catching the white lowland mist, spread over it a white, iridescent sheen, like that of phosphorus in the sea.

"Boys," exclaimed Lott, in horror, "they're coming right on top of us!"

"Hist!" whispered Anthony. "They are in the creek, you fool! I'm going on to see."

And before they could stop him, he had slipped like an eel from between them, and soon was lost in the mist.

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To jump from Tall Trees was one thing; but this altogether was another. His two companions looked at each other askance. There was not a yard between them. In the pale moonshine they each thought how white was the other. It was some time before either found the voice to speak.

"I 'm going with him, Willie," said Constable, at last, very brave, but with a tremor in his voice.

He moved forward; but Willie Lott had quickly grasped him by the leg.

"Wait a bit!" he gasped; "wait a bit for me! I 'm not going to loiter here alone! There's been dead men found in Judas Pool before to-night."

"Then come on," said Constable; "only keep your head down, or we 're lost."

"Oh," groaned Lott, "I wish I 'd never come."

Nevertheless, he had; and no doubt hoping to make the best of a bad job, he pulled himself together, and they crept on side by side. They paused frequently to listen. Each time they heard the boat drawing near to the entrance to the pool. They could now hear the water dripping from the oars. Then, on again they went, until they came unexpectedly upon Master An-

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thony, flat upon his face on the bank of the pool not five yards from Judas Gap.

The river was on one hand, the pool upon the other. Near by, a water-lily caught the current of the stream; and the water lipped and juggled on the leaf. The moonshine fell upon the pool, which was all but filled to overflowing. The white face of the salt water between the rush-grown banks was as still and silent as a stone upon a grave.

Upon the opposite bank, between themselves and the entrance to the creek, stood an oak-tree, gnarled and crippled—the only one for miles around. (It is now fallen to the water's edge; but all this took place more than a hundred years ago.) Beneath the oak a twig snapped suddenly. They guessed it was the man, though they could not see him; he was altogether lost in the darkness under the tree.

"There's two, at least," whispered Lott, "and maybe there's a score."

"What of it?" answered Anthony, in disdain.

"What of it!" echoed the other. "Why, if we were caught—" But Anthony had sharply closed Lott's mouth with the palm of his hand. For, at that moment, a boat shot out from the creek to the center of the pool.

By the light of the moon they could distinguish two figures: the one, in the bows, leaning well forward on his oars; the other, seated on the stern-seat, as a man lies back in a comfortable chair.

"Are you there, Gipsy?" said a voice, hushed and very hoarse.

And "Aye, aye" came from the other side.

"Shall I run her under the tree?"

"That ain't no good," replied the man they had followed. "Do you back her against t'other side, an' I 'll come round to yer there."

"Losh!" groaned Lott, "we 're lost!"

The man backed the boat into the reeds, close to the spot where the three boys were. They were no longer the sleuth-hounds. It seemed that now the tables were turned. Indeed, their situation was none of the pleasantest, for, in order to reach the boat, the man from the other side would have to pass within a few yards of where they lay. Fortunately Anthony had selected a place where the grass was high; and they lay flat upon their chests, listening to their hearts thumping against the ground.

As the man passed the Gap he stepped into a puddle, and the water, splashing against John Constable's face, sent a cold shiver down his back.

But he passed without seeing them; and at one and the same moment they all three breathed again.

The other man in the boat now struck a light and lit a lantern, which cast a bright golden pathway across the surface where the troubled water danced. Leaving the lamp in the bows, he next sprang on to the bank, and made fast the painter to a pilehead in the reeds. This done, he knelt down at the water's edge, holding the gunwale of the boat close beneath the bank.

At that, the man in the stern rose lazily from his seat; and so close was he to the boys that they even heard him yawn. He then stretched himself, extending his arms at full length, and they could see the lace falling about his wrists.

"Hurry up, me lud," growled he at the water's edge. "I ain't a-going to hold this boat here all night."

"*Mm Dieu*, but I am stiff," drawled the other, in tones that sounded particularly melodious after those of the men who had spoken before. "So this is your island fog of which I have so often heard?"

"Fog!" exclaimed the other. "Fog! Sink me, this ain't no highland fog, governor! It's wot we calls a bit of a river mist."

"Ah, of the mist I know nothing; but it is bitter indeed, as you say."

"Well, supposing yer ludship steps on ter dry land."

"Pardon, the land is wet. That much, at least, I can see."

"Don't argify," roared the other.

"I have not my dictionnaire."

"Git out, or I'll jump in an' kick yer out of it!"

"My friend, I will make that unnecessary. I will do as you say. But, I tell you frankly, I am not impressed with either this England of yours—or yourself."

At that, he stepped gaily on to land; and as he did so the light from the lantern caught the golden buttons at his wrists.

And thus it was that the Vicomte des Ormeaux first set foot upon the shores of England.

CHAPTER II

HOW THE TROUBLE BEGAN

THROUGHOUT this conversation the man whom the boys had followed, and who had been addressed as "Gipsy," had kept back some paces from the bank. He now approached, and touched his hat to the Vicomte in a surly kind of a way.

"Where do yer want ter git to?" he asked.

"A house, my friend," was the suave reply; "any sort of a house where I can close the door and keep out your bitter river mist."

"Yer won't keep away from the dags in the *Stow-er Walley* this time o' year," growled the other.

"Ah, my very thought!" exclaimed the Vicomte, closing his snuff-box with a snap, "though I understand not a word of what you say."

And there he was, standing in the moonlight, as straight as a larch, and a very courtly figure of a man. He spoke our language prettily, with

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only the shadow of a French accent. He pronounced each word separately, in a crisp, incisive manner, fearing perhaps that he might find a difficulty in being understood. But of this there was little chance. The correctness of his pronunciation, as everything else about him, was plainly overdone. And here, when we know him better, will we find his most radicated weakness. He did everything *too* well. It would have been better for him in the end had he been a little less of a masterful man. He was a bundle of self-confidence, as he was a mountain of resource. It was not within the man, either in love or in war, ever to acknowledge defeat. He knew how to fight to the end. When fair means failed, he turned to foul; for it is very doubtful whether he ever possessed a code of honor of his own. He was as cruel as a panther, and as cunning as a fox. Yet, even after we have learned to hate him, to do him justice we must still carry this much in our minds: he had always with him a subtle sense of humor and was inordinately brave.

The man in the boat suddenly blew out his lantern, and sprang upon the bank.

"Lookee here, me lud," he said, with a touch of meekness that he plainly considered a joke. "What did yer ludship pay me for?"

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"What for," answered the Vicomte, "but to place me in safety in your fog-begotten land."

"Ex-actly," added the man, drawing out the syllables and emphasizing each with a nod of the head. "Now," he went on, "me and my mate are honorable gents. Ain't we, Gipsy?" he added hurriedly, as if he anticipated contradiction.

"We are," said Gipsy. "Sink us if we ain't."

"Well," continued the other, "me and my mate considers that at this point of the perceedings we ought ter come ter a definite understanding with yer ludship. Don't we, Gipsy?"

"We does," said Gipsy. "Both on us."

"Ex-ac-tly." And there he stopped.

"Pray proceed," remarked the Vicomte.

"Gipsy," said the man, suddenly turning to his comrade, "do you perceed, as his ludship orders."

Gipsy drew in a long breath, like a man about to dive.

"My name's Yates," he began, "Gipsy Yates, on account of me complexion, which you can't see because it's dark; and my mate here (who's a honorable gent same as me) hands me sealed orders to heave to at Judas Gap at eight o'clock ter night, and—well, here I am," he ended a trifle weakly.

"I don't dispute it," said the Vicomte. "But

in the meantime my feet are getting confoundedly damp."

"That's due to them there finniking boots," observed Gipsy. "But where was we?"

"At eight o'clock to-night," prompted the Vicomte.

"Ya-as. Well, my mate tells me he's undertook to land you safe an' sound in merry England, and being a honorable gent, born and bred, he's done it; and you being another honorable gent, also born an' bred, has paid him; and the whole transaction was fair and square and above-board—while it lasted. But it's finished—savvy?"

"Pardon?"

"There ain't no pardong about it. You're in England, all right? Are n't yer?"

The Vicomte threw up his hands.

"*Ma foi!*" he cried, looking around him. "Am I likely to forget it!"

"Well, then," continued Mr. Yates, "wot my mate wishes to specify is that he ain't undertook to take you further."

"Then, gentlemen," said the Vicomte, with the shadow of a bow. "I have only to thank you for your service, and to wish you both—a very good night."

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And at that he took a step forward, but Gipsy caught him roughly by the arm.

"Not so slippy," he observed. "It ain't no use stepping off acrost the marsh by yerself. You 'll only walk into a dike; and maybe it 'll be fower months afore yer gets washed up at Brantham. I 'll show yer the way inter Dedham, as a matter of ettiket atween gents, arter you 've handed over to me and my mate all waluables and perkysites. Now, then, fust of all, the coin."

The Vicomte, whistling, pulled out his purse. "I have precisely one louis d'or, three francs, and a twenty-five-centime piece."

"Me lud," cried the second man, "that won't go. We ain't a-going to accept that. Are we, Gipsy?"

"We ain't," said Gipsy. "Neither on us."

"Accept it or not as you will," was the serene reply. "It is all I have."

"It 's going to be five louis," growled Gipsy, "or—Judas Gap."

"Ma foi!" exclaimed the Vicomte, with a glance toward the pool. "We live in a world of complexities! I have but just escaped from my native land, where they wanted to cut off my head because I had too much money; and I am no sooner arrived here than you wish to drown me

because I have not enough. Truly, it is not possible to give satisfaction to every one!"

"Well, one louis ain't going to satisfy us."

Mr. Yates stepped away from the Vicomte and drew from his pocket a long cord coiled around a stick.

"Un moment!" cried the Vicomte, for the first time raising his voice. "You imagine, gentlemen, that you have me in a trap. Permit me to explain to you that the opposite is the case. I suspected this, and have made my plans accordingly. Gentlemen, you are completely surrounded. Observe!"

Gipsy dropped the cord, and the other man as suddenly let fall an oath, as three heads came simultaneously out of the grass. The Vicomte had placed himself on the other side of the men; and the moonshine caught the triggers of a brace of pistols in his hands.

It was a wonderful stroke, yet no longer wonderful when we consider the man's inherent custom of finesse. Though his voice had been perfectly calm and he had appeared throughout selfpossessed and wholly at his ease, all the time he had been glancing around for some method of escape. The marsh everywhere was desolate. He had no idea of where he was. He only knew



The moonshine caught the triggers of a brace
of pistols in his hands

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that if he followed the creek he would come again upon the sea. He had passed the lights of Manningtree and Brantham, and little doubted that at one of these places he would be able to find a lodging for the night, if he could but free himself from the ruffians who threatened him with his life. This, therefore, he made up his mind to do; and in looking about him to select his ground for escape, his sharp eyes caught the figures of the boys, who, at the instigation of Anthony, exposed their heads at the Vicomte's words.

Lott actually rose to his feet before Anthony could stop him. Fortunately, he was the tallest of the three, and in the gloom might very well have been a full-grown man. But Anthony, who from the start had fallen in with the Vicomte's game of bluff, held John Constable to the ground by force.

"Mate," exclaimed the boatman, "we're nabbed!"

"We are," gasped Gipsy. "Nabbed it is, as sure as Fate!"

"Precisely," said the Vicomte, "you are, as you term it—nabbed."

"Who 'd 'a' thought it!" cried the other. "But we ain't took yet!" And as quick as lightning he whipped a knife from his belt. He had taken

one step toward the Vicomte, when a bullet from a catapult caught him clean between the eyes.

He went down in the mud, groaning loudly and crying out that he was shot in the brain.

The Vicomte stepped across to Gipsy, and, holding a pistol before his eyes, told him with a great show of politeness to hold up both his hands.

"Mercy, me lud!" the man let out. "It was all gammon wot I told yer of Judas Gap. We was only frightening yer, truth we was."

If that was all, they had made a sorry show of it; for never was a man more tranquil in the world. Yet he said nothing in reply, but just took Gipsy by the sleeve, and led him to the bank of Judas Pool, all the time holding his pistol within an inch of his ear. And there he suddenly bundled him into the boat.

After he had done that, he returned to the other man, who had by then got upon his feet, holding his head and still crying out that he had been shot through the brain. When the Vicomte again raised his pistol, the fellow protested that it was enough to have killed a man once; and forgetting for the moment he was dead, leaped vigorously into the boat, taking the painter with him. He dropped clean on to the back of his comrade's neck. Yates, thinking it was the Vicomte, let

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fly with his fist, and catching him under the chin, laid him out full length in the bows, more nearly dead than he ever had been before. Then, instead of being sorry for what he had done, he burst into a string of oaths.

By the time he was obliged to desist for want of breath, the boat had drifted to the center of the pool, and the only sound to be heard was the Vicomte's rippling laugh—soft, low, and artificial, yet as much a part of himself as his cambric handkerchief or the buckles on his shoes.

There was something catching in it, nevertheless; and Anthony, despite himself, found he was laughing too.

"He who laughs last laughs longest," said the Vicomte. "But may I ask to whom I am indebted for salvation?"

"My name is Anthony Packe, at your service, sir." And the boy bowed, for he had caught a little of the courtesy of the Vicomte.

"And your friend?"

"John Constable of East Bergholt on the hill." Lott stepped forward of his own accord.

"And Willie Lott of Flatford Mill," said he, putting Anthony to shame in the matter of a bow. "And here's my bit of a stick, and here's my hand!"

The Vicomte smiled, and took it. Then he winced; for his own hand was thin and white and no larger than a girl's.

"I am overcome with the honor," he said, somehow managing to smile again, though it is doubtful whether he ever forgave Willie Lott that shake of the hand. And indeed, in after years, Lott himself bitterly repented it. In proof of which there is an anecdote:

Once John Constable set up his easel on the brink of Judas Pool, where Willie Lott found him before he had washed his canvas over.

"If you paint it, John, I'll put my knife clean through it—as true as the gospel I will!"

But the artist was busy with his palette and did not seem to hear.

"I'll not have it! I'll not have it, I say!" cried Lott, so persistently that Constable at last looked up with his brush between his teeth.

"Why not?" he asked in surprise.

Lott's answer was prophetic.

"Because, John, pictures don't die, least of all your kind. And you'll not paint this, with me standing by to kick the easel into the river, let me tell you that, old friend. Isn't the Stour Valley large enough, that you must be painting the place where Willie Lott, of his own free

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will, gave his hand to the blackest-hearted ruffian in all Christendom?"

"But we never suspected it, Willie!" broke in the artist, whose heart was set upon the scene.

"Then, the more fools we," said Lott. "'Twas in the face of him—from the start."

At that he picked up the easel and carried it along the river bank for near upon a mile. And thus it was that John Constable came to sketch the Valley Farm.

But on the famous night that the Frenchman landed they little dreamt of what the future had in store. Indeed, then, as for months afterward, they deemed him all that a courtly gentleman could be.

The boys led him away from the marsh-lands; for he had again complained that his feet were wet and cold. Together they ascended Jupe's Hill, and entered Dedham, long after midnight, by way of the Manningtree Road. On the way he told them tales of the Revolution: of how his brother had died upon the scaffold, and how he had seen his father's statue pulled down from its pedestal and shattered in the street in the midst of a cheering mob.

That there had been a statue of the Frenchman's father in Paris, profoundly impressed the

boys; and, on being further questioned upon the matter, the Vicomte owned that he had once counted as his greatest friend the man who was his King. Then he went on to tell them of the terrible doings in Paris: of how they had burned the Pope in effigy—a thing that seemed a colossal scandal in the Vicomte's eyes; of how the King had fled in a glass coach, with the pale faces of his wife and children hidden in their cloaks; of how Jacobins had converted Paris into a very stubble-field of gibbets, and of how "his" France was now dead and soon would be forgotten, and the prison-lock had turned upon his King. So that in no time he had the three of them gaping and flushed in the face, and they were come to Dedham Street.

Very dark and deserted it was; nowhere was there anyone about. The old weavers' houses lay together where the moonshine mingled with the fog, in a single snaky line, that crossed the shadow of the tall tower of the church and gained the lower slopes of the valley-side.

The Vicomte stood in the square and ran his eye along the street. He made a wry face as if he were about to take a dose of some unpalatable medicine.

"Dedham!" he soliloquized, albeit aloud. "I

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would so much like to meet the man who gave it that name. At least, he had the gift of seeing things as they are. But, without doubt," and he shrugged his shoulders, "without doubt, he himself is long since dead." Then he laughed, but pulled up with a sudden jerk. "*Ma foi!*" he whispered, "but, after Paris, how quiet! how still!"

It was the intensity of his manner more than his words that took the breath completely out of the boys. They stood round him, spell-bound, with their eyes upon his face.

As for the Vicomte, he stood silent and very still for some minutes. Then, all of a sudden, he launched out at the height of excitement, throwing his hands wildly into the air and making the ruffles dance.

"Saved!" he cried. "*Mon Dieu*, but I am saved! My head should be in the basket of the guillotine; my body should be floating in the Seine! But I am here—here in this fog-begotten village; and I shake my fist at the stars!"

It was play-acting; nothing more. It was manifestly done only for effect; for the stars of which he spoke were hidden in the mist. The last words he had shouted at the top of his voice;

and without so much as drawing breath, he added, "Where 's the inn?"

But not one of his listeners yet could find his voice. Louis des Ormeaux would have made his mark upon the stage.

"I must find a lodging for the night," he continued. "We must rouse up these good people. It is necessary for me to sleep."

Then Anthony, Packe, upon a sudden, generous impulse, did the thing which was at the root of all the trouble that the future held in store.

"If you will come with me to my house," he said, "I am sure you will find my father will give you a hearty welcome. All his sympathies are with the Royalists in France."

The Vicomte agreed upon the instant. So, leaving John Constable and Lott to spend the night at Dedham Mill,—which was the property of Constable's father,—Anthony and the Vicomte passed through the street, and followed the road along the Essex side of the Stour, until they came to the house that was called Nether Hall, which lay back a little from the road.

Here, Anthony, turning in at the gate, set to a violent knocking at the great oaken door.

It was several minutes before a front window

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was thrown violently open and a head in a night-cap was thrust out into the air.

"I 'll not let ye in, ye young blackguard!" bel-
lowed a voice so loud that they heard the roost-
ing birds shifting on the branches of the trees.

"But, father—"

"Outside ye are, and outside ye 'll stop, ye
ragamuffin. Nor dare to speak a word to me.
Gallivanting about in the dead of night, ye black-
guard! What would the country come to if all
were the likes o' ye?"

"But, father—"

"Don't keep on fathering me! I disown ye,
once and for all. If ye choose to come home at
this time of night, ye can sleep in a ditch for
aught care I, or get some of your own low-down
playmates to take ye home to their pigsties of
cottages; but the only bit o' my house you rest on
is the doorstone."

And down went the window with a bang.

"A cordial greeting!" observed the Vicomte,
laughing again.

"I apologize," said Anthony, meekly.

"For what? For a stern parent? An ex-
cellent thing. Ma foi, I had never a father that
I remember, beyond one that was fashioned in
stone, but once upon a time I had the very Jezebel

of a wife. She also locked me out. Ha—but I went away and I did not return.”

“I am dependent upon my father,” said Anthony, a trifle sadly perhaps, for he was not a little ashamed.

“Tut!” cried the Vicomte. “That is nothing, my young friend! I also was dependent upon my wife. She thought wholly so. I showed her otherwise.”

“Can you climb?” asked Anthony.

“*Mon Dieu*, no! I would never force my way into a stranger’s house.”

“He’ll give you welcome enough,” answered Anthony; “but he does not know you are here. He was in too great a rage either to notice you or to give me time to explain. I know!” he cried, as if it were a sudden thought. “My sister’s window! She’ll come down and let us in! She’s done it before for me, and my father never says anything to her.”

So round they went to the side of the house, where they threw pebbles from the pathway against a window that Anthony pointed out.

It opened; and all they could see was something white.

“Cis?”

“Oh, Anthony!”

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By her voice she was excessively shocked. The Vicomte was under the cedar-tree, bowing with unceasing vigor, with his hat upon his heart.

"Cicely, let me in?"

(This in a soothing tone.)

"Oh, you naughty boy!"

(Plainly, she wavered already.)

"Please, Cis—*dear!*"

(There was a wealth of brotherly devotion in every word.)

"But I can't, Anthony!"

(There was no longer any doubt that she would.)

"Yes, you can. I called you 'dear'."

(The *coup de ε* re. The window closed.)

They passed or ptoe round to the front; and there they waited patiently in the porch.

"Women take a prodigious time dressing, don't they? remarked Master Anthony, blowing on his hands as if they were cold.

At last, the door opened; and Anthony stepped in, leading the Vicomte by the hand.

Cicely Packe stood in the hall, candle in hand, and in terrible dishabille, with her fair hair hanging about her shoulders, and wrapped around with a shawl.

"Monsieur le Vicomte des Ormeaux," said An-

thony, with a regal wave of the hand, "allow me to present you to my sister, Mistress Cicely Packe."

The Vicomte bowed, lower than ever before.

But Cicely only turned very red and then blew out the light.

CHAPTER III

OF THE MAN'S INVETERATE CUNNING

IN the days of the elder Pitt, Sir Michael Packe had been a great man at St. Stephen's; one of the old-time statesmen who held that wholesale, round abuse was the chiefest quality of debate. But at the signing of the peace with America he ordered his coach and drove away from London, vowing he would never again set eyes upon the Mace. He went to his home in the valley of the Stour, taking to the covert-side with a keener relish than he had ever had for White's; and, though he nevermore set foot in the House of Commons, he remained the most vituperative of orators upon any question of politics to the very day of his death. He fully believed that his country's glory was gone. If the hounds failed to find in a certain covert, he would storm loudly at the master, telling him England was gone to the dogs and could breed neither foxes nor men any more.

No one resented his vehemence, not even the

master of hounds. They all knew him too well, holding the common opinion, that if Sir Michael had not the right to interfere, he at least was not deficient of the lungs; and there was no one who could boast of the voice to talk him down. Besides, there was never a shadow of ill will at the back of his words. The irascible old baronet was recognized as the kindest-hearted and most generous gentleman in all the country-side. If a beggar came to him for alms he knew what to expect: half an hour of the most virulent terms of abuse, during which Sir Michael would go purple in the face, and then, a silver crown and a "Get out o' me sight, ye limpet, or I'll have a gardener toss ye over the wall!"

Well on in middle life, Sir Michael had been left a widower; and from that day on there was a family of three persons living at Nether Hall; the baronet and his two children, Cicely and Anthony, with both of whom this history is narrowly concerned.

At the time that the Vicomte first came to Dedham, Cicely Packe was at the gate of womanhood, fair in complexion, with a blue, laughing eye and a manner that was the very cream of gentleness. She ruled Nether Hall with a velvet glove; and there was not a stable-

boy who scrubbed a bucket who did not fondly cherish in his heart the belief that he was doing it for her. She divided her love between her father and her brother, and often stood between them when words were high. Once, her father aimed a blow at Anthony with a stick; and Cicely, stretching forth her hand to save him, took the stroke upon her wrist. Then father and son knocked their heads together in an attempt to kiss her, at one and the same psychological moment and under the same impulse of true affection. And it was the old baronet himself who took both his children by the hand, and leading them into the dining-room, set them down on either knee, and told them they were all that he had in the world to love. For, Sir Michael was the same to his son as he was to the "limpets o' beggars." Though he abused him, he loved him none the less. Things were only come to this pass: the old man must storm and the son must be stormed at, else both felt that something was radically wrong.

Though for Cicely the Squire had never an angry word, even to her her father's very tantrums had become part of her daily life. When he raged and roared and stamped his feet, scattering the servants right and left, it was Cicely

only that was able to approach. At the very sight of her he would begin to splutter and stammer; and a pair of soft arms, twined lovingly around his neck, would always do the rest.

But poor Anthony had no such hold upon his father. He was obliged to keep out of the way until the old man's wrath was past; and this frequently was a matter for several days. The evenings when he had returned late from his nocturnal wanderings with John Constable were invariably followed by a storm in parental quarters. On the night he brought the Vicomte back, he was later than ever before; and, the following morning, no sooner had Sir Michael got to the foot of the stairs than he bore down upon a servant in the hall.

"Where's that jackal of a son o' mine?" he thundered.

The man, who was visibly shaking in his shoes, was about to say that he had gone up to call Master Anthony and found a stranger in his room, but the old Squire never gave him time to open his mouth. Taking it for granted that Anthony was still in bed, he made back up the staircase, puffing and blowing like a grampus, and, bursting into his son's room, came face to

face with the Vicomte, strapping the buckles of his shoes.

For a moment the Squire's eyes seemed to threaten to spring out of his head. Twice he opened his mouth, as if to speak; and, as often, all he did was to come out with a great spasmodic snort, like that of a sow when you strike it with a stick. He took a step forward, and then a step back; and finally, whipping out a large, red handkerchief, covered his confusion by violently blowing his nose.

The Vicomte bowed.

"Monsieur," he began, "I fear I owe you an apology."

"Zounds!" exclaimed the old baronet, finding his voice in a gasp. "A cockroach of a Frenchman, or I'll swallow me hat!"

"Monsieur, I would not so imperil your digestion on my account. By the courtesy of your son I was here for a lodging for the night. I ask for nothing more, monsieur. They have hounded me from Paris; one after the other all my friends and family have passed from the prison to the tumbril, from the tumbril to the guillotine. They have taken all I once possessed; and they have razed the house of my fathers to the ground."

"The blackguards!" let out the Squire.

"They name it 'Liberty,' monsieur, and make me run for my very life; 'Equality,' and leave me with one louis d'or and the clothes upon my back; and also 'Fraternity,' and, *mon Dieu!* they wish to cut off my head! Ah, but we live and learn. In the last two years I have lived a lifetime and I learned much, though there is more that I have failed to understand; for example, monsieur, the precise meaning of these three high-sounding words."

It will be remembered that Anthony had made the Vicomte acquainted with his father's views on the Revolution; and, indeed, at that time the Squire's pet aversion was Mr. Charles James Fox and the English supporters of the Republican cause. Beyond a doubt, the Vicomte remembered this, and had even then some sweet remembrance of Cicely's face in the candle light; else he had never played so skilfully upon the old man's sympathies from the start. And certain it is that at that moment he walked into the highest place of his esteem.

The old man, taking the Vicomte by the hand, forthwith launched out in a tirade against Mr. Fox, whom he termed "an arch-traitor" and "sedi-

tion-prating knave." Then, suddenly remembering his son, he flew out of the room; and finding Anthony on the staircase, caught him by the scruff of the neck.

"Why did n't ye tell me, ye rascal, there was a French gentleman with ye i' the garden?" he thundered, shaking the boy vigorously, and again going red in the face.

"You never gave me time," choked Anthony, restraining his laughter with difficulty. "I tried to begin to explain—" But, his father ended the sentence for him, by sending him flying down the stairs, at the foot of which he cannoned against a maid-servant, carrying a tray with the breakfast things that were all smashed to atoms on the floor. Cicely always remembered the morning of the Vicomte's arrival as that on which the large China dish was smashed beyond repair.

The girl sang out "Lawks!" and then sat down upon the door-mat while Anthony went over the top of her and landed on his head.

"That 's it!" thundered Sir Michael. "Smash up the house about me ears, ye clumsy loons! Why, in the name o' Thunder can't ye mind where you're a' going?"

Then, Cicely came out of the dining-room,

wringing her hands when she saw the extent of the damage, but breaking into laughter, despite herself, at the faces of them all.

The Vicomte appeared, immaculate and expressionless, at the very moment that the servant burst into tears.

"Oh, ho!" roared the baronet. "Don't ye trouble to blubber about it, ye female clown! It's only *my* belongings you've deliberately thrown upon the floor!"

"Oh, Sir," sobbed the girl, "I could n't help it; really I could n't, sir!"

"Help it! O' course you could n't help it, ye clumsy, chop-fingered mountebank—"

"Oh, father," cried Cicely, "you did it all yourself!"

At that, he began to splutter, like an engine letting off steam. Indeed in many ways he was very like a locomotive; and might easily have served to suggest the invention to the renowned Mr. Watt in lieu of that very historic kettle. It was as if the old gentleman was always under the pressure of a maximum of steam. Invectives flew backwards and forwards like piston-rods; he hurled expletives like cinders in his path; and his red face resembled the furnace itself; while Cicely alone had the knack of opening the

safety-valve, which caused so much spluttering, but eventually cooled him down.

So quickly so on this occasion, that by the time he had descended the stairs he was ready to own that he had been at least partly instrumental in bringing about the catastrophe, though he still held that the maid ought not to have been doing the footman's work. None the less he gave her a crown with which to dry her tears; and then, redundant with the effect of his own munificence and the responsibility of a host, he led the Vicomte into the dining-room.

There a formal introduction took place. Cicely blushed; the Vicomte bowed; and the baronet, without further ado, set to upon a steak.

During that first meal the men held their ears in one incessant flow of talk. Long after breakfast was finished, they sat and listened to stories of the Revolution, of the noble house of des Ormeaux, and the experiences of the Vicomte himself in distant quarters of the globe.

Sir Michael sat with his mouth open, and now and then gave a grunt. Anthony, from time to time, shifted restlessly in his chair, and so closely did the boy hang upon the words that excitement set a sparkle in his eye. Only Cicely sat with



downcast eyes; but the Vicomte could make her raise them at his will.

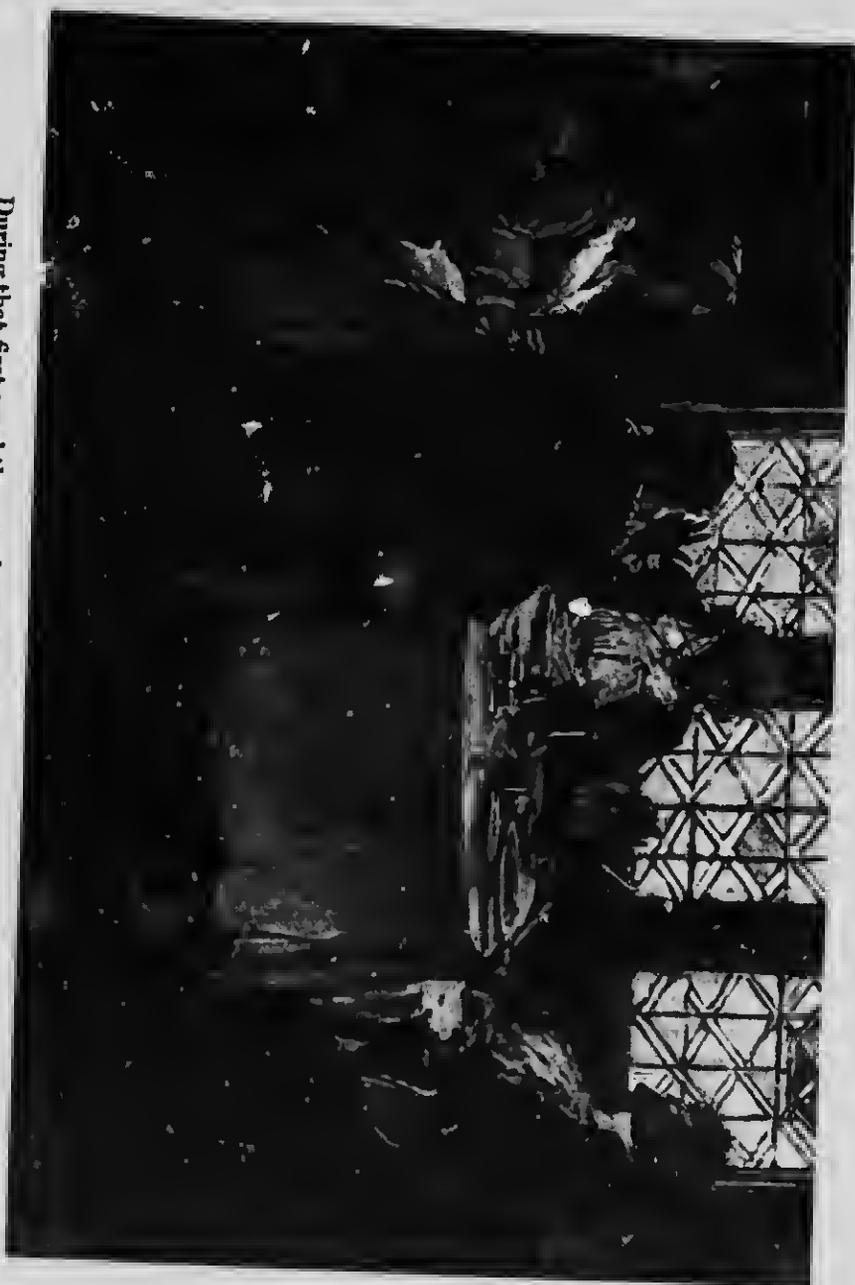
And he knew it. He suspected it as he helped himself to salt; he knew it when she handed him the English ale, which was not at all to his liking. For, around that breakfast-board, the devil hovered with the key of old Pandora's box; and long before they rose the invisible spirit of mischief was already in the air.

Never before had Louis des Ormeaux seen the fair face of such an English maid; and never before had Cicely seen a man she so intuitively feared. Thus the terror of the one and the love of the other came into the world as twins, and lived throughout those short and stormy days.

Upon the months that followed it is not necessary to dwell. The Vicomte became one of the family at Nether Hall and a well-remembered figure on the shady side of Dedham Street. There are men living in the valley hamlet to-day who recollect hearing their grandfathers talk of the foreigner with the lace ruffles and the sparkling buckles on his shoes.

It appears the mill-pond had some sort of fascination for him. He was wont to linger on the old wooden bridge and watch the water stirring the weeds and slipping out to that same sea

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During that first meal the man held their ears in one incessant flow of talk

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that washed the coast of France. Sometimes Anthony was his companion, but more often he was alone. Once only was he seen with the girl. On that occasion John Constable was carrying his easel up the hill at Bergholt, when he came suddenly upon two figures in a lane: Cicely Packe, with parted lips and very white in the face, had drawn back against the trunk of an elm, her hands clasped together on her breast. The Vicomte stood in the center of the roadway, leaning eagerly forward, with hands outstretched before him, as if he yearned to take her to his arms.

As the miller-artist passed, the Vicomte turned upon him sharply; and hissed an oath in French between his teeth. And John Constable never forgot the look of anger that was on his face. He told Anthony of it; and thus it was that the boy first came to mistrust his father's guest.

In the light of future events we now know the whole story; though, at the time, Cicely never revealed her secret to a soul. It seems that day the Vicomte asked her to be his wife. She refused him; but he was not the man to take such an answer as the last. From that day forward he plagued her with his love. Never were they

alone for an instant that he did not remind her of it. Her mind was made up, she said; she did not love him. Very well, then, he was satisfied to wait; he had already learned enough of patience at the hand of Fate. Indeed, this was the string that he loved best of all to touch. He strove to play upon her pity for his trials, and, like Othello, tried to make her love him for "the dangers he had pass'd." But, howbeit, with the most indifferent success.

She admired him as a man of courage, of that much she was sure; yet she was also conscious that she hated him, though she could not give a reason why.

Her father noticed her antipathy, and upbraided her upon it. Des Ormeaux, he said, was a brave soldier and a highly cultured gentleman. He was a type of the old French nobility that the Revolution had rooted up. It would become her better to show some distress in his misfortunes and a little admiration that he bore them all so well.

Sometimes he even thus addressed her before the man himself. And then would the Vicomte never fail to take her part, making light of the very deeds that he kept magnified for her private ear.

Things had come to this pass in the autumn of the following year, by which time the French had made away with their King and beautiful Queen, and war had been openly declared. The Reign of Terror was at its height. Many of the surviving members of the French aristocracy had taken up arms in the ranks of the allies; but the Vicomte des Ormeaux showed no inclination to leave the peaceful valley of the Stour. On the contrary, he seemed to have made himself completely at home at Nether Hall. He had a room of his own, where he would sit and read for hours. He delighted in the old classics, of which there was a passable library in the house; for, though Sir Michael himself was no reader, his father before him had been of very studious habit. Also, there was a fine chestnut mare in the stable that was kept for the Vicomte's own exclusive use. Though he seldom or never followed the hounds, he used to take long rides along the highroad, as he said, for the good of his health; and it was on one of these that an adventure befell him that he turned to some account.

He had ridden into Colchester, as he remarked, to see a friend who was returning to France, whence he was in the hope of getting funds.

There had been some delay in the business; and before he had returned two miles upon the London road, the sun set behind the coverts to the west.

It had been a dull October day, and the evening sky was turned a heavy red. As the Vicomte passed the Birch Woods, a horseman turned out of the byroad, and kept on a little ahead of him. From time to time, the man looked back, with his right hand upon his horse's quarters and the reins loose upon its neck. Though it was not yet six o'clock, it was rapidly growing dark; and the Vicomte could but dimly discern the figure of the man, who wore his hat well down upon his eyes and a green-hooded coat that reached to below his knee.

Between the Birch Woods, where the road branches off to Dedham Heath, and the Gun Hill, at the foot of which was the turnpike, the highroad dips into a hollow between the trees, the roots of which stand on high gravel banks, well above the level of the road. Here the man turned his horse's head and came to a standstill in the shadow of the trees.

The Vicomte approached at a walking pace, and whistling all the time; though his nimble

fingers were loosening the pistols from his holster, and he drew in a shorter rein.

He passed so close that their boots rapped together, and the mare was evidently touched with the spur, for she pranced nicely and laid hold upon the bit. The Vicomte apologized profusely. The horseman turned his head sharply away and swore aloud. But the Vicomte was laughing, as he walked his mare slowly up the rise.

Half-way up he stopped and listened. The low ground was buried in the darkness, though the crest of the hill showed plainly against the dying light of day. He could hear no sound. Plainly the man was still waiting in the shadow of the trees.

Suddenly the dark figure of a second horseman, coming in the opposite direction, rose against the sky-line and began to descend the slope.

The Vicomte looked quickly about him, seeming at first uncertain what course to take. The silhouetted figure was very clearly marked against the light. It was that of a man of extraordinary breadth, who sat his horse as a sailor does, well upon the withers, with his feet drawn back against the animal's flanks.

Now, it was one of the best-known characteristics of des Ormeaux that he never was known to show any outward vestige of surprise. If he said "Ma foi!" he uttered the expression without emotion or even raising his voice; and this particular occasion was a case in point. He dropped his reins; took out his snuff-box; helped himself to a pinch, and closed the box with a snap. Then, and not till then, did he say "Ma foi!" in much the same tone of monotony as an usher calls the roll.

After that he continued at a walk, but this time holding to the darker side of the road.

When the two riders were come level with each other, the man hailed him.

"Jerry Abershaw," he cried. And then, as if alarmed, "Is that you, Jerry?"

"No," answered the Vicomte, without a second thought. "You'll find him at the bottom of the hill."

It was a very commonplace remark, and said in commonplace manner enough; and, marvelous to relate, the Vicomte had assumed the sing-song accent of the Essex dialect. And if further proof be needed of the extreme difficulty of surprising the Vicomte, let it be stated that Jerry Abershaw, although at the time only

twenty years of age, was the most famous highwayman then upon the road; and the Vicomte had lived long enough in England to know him well by repute.

"Thankee," said the horseman, and then pulled up with a jerk. "Looke here," he cried. "Wot do *you* know of Jerry Abershaw an' where he is?"

"Tut, mate," was the astonishing answer he received; "I know Jerry Abershaw, and I also know you."

"Know me, do yer! Then who the blazes am I?"

"They call you Gipsy Yates," said the Vicomte, breaking into a trot.

CHAPTER IV

HOW JERRY ABERSHAW ROBBED THE IPSWICH COACH

MR. YATES, who had poor ability as a rider, nearly fell off his horse. He recovered himself with difficulty; and then so great was his astonishment that for some minutes he could do nothing but scratch his head. There were a dozen questions he was burning to ask. But the answers had clattered away in the twilight with the sound of the hoofs of the Vicomte's mare upon the hard and stony road.

As for the Vicomte himself, on gaining the rise, he broke into a brisk canter, until he reached the corner next before the turnpike, where the road branches off to Langham Moor.

Here he reined up; and then, backing the mare across the road, deliberately jumped a gap in the hedge. He sat his horse like a centaur. In everything he did Louis des Ormeaux was a perfect model of grace. He had leaped into a newly plowed field; and the mare, shying at

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a scarecrow that came out of the darkness under her nose, swerved sharply aside, with a suddenness that might have unseated many a better man. But all the Vicomte did, as he held her in, was to flourish his cambric handkerchief, with such a parade of elegance that he might have been "showing off." As indeed he was; he was "showing off" to the night.

He set the mare's head back toward the south, and crossed the field at a gallop, parallel to the road along which he had just approached. On gaining the edge of the spinney at the bottom of the hollow, he dismounted, and tied up the mare to a tree. Thence he proceeded on foot into the darkness of the wood, and very soon came upon the sound of voices on the road.

"If he knew *you*, then why, *by Christopher!* could n't you recollect *him?*" asked a voice, testily.

"Why could n't you reckonize him yerself?" came the counter-question, in a surly voice that the Vicomte was able to identify as that of Gipsy Yates.

"Because I never looked at him, you fool," was the sharp rejoinder.

"No more did I," said Yates. "So that settles it."

"It settles nothing," cried the other, who sprinkled his talk with a multitude of oaths. "I've got good enough reason to avoid being seen. Offers of reward to the man who takes me are as plentiful along the Kingston Road as milestones. But who are you, I should like to know?"

"'Gipsy' Yates," was the proud answer. "That's me, an' that's wot they calls me at Freston on the Orwell, where I'm well enough known not to be nabbed at a job like this."

"Instead of making free of the highroad, you ought to be catching mackerel in the Wash," observed the other in disdain.

"Steady!" said Mr. Yates, in a gruff but conciliatory tone of voice. "Steady, mate; steady! I'm a honourable gent, by both birth an' *se-gacity*; but if me spirit's roused,—then let Providence protect an' safeguard him wot's done the rousing."

He seemed hugely impressed by the solemnity of this speech, for he drew himself up and coughed in a very dignified way.

But "Fiddlesticks!" was all the answer he got for his rhetoric. Whereupon he became indignant.

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"That ain't a term wot one gent has any right to use to another," he began.

"Lookie here, Mister Gipsy Yates," rapped out the other, taking him up with a touch of anger in his voice. "You don't sit there like an old sock on a clothes line and bandy words with Jerry Abershaw. They've caught 'Galloping Tom' and hanged him at Wimbledon; and Jerry Abershaw was in the crowd to see it done. And when he rode away from the town that night, Jerry Abershaw knew that he had lost a friend. But, before another sun had risen he had sent a coachman and his postillions to drive Tom's coach into Hell. So there was n't much time wasted, on the whole."

"Zooks!" exclaimed Mr. Yates. "That, indeed, there were n't!"

"That's Jerry Abershaw, and that's his way of thinking," said the highwayman. "And you can come into the job or not, as you like; but if you do, you take your orders from me. I know the game a trifle better than you. You'll take post on the other side of the road, and when the coach is level with you, bring down the off-side wheeler with a bullet behind the point of the shoulder. Come out of the ditch as they pass; and you can't miss at the range. When the

horse is down, whip round to the conductor, and leave the driver and all the rest to me. That's what you've got to do; and if you don't like it, you can leave it."

"Now them orders is concise and uncommon explicit," began Mr. Yates.

"We don't want any words—are you game?"

"Here's me hand upon it."

"Keep it," said the highwayman. "I've no desire to smell of fish for a week. I've only got a sheep-stealing smuggler to help me, since there's no one else in the district I can trust, and it's not a one-man game. I'm left single-handed; for, poor old 'Gallop' Tom' is dead and gone. Rest his stainless soul in peace!" he added in mock piety, which completely deceived the simple soul of Yates.

"I know how yer feels, Governor," he replied with profound sympathy. "I felt just like that when I lost my little dorg. He were wonnerful handy in the marshes. He could smell a Custom House oficer at half a mile, could Tom; for my dorg's name was Thomas, too. I'd christened him after a brother of mine, wot sold him to me for a shilling. But, my brother, Thomas Yates, never come to no good in the world. He took to dog-stealing at one time, and we did

have hopes. But now, he's a sexton, Mr. Abershaw, and, would yer believe it, so lacking in brotherly affection that he would n't even consent to open the parish almsbox; not after I'd perjerged meself by giving him a shilling for wot I knewed was stolen goods!"

And here, Mr. Yates sighed at the memory of such base ingratitude. Jerry Abershaw looked at Mr. Yates in astonishment, and then savagely struck at his spur with the handle of his whip.

"*By Christopher!* you're a one to take the place of 'Gallop'ing Tom!" he exclaimed. "I'm thinking that to open a parish almsbox is more in your line than holding up a coach with the royal mail aboard."

"Is it!" said Yates. "Then you never seed me shoot the coast-guard at Clacton Wick."

"No," said Jerry. "No more did the coast-guard."

"No," said Yates, nodding his head. "That he did n't. And he's never seed nothing from that there day to this."

"Anyhow," said Jerry, in some sort appeased, "smuggling's one thing an' highway robbery's another."

"Agreed, mate," Yates cut in. "An' what I say is, God bless the King's highway."

"The King's!" echoed the robber. "Let George the Third sit in Buckingham Palace, and toast his toes at the fire, and call himself a king. But the only king on the highroad is he who has got the pluck to collect his taxes for himself."

"I'm with yer," said Yates. "Mr. Abershaw, you're a man of personality, and I likes you for it none the less."

"Never asked 'it of you," said Jerry. "But remember what I've told you. You've only got one horse and one man to settle. There's no one in the coach who is likely to put up the shadow of a fight, except a young officer of marines, and I'll do for him. But, quick! Here they come! Get across the road, and keep back in the shade of the ditch till they are right upon us. Then aim straight; use your pistol-butt if the man shows fight; and if you do, hit hard."

He rapped out his orders sharply, like a man accustomed to command. His voice was even musical, and there was never the sign of a tremor in its notes.

A gentle breeze had sprung up from the south, that, even as he spoke, carried with it, from the distance, the sound of wheels upon the road.

Now, beyond the edge of the wood, where the Vicomte's mare was tethered, there stretched an open sixty-acre meadow of fine, rolling grass. Round this the highroad curved; so that the Vicomte had but to cross the meadow if he wished to warn the coach.

From the direction of the Birch Woods came the rumbling of the wheels, the sound of the horses' hoofs, and, now and again, the cracking of the driver's whip. But the Vicomte never moved a step from where he stood.

Up, Monsieur des Ormeaux! Up and ride for life! For an old woman sits beside the driver, with her grandson on her lap; and on the back seat, alongside that young officer of marines, sits another little girl. She is only six, my lord, and traveling all alone; and see how she hugs her doll! Quick, monsieur; there's no time to lose! The horses are the finest team on all the King's highroad, and put the miles behind them like cinders through a sieve. Watch that near leader—the flea-bitten gray—how she lifts her feet and tosses her head, and look at the foam upon her flanks! Back to your horse, my lord; you yet have time! But be quick, for pity's sake! for Jerry Abershaw has drawn beneath the bank and clapped the black mask upon

his face, with two little slits for eyes. Oh, my lord! for the honor of France! Where is the blood of Bayard, if, at least, you will not save the doll?

The Vicomte leaned against a tree, idly twisting a broken twig between his lips.

And now the coach is near upon them. They, in hiding at the roadside, can hear one of the horses roaring and the jangling of the chains. The coach comes down the dip with a swing, the leaders' traces hanging loose and beating on their sides. The driver holds them in. At the bottom of the hill he is about to let them go, to take the rise before him, when a pistol-shot, quickly followed by another, goes echoing through the wood.

The flea-bitten gray rears high into the air. For a moment she stands almost upright; and then she plunges forward, her head between her knees. The off-side wheeler goes down against the pole, turning the coach from the road, so that the near wheels are sunk deep into the ditch. The coach comes up with a jerk; and the driver is hurled forward from his seat.

Then the voice of Jerry Abershaw rings out on the evening air:

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"Hands up, me merry roosters! Your money or your lives!"

There is only one to give answer. Gipsy Yates has the conductor under his knee; the driver lies stunned upon the roadway; and the others are for the most part old men and women, pale and trembling in their seats. The women snatch their children to their hearts; and the arms of the little girl are wrapped around her doll. But what cares Jerry Abershaw for that? There is neither sex nor age nor station on the highway. He has swung himself on to the box-seat, when his answer comes when least he had expected it. He had overlooked the officer of marines.

He is a young man, this officer; and, though a captain's badges of rank are on his shoulder-straps, he might have been an ensign by his looks. For all that, he carries himself as if he had already tasted war. There is none of the running wild of the newly blooded whelp. He has Jerry Abershaw at a disadvantage,—for at the moment the highwayman has his pistol in his teeth,—but he does not lose his head. He fires like a veteran, calmly steadying the muzzle on his wrist.

Jerry bobs, like a playful duck in a pond. The cotton wad strikes his mask, and the bullet carries off his hat. But he is up again, his second pistol in his hand. And now it is Jerry's turn; for the young officer has not another charged.

From behind the black mask there comes a laugh. The officer's face is white in the light of the lantern on the boat; but his lips are firmly set. The old woman on the box-seat softly begins to cry.

The highwayman steps slowly over the box, and calmly sights his pistol fair between the other's eyes. The young man's lips are seen to move in prayer; but he does not turn away; he does not even move. Beyond a doubt, he knows himself for lost; but he has been taught in the school of Nelson to stand face to face with death.

Jerry Abershaw, in another two years you will be publicly hanged on Kennington Common, and your body will be set on Putney Heath. Yet, among your crimes no court of law has numbered the murder of an officer of marines; though, in the sight of Heaven, that murder was as good as done. The pistol was held true and steady on its mark. Your aim was as good as ever it

With one spring the young man was at his throat



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was. It was no fault of yours that, as you pressed the trigger, a little child struck the barrel upward with her doll.

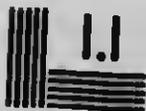
With one spring the young man was at his throat. They came down together on a seat, locked in each other's arms. The highwayman had all the strength; but the officer, by the suddenness of his onslaught, had the advantage from the start. He held it, too, like a man, pressing his thumbs deep into Jerry's throat. From behind the mask the air was filled with gurgling, choking sounds; and there is little doubt which way the struggle would have ended, had it not been for the untimely intervention of Mr. Gipsy Yates.

At the report of the officer's pistol-shot, he had looked up sharply, loosening his hold upon the conductor, who still struggled beneath his knee. Then came the second shot. He was unable to see the top of the coach, but guessed that something must be wrong. Now was the time to show that Gipsy Yates was "game"! He raised his powerful arm, and with one blow of his great fist stretched the conductor senseless on the ground. To swing himself on to the top of the coach was the work of a second, and coming upon the young soldier from behind, he



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brought the butt of his heavy horse-pistol down upon his skull.

With a cry of pain the young man threw up his arms, pressing for a moment a hand upon his head. Then he fell forward with a groan, and lay quite motionless upon the flooring of the coach.

Abershaw struggled to his feet.

"By Christopher!" said he, holding his swollen throat. "He was like a ferret at a rat!"

Mr. Yates regarded with satisfaction the still form huddled beneath the seats. A little blood was trickling from the hair.

"Wot about me being game?" he asked.

But the famous highwayman was already at his work. The old men, with eyes upraised, were turning their pockets inside out; the women were fumbling with their purses and asking him to wait. Their fingers trembled so that they took long to open them; and Jerry quickly saved them the trouble by snatching their purses from their hands and dropping them, one after the other, into the great bag-like pockets of his riding-coat.

"Empty the boot," he cried to Yates; "and see what you can find."

Mr. Yates was nothing loath to obey. One

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after the other he threw the parcels down into the road after he had first ripped them open with a knife. Then were there all manner of things scattered on every side: soft goods from the dyers and hard goods from the ironmongers; kettles and books and toys; articles of clothing, kitchen utensils, tobacco, pictures, and knick-knacks of every possible description. There was, in short, no kind of thing that did not seem to be there.

Parcels addressed to watchmakers and jewelers he never troubled to investigate: they went unopened into his pockets; until the boot was rifled and altogether empty.

Jerry Abershaw came down the coach, with his pockets fat with purses, watches, and coin. As he passed the little girl, trembling but still holding fondly to her doll, he raised his hand as if about to strike. But something stayed the blow, for he paused and then passed on.

Down upon the road, he gaily swung himself across his horse. Yates quickly followed suit.

Jerry Abershaw, the wrecker, gave one last glance at the derelict of the London-Ipswich coach, and politely doffed his hat. Then, digging in their spurs, they both set off at the gallop in the direction of Colchester; and soon the

sound of the clattering horses had died away in the silence of the night.

Monsieur des Ormeaux politely took a pinch from his snuff-box; and then out came his pet ejaculation.

"*Ma foi!*" he remarked, in the same tone of monotony as before. "*Ma foi*, a more pretty spectacle I have never a wish to see!" And as he uttered the words, an owl turned out of the woods and screeched, as it crossed the road, above the rifled coach.

CHAPTER V

OF JERRY ABERSHAW'S HEADLONG RIDE FOR LIFE

AS the Vicomte turned in at the gate of Nether Hall, Sir Michael came out into the porch.

"Ah, Moosure!" cried the old, red-faced Squire. "There you are! We all thought ye were lost."

"So indeed I was," answered the Frenchman, swinging down from the mare. "I was delayed long in Colchester. My friend was not arrived; and in coming home, I took the wrong turning, I know not how, and found myself—I know not where," he ended with a shrug.

The baronet burst into a hearty laugh.

"Anthony," he bellowed, "come ye here, ye rascal! Here's Moosure lost his way from Colchester, and I warrant had nothing to eat since midday."

"On the contrary," broke in the Vicomte, "I had a cup of chocolate before I left."

"Chocolate!" roared the old man. "Scissors

and tongs, ye can't fight the regicides on that!"

"Ah," laughed the Vicomte; "at least, I have satisfied my appetite for the picturesque. Your English country roads are—alive with incident."

By which time both Anthony and Cicely stood beside their father, and a stable-boy had run up to lead off the Vicomte's mare.

"Zounds," exclaimed Sir Michael; "she's up to her hocks in mud!"

"Ah, oui," casually threw in the Vicomte. "I tried a short cut. It was then that I employed the eye for the picturesque of which I spoke. I am not sorry that I did so. Curiosity, it is supposed, is the inheritance of the ladies, Mademoiselle," he added, addressing himself to Cicely. "I assure you it is not so. I am more inquisitive than any woman that ever yet was born. Ah! *mon Dieu!* it is colossal, this curiosity I have!"

At the words, he threw out his hands and turned his eyes upward, as if the abnormal development of this particular trait was far too terrible even to contemplate. Then, he stepped lightly into the hall, and fell to brushing his coat, which was green from the rind of trees.

His host led him into the dining-room; and there the Vicomte set himself down to dine.

Cicely soon went off to bed; but the Vicomte

kept Sir Michael and Anthony long before the board, while he regaled them with a fanciful story of how he had lost his way, and how he had got cramp, from riding, in a leg that once was wounded, and had been repeatedly obliged to get down from the mare and walk. He was a master in most things was Louis des Ormeaux; but, he was a past-master in the art of telling lies.

Early the following morning Anthony burst into the Vicomte's room.

"Have you heard the news?" cried the boy.

"I have had little chance since I saw you last," said the Vicomte, sitting up in his bed. "I was dreaming I was once again in France."

"No," cried Anthony, beside himself with excitement, "they've robbed the Ipswich coach!"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" exclaimed the Vicomte. "How pitiful! How sad!" Then he added, in tones of the most sincere solicitude: "I hope no one is hurt?"

"The driver has got his ribs smashed, and there's another man with a broken skull," the boy went on, all in a breath. "They've carried him into the Gun Inn, but the Dedham doctor doesn't think he'll live. And they say it's Jerry Abershaw; for yesterday he was recog-

nized by a Yorkshireman at 'The Cups,' at the time the coach changed horses; and there's a troop of light dragoons gone out from Colchester to try and hunt him down."

The boy was almost delirious with the news. For at that time Jerry Abershaw was the terror of the road.

And, indeed, the rumor that he had come east set the whole county by the ears; and before the day had passed there had been a fine stand-up fight in the stableyard of the Marlborough Head.

An Ardleigh man came in, and said he had seen Abershaw half a mile out of Little Bentley, at the very hour that a wagoner from Higham claimed to have come face to face with the same gentleman on the Hadleigh road. As each was convinced he was right, there was no way out of the difficulty but to repair to the yard and there settle the matter with their fists. And this they did, to such effect that the Ardleigh man afterward held his nose for three quarters of an hour under the Grammar School pump; while the wagoner went home at the bottom of his own cart, with a cold beefsteak over his eye, and his head done up in a towel.

As a matter of fact, both were equally in the

wrong. Jerry Abershaw, chased by the King's dragoons, doubled back from Colchester, and, jumping the turnpike under the keeper's very nose, galloped into Suffolk, where he crossed the line of a fox. Before he could pull up, he was well in the middle of the hounds. The leading dragoons were close upon him; and in less time than it takes to say it the whole field had taken up the chase. The hounds held to their original quarry, and, it is believed, killed near Bramford osier-beds; but the master, the huntsman, the whips, and all the field—the ladies as well as men—then and there turned off for the better sport.

And Jerry Abershaw was never harder pressed in all his life. He afterwards expressed the opinion that ten years of all the perils and hardships of the road were worth that one mad, headlong ride for life.

They "Tally-ho-ed" until the coverts echoed, and took jumps they never would have looked at with a fox. They opened gates for none of the ladies, all of whom, save the master's daughter, were left behind from the start. They shouted at Jerry; and they shouted to one another. They waited for no man at the gaps; for courtesy and caution had gone together to the winds. Cap-

tain Reginald Truman, of Little Horkesley Hall, riding his horse to a finish, went clean through a rotten, six-barred gate, with never so much as a scratch to beast or man; and the huntsman's horse fell dead a mile from Raydon wood.

And all this time Jerry Abershaw was tearing on before. For five miles they held the highwayman in view. Then they lost him. But a yokel outside Washbrook was able to put them upon the scent. They sighted him once again near Hinesham; and this time Jerry Abershaw was very nearly caught.

He had turned out of a stubble-field, and was going full-tilt up a lane that ran between high, impenetrable hedges, when he came face to face with a mill-cart fair across the way. With one glance he saw that it was not possible to pass: the wheels were well upon the banks on either side and the thorns and brambles brushed the flanks of the cart. The lane was converted into a veritable cul de sac. The field were close upon him; and a moment wasted he knew, might mean his life.

The wagoner threw up his hands, yelling out for mercy on the spot. But the highwayman never stayed to trouble him for long, but, then

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This time Jerry Abershaw was very nearly caught

and there, turned his horse's head and galloped back upon his tracks. Two of his pursuers were already in the lane. The first of them was one of the whips; and him he passed like a streak of light, catching the man a blow across the mouth with his pistol-butt, that in a minute had dyed his breeches the color of his coat. The second was the master's daughter, full out top of the field, sitting well back on her thoroughbred, with her hat left miles behind in a thorn-bush and her hair streaming out in the wind. Jerry went past her, well bent forward over his horse's neck; and as he did so, he carried his hat from his head with a great, backward, sweeping motion, that was a courtly thing to see. He held the hat for a moment over his horse's tail; and then whipping it back to his head, he threw the lady a kiss and cleared the fence to the right.

Hintlesham Park was before him, an open stretch of grass-land, with the thick of the field bearing down upon his heels. Twenty horses came over the fence, like a squadron spread in line; and Jerry Abershaw not a hundred yards to the front. They gave a "View-halloo!" that might have waked the dead beyond the priory walls, while Jerry, pressing home his spurs and clenching his teeth, listened to the thunder of the

hoofs. The word had been passed around who their quarry was; and, one and all, they shrieked his name and called on him to stop.

But no thought was further then from Jerry's mind. Before him was the freedom of the high-road; behind him the gallows—nothing less; and, in that one great sprint across the park, he saw his own limp and helpless body dangling high on hangman's oak and the rooks above his head. And he swore that his old, gray horse had seen the vision too. For, though his flanks were going like bellows, and he had burst a vessel in his nostrils that marked the line with blood, he galloped as he had never done before. The pick of the blood of the county was hard upon their tracks. They were all fresh out for a morning's sport, though they had never bargained for such a day as this. And Jerry Abershaw had been chased by dragoons all the way from Boxted Heath. The dragoons were now out of the race, but the hunting-field was not; and Jerry had to prove that he was better than they all.

Across the park he gained—it might have been not more than twenty yards. He went through the priory coverts, scattering the pheasants and setting the rooks a-cawing overhead, and got safely over Flowton Brook.

It was about midday; and the only soul in Flowton Street was an old almswoman, with a basket full of eggs. The rest of them were seated at their dinners, when they were startled by the clattering sound of the hoofs of a bolting horse. One and all, they rushed to their cottage windows, and some had even got as far as their doors, when a man in a green-hooded riding-coat, mounted on a gray horse dripping wet, came helter-skelter down the village street. At the corner by the church he bowled over the old woman like a ninepin; and the eggs were spread across the path. They say she was over ninety then, having been born the very year that Queen Anne came upon the throne; and she never recovered from the shock. But some of the eggshells remain to this day, as they were picked up in the village street; and if you are tactful, and lead up to the topic by way of the season's harvest, you may get the story out of a village gray-beard, much as his grandfather told it him, with minor additions of his own: of how on an autumn midday, in the reign of George the Third, Jerry Abershaw, the highwayman, came down Flowton Street, and half the field of the Suffolk Hunt made their windows shake. Then he will lead you off to his cottage, and, opening a drawer in

a dresser, hand you the broken shell of an egg.

"An' thar 's one of th' eggs that they pelted 'un with," he will tell you; for such he fully believes to have been the case.

But we know the truth of the whole affair: that Jerry Abershaw was last seen that day by the gamekeeper at Nettlestead Hall, with the steam rising from his gray horse as if from a saucepan on the fire. After that, he was lost; and the Suffolk Hunt went home to warm their swollen feet at their fenders and tell their wives of the greatest run that ever the county saw. The huntsman took days to find his hounds. They had eaten the fox and run wild about the skirts of Ipswich. As for the master's daughter, she afterward married a peer, and became a well-known beauty at Almack's Assembly Rooms in King Street, where she related to an attentive group of listeners—including Lord Carlisle and his personal friend, his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales—how she had passed within a hand's-breadth of Jerry Abershaw in a lonely country lane and how the highwayman had doffed his hat and thrown her a kiss.

Jerry must have hid in a coppice until night-fall; for he was not recognized by any of the few that knew him until months afterward, when he

was back on the Kingston road, at the inn of "The Bald-faced Stag," which had the unenviable reputation of being the headquarters of this notorious rogue. But a gray horse was found exhausted on the highroad, three miles from Bury St. Edmunds; and on its saddle a sheet of paper, torn from a note-book, on which the following short words had been hastily written, in uneven roman lettering:

TO THE MASTER OF THE SUFFOLK HOUNDS.

That was all. Except that one of Sir Joshua Holbrook's thoroughbreds had been stolen from the paddock near at hand.

And it is all forgotten now. They will talk of a run of above an hour as a thing worth living for. But there was a day when the soft pastures of sleepy Suffolk thundered with a frenzied, desperate race for human life, when the sheep were startled from their midday sleep and the farmyard dogs were set a-barking in the sun, and men rode as they had never done before. And that was the day when Jerry Abershaw, the highwayman, was top of all the hunt.

CHAPTER VI

HOW A BROKEN HEAD MAY LEAD TO A BROKEN HEART

IN the meantime, the Vicomte was sitting up in his bed.

"*Mon Dieu!* how pitiful!" he sighed.

"If they catch Jerry Abershaw, he'll be hanged," said Master Anthony. For there was not a shadow of doubt upon the point.

"Vraiment," observed the Vicomte. "It is necessary for the general welfare of the community to hang all such wicked rascals. But, I think of my own unhappy country. There, all men are turned robbers and thieves; neither do they restrict their robberies to the highroad. They break into palaces and prisons, and uproot the tombs of kings." Then, he broke off suddenly, as if something had occurred to his mind. "But, tell me, where is Freston?" he added, in a very altered voice.

"Freston?" repeated Anthony, who, with John Constable, knew every mile of the country

around. "Freston is near Ipswich, by the mouth of the Orwell."

"Ah," said the Vicomte; "then how does one get to Freston from here?"

"By the Stratford turnpike and along the Ipswich road. But, why do you want to know?"

"I have a friend," was the answer, "who is very well known at Freston on the Orwell. I remember now, it was the Orwell that he mentioned," he added as if to himself.

"It is only a little village," said the boy, as if its want of magnitude were little short of disgrace.

"Ah, perhaps; but, my friend is such a gentleman as might have a liking for being alone; almost a recluse, as one might say. And how far might Freston be from here?"

"Fifteen miles," suggested Anthony.

"So near! Then one might ride there within two hours."

Whereupon, having gained all the information he desired, he proceeded to dress for the day.

Directly after breakfast Sir Michael Packe called for his horse and rode off to the scene of the disaster.

Fresh horses had been sent out from Colchester, and the coach had continued on its way. But

THE REFUGEE

both the driver and the young officer of marines lay at the Gun Inn, the latter unconscious and upon the verge of the other world.

Sir Michael found the inn crowded to overflowing.

There was the Dedham doctor, in his top-boots, seated before a tankard of ale and giving out that no power on earth could save the officer's life. There were a couple of schoolmasters from the Grammar School, quoting Latin to the point, and John Constable and Willie Lott, searching the roadway for the marks of Jerry's horse.

The vicar of Dedham and the rector of Langham were there, in cocked hats and cassocks, discussing the price of pigs; and altogether mine host of the Gun was doing a roaring trade and blessing Jerry Abershaw from the bottom of his heart.

But, though there was a great deal of useless talk and lifting up of hands, it was old Sir Michael himself who was the first to think of a practical thing.

"Who was the young man?" he bellowed.

But neither the divines nor the schoolmasters nor the doctor nor the innkeeper himself were anyhow able to say.

Then, "What in the name of Thunder, had

they been doing all the time?" Which, of course, was quite a sensible thing to ask.

There was a silence of several seconds. Then, the doctor observed that the treatment was complete rest and freedom from exercise. (Which, seeing that the patient was entirely insensible, there should be no difficulty in putting into effect.) Whereupon, Sir Michael called the doctor a fool—among other things; and the doctor, in order, it is presumed, to prove the contrary, remarked that there was danger of compression of the brain by cerebral hemorrhage, and it was first necessary to revive the paralysed nerve centers of the heart.

So saying, he looked very wise for a moment—and then remembered his beer.

Sir Michael went out of the room, fuming and exceedingly red in the face. In the passage he caught hold of the pot-boy and cuffed him soundly over the head. Then, puffing and blowing, he ascended the stairs, and entered the room where the young man lay, pale and still, with his head done up in bandages that the doctor had steeped in lotion.

In the pocket of the greatcoat, which lay upon a chair at the side of the bed, Sir Michael found an opened letter addressed to Captain Roland

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Hood, his Majesty's Green Marines, on board his Majesty's ship *Swiftsure*, then at anchor in Plymouth Sound.

"Hood?" repeated the old gentleman, as if he knew the name. Then he remembered that this must be the son of the widowed lady that lived at Bentley Hall, on the Suffolk side of the Stour: he had heard it said that her son was in the Green Marines. Upon the instant he came downstairs again, and, going out into the yard, seized John Constable by the lapel of his coat, which was powdered white with flour.

"Can ye run, ye lanky loon?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir," answered the boy artist, holding up an arm, as if he anticipated a blow.

"Then off to Nether Hall, and order that bull-calf of a coachman of mine to put to the bay-horses and drive to Bentley Green. Tell the oaf to bring back the lady from the Hall; and if he's not returned to the Gun Inn by twelve o'clock, ye can tell him I'll stop his pay for a month."

At that the old man flourished his stick in the air while John Constable made off as fast as his legs could go. And within two hours from that time a sweet-faced little lady was leaning forward in Sir Michael Packe's great chaise, with her trembling hands tightly clasped together and

her face as white as snow, while the hedges and trees flew past, along the Ipswich road.

She went up to her son very bravely, but looking straight ahead, both Sir Michael and the doctor following her into the room.

The young man was still unconscious; but the doctor, perhaps only to give courage to the widowed mother, said that he thought there still was hope. Whereupon Sir Michael, taking his words in earnest, went down to his "bull-calf of a coachman" in the stable-yard, and, though his horses were all in a sweat, told him to get off six miles into Colchester and fetch out Dr. Gosling.

This learned gentleman arrived in the due course of the afternoon, and fully concurred in the opinion of the Dedham doctor: that it was, above all, necessary to revive the "paralysed nerve-centers of the heart"—only he went one step further, and did it.

And that was the first step in a recovery which occupied several months, during many weeks of which the patient was delirious, being saved again and again from the door of death, but turning back continually, like a child that wants to sleep.

But he pulled round in the end; and the Dedham doctor never ceased to refer to it until his dying day.

"I once had a case of concussion of the brain," he would begin, and then go on to expatiate upon the treatment he had thought fit to adopt as opposed to that of the common herd of ordinary medical men. For, with regard to that recovery, he took an ocean of credit upon himself. It never occurred to him that there were others beside himself who had a right to an equal share in the pride and pleasure of it all. For, throughout that long and critical illness, Roland Hood's mother and Cicely Packe took turn and turn about to be nurse. When the one slept, the other kept watch at the bedside; so that there was always one of them at hand to smooth his pillow when he woke.

Thus it was that, after the delirium had left him, Roland Hood came to look upon the same two faces, that seemed forever watching at his couch, for every little need. One or the other was always at his side. So that, in course of time, they were to him the very sweetest faces in all God's gracious world.

During this period the Vicomte was left much to his own resources. Anthony sought the company of his friends, John Constable and Willie Lott; and Sir Michael, redder in the face than ever, was continually backward and forward

from the Gun, with grapes that had come from London and brown jugs of cream. The Vicomte constantly questioned the Squire after the health of the patient, and, as often as not, received with his answer the entirely irrelevant information that the widow was the gentlest and the sweetest-tempered lady that could anywhere be found. So the Vicomte, knowing full well that extremes meet in all things, but perhaps in the affairs of the heart most frequently of all, was probably the first to guess the truth, though he showed not a shade of it in his face. This we may place to the credit of his good breeding. But there was afterward proof of a greater duplicity he was practising at the time.

In Paris the Committee of Public Safety had instituted a system of terror from which the whole civilized world, including France herself, recoiled in horror and disgust. At the head of this body were Carnot, Robespierre, Saint Just, and Couthon, men who in their day sent thousands to the guillotine. Toward the end of this year of nameless horrors, a plot was hatching in the Convention itself to overthrow the tyrants. The Vicomte got word of it and made his plans accordingly. Though before his host he continued to denounce the whole aims of the Revolution, he

secretly became a Republican, and joined that party in Paris that went by the name of the *jeunesse dorée*, who were afterward, under Pichegru, to compass the downfall of the Jacobins. Past a doubt he saw no other method of regaining a little of what he had lost. The Republican armies had met with repeated success upon the frontiers; Toulon had been recaptured; and France, for the time being, was safe, as far as external enemies were concerned. In other words, the Revolution looked like being a success. The days of monarchy and despotism and even aristocracy, were past. Monsieur des Ormeaux was content to satisfy himself with what he could get.

About this time letters arrived frequently from France. One and all, they were addressed to "le citoyen Ormeaux"; and the Vicomte, with many a sigh, would show them to Cicely and her father, in proof of how he had even been robbed of his name.

As soon as Captain Hood was able to be moved, he was taken to Nether Hall; for there it was that Sir Michael insisted he should go. He was not yet strong enough, the doctor said, to stand the journey by road to Bentley Green; though, in the

light of after events, it seems likely that Sir Michael himself put the words into the doctor's mouth. Anyhow, certain it is that no one at the time, with the exception of the Vicomte, suspected the red-faced, irascible, kind-hearted old widower of any designs upon the elder lady's hand.

Such however, was the case. And it so happened that when Christmas-time was come, and the snow lay thick and white upon the richness of the valley of the Stour, there was a party at Nether Hall of six persons around the blazing logs: the Squire and his son and daughter; the Vicomte; Captain Hood and his mother, the widow of Bentley Hill. From this circle there was one who would rise suddenly from his seat, a dark look upon his sallow face, and the firelight red in his eye, and go quickly out into the night and the falling snow. At such times it was Cicely alone who guessed the truth; and she trembled at the thought of it. For, though the girl knew little or nothing of the world, her woman's instinct warned her of the love for herself that was slowly eating away the Frenchman's heart. She knew, too, that the Vicomte had not been blind to the tender glances that she could not keep

from Roland Hood; and she had seen his face change swiftly as he thought of it. And then she shivered and drew closer to the fire.

In the breast of a weaker and a better man the mortification and bitterness of it all had swelled and throbbed, and his sorrow would have melted in his eyes. But not so with Louis des Ormeaux. He knew nothing of the power of sympathy; he was not able even to be sorry for himself. If it had been within him to be so for any man, he might have pitied Roland Hood, lying back in his pillows, with his white face and the bandages stitched about his head. But he was rocked by a passion of bitter jealousy that never left him. Through sleepy Dedham Street there stepped a man, with the grandest air in the world and the finest clothes upon his back, in whose breast lay the germ of a violence that would one day break its bounds. He would go down by himself to the mill-pond, and brood for hours on the bridge.

At last, before the New Year was far advanced, Roland Hood was able again to get about. Sir Michael hoped that he would stay on at Nether Hall until he was able to join his ship. Then followed, save where that one impenetrable shadow was concerned, what were the happiest days of all, during which those little secret

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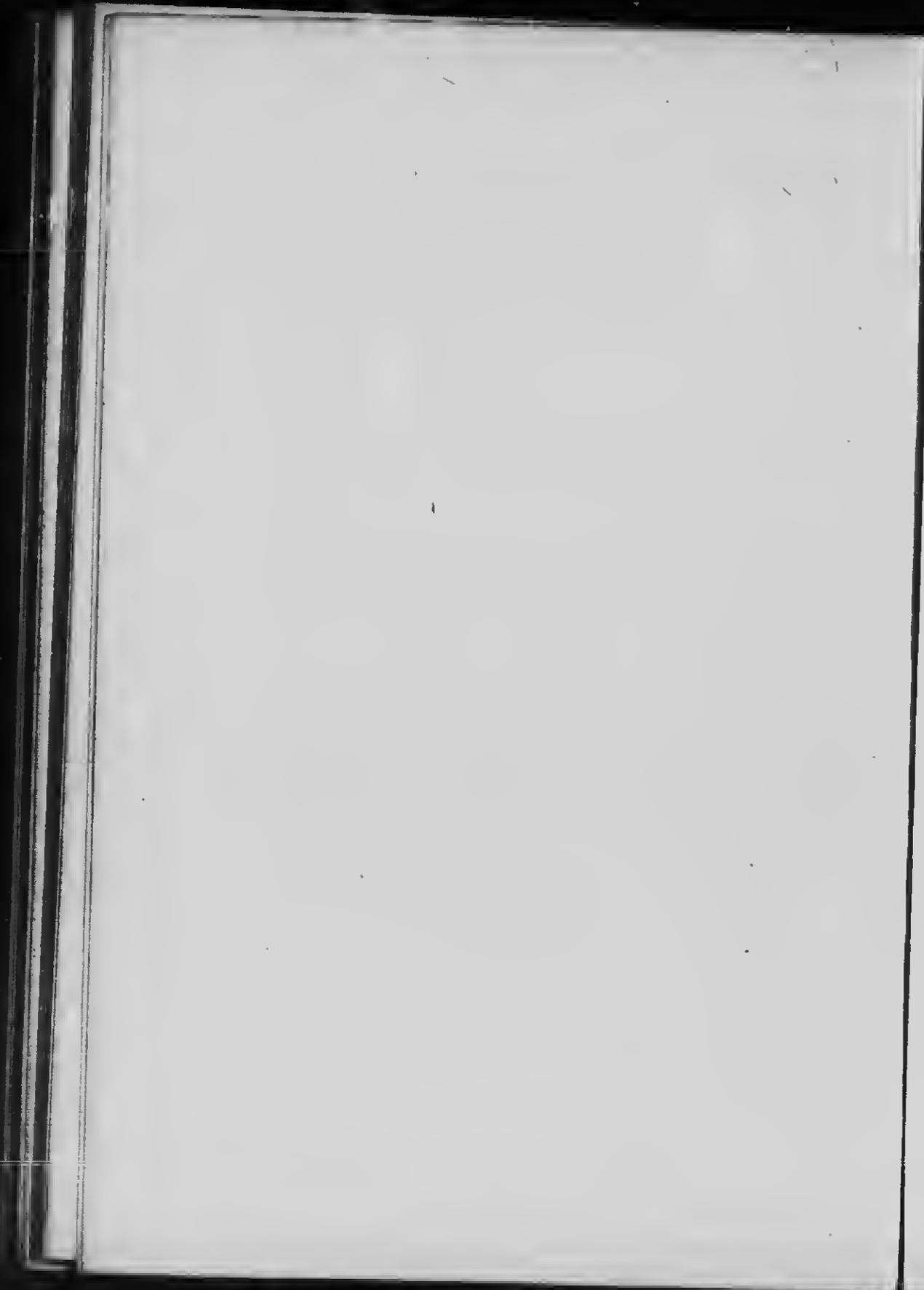
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He would go down by himself to the mill-pond, and brood for hours on the bridge





springs, which had been working underground, so silently and yet so surely, burst upon the surface into the open light of day.

How Sir Michael proposed is a mystery to this day. The gossips of Dedham held that he threatened the lady with a hunting-crop, else she never had promised to be his wife. But those that knew him better recognized that, under a very boisterous and violent manner, there beat a heart of gold; and they guessed that the lady had not been blind to his greater worth. For, though she still retained much of the charm of her youth, she had gained all that gentle power of understanding which can only come by years.

That the other affair was more romantic, we would never presume to assert; that it was more picturesque, we will not for a moment deny. There was a girl of twenty summers and a young officer in the dazzling uniform of his Majesty's Green Marines. It came about at the foot of the garden, by the side of the sleepy Stour. And there was no one there to see it, save the stars—and the Vicomte, Louis des Ormeaux, hid in the dark shadow of the rhododendrons, for all the world like another snake in a second Garden of Eden.

CHAPTER VII

MR. AND MRS. YATES AT HOME

IT was known in the servants' hall that that night the Vicomte never went to bed. Bannister, the butler, who slept on the other side of the wall, heard him restlessly pacing his room throughout the earlier part of the night; and at four in the morning a groom, in going to attend to a sick horse, noticed a bright light still burning in his window. Also if further proof be needed, the housemaid found there was no necessity to make his bed in the morning: apparently he had not even laid himself down in his clothes.

For all that, he appeared spotless and immaculate at the breakfast-table, a thing of frills and ruffles, with a smile for everyone and seemingly in the best of spirits. But no sooner was the meal finished than he went round to the stables and ordered out the mare. The stable-boy, who tightened the girths, said that the Vicomte could not stand still for impatience, but kept telling him

to be quick and rapping his boots with his cane. When he rode off, his white teeth were showing, and he was snarling like a fox.

It was a boisterous morning in March. The sun shone brightly, but a strong gale was blowing from the southwest that was bitterly cold and raw. It caught the hood of the Vicomte's coat and made it flutter about his mouth, as he trotted briskly along the London road.

Half-way to Ipswich, he reined up before a sign-post, where a narrow lane met the highroad at an angle. "TO FRESTON," he read, and cut his horse across the quarters, and set off at a canter down the lane.

Within an hour he was walking the mare over the hill into the little hamlet of Freston, that lies scattered and hidden among the woods on the Orwell bank.

A roadmender, bowed with toil, was seated before a heap of broken stones; and him the Vicomte hailed.

"Would you be so good as to tell me if this is Freston?" he asked. Even with a roadmender he could not be impolite.

"That it be," answered the man, letting the head of his hammer rest on the pile of stones.

"Merci," said the Vicomte, "but I have not yet

done. I have a friend of the name of Yates, who lives here. May I ask if you happen to know the name?"

"Him as they calls 'Black' Yates!" exclaimed the man.

"May be; but I thought it was 'Gipsy'," said the Vicomte.

"Ah, that 's him!" cried the other. And then in terms of the utmost surprise, looking the Vicomte over from the braid on his hat to the sole of his polished boot, "a friend o' yourn, did 'ee say?"

The Vicomte, with a nonchalant air, flicked his handkerchief across his face. It was a habit he had; as if he was eternally pestered by a fly.

"When I say 'friend'," he remarked, "I am not precise. But, tell me, where does he live?"

"Well, he don't live in Freston," said the man.

"Ah, no," sung the Vicomte; "but he is very well known in Freston on the Orwell. Is he not?"

"That he is," was the answer; "and he ain't that by an honest living such as breaking stones. You'll find his house away back on the road you've comed by and first turning on the left. It's a small white cottage, down by the water's edge."

"A thousand thanks," said the Vicomte; and he set his spurs to the mare.

He found Mr. Yates's residence without any difficulty. Dismounting, he tied the mare to the gate; and then he knocked at the door. It was opened by a woman, who drew back nervously, half closing the door in his face.

"Is Mr. Yates in?" asked the Vicomte.

"I dunno," she said; "I 'll go an' see."

In two seconds she had returned.

"No," she said. "He 's out."

"Merci," said the Vicomte; and brushing the woman aside, he stepped lightly into a small room. And there was Mr. Yates seated at a table before a plate of fried bacon and a glass of hot gin and water, which he was slowly stirring with the stem of a long churchwarden pipe.

At the sight of the Vicomte he let go the pipe and lifted his hands in the air. The Vicomte bowed slightly, from the hips, with his legs very close together and holding his hat in his hand.

"Well, I 'll be sunk if it ain't the furrener!" exclaimed Mr. Yates. "I 'll be gibbeted if it ain't!" Then, mastering his astonishment, he rose from his chair and attempted a display of heartiness that made the Vicomte smile.

"Well, now," he cried at the top of his voice,

"I look upon this here as a downright honor. Why, sir, I'm that there pleased to see yer ludship, as I can't rightly put it inter words."

But the Vicomte took him up.

"I believe you," said he.

"Pray take a seat, sir—me lud, that is."

"Thank you," said the Vicomte, throwing hat, gloves, and cane upon the table. "I want a word with you *in private*." He gave emphasis to the words, at the same time throwing a glance in the direction of Mrs. Yates who was on her knees at the fire.

Yates caught the look.

"Confidential like?" he suggested.

"Precisely," said the Vicomte. "Where shall we go?"

"Go!" echoed the other. "Me don't go no-where, me lud."

Mrs. Yates picked herself up.

"Where've I got ter go to?" she asked humbly.

"Go fur a walk," said Yates. And, at that, the dutiful lady, without waiting to put on either a hat or a shawl, set off along the road, as if she were bound for Ipswich, at five and a half miles an hour.

The Vicomte watched her from the window.

"Did you do it yourself?" he asked, with a nod of the head.

"Every bit," assented Yates, with obvious pride.

"*Comment—how?*"

"Sometimes with kindness, sometimes wi'out," observed Mr. Yates; "but allus with a stick."

"Perfect!" exclaimed the Vicomte, in tones of the most sincere admiration.

"Don't mention it," modestly threw in Mr. Yates, as if trying to make light of a matter which reflected unbounded credit upon himself. "There 's very few gentlemen wot knows the way to govern a wumman."

"*Ma foi,*" threw in the Vicomte; "you're right!"

"Don't mention it, me lud," repeated Mr. Yates with a slight bow by way of acknowledgment. "An' now, what might yer ludship want of me?"

The Vicomte paused for a moment to take a pinch of snuff from his silver box.

"You know the coast?" he said at last, closing the box with a snap.

"None better," assented Yates.

"Intimately, I feel sure," threw in the Vicomte.

"An' for why?" asked the other, quickly.

"You should know that best yourself. Listen now; I warrant that every drop of that gin is smuggled."

"Save me if I ever did such a shocking thing in me life! I'm a honorable gent, wot would n't soil his hands in such-like occypation. Arst me wife."

"It's not material," said the Vicomte, carelessly. "I trust that you are a smuggler; indeed, I happen to know that you are. I must have a man who knows the coast. Also, can you find me Jerry Abershaw? I may want him within a month."

As Mr. Yates afterward observed to the highwayman, "When he arst me that, the breath went slick out o' me body. Strike me Davy, but he could have flipped me over back'ards with his second finger an' thumb!"

But the Vicomte was not so disposed. He merely lay back in his chair and helped himself to snuff.

Mr. Yates's lower jaw had fallen. His cheeks had vanished, and his forehead had gone up somewhere under his stubbly hair. For some moments he sat rigid and mute on the other side of the table, seemingly nothing but mouth and eyes.

"*Wot 's that?*" he gasped.

The Vicomte yawned.

"My friend, why do you trouble me to repeat myself? You heard what I said very well. When I shall require him, you take horse and ride to London, and bring Jerry Abershaw to me."

"*Who?*" exclaimed Mr. Yates.

"Jerry Abershaw," repeated the Vicomte.

Mr. Yates closed his mouth with a snap and vehemently shook his head.

"Sink me, but I never heerd of him!" he asserted.

"*Mon Dieu,*" sighed the other, "all this is a pitiful waste of time!"

"Never heerd of him! Never heerd the name in me life! Does he come from these here parts, me lud?"

Mr. Yates had no great histrionic ability. He had assumed an air of dogged determination, but he never feigned the vestige of an effort to recollect. Therefore, he would have deceived no one, his visitor least of all.

The Vicomte, without a word, drew a bundle of banknotes from his pocket and slapped them down on the table. Mr. Yates's eyes again opened to their utmost, but he never spoke a word.

The Vicomte, dampening his finger-tips, counted out three crisp notes and tossed them across to Yates.

"There," he said; "there is the price of silence. Meet me to-morrow night, at ten o'clock, on Ramsey Height. I will whistle three times, and you will find me on the outskirts of the wood. I have business of a private nature. I need your help, else I would never be here. You have no choice but to obey."

Mr. Yates was no fool. He thought he scented a trap.

"Yer words is plain enough, governor—me lud, I mean; but you 're somewheres under a misapprehension, all the same. I'm a honest man, fair an' square an' aboveboard, and allus was, from the very day I was born. And strike me dead, an' it 's true."

"Tut, my friend!" said the Vicomte, not a little testily. "You waste your breath on me. It will be wisest to do as you are bid."

But Yates was stolidly silent, though the notes seemed to dance before his eyes.

"I don't believe this here 's a honest job," he said at length, and there was a touch of indignation in his tone, as if the Vicomte had made some slur upon his personal character that was partic-



“Take that money,” he thundered, “and meet me
to-morrow night on Ramsey Height”

ularly galling to a gentleman of such unblemished past.

The Vicomte angrily rapped the table with his knuckles.

"Have done!" he cried. "I warn you, do not try to play the hypocrite with me!"

Mr. Yates was a pinnacle of righteousness.

"Lookee here, me lud," he said. "You walks inter the house of a man wot 's a honorable gent, by both birth and *segacity*, and accuses him of keeping low companionship. Now, I arsts you, me lud, is it gentlemanly; is it perlite?"

The Vicomte got to his feet, seizing his cane in his hand.

"Take that money," he thundered, "and meet me to-morrow night on Ramsey Height—or I 'll have you up before the bench for holding up the Ipswich coach!"

Gipsy Yates went back like a man knocked out of the ring. He was far past the power of dissimulation now.

"Strike me dead," he gasped, "but who, in the name of mystery, told you that!"

The Vicomte never moved. He stood with his fingers drumming upon the twisted hilt of his sword.

"You were the man who emptied the boot,"

said he, "that is to say, after you had shot the horse and struck the marine officer a blow upon the head."

"But," faltered Yates, "*you* was n't there. Was you?"

"I was," said the Vicomte. And then there came a pause.

"Holy Moses!" ejaculated Yates. "I'm corked!"

"No," said the Vicomte, "you have only to do as I bid you, and I promise my mouth will be shut. I can keep a secret as well as yourself; and if you wish for anything more to set your mind at rest, I can tell you now what you must very soon learn for yourself, that my business is wholly as reprehensible as yours."

Yates was no longer in any doubt.

"Say, governor," he threw in, "and how did yer get the money?"

"How so?" the other asked.

"When I saw yer larst, you'd only got one louis about yer."

"Since then I have had negotiations with my own country," hastily answered the Vicomte. "But that's my affair, and not yours. What I wish you to understand is that this must be kept

secret. Serve me well, and it will pay you. Play me false, and I 'll find you out."

"Aye, aye," responded Yates. "As long as a work 's honest, an' the skipper knows his mind, Gipsy Yates don't arst for nothing more."

The Vicomte turned to the door.

"Ramsey Height," said he.

"Sure," said Yates. "I 'm your man, me lud."

"Good!" exclaimed the Vicomte.

He was about to go, when Yates caught him by the sleeve.

"Governor!" he whispered. "What 's the game?"

"That also," said the Vicomte, airily, "is altogether beside the mark."

And with that he closed the door and was gone, while Gipsy Yates sat down again to his bacon, which by then had grown cold.

But his appetite appeared to have gone, for he soon put down his knife and fork and, pushing the plate aside, solaced himself with the gin.

"A wunnerful gent!" he ruminated. "A wunnerful gent, indeed! It *did* occur to me ter land him one over the head and empty his pockets on the spot; but I thought better on it somehow. There was a dangerous look in his eye when he

got ter his feet that time an' he kep' playing his fingers around his sword-hilt in a sort of a fascinatin' kind of a way. An' that," he added, sagely, "is wot 's known as personality. He 's got it, and so has Jerry; an' it 'll carry a man a deal further than wot any amount of muscle 'll do,—even with wummen. That 's the remarkablest part of it all, even the inferior interlecks of females reckernizes it." Then he smiled; for doubtless the thought was a trifle flattering to his pride. "I 've got a touch of it, meself," he observed, and emptied his glass of gin.

Meanwhile, the Vicomte was cantering homewards, whistling an air from a Paris opera and gaily tossing his cambric handkerchief into the breeze like a child. Once, he let it drop, and had to dismount to recover it.

As he paused with his foot in the stirrup, Mrs. Yates came past, putting her best foot foremost and well maintaining the highly creditable average of five and a half miles an hour.

The Vicomte was never a man who allowed an opportunity to slip.

"Ah, Madame!" he cried. "And what a dear, good fellow he is!"

"'Oo?" asked the woman. "My husband?"

"Who else!" ejaculated the Vicomte, as if it

were a generally acknowledged fact that there was but one really dear, good fellow in all the civilized world, and that one Mr. Yates.

"Don't yer believe ut!" said the woman, with a sly wink and a nod of the head. "Only don't go an' tell him as I told yer so," she added in a whisper.

"Madame," cried the Vicomte, "your words astonish me! But, rest assured; your secret is profoundly safe."

"He's got 'is faults," she sighed; "but, arter all, so have we all; and the Lord knows as I've got mine. I'd be the last to deny ut."

The Vicomte regarded her with curiosity, mingled with a high degree of mirth.

"If you will excuse so personal an allusion," he asked, "how did you come by that black eye?"

The woman smiled, and began wagging her head from side to side, in an exceedingly artful way.

"Did the dear, good fellow give it to you? Eh?"

Mrs. Yates's answer was somewhat extraordinary, to say the least of it.

"No," she said, in a hushed and confidential whisper. "But he thinks he did!"

"*Comment!*" exclaimed the Vicomte. "But how?"

She only wagged her head the faster, and brought her finger sharply against the side of her nose; and then it was that the Vicomte guessed that she was but half-witted, and admired the perspicacity of Mr. Yates in selecting a lunatic lady for wife.

"Come, tell me," he urged, his thin lips parting in a smile.

"Yer won't let on, if I does?" she whispered.

"Ah, non! Upon the honor of a gentleman of France."

"Well, then," she began; "it's like this: he give me a black eye when he was courtin' of me; and then he give me another on the weddin' day; an' he went on giving 'em, until ut become a regular habit that I could n't break 'un of. He says the place don't look like home without ut, an' I likes to make 'un comfortable-like, so I just rubs the blacking brush acrost it whenever I cleans his boots. He still hits me occasional, but he don't do it near so often as he thinks he do. Not he!" Whereupon she winked again, and wagged her head even faster than before.

The Vicomte burst into a laugh.

"Magnificent!" he cried.

"Well, it makes him happy ter see ut," threw in Mrs. Yates; "an I hope I'm a dutiful wife. But, deary-me, he told me to walk, and I ain't a-walking at all! I'd gone an' been an' forgot."

And at that, tucking her hands under her apron, she set off once more along the road.

The Vicomte followed her with his eye, his shoulders shaking with merriment, which he saw no need to suppress.

"And so, Mr. 'Gipsy' Yates," he cried to himself aloud; "and so there are very few gentlemen who understand how to rule a woman. *Mon Dieu*, but it is droll!"

And there he sat on his horse on the King's highroad, laughing until he was forced to hold his sides. And all the time, he was eating out his heart.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SNAKE IN THE GRASS

ARRIVED at Nether Hall, the Vicomte was informed by Sir Michael of the engagement of Cicely to Captain Roland Hood. He received the news with an affectation of surprise, and then he declared that from the bottom of his heart he wished the young couple all the happiness in the world. He took Roland aside and congratulated him in a very cordial and effusive manner. To Sir Michael he expressed the opinion that a more suitable match he found it difficult to conceive. And, altogether, Monsieur le Vicomte seemed as delighted as anyone else in the house. It is not easy to say what it was that prompted all this falsity. There could be nothing to be gained by such hypocrisy. It was only inherent in the man to practise it.

To Cicely alone his manner was greatly different. With her he made light of the whole affair, regarding it merely as a pretty and not unpicturesque species of joke, *un passetemps idéal*—as he

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put it in his own language—well enough in its way; but, he intimated, there were far more serious things in the world. He entered into conversation on the subject, in much the same manner as a grown-up person will take a good-natured interest in the prattling of a child. If Cicely resented his demeanor, he adopted an exultant air. Which was the greatest mystery of all.

It had always been the custom of the Vicomte to sigh frequently when he talked; yet now, when one would have thought there was cause for it, he seemed disinclined to sue for pity or consolation. His self-confidence was alarming. He carried himself as one who had the victory in his hands.

Cicely had never trusted him from the start. Circumstances, and her woman's instinct, had long since shown her that to which everyone else in the house was blind: the tremendous hold the man had upon himself. She had seen him rocked by emotion and quivering, like a pennant in a gale, and a moment afterwards, in her father's company, all urbanity and smiles. She knew him for one who would be terrible in wrath, whose nature had all the force and violence of an irresistible mountain torrent. And yet, as far as

the man's vehemence was concerned, figuratively speaking, he could fold it up and put it away at will. A pinch of snuff, a laugh, and a whisk of his cambric handkerchief, was all that was needed to bring about the change. Before this despotism of the will, Cicely felt herself to quail, and not altogether without a reason. For she was conscious that this man, who had such dominion over himself, was capable of exercising an almost equally complete mastery over one who was weak and who already stood in fear and trembling at his very glance. Even under the shelter of her father's roof, where from her bedroom window she could see the cattle browsing in the rich, open pastures and the tall, gray tower of Dedham Church rising above the tree tops in the peaceful valley of the Stour—even with her lover at her side, a feeling of insecurity took strong hold upon the girl.

"Roland," she once ventured, "when you are alone with Monsieur des Ormeaux, does he ever talk to you—of me?"

"Oh, very seldom; and when he does, it is only to tell me that he thinks I have found a very charming little wife."

"Is that all he says?" she wondered. She barely spoke aloud.

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"Yes," laughed Roland, and then his face changed; indeed, there was the vestige of a frown. "To tell you the truth," he added, "I do not care very much about discussing you with Monsieur des Ormeaux. I do not like the man."

"Why, Roland? Why?"

She spoke breathlessly; and on a sudden the color left her cheeks.

"Why!" he repeated in surprise. "You are not afraid of him, are you, Cicely?"

"No," she cried. "Oh, Roland, tell me I am not!"

She had caught tight hold of him. He took her playfully, yet tenderly, by the shoulders.

"Of course you're not!" he laughed. "Why should you be?"

"I don't know why," she answered hastily. "I can't think of any reason why I should be so. He is always polite; he is most considerate, too; but sometimes when he speaks to me, he smiles. And then I fear him, Roland! I could not tell you why; but I do," she cried, "I do."

"No; of course you could not tell me why! For it is all imagination, Cicely, and altogether without a cause. I, too, dislike him. But you must not let such silly fears run away with you:

Monsieur des Ormeaux can do us no harm; and it is not likely he will ever try."

"No," she sighed, and drew closer to him she loved.

So little did they know the man! They thought, poor, foolish ones, that they were secure in a happiness that seemed to them the only thing in all the world. They did not dream that Louis des Ormeaux, if so it fell in with his plans, would go back to the Middle Ages and fling civilization to the winds as readily as he would take a pinch of snuff. For the lean, lithe form that paced the garden of Nether Hall, whipping the spring-time blossoms with his cane, veiled alike the heart of a Roman and the fiery spirit of a Gaul.

May had drawn swiftly into June. It was the time of year when the Stour Valley, always with a gentle beauty of its own, is at its best. The richness of the fields was bespangled over with the yellow of the buttercups, and on the lowlands the marsh-mallows stirred in lazy breezes from the coast. Lilac and laburnum were in bloom, and the lanes and hedges white with hawthorn; which, together with the daisy-dotted meadows, made it seem as if the valley had been powdered by a fall of summer snow, that could not melt in the sunshine, and cast abroad the sweetness of its

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perfume. Flocks of sheep were scattered on the uplands; cattle wandered lazily along the river-side; while, between the pollard-willows, the sleepy, listless river drifted to the sea.

It was that Eden of England that John Constable loved so well; and surely no scene was ever more symbolical of Peace. Yet, at that very time, the whole civilized world was arming itself for war; and upon this same glorious First of June, Lord Howe shattered the French fleet and drove them back to Brest.

Indeed, Europe was now upon the threshold of those twenty years of strife that saw the rise of Napoleon and heard the tramp of the Grand Army over the snows and across the desert sand. The war-dogs were loosed; the imperial eagles of France were to be borne in triumph through nearly all the capitals of civilization, and Moscow was doomed to flames. As yet the vineyards of Spain and Italy were untrampled under foot; the Danube flowed its even course, and the green corn rustled in the breeze upon the field of Waterloo. But the reign of Terror was drawing to its close. France was already dyed in blood. And now the flood-gates were opened wide; and soon the earth would shake and the air would thunder, for the Man of Destiny was come.

He was born of the Revolution, as his own boundless ambition was born of himself. He was to stand for all time as the world's greatest genius in war, and would, in very truth, have been the conqueror of the world, had it not been for the little man with the thin sad face—Horatio Nelson, to-wit—who was then pacing the quarter-deck of H. M. S. "*Agamemnon*," with his eagle eye upon the coast of Corsica, and who, by the Grace of God, was to keep the Union Jack at the masthead through it all.

Sir Michael was all for war, as, he said, every loyal, self-respecting, and patriotic Englishman always ought to be. It was only such pessimistic knaves as Mr. Charles James Fox who were against it.

Indeed, the war fever stirred up afresh in the old Squire an active interest in politics; the more so since at that time, he received several letters from Mr. Pitt, the youthful Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer. Pitt remembered Sir Michael, as a staunch supporter of the great Lord Chatham at the time of the American War, and said that it would give him great pleasure to introduce Sir Michael's son into Parliament, should the young man have any desire to embark upon a political career, at such time as

he came of a fitting age. Sir Michael laid hold upon the notion. He said that there were but three places in the world where a gentleman ought to be found: the Houses of Parliament, the battlefield and the covert-side. Anthony stated fearlessly that of the three he liked the first-named least. Whereupon, the old Squire, out of pure cussedness, decreed that his son should become a statesman, whether he wanted to or not. Anthony laughed the matter off; for, in youth we live in the present, and let the future look after itself, and as yet he had a year or so in which to be free of the countryside and the playground of Dedham Grammar School, with his friends, John Constable and Willie Lott. Of course, he wished to go to the war, but he could not; indeed, at that time, there was not a half-grown Britisher in all England that would not be fighting the French.

Roland, in spite of protests from Cicely, was for getting back without delay to his ship, which had gone south to the Mediterranean, and was already within sound of the guns. His marriage was postponed until he came back again from the war. It had been originally intended that a double wedding should take place in Dedham Church. But, as will be seen, so many things

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were destined to intervene between the younger couple and their united happiness that Sir Michael grew redder in the face than ever from impatience, and finally (to take a peep into the future) wedded the widow in the spring of the following year. But in the summer of the year 1794 England was already flushed with the news of her first great victories on the sea. All loyal and gallant Englishmen were for avenging the murder of the King of France; and, holding their duty to their country over and above the private affairs of their hearts, they soon forgot their lovers' tears, in dreams of clearing the decks for action and Lord Howe's new manœuvre of "breaking the enemy's line." The Seven Years War and the policy of the elder Pitt had placed half the world under the dominion of England. Sir Michael had complained that the race of great Englishmen was ended; and Howe, Jervis, Nelson, Moore and Wellington were even then buckling on their swords.

Now that Captain Hood was fully recovered of his injury, he and his mother went back to Bentley Hall. It had been decided that they should spend the last few weeks before he rejoined his ship at their old Suffolk home. There was a double reason for this: the widow was in

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some anxiety as to her housekeeping and servants; and, to be plain, there was also some talk of the proprieties, for at that time, there were one or two gossips in Dedham village, whom not even the war could supply with sufficient talk.

But, as Bentley Hall lay not half a dozen miles from the gates of Nether Hall, no sooner had he returned home than the gallant captain was forever on his horse, pounding the Ipswich road.

And so the time passed quickly on, until the autumn was upon them; and one short hour was all that remained. Roland was to leave the following morning; and now it was that, once and for all, he must wish Cicely good-by.

They were in the garden, when the Vicomte came suddenly upon them in the summer-house.

"Pardon!" said he. "I interrupt?"

"Not at all," said Roland. "We are glad to see you, sir." This was not strictly true; but it was always a difficult matter to hold word for word, to fact and at the same time keep level with the Vicomte in politeness.

"I will delay you not a moment," the Vicomte went on. "I understand you naturally wish to be by yourselves. *Mon Dieu!* but it may be ever so long before you meet again!"

As he said this, he gave peculiar emphasis to the words, and threw his hands and his eyes sharply upward, as if there were some calamity afloat that only himself was able to foresee.

"Why do you say that, Monsieur?" cried Cicely, more than a little alarmed.

He smiled—his old, cruel smile—and then he bowed exceeding low.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "we never can tell."

That was all; and then there was a silence, during which Roland shifted uneasily upon his feet, and Cicely turned anxiously to look at him. But the Vicomte stood quite motionless, with the ghost of the smile still playing around his lips.

"Sir," said Roland, "you are pleased to be pessimistic. I myself take a happier view of things."

"It is natural to hope for the best," threw in the Vicomte, "especially when one is young. We are very like fish that are caught in a net; we never realize what a calamity has befallen us—until we are landed high and dry."

"I fail to take your meaning," said Roland. "Do you mean to imply that to be forewarned is to be forearmed?"

"Mais non!" exclaimed the Vicomte. "That

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is not my intention; and it is very far from being the case. Cassandra prophesied the fall of Troy; no one believed her; but," he added softly, "nevertheless, the city fell."

And at that he bowed again.

"Monsieur," said Roland, turning impatiently away, "you speak in a riddle."

"Say rather a parable," cut in the other, "of which the meaning is more than plain: that the majority of us are dolts, Monsieur. It is very sad, but true."

They had nothing to say. They could not accuse him of rudeness. He was quite polite with it all.

"But it is not to tell you that that I am here," he went on. "I have come to pay my adieus, Monsieur le Capitaine."

"But I will see you before I go, surely?" said Roland.

"No, Monsieur. I have to ride into Colchester this afternoon, to meet a friend of mine who arrives by the Harwich coach. He is about to return to France. Ah, my fortunate friend!" and he sighed, placing his hand on his heart. "How I, too, long for Paris once again! But Versailles is gone; the Tuileries is no more; Paris, as I have known it, is a thing of the past! Ah,

Monsieur, but it is all too sad to contemplate! Was there ever a moment more suited for adieus? It is a sad word, Monsieur; but what would you have? We all are heavy in our hearts. As for myself, I am desolate!"

And the man was smiling all the time. More than that, in every word there was a touch of mockery in his tone.

He wished the young Englishman good-by with all the courtesy in the world, and, with a final bow, went up the gravel path toward the house, humming his favorite air and swinging his cane in his hand. It is noteworthy that he used the word "Adieu," and not "Au revoir," as if he thought that they were not to see each other again. But here, for once, the Vicomte des Ormeaux was sadly in the wrong.

When Roland Hood mounted his horse, his heart was as heavy as lead. Under the light in the Hall porch he had seen Cicely turn away and bury her face in her father's coat. He had heard Sir Michael's voice ring out:

"Give the frog-eating varmits a thrashing, me boy! Show 'em again what British pluck can do!" And then, in a loud, husky whisper, he

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had heard the old man say, "Bear up me girl! Be brave!"

At that the young man had set his teeth on his under lip. His throat was aching sorely; and deep down somewhere in his chest there was a feeling of something that quivered, that made his breath come fast and short. Using his spurs, he set forth upon the road.

Five days later his new ship sailed forth of Plymouth Sound. She was a frigate, the *Inconstant*, and there was a wealth of irony in the name. For Roland Hood, from the upper deck, watched the shores of England fade away in the fog, and vowed he would be always true to a certain English girl.

Later on his brother officers observed a change in their friend, who was more reserved and silent than had previously been his wont; and putting their heads together, they arrived at the conclusion that Roland Hood was in love. And at that, they one and all sorrowfully shook their heads, deploring the fact that another good marine had gone the way of youth. Yet, there was not one of them there who was not himself in precisely the same predicament.

But, in the gun-room and the ward-room these

were among the few things they never mentioned—unless they happened to be Irish; though they *thought* of them, from time to time, but most when the bullets were splintering the decks. And such times were to come with a vengeance; for when the *Inconstant* rolled down the Channel on the look out for the French, the hearts of every man and boy on board were beating fast; her magazines were filled to the doors with powder, and the skies were heavy ahead.

During the months that followed Captain Hood took part in the combined naval and military operations in the Mediterranean. But it was not until the action of La Spezia, when the *Inconstant* was shot to splinters under the *Ça Ira's* eighty-four guns, that his personal courage was brought under the special notice of Nelson. And this was, in some sort, the turning-point of his life. It had much to do with his future success. He was selected to carry Admiral Hotham's report of the action to the Admiralty, and therefore arrived in England somewhat unexpectedly, as will be seen, just in time to avert a terrible calamity. And what that calamity was, and how nearly it came about, it is now our duty to tell.

The days that followed Roland Hood's de-

parture from Nether Hall were heavy indeed for Cicely. It was, in some degree, a comfort to her that during the autumn months she was left mostly to herself. Her father had taken again to the hunting-field; Anthony was forever roaming the countryside; and day after day the Vicomte left the house immediately after breakfast, and did not return till night.

No one knew whither he went. He explained that, as a soldier, he was accustomed to an active life. He was never so happy as when astride of a horse. He never tired, he said, of gratifying his eye for the picturesque, and went into raptures upon the beauties of the Valley of the Stour. He little marvelled that Englishmen were the finest horsemen in the world; he himself could ride, all day and every day, in such a green and hospitable land. France was beautiful. Ah, yes! Who would deny it? But, Merry England, as they called it, had a beauty of its own. And there were inns upon every road, where there was always company and greeting, and wholesome English fare. They must not be surprised, he was at pains to let them know, if sometimes he spent the night at an inn, and did not return for a day or so. He loved to be far afield.—Thus would he babble on.

No one ever thought for a moment of doubting his word. The old Squire, though he was too sleepy at nights to listen to much of his talk, believed the man to be all that a courteous nobleman should be. Cicely shunned him, and feared him still, but kept her fears to herself. Anthony regarded him half in suspicion and half in a kind of mirthful curiosity; for Monsieur des Ormeaux was a mystery that a boy of seventeen, born and bred in an English village, could not be expected to solve.

At all events, when the Vicomte asserted that he loved to be far afield, there was no question that he spoke the truth. Night after night he brought back the mare in a muck sweat and splashed about the girths in Essex mud. The result of which was that the Squire bought a fine chestnut from a cavalry officer in Colchester, which he presented to the Vicomte on the second anniversary of the day the refugee landed at Judas Gap.

The Vicomte received this handsome present with profuse thanks. Indeed, he made a motion as if to embrace the Squire; whereat Sir Michael, spluttering a great deal, shook him violently by the hand, and beat a hasty retreat to the pantry, where he told Bannister that "Moosure" had at-

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tempted to kiss him. The Squire roared with laughter; and the butler observed that there was "no accountin' for sartin for the tastes of furren gents."

So the Vicomte, with two horses to ride, was constantly from home, for which Cicely was more than a little grateful.

Only upon one occasion was the old subject broached. It was a winter's afternoon, and had rained hard throughout the day; but now the clouds had lifted upon a blood-red sunset that mingled with the firelight on the window-panes. Sir Michael was not returned from the chase. Anthony, with John Constable, had gone to Langham marshes to snare a heron, in full belief of the old Essex superstition that a heron's legs made wondrous fishing-bait. As for the Vicomte, the weather had kept him in, and he had passed the day in his room.

Cicely was alone. She had gone to the harpsichord, and for some time her fingers moved upon the keys. It was the sound of the music that brought the Vicomte down the stairs, on tiptoe, like a cat.

The room was growing dark, and softly she broke into a song. Cicely's heart was full. And Louis des Ormeaux, entering noiselessly,

listened and heard it through. The sweetness of her voice, the softness of the notes, touched the innermost strings of his heart. He burst suddenly forth: he told her of his love and again asked her to be his wife.

She reminded him of what he already knew, that her hand and heart were plighted to one who was serving his country across the seas.

But the Vicomte was beside himself. For once in his life, he was rash.

"I take no such answer," he cried to her. "This love of mine was not given to me for nothing. You have yet to learn that I cannot be dismissed."

She drew herself up. She looked proud and even defiant, but her heart was beating fast.

"My father's house," said she. "I think you forget, my lord, you are his guest."

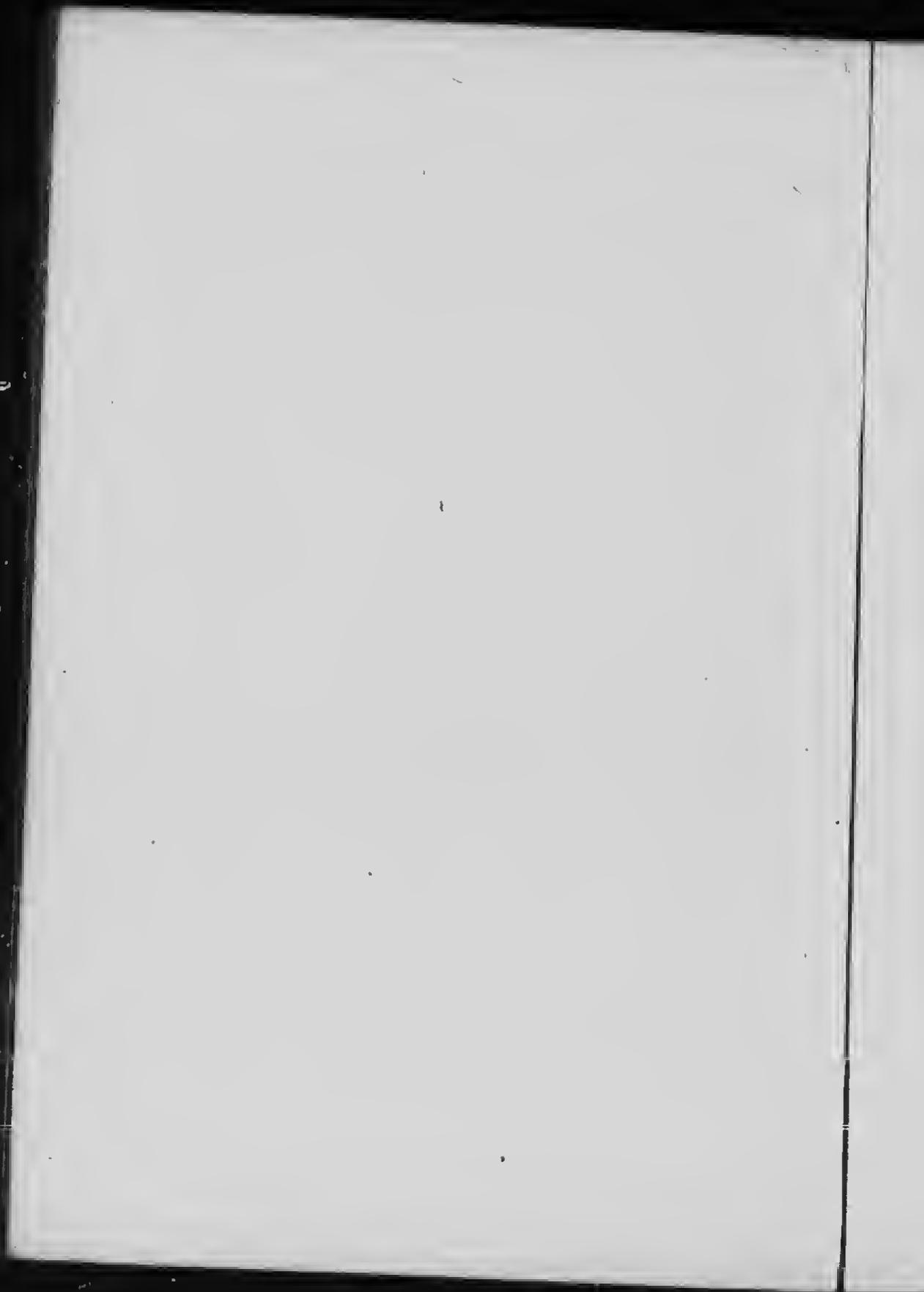
The Vicomte bowed exceeding low.

"Pardon," he muttered. "I ask forgiveness—I forgot."

He turned upon his heel and left the room, closing the door without a sound. But, no sooner was the door shut than he laughed, showing his white, glistening teeth, and went back softly to his room. As for Cicely, sitting down at the harpsichord, she buried her face in her hands.

He turned upon his heel and left the room





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It was there that Anthony found her. He asked what ailed her, for her cheeks were wet with tears; but she would not answer him. Boy though he was, and little used to the ways of the world, he could no longer be blind to the fact that this man plagued his sister with a love that she neither would nor could return. He remembered what Constable had told him of the scene in the Bergholt lane; and from this incident dates Anthony Packe's firm distrust of the Vicomte, that led to the disclosure of his perfidy.

CHAPTER IX

RAMSEY HEIGHT

IT was the week following this that John Constable and Anthony planned an expedition into No Man's Land—the marsh country to the east of Judas Gap, where the smugglers, running from Antwerp and Rotterdam, were wont to land their freight. They had no other object in view than to sail the length of the creek, and down the estuary of the Stour to the junction of the Orwell, and, perhaps if there was time, indulge in some fishing at the river's mouth.

They rose at four o'clock in the morning, which, in itself, was a masterful thing to do in the depth of winter. Their boat was moored in Dedham mill-pond. At Flatford they picked up Lott with a frost-bitten nose and blowing upon his hands to keep them warm; and by sunrise they were alongside Judas Gap. Here it was necessary to land their cargo, such as it was—provisions for the day and fishing-tackle enough

to deplete the German Ocean of fish. They carried the boat over the Gap, and launched her, safe and sound, in the salt water of Judas Pool, where they set up the mast, and sailed down to Manningtree, where they gained the river mouth.

Lott, who had grumbled considerably at starting, was now delighted he had come. It was a clear and frosty morning. Aided by the river current and the outgoing tide, they sent their boat skimming down the estuary like a swallow on the wing.

Presently they passed the Orwell mouth on the Suffolk side, and the shores of the sister counties parted, like outstretched arms that strove to embrace the open, rolling sea.

John Constable sat silent in the bows, noting every change and effect of color in sea and sky and cloud. He loved the Valley best in summer-time; but the cold, desolate beauty of the winter marsh-land, the dripping willows, and the flooded meadows was not lost upon the boy, who was destined, in after years, to become one of the master landscape-painters of the world. He was all the time, howbeit unconsciously, receiving those impressions that were to make the name of Constable immortal.

They passed Harwich on the right, and an-

chored in midstream by Landguard Fort. They fished without success, and consoled themselves with a most prodigious meal. And after that, what should Master Anthony wish to do, but bathe! Moreover, then and there, he stripped, and took a courageous header from the boat. Coming to the surface, he assured his comrades that the water was not near so cold as it looked; and the end of it was that, in a very short time, all three were floundering in the tide.

They were about to weigh their anchor, when they saw, coming down-river, a wherry, with a brown sail and a lamp swinging at her peak. She was bearing straight upon them, and threatened to run them down.

There seemed to be only one man on board, and he was looking back through a telescope in the direction of Ramsey Height.

Anthony gave out a loud "Ahoy!" and the man turned, putting his helm to port in the nick of time. The wherry passed within six feet of the boat.

"Why don't you look where you're going?" demanded Anthony Packe.

The man on the wherry never deigned a reply, though he gave out a snort like that of a pig. He looked at them for an instant, in something of

surprise, and then, turning his back upon them, fixed his glass once more upon the crest of Ramsey Height.

But they had seen enough. Both Anthony and Constable knew him at a glance. It was the same man that, two years since, they had tracked from the Sun Inn to Judas Gap, upon the night the Vicomte landed, and whose name, they distinctly remembered, was Gipsy Yates.

They watched the wherry in silence, as she headed due east for the open sea. And then Anthony came out with a hearty laugh.

"Well," said he, "I thought I knew a fishing-wherry when I saw one; but it seems, with Mr. Yates on board, she's a smuggling craft, and nothing else."

"See," said Constable, pointing in the direction of the wherry, "she's turned a point to larboard; she's making straight for the Hook."

"And will come back with a cargo of gin," said Anthony.

"Did you notice her headlight?" asked Lott.

"What about it?"

"Why, it was as big as a street lamp, and had green glass to it, as if it was meant for the starboard side."

"For signals," Anthony sagely observed.

"She shows a light at sea, and they signal back whether the coast is clear."

"Sure enough," said Lott; "and they have a man Ramsey way; that was where he'd fixed his glass."

"Let's run into Harwich," said Constable, "and warn the custom-house."

But Anthony Packe gave a sniff of royal disdain.

"And where's the fun in that?" he asked. "Not a bit of it," he went on. "We'll put back up-river. We'll land at Wrabness Wharf, climb up to Ramsey, and see for ourselves."

"It's a dangerous game," reflected Constable.

"And what about bed?" said Lott. "It means we'll have to spend the night at Manningtree."

"And who will suffer for that?" asked Anthony; and he pictured his father's anger.

The thought seemed to weaken his resolution. For some moments he sat in the boat in silence, watching Yates's wherry out at sea. However, in the end the spirit of adventure was too strong for him. He hauled up the anchor without a word.

Anthony's impetuosity frequently deprived his companions of their breath. But this was an unusually daring scheme.

"I shan't go," said Lott, who had never forgotten the night at Judas Gap.

"Stay at Wrabness, if you like," said Anthony; "but, whether you come or not, I'm going up to Ramsey Height. The free-traders have a signaling-station there; and I warrant the customs people know nothing at all about it."

"Then why not tell them?" Lott almost pleaded. "Why not tell them now?"

"And fine fools we would look," responded Anthony, "if there's nobody there at all. No, Willie; I am going to see for myself."

There was no keeping him back, and they knew it. They hoisted the sail, and tacked up the wide estuary, passing the shipping clustered in Harwich port.

The afternoon was already far advanced; and, fortunately for them, the tide had turned at two o'clock, else they had taken hours to reach Wrabness. As it was, the sun was setting by the time they had made fast the boat in a narrow creek.

Lott was still unwilling to take part in what he deemed a most foolhardy and senseless expedition. He could see no object in it; nor, indeed, was there one, beyond the seeking of danger for danger's sake. Constable, however,

who could not let his younger friend go on alone, offered to go up to Ramsey Height with Anthony Packe, while Lott remained in charge of the boat.

Between Ramsey and Wrabness, the hills on the Essex side of the Stour that rise above the marshes are covered by a dense wood of larch and birch-trees, with here and there a sycamore or elm. And into this wood, at night-fall, Anthony picked his way, with John Constable close upon his heels.

They threaded their way as cautiously as Indians on the war-path. If the truth be told, they were not without experience in the subtle art of poaching; and the fact that no gamekeeper had as yet found them out, or indeed even suspected them, speaks much for their skill in this respect. Their progress was slow, but sure and silent; for, if there were smugglers on the hill-top, a snapping twig, or a shin barked upon a fallen bough, might easily cost their lives.

On this account, it was completely dark by the time they gained the crest of the hill, that juts forth as a promontory opposite the junction of the Orwell and the Stour.

Ramsey Height is the most commanding eminence in the neighborhood. Thence, on a clear

day, one can see up-river beyond Brantham, to the wooded Bergholt hills. At one's feet lie the fishing villages of Wrabness and Ramsey—both of ill repute in the days when smuggling was a trade—and the town of Harwich, at one time England's premier port. Farther to the east is stretched the open sea, as far as the eye can reach; and to the south, the flats of St. Osyth and Clacton Wick.

On gaining the hilltop, the two boys advanced more cautiously than ever. Constable stumbled in a fox-earth; Anthony turned quickly, and, almost with fear in his voice, whispered to his friend to be careful, if he set a value on his life.

They were not gone twenty paces farther than they had reason enough to be glad of the warning. A creaking sound, soft but continuous, came to their ears in the stillness in the wood.

They stood transfixed, listening, and hardly dared to breathe.

The noise continued, stopped, and then began again. They could liken it to nothing that they knew.

"Whatever is it?" whispered Constable; and his voice shook.

"I don't know," said Anthony. "It's something—to do—with wood."

He, too, was trembling. They were very far from home—on the other side of No Man's Land—and they might be shot in the dead of night on Ramsey Hill, and the truth of it never known.

They waited, side by side, for several minutes that seemed to them like hours, and never dared to move. And all the time the creaking noise went on, with short, irregular pauses that came at unexpected moments. Even the sharp click of a pistol lock, a smuggler's oath, or for that a shot itself, would at last have been welcome; for there is something awe-inspiring in that which we are at a loss to understand.

The fancy that there were no smugglers there at all, but that it was something supernatural, took strong hold upon them both.

There was no moon. They were still among the trees. It was so dark that they could not even see each other.

"We must go back," said Constable.

Anthony never answered. He, too, wished to be away, and owned it to himself, though something of shame possessed him, and he vowed that he would stand no ridicule from Willie Lott. For all that, he acquiesced.

Together they turned back. They had had enough of the darkness, and they made for the

edge of the wood. The night was frosty and clear. When they came into the starlight, it was as if they had stepped into the open light of day. It gave them courage at a bound. They each took a long breath; and then a sigh of relief escaped their lips. They could see the lights of Harwich, dotted at the river mouth, and all above them the stars, that spread a sheen upon the ocean at their feet. The creaking noise went on and on, but already they feared it less.

"Look there!" cried Constable, under his breath, clutching at Anthony's arm.

He pointed out to sea. Anthony Packe looked up. And there, far away in the night, upon the dark horizon, was a big green light that blinked like a sleepy cat.

"Yates!" said Anthony. "That's Yates's wherry. We were right."

At that he went down on hands and knees, and crawled toward the creaking sound. He had guessed already what it was, and was wondering why he had never thought of it at first.

He crept forward stealthily, across dead leaves and banks of moss, and presently came to a place where there was a glade upon the skirting of the wood.

The spot was admirably chosen; for trees

surrounded it on every side, save that which faced the sea. Also, it lay some little distance back from the crest-line of the hill, so that neither the lights of the harbor were visible, nor those of the shipping at anchor in the roads.

Anthony lay hidden in the darkness upon the edge of the glade, and peered boldly forward.

He saw a vertical wooden post, to which was attached a long crosspiece, resembling a pair of arms. The center of the crosspiece was but loosely fixed to the head of the post, for at one end a man worked it, like the handle of a pump. At the other end was suspended a lighted lantern, that threw a bright green light upon the dead leaves on the ground.

The explanation was simplicity itself. When the man pumped with the crosspiece—which, for sure, had all the time been responsible for the creaking sound—the lantern rose and fell. No doubt there was some manner of code between them; for the green light at sea seemed to answer him. Nor was this all; for the man, whose figure was silhouetted against the broad rays of light, was none other than Louis des Ormeaux, sometime a vicomte in France.

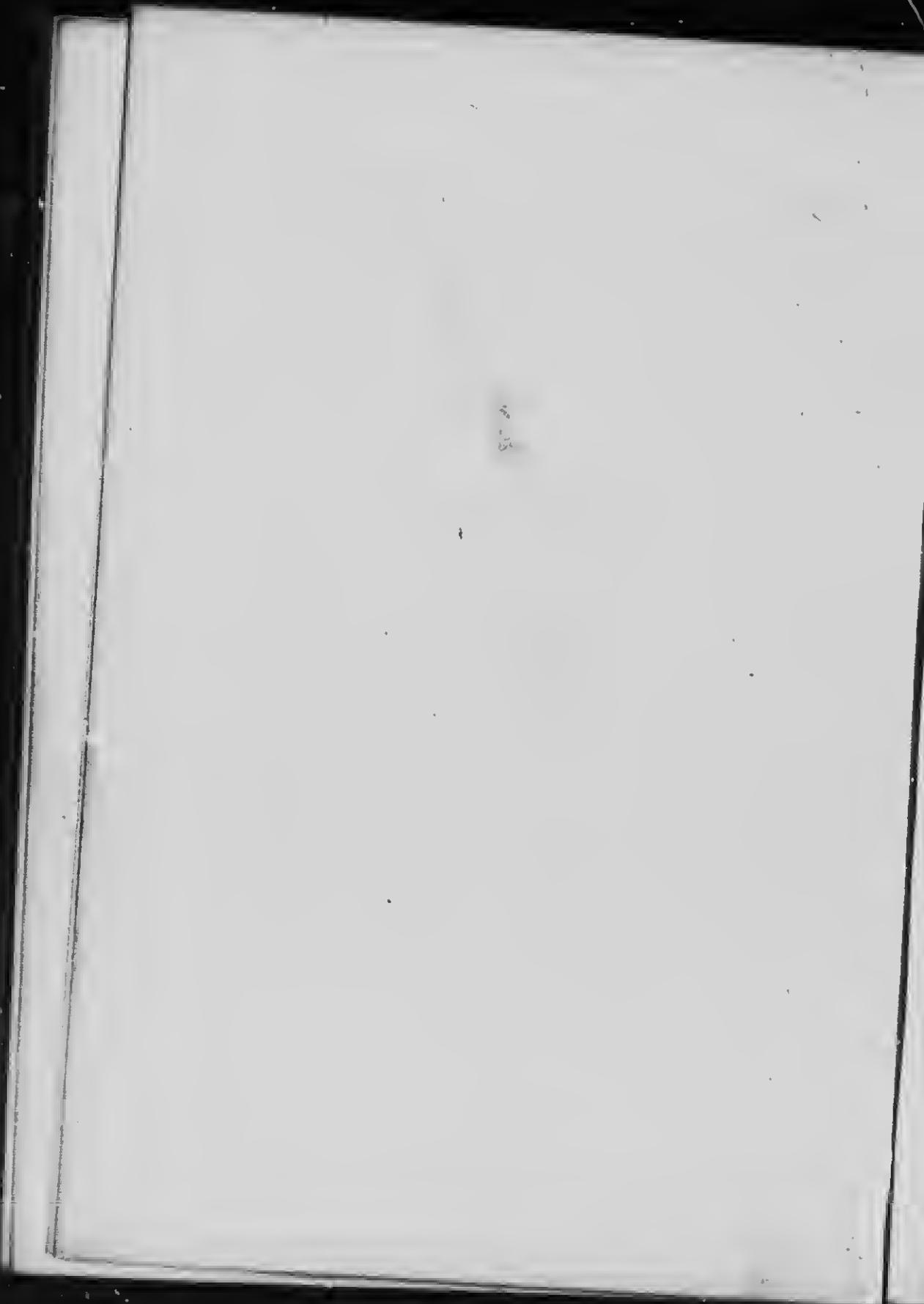
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CHAPTER X

THE MAN AT THE CROSS-ROADS

FOR some seconds Anthony Packe was too astounded to move. The thing was entirely absurd! The cultured and polished Louis des Ormeaux in league with common smugglers! He could not believe his eyes. And yet there was the man as large as life, with the ruffles about his wrists and his white cravat.

Anthony drew away without a sound. But he was not gone fifteen paces than his eagerness to tell John Constable of what he had seen got the better of his wisdom, and he advanced more rapidly than was discreet. He trod on a twig that snapped; and then the creaking noise on a sudden ceased, and Anthony's heart stood still.

John Constable must also have heard him; for, a moment afterward, he appeared at his comrade's side.

"What was it?" he asked.

"*Hist!*" whispered Anthony. And they waited with straining ears, scarcely daring to breathe.

There was a silence that seemed interminable; and then, much to their relief, the noise of the signaling began afresh. Doubtless the Vicomte had heard the sound of the breaking twig, but now put it down to a fox, or a weasel, or some other nocturnal denizen of the wood.

A few minutes later, the boys, stealing down hill toward the south, came out upon the main Harwich road. Thence they set off at a run, Anthony leading, and Constable at his heels, plying him with questions that he would not stop to answer.

It was then that a full moon rose in the south-east, and showed the highway as white as plaster on a wall.

They came, hot and panting, to the cross-roads where the ways branch off to Oakley and to Wrabness Wharf. And there they heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs coming toward them on the London road.

Past a doubt their ears had been deafened by the sound of their own feet and heavy breathing, or they had heard the rider approaching long before they did. As it was, the man can-

tered up to the sign-post, where he reined in, at the very moment that the two boys arrived at the same identical place. The horseman came from the direction of London, that is, from the west; in consequence, the moon was full in his face, and the boys had a clear view of the fellow, and retained for many years afterward a distinct remembrance of the sight.

He was riding a gray thoroughbred, with a long mane and tail, that must have been nearly seventeen hands—though, as to this, there may very likely have been a mistake, since the horse stood on the grass sward around the sign-post, that was several inches above the level of the road. In any case, it was a splendid animal, well bred and highly wrought; for, champing the bit, it tossed its head and pawed upon the ground, and they could see the hot breath pumping from its nostrils. But it was the rider, more than the horse, that held their eyes. He sat upright in the saddle, as straight as a dart, with the reins in his left hand, and the other arm akimbo at his side. A hooded coat, that looked black, but might very well have been green, was unbuttoned, disclosing a slim and youthful figure. When he cocked his head to look at the sign-board, the light of the moon fell full upon his

face. And they saw that his features, saving the mouth and chin, were hidden behind a black mask, with little slits for eyes.

John Constable and Anthony Packe looked once, and then—questioned not the order of their going: they took to their heels and ran.

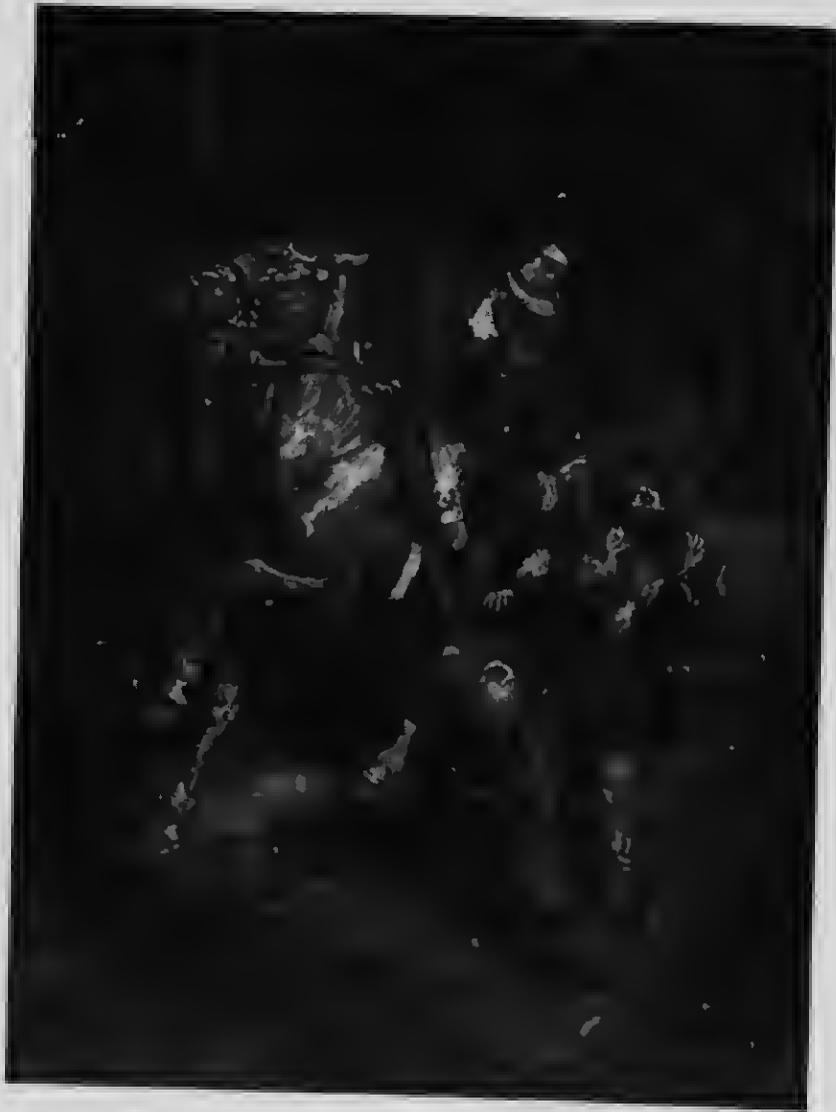
A hearty laugh sped after them, whereat they ran the faster. Smugglers were one thing, but they had never bargained to encounter a "gentleman of the road."

To their utmost alarm, the man started in pursuit; they heard the horse spring off upon the Wrabness road. They were about to break through the hedge and gain the shelter of the wood, when the highwayman drew up abreast of them, seizing Anthony by the collar of his coat.

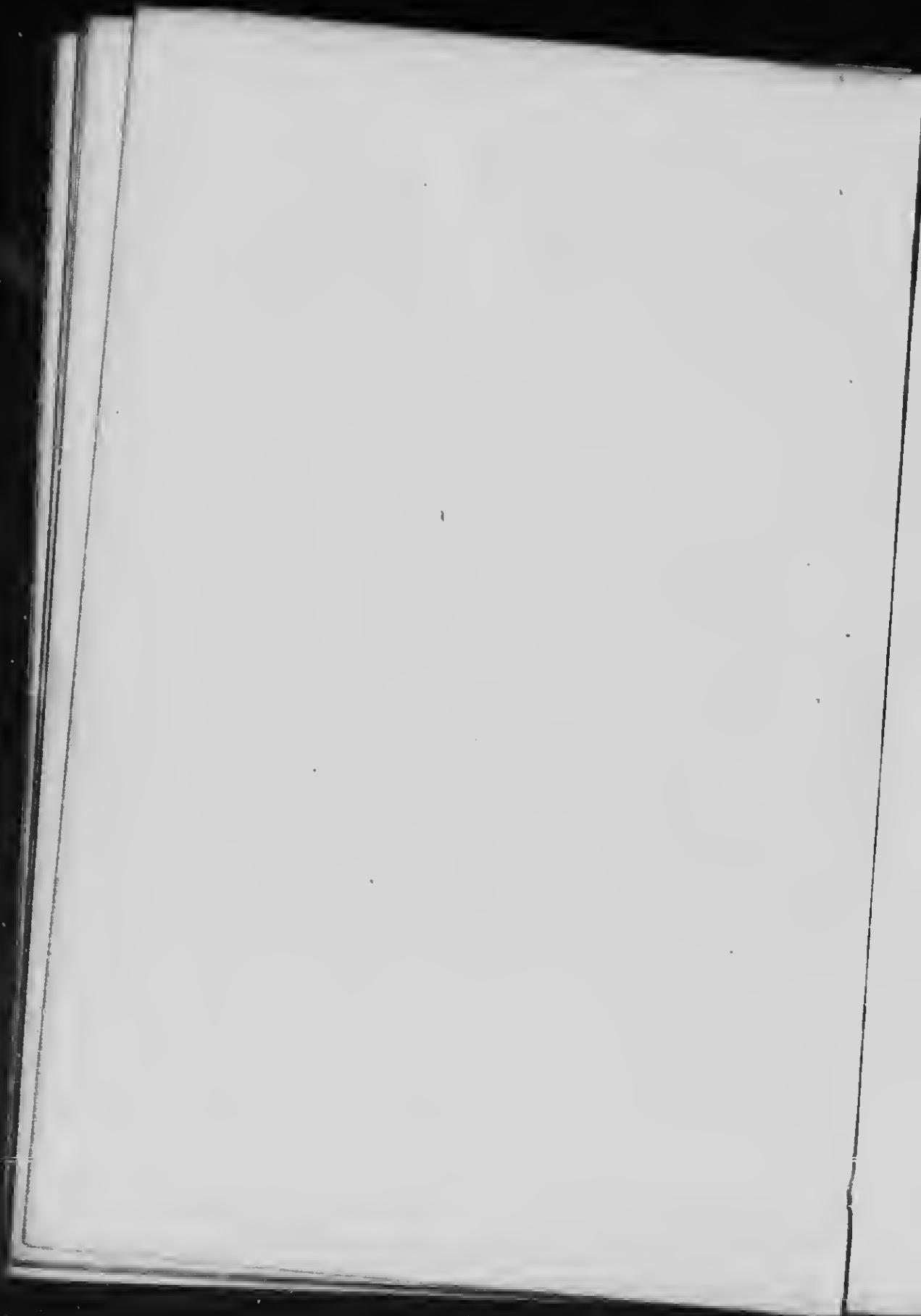
John could not desert his comrade, but, with all his lung power, let out, "Mercy, sir! We'll give you all we've got!" and fumbling in his pockets, produced fourpence in cash, a lamp-black crayon, and a broken knife.

The highwayman inspected this valuable booty by the light of the moon, and then, giving the crayon and the knife back to Constable, pocketed the fourpence on the spot.

"Thankee for nothing," said he, and turning



The highwayman drew up abreast of them, seizing Anthony by the collar of his coat



to Anthony: "Maybe you can do a trifle better than that?"

Anthony had two shillings, which the highwayman took, and then went on:

"But I'd never gallop my horse twenty yards for the sake of two and fourpence," said he; "though, to be sure, these hard times, I'd not turn up my nose at even that. What I want, of one or the other of you, is information. The sign-post tells me naught but Harwich—London, and Oakley—Wrabness Wharf, whereas I'm overdue on Ramsey Height. To be quite precise," he added, "and of course in perfect confidence, I'm engaged to meet with a very particular friend."

Anthony Packe on a sudden lost his breath. This thing was going from bad to worse. It was more than a mystery now. So Monsieur des Ormeaux, whose illustrious father had stepped the floors of the Tuileries in the days of the Grand Monarque, was consorting with smugglers and highwaymen in the land whither he had fled for his life.

Anthony, who naturally did not enlighten the highwayman that he knew who this particular friend happened to be, put the man upon the road.

"Thankee kindly," said he, as he turned his horse's head. "Good night t' ye both; and bless the saints that Providence never put it into my power to lighten your pockets of more." Then he changed the tone of his voice. "And mind," he growled, "not a word! Keep your mouths shut, both of you, or, *by Christopher!* if ever we meet again, I close 'em fast with this."

He produced from under his cloak a heavy horse-pistol, that he held by the muzzle and shook.

"So now ye know," he warned them. And at that, clapping spurs to the gray horse, he went cantering down the road, whistling like a link-boy, with the pistol still in his hand.

"Well," said Anthony, when the man had turned off upon the Harwich road, "wonders will never cease!"

Constable, misunderstanding his meaning, vowed that it was indeed a most eventful night.

"Do you know who this friend is?" cried Anthony. "Do you know what I saw on Ramsey Height?"

"I've asked you a hundred times already," said Constable. "Perhaps you'll tell me now?"

"Why, this rogue's 'particular friend' is none other than the Frenchman who lives with us."

And thereupon Anthony told his friend of everything he had seen.

As they alternately walked and ran to Wrabness Wharf, they discussed the question in every possible light, but nohow could they explain the matter at all. Neither had Willie Lott any suggestion to proffer. It seemed inexplicable to them that such a man as des Ormeaux should stoop to free-trading and open robbery for gold. Yet, certain it was that, when the Vicomte landed in England, he had, upon his own assertion, only one louis d'or, three francs, and twenty-five centimes; and now he had money enough and to spare. It was true he had a ready explanation that the funds had come from France, but this might very well be false. Anthony no longer trusted him. The man was a villain, from his braided hat to his boots. As to that there was not the faintest doubt.

None the less, what business had brought him to Ramsey Height in the darkness, to signal to a smuggler out at sea, was as great a mystery as before; and the fact that a highwayman, masked and armed, was to meet him there took them no step nearer to the solving of the riddle.

They talked it over, again and again, until they were come to Manningtree, where they left

the boat, and set off toward Dedham across the fields. Lott left them at the lane that leads down to Flatford Bridge; and before they parted company they were all agreed to hold secret the little that they knew. Anthony suggested that they should keep close watch upon the Vicomte, in the hope that further evidence might come to hand; and this his companions considered the most prudent course to take.

That night, when Anthony got back home, the next best thing to a free fight took place at Nether Hall. It was his father who let him in, and who, without a moment's hesitation, grabbed him by the neck and took down a hunting crop from the wall. But, Anthony Packe was no longer a child to be laid across his father's knee; and in the short space of a minute or so, the old man learnt as much. For Anthony wrestled free, while Sir Michael, vermillion in the face and blowing like a whale, bellowed and thundered enough to lift the roof completely from the house. This brought Cicely down the stairs, who begged and prayed Sir Michael to let her brother off. As for the Squire, he was by no means unwilling to do so, since he recognized the fact that he would have to catch Anthony before

he could thrash him, and to catch him was more than, at his time of life, he was able to do.

No sooner had he magnanimously consented to spare his son than there came the grating sound of a key in the door. At which, Cicely bolted up the stairs; and a moment afterwards, the Vicomte stepped lightly into the hall.

"Ha!" said he, with a look of surprise. "So late!"

But the Squire was in none of the best of tempers.

"As far as I can see, Moosure, I'm master of a house of owls, that come screeching back to roost at all hours o' the night. Why, by Thunder," he burst forth, "ye can't get up at sunrise, like a Christian, and pass a healthy day on the line of a fox, and when the sun goes down, and ye've had your fill o' port, roll up to bed, me lord, sober enough to get there and sleepy enough to sleep—beats me! egad, it pulls me up; no less than a double ditch with a six feet drop on t'other side! And yet, ye've not slipped in wi' the latch-key afore cockcrow for a week, else I'll swallow me night-cap under your nose!"

"It may very well be true," said the Vicomte, as if he had a grievance. "But, 'tis the fault



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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of these most impetuous cocks of whom you speak. *Ma foi*, I sometimes think that when the sun goes down, they think it is coming up; and without waiting more carefully to observe, they must needs display their vocal powers! O irrepressible chickens! To think that you should be cause for so much talk!"

"Faith," chuckled the Squire, grinning from ear to ear, "ye 're a wit, me lord; ye 're a wit!"

"But, apart from levity," threw in the Vicomte, "I ask pardon if I have disturbed you from your sleep."

"Not a bit," said Sir Michael. "'Twas this whelp o' mine." And again he made a motion towards the crop.

"Ah, now!" exclaimed the Vicomte. "You would not chastise so brave a boy! You will, for my sake, let him off. Come, come, Sir Michael; you will give me your word, will you not?"

Now, if Anthony resented anything, it was that Louis des Ormeaux should pose as special pleader on his behalf. He felt a hot rush of blood pass over him, and turned to Sir Michael, with never a glance at the Frenchman.

"Father," said he, "if you think I deserve a thrashing, give me one, by all means. I'll not

resist. But, I must ask you to be so good as not to do it before the eyes of—a stranger. That would scarcely be fair to me.”

“Get off,” roared the Squire; “get off wi’ ye to bed! I’ve pledged me word to your sister, and that’s enough for me. Also, I warrant ye’ve had no food since mid-day; so off to bed without it. Get ye out of me sight!”

Anthony made off, as he was ordered, glad enough to be gone; and no sooner had he disappeared at the head of the stairs, than the Squire turned to the Vicomte with his face again all smiles.

“Did ye hear what the lad said?” he asked. “There was blood for ye, Moosure! British pride wi’ a vengeance! Spirit, that’s what it was! Zooks! he’s a credit to his father, after all.”

“Precisely,” answered the Vicomte. “A very excellent boy, I am well aware!”

And he too went up the stairs to bed, wondering whether or not Anthony knew anything; for this touch of hostility, that was altogether lost upon the Squire, was something new.

They now entered upon a period of vigilance. During the weeks that followed, Anthony Packe and Monsieur des Ormeaux watched each other

with growing suspicion. In courage there was not a pin to choose between them. But the Vicomte was as sly as a mole, and before long he felt perfectly convinced in his own mind that the boy knew something of his affairs. He was, however, outwardly most polite.

As for Anthony, he was still determined to keep an eye on the Vicomte and find out something more. Upon three separate occasions, when my lord had gone abroad, in rainy weather when the roads were deep in mire, Anthony had followed the track of his horse's hoofs along the Suffolk side; and each time des Ormeaux had taken the Freston road.

Upon the last of these, in the vicinity of East Bergholt, Anthony was diligently pursuing the hoof-prints of the horse that the Vicomte had got from the Squire, when the man himself suddenly came forth of the door of a roadside inn, and caught the boy red-handed at his work.

Anthony was too taken aback to speak a word. He turned white, and then red, and finally laughed, without a cause.

Monsieur des Ormeaux was perfectly self-possessed.

"A strange coincidence," said he; "a strange coincidence, indeed!"

"Very," answered Anthony, which was about the best he could do.

"I think no such thing," sings out the Vicomte. "You know very well that you are not here by chance." Then, for the first time, Anthony saw him angered. His eyes flashed fire, and he rapped his boot with his cane. "Let me tell you this," he cried: "you are very incautious to meddle in my affairs. Let me see no more of it! I warn you, you are indeed on dangerous ground."

By now, Anthony had gained something of his presence of mind. He was willing enough, if there was need, to come to blows with the man. He spoke very calmly, with discretion beyond his years.

"Sir," said he, "I know not what 'affairs' you can have in this country that you must hold secret from my father and myself—"

But here the Vicomte took him up.

"Nor have you right to know," he snarled, showing how easily a crafty man may display his weakness before the frankness of a boy.

"On the contrary," said Anthony, quite calmly, "seeing that you have come to our land for protection, and that you are dependent upon my father's hospitality and the goodness of his

heart, I think that we have every right to know."

The Vicomte thought for a moment. He saw that he must keep his temper; he recognized the necessity for restraint. He indulged in a pinch of snuff.

"We talk too much," said he. "I will tell you the truth; why not? I can do so in two words;" and he held up two fingers, and smiled. (Without exception, he was a most plausible rascal.) "I am in love," he continued in confidence. "*Ma foi*, I am most confoundedly in love! I keep it a secret, because I am an aristocrat, and she, sweet girl, is only--a dairymaid. Therefore, I tell no one. The good people of the neighborhood have much goodness, but no romance. They would fail to comprehend that Love should never be restricted or controlled. We have no power over Love. It knows neither station nor rank. But, as far as I am concerned, a pretty face is a pretty face, whether we find it in a palace or--among the cows." And he ended, with a shrug, and stood in an attitude with raised eyebrows, pursed lips and opened hand.

Anthony said nothing, but looked him square in the face. He knew in his heart, that if ever

there was, or had been, such a thing as a white, bare-faced lie, most assuredly he had heard one then. In the first place, the boy knew that the Frenchman loved his sister, strive to disguise it as he might. In the second, this fictitious dairymaid by no means accounted either for the signals passed to smugglers at sea or the masked man at the cross-roads, who had ridden to Ramsey Height. However, the boy was wise enough to know that one must fight a man like the Frenchman with weapons such as he himself did not scorn to use. He pretended that he believed him, to put him off the scent. It is doubtful, however, whether he did so: Monsieur des Ormeaux was not an easy man to deceive.

"You must forgive me, sir," said Anthony. "I surely should never have guessed."

"I know not what you thought," said the Vicomte.

"To speak true," said Anthony, "I thought that you were deceiving my father."

"Tut!" the Vicomte took him up. "To think that I should dream of such a wicked thing!"

He looked profoundly shocked. Anthony gazed at him in wonderment: the man was a beautiful rogue. "It would be but common justice," Anthony thought to himself, "to shoot him

where he stands." However, he suppressed his feelings, and played the Vicomte's game.

"I have asked your pardon, sir," said he. "I can do no more."

"And I grant it," said the Frenchman, "from my heart." Then, he cocked his head, and looked at Anthony from out the corners of his eyes.

"Do you go home?" he asked. "Or would you like to continue—on the trail?"

Anthony blushed.

"That's unkind," said he.

"True!" cried the Vicomte, slapping him on the back in friendly fashion; and the very touch of the man's hand seemed to chill. "You are forgiven," he continued. "It would have been fairer in me to have said nothing more; but I could not resist a parting thrust. And 'pon my honor, you deserved it, for thinking me a villain. Howbeit, au revoir." And he gracefully waved his hand.

At that, they parted, Anthony leaving the Vicomte standing without the inn. "Upon your honor!" repeated the boy, when he was out of ear-shot. "A fine man to speak of honor! It's a name to you, and nothing more."

And if Master Anthony's thoughts were im-

polite, those of Monsieur des Ormeaux were black indeed.

He helped himself to a pinch of snuff. He looked after the boy with a mouth screwed sideways, and his thumb pressed upon a nostril.

"Ah, my little friend," he whispered, "you warn me that the time has come to act. Very well. Within a week the blow shall fall: I'll bring the house about your ears."

At that, he whipped round upon his heel, entered the stable-yard of the inn, and paying the hostler royally, mounted the chestnut horse.

Once more upon the road, he broke into a headlong gallop, with his white teeth showing in a cruel, relentless grin. Nor did he draw rein until he was over Freston Hill, and come to the cottage of Gipsy Yates, where he rapped on the gate with his cane.

CHAPTER XI

TREACHERY

IT was Mrs. Yates who opened the door, and came down the garden path, with an eye blacker than ever and her hands tucked away in her apron.

When she saw who their visitor was, she curtsied. The Vicomte doffed his hat—by way of a joke.

“Ah, Madame, herself!” he exclaimed. “And is the dear, good fellow at home?”

The “dear, good fellow” was at home, as “Madame” owned with reluctance. And at that, the Vicomte came down from his horse. He made fast the reins to the gate-post, and then, stepped up to the cottage door, and entered, without so much as a knock.

And thereupon was the reason of Mrs. Yates’s hesitation quite apparent. Yates, once more, was seated before his bacon, and stirring his gin and water with his pipe. It was clear at a glance

he had taken more than enough of the latter. He was sober, of course, but his face was flushed; he never rose to his feet when the Vicomte entered the room.

"What cheer, mess-mate!" he bellowed, brandishing a fork in the air. "I warrant it's no fair wind that blewed you acrost the river. Come in, me lud. Come in."

The Vicomte glanced at him sharply, with his fingers drumming upon his chin. At length, he overlooked the impertinence, and sat himself down on the table, swinging his leg.

"Where's Abershaw?" he asked.

"Gone back," said Yates; "back to the 'Bald-faced Stag' on the Lunnon-Kingston Road."

The Vicomte took snuff.

"We want him," said he. "I have work for Master Jerry; and you, my friend, must get off and bring him here."

Mr. Yates drew his pipe from his glass, sucked the stem for a moment, and then put it back. Placing his hands on the edge of the table, he balanced his chair on its hindermost legs, so that more than once he was in danger of falling backwards. But he looked at the Vicomte all the time.

"V... this here's a rum 'u.1," said he, "sink

me if it ain't! I thought, me lud, you was a gent what knew his own mind; but it seems you don't," he added, scratching his head. "Why, less'n a week ago, you told Jerry he could get back to 'The Bald-faced Stag,' and when you wanted him you 'd send for him, which would be in about a couple of months!"

"Is that all?" asked the Vicomte, as if bored.

"How d'ye mean, me lud?"

"Have you finished speaking?"

"M'yes," answered Yates, as if in doubt. "Nothing else—as I can reckerlect."

"Ah," said the Vicomte, "I'm glad to hear it. Since I gave those orders to Abershaw, circumstances are changed." He jumped suddenly to his feet; clapped his hands like a child, and then threw them upwards into the air, making the ruffles dance; and, bursting into loud, almost hysterical, laughter, he slapped Yates violently upon the back. "The iron is hot," he cried. "I must strike at once. If I waited, I very easily might lose."

Yates drew near to the Vicomte, and spoke in a husky whisper:

"Is everything ready?" he asked. "Are the furriners ready to cross?"

"Not yet," said the Vicomte. "Not yet."

Listen: I will tell you. The French Republic has made peace with the Dutch. It is now possible, nay, probable, that the plans of my very good friends in Paris may be carried out. This shore, of all the English coast, is most open to attack. The invading fleet will lie hidden in the Texel. They will cross in a fog. Upon the Essex coast there are three pivots of defence, of which the most northerly is Ramsey Height. As you know, I have selected that point because it is the farthest from London. Ramsey Height, within the course of the next few months, is to play an important part in the history of England; and so, my friend, is a certain dear, good fellow who rejoices in the name of Yates." He laid both his hands on Yates's shoulders. "I leave you in charge," he went on, "in sole charge of Ramsey Height. I must return to France, to those who are my masters. You will keep watch upon the Harwich fleet. I will take good care that there is always some craft at sea on the lookout for your signals. I need not enjoin you to secrecy and diligence: you know well enough how exceedingly well you are paid. I leave you, as it were, the man of the moment. You will be acquainted when the Invasion is prepared; you

will be in readiness to signal for us to advance, to welcome the friends of Liberty to English shores."

"Werry eloquent and comfortin'," observed Yates. "And you want Abershaw for final instructions afore you goes?"

"Not so," said the Vicomte. "The Invasion is not yet prepared; but my own affairs have progressed, have reached a climax, as it were. If the truth be told, my hand has been forced; and that being so, I am the less likely to stop at half measures or any sort of a compromise. I am a man," said he, striking the table a blow, "whom it is dangerous to cross; and that these country loons have yet to learn."

He broke off and stood looking out of the cottage window, his hands trembling and the shadows passing across his face.

"But we want Abershaw," he went on with lowered voice, and turning again to Yates. "You will bring him to me, my dear, good fellow, will you not? You must be on the road to-night."

Yates gave a grunt of dissatisfaction and muttered something about a man not getting much time for "hisself in the bosom of his family."

"You're well paid," said the Vicomte. And Yates could not deny it.

Whereupon Monsieur des Ormeaux, waving his cambric handkerchief and strutting to and fro in the room, conjured up golden visions of what Mr. Yates would be worth when the Dutch fleet had landed the French army upon the Essex coast, and Hoche had given "the richest country in the world" up to "courageous citizens" to plunder.

So now we are brought face to face with the full perfidy of the man, with treachery mingled with base ingratitude; and we see him for what he was. He had, of course, made his peace with the new government—the Directory. Undoubtedly, had he wished it, he could long since have returned to France. He had found, however, more profitable employment in England—as a spy. He had also, as we know, certain prospects that held him to the valley of the Stour.

As for the Invasion, it was then, and for many years to come, a source of national alarm. It was from this year that the "Great Terror," which for nine years was suspended over England like a cloud, may be said to date. Des Ormeaux was evidently employed by those who favored a descent upon England from Holland.

The French general Humbert entered Holland with six thousand Republican soldiers to reinforce the Dutch army under General Daendals, the originator of the scheme. Beyond a doubt, des Ormeaux and Yates had established a direct line of communication by means of signals from Ramsey Height to Admiral De Winter's squadron, which was lying in readiness to embark the army of invasion.

England was not yet panic-stricken. The danger was known in London; but in those days news took long to spread. There were few newspapers: news for the most part was passed from mouth to mouth, or carried about the country by pedlars in the form of pamphlets or caricatures. It was known in Dcdham that the French Republic contemplated the invasion of England; but the victory of the First of June had done much to relieve the tension. Hoche's descent upon the Irish coast was looked upon as a joke, so completely did the expedition fail. Nevertheless, from that time, talk of a foreign invasion was continually in men's mouths, becoming more general as the danger became more imminent, until it reached its climax, ten years later when Napoleon pitched his camp at Boulogne. Nor did Englishmen deem themselves secure until

Nelson had shattered the French and Spanish fleets in Trafalgar Bay.

From this the reader may be inclined to wonder how it was that Anthony Packe, when he found the Vicomte signaling out to sea from Ramsey Height, did not immediately suspect the man of more base designs than smuggling contraband. The truth is, the idea did enter his mind, but he dismissed it; he little doubted the man was a villain, but, he never for a moment thought it possible that any one could be capable of practising such complete hypocrisy. For the Vicomte was continually storming against the Directory: in his eyes, or rather according to his words, Jacobins, Girondists and all sections of the Republican party were equally vile. They had murdered a king. They had robbed France of its noblest and its best. They had torn down the Church: they had driven God from the land. And this was enough for the Vicomte. It was his custom to tell the story with tears in his eyes, after which, he would vow that all he had now to live for was to see these wrongs avenged and to put back the Bourbon on the throne.

Little wonder if Anthony Packe thought the man sincere, and could not believe that he was a turncoat, who had joined that same body of men

who had dethroned the King of France. Then again, my lord was forever expressing his gratitude to the Squire for the hospitality he had received; he never tired of protesting his love of England and the English—*yet all the time he was a spy.*

That evening Louis des Ormeaux rode back to Nether Hall, while Gipsy Yates, in his own nautical fashion, pounded the London highroad on his way to The Bald-Faced Stag, to bring Jerry Abershaw east again to assist the Frenchman's plans.

The Vicomte's heart was light. He saw the future very clearly. He told himself that he had played his cards exceedingly well. He depended, to a very large extent, upon Abershaw and Yates; but he could trust them: they were rogues, but reliable rogues, and, whatever happened, were never likely to show the white feather.

During the days that intervened between the meeting on the Bergholt road and the Friday in the following week, when the bulk of the man's villainy came to a head, it was a strange party, indeed, that daily sat down to dinner in Nether Hall. Anthony and the Vicomte were all but openly foes. Cicely feared him more than ever;

for there was something in the man's manner that threatened immediate danger. The old Squire alone was blind; he was still effusive; he thrust the port towards his guest, and called him "Moosure," and talked continually of the "regicides."

Louis des Ormeaux had a monstrous scheme in his head; but in that selfsame week there happened a thing which neither he nor anyone else had foreseen. The unexpected took place when a brig dropped anchor in St. Helen's Roads, and Captain Roland Hood was put ashore in Portsmouth, with Admiral Hotham's despatches upon the combat of La Spezia.

Hood made up to London on the mail-coach, where he was some days about his business with the Admiralty. But, upon his first arrival at Old Slaughter's, in St. Martin's Lane, where he lodged, he wrote two letters, which he himself gave in charge of the conductor of a flying coach that started for Ipswich within an hour: the one of these, to his mother, to be left at the Bentley Tankard for Thomas Timms; the second, addressed to another lady, was to be handed in at the Gun Inn, next before the county turnpike, for any one of the household of Sir Michael Packe, J. P.

And now Fate stepped into this matter very unkindly. For it so happened that the first member of the household of Nether Hall to call at the Gun Inn after the passing of the flying coach was none other than Monsieur des Ormeaux himself.

"A letter, my lord," said the landlord, twisting the same in his hands.

"For whom?" asked the Vicomte.

"Mistress Cicely Packe."

"Ah," said Louis des Ormeaux. "Give it to me, then."

So he took it, and went down the hill, singing very softly, with a quick and boyish step.

When he got to the turnpike, instead of going on along the Dedham road, he turned to the right, into the wood, and seated himself on a fallen tree. There he opened the letter and read it, and from time to time out came his pet ejaculation: "*Ma foi*"

The letter began with an account of the Battle of La Spezia, and of how the French had been beaten off; but there was no mention of the fact that Roland Hood's own gallantry on that occasion had brought him under the notice of Nelson. He merely stated that he had been selected to con-



The Vicomte seated himself on a fallen tree, opened the letter, and read it

vey the commander-in-chief's despatches to the Admiralty, going on to say that he was leaving London by the mail-coach and would arrive in Suffolk on Friday evening. He concluded with a few tender passages, of little or no account, owing, for instance, that he could scarcely contain himself, that he was so soon to behold the fair face of her he loved.

When the Vicomte had got to the end of the letter, with a thoughtful expression, he folded it in his hands.

"*Morbleu!*" said he. "Another day—but one day later—and all would have been well! As it is, this young popinjay appears upon the scene upon the very night when I could wish him farthest away." He looked about him as if he sought something with his eyes; he was impatient and restless in manner. He quieted himself with snuff; and then, with a screwed face and his eyes half closed, spoke very quietly to himself: "If he were to take it into his head," he ruminated, "to ride over to Dedham on Friday night—*ma foi*, he would ruin all!" And here the Vicomte threw up his hands. "No no," he rapped out. "We must stop it. We know a trick as good as that."

Thereupon he walked briskly to the road, and a few minutes afterward entered the gates of Nether Hall.

This happened on the Tuesday; and all that day, in spite of his self-assurance, Monsieur des Ormeaux was clearly not at his ease. He could not stay still for a minute, but wandered about the house; when spoken to by the Squire, he started, a very unusual thing in one whose manner was that of a man always at his ease.

At midday on the following day he took horse and rode Londonward upon the highroad. Near Stanway he had the good fortune to meet with the very men he wanted: Gipsy Yates, in his fisherman's kersey, and Jerry Abershaw, without his mask, and a handsome fellow he was.

The Vicomte was genuinely relieved to see them. And without doubt it was then that he gave his final instructions, with the exception of certain details which he had not yet settled in his mind.

. He returned to Nether Hall in the best of spirits, and that evening was most hilarious. He kept the Squire in a constant fit of laughter, but both Anthony and Cicely saw the dissembler under his jokes: they recognized in the coldness of his eyes, the wolf in the jester's cap and bells; and

they both felt a dread presentiment of danger fast drawing down upon them all.

So much that Cicely came to Anthony after the evening meal. Her face was white, and her hands were pressed together.

"Anthony," she cried almost breathlessly, "something dreadful is going to happen!"

Anthony laughed weakly, and asked her, "Why?"

She did not know, and she could not say; but she was sure that some calamity was at hand.

The boy frowned.

"I wish he was gone," said he. "He's a scoundrel."

"Do you know it?" she asked quickly.

"I'm sure of it," said he.

"Oh," she muttered, half to herself, "I wish that Roland were here."

That offended Master Anthony, and not unnaturally: he considered himself and the Squire sufficient protection for anyone. He had the modesty not to say so; but he informed his sister that Captain Hood was a great many miles away, and would not be back in England for many months to come.

The Thursday the Vicomte held to his room. They heard him opening boxes, pulling out draw-

ers, and continually closing the cupboard door. Also, it appears that that day he rearranged all the books he had got from the Squire's library and kept in his bedroom for his own especial use—in the light of future events, an extraordinary thing to have done.

In the evening he asked Sir Michael to put off dinner till eight on the Friday. He had to go into Colchester, he said, on business, to meet this eternal friend of his who was always returning to France. The business was very important; they had arranged to talk it over in the Cups Inn. He could not be back before eight at the earliest; he hoped it would not greatly disturb the house.

The Squire had no objection, appealing to Cicely, who, of course, was responsible for such domestic affairs.

She said that she would see to it.

"Ah," said the Vicomte, "you are too kind, Mademoiselle."

He was going on with his thanks—he was overflowing with gratitude—but she left him hurriedly, and went to her own room, where she sat and trembled before her glass, and looked at her own pale face.

CHAPTER XII

A CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS

NOW, Thomas Timms was the stableman at Bentley Hall, and his face was as round as the moon. Into the bargain, it was as red as a beet-root, and adorned on either side by a pair of bright red whiskers that completely concealed his ears. When Thomas was surprised, his round face became oval, which transition so protracted his whiskers that his ears came out from behind them, like a couple of rabbits peeping out of their holes; and as no man in this world was ever more easily surprised than Thomas Timms, his ears were constantly on the move, in and out. In fact, they were almost as active as his bandy legs, for Thomas had never been known to walk. He went at a quick trot, appearing to go so fast that his legs may be said to have 'twinkled.' But, as a matter of fact, he went no faster than the average man could walk, for his legs were exceedingly fat and short.

On this particular Friday evening, in the yard

of the Bentley, Tankard, Thomas Timms could not stand still. He had brought a horse for Roland to ride and a cart to take his luggage back to Bentley Hall. He told everyone that his young master, whom they had all known since the days of his childhood, was coming back from fighting the French—quite superfluous information, since thirty villagers, at least, were there assembled to give the captain something of a home-coming and celebrate the occasion with a pint or so of beer.

Talk in the inn ran high; and Timms expressed the opinion that, as soon as his mistress was married to old Sir Michael Packe, he himself was off to the wars; which brought forth a hearty peal of laughter. The idea of Timms carrying a musket as long as himself appealed to their rustic sense of humor; and little did any man among them dream that, that very night, Thomas Timms was to be of some service to his country and his King.

They were in the midst of all this laughter, when they heard the coach upon the road.

In a few minutes it drew up; and there, on the boxseat was a young officer in the uniform of the Green Marines, with a sword at his belt and finely powdered hair. There was neither rest nor change of horses; but down came Roland Hood and his boxes, and on went the coach again.

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They gave him three cheers, and a fourth; and then three more for his widowed mother, who was the kindest-hearted lady in all the country-side. After that there was nothing for Roland to do but to treat them all to beer; which called forth more cheering, and sundry groans for the French.

In the meantime Timms had gone off with the luggage, in such haste to tell his mistress that her son was safely returned that he took the pony, which was used for the garden roller, down and up the hills at a canter, till he pulled up before the front door of Bentley Hall.

Roland was no less anxious to be home; but it was by no means an easy matter to get away. One after the other, they drank his health, burying their sunburnt, honest faces in pewter mugs. And then nothing would please them but that Roland should get to the top of some mounting-steps in the stableyard and give them a speech. This he did to the best of his poor ability; and the most that he said was drowned in repeated cheers.

At last, with promises to tell them more of the French, he managed to get away. He mounted his horse, and rode out from the stableyard.

It was a starlit, but, as yet, a moonless night. From the Suffolk hills the lights of Harwich showed clear and bright at the valley mouth, and

out at sea were the lights of passing ships. The trees stood out against the sky like coal-black monsters ranged to guard the road, that curled among the hills.

Roland was walking his horse up one of the steeper hills, when two horsemen came upon him so suddenly out of the darkness that he was taken completely unawares, and a voice rang out as clear as a bell above the drumming of the hoofs upon the road.

"Pull up, *by Christopher!* Your money or your life!"

The three horses cannoned with a heavy thud. There was the sharp crack of a pistol-shot, a muffled exclamation, and a snort, as Roland's horse reared high into the air.

They were in the shadow of a clump of elms; and so dark was it, and so close were the three together, that Gipsy Yates, who came upon the rider from the right, had thrust his pistol over Roland's shoulder before he knew it. He fired as the horse rose; and the bullet flew high into the night. But Jerry Abershaw from the other side, had taken hold upon the bridle, and, rising in his stirrups, pulled with all his might. The horse came down again; and Roland, adding the strength of his own right arm to the weight of

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the plunging beast, caught Gipsy Yates with his fist upon the angle of the chin. The man let out a grunt. Then he turned slowly over in his saddle, and came headlong to the ground, while his terrified horse galloped off along the road.

But Jerry who had slipped from his mount still clung to the bridle like a leech.

"Hands off!" cried Roland, struggling at his holster.

"Hands up!" was Jerry's answer, as he leveled his heavy pistol at the other's head.

But, quick as thought, Roland had seized his wrist; and again the shot went wide.

Jerry struggled desperately; but Roland held his wrist in a grip of iron. The highwayman let go the horse's head and sprang violently backward, jerking his opponent bodily out of his saddle. Roland's weight came down upon his chest; and they went over together like a brace of duck brought down upon the wing. But Jerry, by reason that he was underneath, took the full force of the fall; and the back of his head struck sharp against a stone.

It had all happened in less than a minute. The two shots had been so close upon one another that they might have come from a double-barreled gun.

Gipsy Yates was soon again upon his feet; and Jerry was only momentarily stunned. There was not a second to lose. Fortunately, Roland's horse had not made off after the other. With one spring he was again across its back. Yates closed instantly upon him. But Roland, bringing his foot against Yates's jaw, sent the man reeling backward; and in another second he was off at the gallop, with the stones flying beneath his horse's hoofs, and a second bullet whistling past his ear.

Jerry Abershaw sat up, and began to swear, softly at first and inaudibly, but, as he gained his senses, he became more explicit and even less polite.

"Bungler!" he let out savagely. "Did n't I tell you before that it was more in your line of business to open a charity box than make free of the highroad? Why, by Christopher, you don't even know the golden maxim of the game!"

"An' what 's that, governor?" asked Mr. Yates, meekly enough.

"Never fire unless you have to," was the answer; "and if you must, be sure of your man."

"For reference on future occasions," remarked Mr. Yates, "I 'll make note on it."

"Future occasions!" roared Jerry. "This is

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the last time you and I join hands. Let me tell you that!"

"Don't say that, Mr. Abershaw," pleaded Gipsy. "I'm a honorable gent—"

"I know," sneered Jerry Abershaw, getting to his feet and taking up the other's words, "by both birth and sagacity. But, the less of honor, the better, Master Yates. We don't want men who fire and miss, till they've collected evidence enough to hang themselves and everyone else."

"But, it was pitch dark!" expostulated Yates. "I could n't see the gentleman!"

"Then, why, by Christopher, could n't you shove your barrel between his ribs, instead of blazing off into the air! I did n't bring you out rock-shooting!"

"I offers all due an' undue apology," observed Yates, sedately. "And, arter all, Mr. Abershaw, you missed him yourself."

Jerry tightened his grasp upon the barrel of his pistol and raised it over his shoulder. "Any more o' that, an' I'll close your mouth with this!"

Strange to remark, Gipsy Yates, who could have laid the highwayman out with one blow from his fist, curled up upon the instant, something after the manner of a hedgehog before the sniff of a dog; for, in the matter of mere brute

strength, they were very wide of a match. But, then, as Yates himself was ready to admit, Jerry Abershaw had "personality," and this inexplicable quality appealed strongly to the imagination of Gipsy Yates. On that account both Jerry Abershaw and the Vicomte des Ormeaux shared the highest place in his esteem.

When Jerry Abershaw threatened him with his whip, Yates raised his arm in self-defence.

"All due an' undue apologies," he mumbled. "I 'm sure, Mr. Abershaw, I 've said it once; but I 'm broad-minded and sagacious enough to say it agen."

Then he remembered that, when the Vicomte had threatened him with his cane, he had not put forth the shadow of resistance. And this in itself is somewhat strange, since, at that moment the Vicomte himself, leading a horse by the rein, stepped forth out of the shadow of the trees.

"Messieurs," said he, "I never yet did see a more pitiful affair. You were two to one; and for one short second he had you both upon the ground."

Then he laughed.

"You might have come to our help," growled the highwayman.

"Ah, indeed I might!" cried the Vicomte. "I

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never dreamed that he would get away. Without doubt I would have turned the tables."

"Another time," said Jerry, "you had best trust to me alone, for all the good a sheep-stealing fisherman is like to be to us."

"In very truth," said the Vicomte, "that is so. But, Yates, did you get my orders?"

"I did," said Yates. "Jim Leake—the man wot brought you over, me lud—will be waiting for us at Judas Gap, and the wherry's moored down-river, well below the bridge at Manning-tree."

"Good!" said the Vicomte. "And now I must be off. Since you have let this man escape, there is not much time to spare."

He vaulted lightly into the saddle. "And now, my friends, au revoir!"

He was about to move off, when Gipsy Yates pulled him up with a shout.

"Here!" he cried. "Hold hard a bit, me lud! I ain't got a horse!"

"A horse! Pourquoi? Where is your horse?"

"Gorn off," answered Gipsy, with equal brevity and truth.

The Vicomte laughed again, and turned to Abershaw.

"Then, no doubt," said he, "our friend here

will be so good 'as to find you another. Mr. Yates must have a horse within the hour. I leave that—and the rest—to you."

"I won't fail you," was Jerry's answer.

They heard the lid of the Vicomte's snuff-box snap in the darkness under the trees.

"*Ma foi!*" said he, "I know it."

And with that my lord was gone.

The finding of the horse was a matter of no importance. It does not stand out in the biography of Jerry Abershaw as one of his most audacious deeds. It was sadly lacking in both romantic and dramatic quality though the Vicomte laughed very heartily when he heard the tale. It is to be presumed that it is intrinsically humorous, though something of the harlequinade order of mirth.

Jerry Abershaw, with his whip in his hand, sat on a milestone at a certain cross-roads, patiently sucking a straw. He had selected the place by reason of the fact that there no less than five roads met, and he was determined to relieve of his steed the first equestrian that came along. Whosoever this might be Jerry cared not a jot, even had it been a heavy dragoon with his curb-chain jangling and his saber in his hand. Jerry

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would, as like as not, have sent him to the other world with a well-aimed shot in the starlight, and when Jerry's little Day of Judgment came, there would only be another murder, laid upon his soul. Therefore, on all accounts, it were nothing short of a dispensation of Providence that the Lord sent one of his own shepherds to pass through the ordeal unscathed. The first gentleman that approached the fatal milestone was no more harmful a person than the Reverend Mr. Applecorn, curate at East Bergholt, sitting well back on his sorrel mare, and rehearsing his sermon for the following Sabbath to a congregation of stars. The word of Jerry Abershaw, of course, cannot be implicitly believed upon such a subject, for it is not on record that that gentleman was ever seen inside a church since the day of his baptism, but he afterwards told the Vicomte that the pastor's eloquence almost moved him to tears, and he distinctly heard Mr. Gipsy Yates put in the Amen, in the wrong place, from the other side of the hedge. However, it may be safely supposed that the reverend gentleman was certainly then at his best, for not only was his starry audience greatly in numerical excess of that customary at Bergholt Church, but they were wonderfully

wide awake—when Jerry Abershaw lifted the preacher out of his pulpit, and dropped him into the ditch.

It is a simple story, and not deficient in pathos, did we pause to hear the curate tell it to the churchwardens after morning service on the Sunday that followed. He laid great stress upon what he would have done, had he been a man of arms, little dreaming that had such been the case he would never have told the tale at all, but would have been found by the roadmender, with a bullet through his heart. As it was, he came off with a scratch in a thorn-bush and the loss of his gold-rimmed spectacles, as well as the sorrel mare.

And since we are alone concerned with the sorrel mare, we will leave the worthy Mr. Applecorn where the highwayman threw him, in what may be called a sitting position, with his feet in the air and his head in the hedge and the rest of him hidden from view in the ditch, and go back to Captain Roland Hood of the Green Marines, whom we left making the sparks fly from under his horse's shoes as he galloped towards his home, thanking his stars for such a narrow escape. It would have been hard, indeed, had he returned safely from out of the midst of so many dangers, only to be shot by a highwayman on the road.

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When he had covered a mile, he drew rein upon a hilltop, for breath for horse and man. He looked back along the road, and listened, thinking that perhaps his assailants had taken up the pursuit. At first he could hear nothing but the blowing of his own beast. Then a sudden gust of wind stirred the leaves in the trees, and carried to his ear the clacking sound of the hoofs of a trotting horse.

It came from ahead; and hoping to find an able-bodied man with whom he might go back and attempt to capture his former assailants, he set off at a brisk canter, and very soon had come within a stone's throw of the horse. It was riderless. The reins hung loose about its neck, and the stirrups jumped and capered at its sides. At his approach the beast took fright, and went off at a gallop, with Roland hard upon its track.

By a singular stroke of chance, he caught the animal not half a mile from his own house, and led it into the stable, at the very moment that Jerry Abershaw threw the Reverend Mr. Applecorn into the ditch. This can be verified by the fact that it was the hour at which the moon rose upon that most eventful night. It was a full moon, as we know; for the tide was high in Judas Creek at midnight, where the bulk of all this

mischief was yet to come to a head. As for the rest of the scene, there were the myriads of stars that already had served to inspire the unfortunate curate; and the lights of Manningtree and Harwich, down the valley, where the sea encroaches inland and the wherries lie beached upon the mud; and the covered trees and hedgerows, standing strongly out in the clearness of the night, with the moon throwing its light upon it all.

The same moon shone down upon the garden of Nether Hall, its tall cedars and its open lawns. Thither we will return, leaving Roland Hood in his mother's arms—and surely the reader's fancy will bring forth a picture of what joy and delight were theirs.

Cicely, full of gloomy forebodings, sought the privacy of her room. Anthony was in the stables, talking to Blunt, the groom, who was the only stableman there. Sir Michael sat alone in the library, impatiently waiting for dinner.

The Vicomte had said that he would return from Colchester at eight o'clock. It was now ten minutes past; my lord was still absent; and the Squire in none of the best of moods.

Cicely came down the stairs. She felt ill, though she could not say what ailed her. She

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went to her father in the library, and, without a word, seated herself on a footstool, with her elbow on his knee.

In a few minutes Anthony found them; and he, too, was unusually silent. They just sat together, the father and his children, with their own thoughts for company.

At last the sound of the mare's hoofs was heard on the gravel drive without; and a moment afterward the Vicomte burst hastily into the room.

"A thousand pardons!" he cried. "Once again my business was delayed."

CHAPTER XIII

THE COUP DE MAIN

THE memory of that dinner lived for years in the minds of them all. Not that the dinner itself was anything but a very ordinary affair; but it directly preceded an event of such startling dimensions that the little details of the evening became magnified in the eye of time, and they were afterward able to recall every word the Vicomte said; for it was he who held their ears in one incessant flood of talk.

When the servants had gone and the wine was passed and the lights in the great silver candlesticks threw little golden pathways on the highly polished board, he told them a simple tale of a pair of robins whose eggs were robbed by a boy. He told it prettily indeed. He called them his "dear, sweet, little redbreasts," and seemed so to sympathize with them in all their trials and troubles that they might for all the world have been human beings that he himself had known.

Indeed, the monstrous part of the matter was that the man was almost moved to tears. Oh, but Louis des Ormeaux was an artist! He had all that insufferable power of self-absorption of the man who can deceive himself in dreams.

He related the story as if he addressed himself to children, in such simple language that, though it lost nothing of its sadness, it seemed all the more to be true. And then he colored it with such pretty impossibilities—things of his own strange fancy—that even Cicely was forced to smile. He said that when the boy climbed the tree, the little hen stayed bravely on in her nest, until she was almost caught; and all the time her heart was beating so fast and furiously that it was torn upon the sharp points of the little quills of the down upon her breast. And a pretty picture he made of it, this man with the cold, cruel smile! "Poor, sweet little robin," he sighed, "with the broken, bleeding heart!" It was a picture that seemed truly to touch the Vicomte to the core.

When he had ended, there was a silence; for no one knew where to look for the moral of the tale. Indeed, there was none. It was all unnecessarily sad.

The lights burned brightly on the table, and

caught the silver salvers and the cut glass and the great gilt frames of the family portraits hung around the walls. Anthony, with his chin in his hand and his elbows on the table, regarded the Vicomte with widely opened eyes; he forgot for the moment that he hated the man. Cicely's thoughts were far away; and the Squire lay back in his chair, idly twisting his glass between his finger and thumb. As for the Vicomte, he got suddenly to his feet, and went to the large bay-window that opened on to the lawn.

"The room is hot," said he; and without so much as asking leave, he opened the window ajar.

Then he went back to his seat, and sat with his eyes on Cicely, and never moved his gaze.

When, at last, she looked up and saw him, a prodigious change was come upon his face. The man's complexion, which was by nature sallow, had turned to a paleness that was almost gray; his lips had parted, and his black eyes sparkled and were inordinately clear.

Not a word was spoken; and in the stillness the girl felt the cold fear of some invisible thing creeping upon her, as if it came from behind. She began to tremble violently, like a sparrow before the eye of a snake.

The room was *too* silent. She felt that it was

the Vicomte who was causing it. He seemed to have cast a spell of silence upon them all. If no one spoke, she knew that she must shriek. And then the key, from the other side, turned sharply in the door.

"What's that?" rapped out Sir Michael, and somehow turned to the Vicomte for reply.

"Oh, what was it!" cried Cicely, now beside herself with alarm.

"Remain where you are," said the Vicomte calmly, "and in a moment you shall see."

But the Squire had got to his feet.

"Some one has locked us in!" he cried.

"It is not so," said the Vicomte.

"I swear I heard it," answered Sir Michael; and he took a step to the door.

The Vicomte was there before him. He turned the handle, but it would not open. It had been locked from the other side.

"*Ma foi!*" said he, "you are right!" But there was about him not the vestige of surprise.

He leaned back against the door, his hands stretched out on either side and his chin held proudly in the air. He was dressed in black, and wore a white cravat; and he smiled.

Cicely felt sick with fear. She had turned snow-white, and was obliged to hold to the table

for support. Without doubt it was she who first saw what it was that had befallen them; but the sight had frozen the words upon her lips, and she had not the power to speak.

Sir Michael and his son faced the Vicomte. They were not able to take their eyes from his face, for, as yet, it all was a mystery to them both. They had only guessed from the expression of the man that something was wrong. Then the Vicomte laughed aloud—the false, ringing laugh; and they saw that his eyes were fixed between them, on the other side of the room.

They turned together; and there, in the opened window, stood two men, in heavy, hooded coats, with black masks upon their faces and pistols in their hands.

“What ’s this?” let out Sir Michael. “Who in the name of Perfidy, are you?”

But his only answer was the muzzle of Jerry Abershaw’s horse pistol leveled at his head.

He drew sharply back. His eyes went swiftly round the room, and finally rested on the Vicomte, who still stood with his back against the door.

“Ring for help,” he whispered.

“I will,” answered the Vicomte, so softly that neither of the men could possibly have heard.

He passed swiftly round the room, taking a

“What ‘s this?” let out Sir Michael. “Who, in the name of Perfidy, are you?”



knife from the table as he went. Then he leaped quickly upon a chair; and before any one had time to realize what he was about, he had severed the bell-rope at the top.

Sir Michael caught his breath like a man shot. The Vicomte sprang down from the chair, laughing and swinging the bell-rope in his hand. And the old Squire took him by the throat and hurled him to the ground.

"Ye villain!" he thundered.

But, as quick as thought, the Vicomte was again upon his feet, and had slipped like an eel to the window. There he took something quickly from his pocket; and in the brief silence that ensued, they heard the sharp click of the lock of a pistol, as the trigger went back to cock.

Sir Michael had his back to the wall. He had drawn himself up to his full height and raised his fists to the level of his broad, deep chest. His face was red, and his eyes were flashing fire. He looked the very grandest figure of a man, standing there defiantly at bay. His square jaw was closed like a vice; his powdered hair showed snow-white in the candle-light; and above his head was the picture of a gallant ancestor, who had charged with Couetts at Blenheim.

He crossed the room in a single stride, bear-

ng down upon the Vicomte like a bull. But, the two men with the black masks upon their faces fell instantly upon him, and brought the old man to the ground. He struck the table in his fall, and overturned the port, which shot across the polished mahogany, and began to drip upon the floor. He struggled desperately. But the combined strength of Yates and Abershaw was too much for him; and in the end, they had the old gentleman bound hand and foot, and gagged.

In the meantime, Anthony stood facing the Vicomte, who had taken post at the window. He had seen his father hurled upon the floor. He looked at his sister, who had got to her feet. Her dress was white, but it was no whiter than her face; and she trembled visibly from head to foot.

Without a second thought the boy seized one of the great silver candlesticks that stood upon the table, and dashing across the room, leveled a blow with all his might fair at the Frenchman's head. But the Vicomte was as quick as he. Parrying the blow with his left forearm, he sent the candlestick flying from Anthony's hand. It struck a silver bowl upon the sideboard, and brought it rattling to the ground. Then, he

bent the boy back across the table, and thrust the muzzle of his pistol in his throat.

"Mercy!" cried Cicely.

She moved swiftly towards the window.

"Stop!" cried the Vicomte. "One step more, and I will shoot!"

"I do not fear you," she uttered.

She was very brave, now that she saw that they were lost.

"Not you," said the Vicomte; "the boy. Raise your voice, or attempt to leave the room, and your brother leaves the world."

She drew back in horror. The man meant it: it was plain upon his face.

Anthony kicked out frantically, but the Vicomte held him down.

"Look to yourself, Cicely," he cried. "Get away, and warn the men!"

She dared not do it. She knew the man would fire, and kill or wound her brother, and then, perhaps, turn the weapon on herself. She was near the door; and she seized the handle and wrenched at it madly. But, the lock was fast and strong. She fell back, with her breast heaving heavily from loss of breath and the terror of it all. She felt her heart beat violently; and so strangely free is thought, that she then remembered the

little robin, when the boy climbed up the tree.

She turned at the sound of the Vicomte's laugh. Her brother was now in the strong arms of the two masked men; and in a minute, they had him gagged and bound to the back of a chair. Sir Michael lay full length upon the floor. The Vicomte stood in the window, with his ruffians on either hand.

"Mademoiselle," said he, with a bow, "will you come with me—to France?"

"To France!" she gasped.

"That is my invitation. I have been a guest too long. I would like for once to play the part of host."

"You cannot mean it!" she gasped; and so terrified was she that her voice was scarcely heard.

"Do you mean to refuse?" he asked.

"Yes!" she cried, finding her voice again. "A thousand, thousand times!"

Then there followed a silence, during which they stood facing each other across the table, and listening to the *drip, drip, drip* of the port upon the floor. She stood defiant, though still very white. Her arms were rigid at her sides and her fists were tightly clenched. As for the Vicomte, he was the same as ever—debonair, and altogether at his ease.

"You are hardly in a position to refuse," said he.

"You do not mean you will—kidnap me?" She faltered for the word.

"I said no such thing," said he. "I am not a common footpad. But, you and I will elope."

"No, no," she shrieked.

"*Hist!*" said he, with a nervous glance at the door.

"Mercy!" she cried. "Mercy! Mercy! You cannot do it! You dare not! Oh, you dare not, on your life!"

"Dare not," he repeated, slowly, shaking his head. "I do not think that there is anything that I would not dare—for you."

He was so quiet and gentle with it all, that it was then that the full meaning of her pitiful situation burst upon her mind; and she fell, rocked with tears, upon a chair. The Vicomte made a sign to his assistants; and they bound a cloth around her mouth. And as they did so, the Vicomte stood over them and swore that, if they hurt so much as a hair of her head, they would pay for it with their lives.

After this he carried her through the garden into the field beyond.

Here they came to a part of the fence where

three horses were tethered by the reins. The Vicomte handed the girl into the arms of Jerry Abershaw, while he vaulted into the saddle.

The young highwayman looked into her face in the bright light of the moon. Her head had fallen back, and her throat shewed white beneath the band about her mouth.

"By Christopher!" he whispered, "as pretty and dainty a bit o' cotton as ever I saw in my life. An' I've seen one or two—on the road," he added, giving a nod to Yates. "She's fainted though," said he.

"So much the better," said Yates.

And then, she was lifted into the saddle and lay across the pommel, as if she did but sleep.

She was all in white, and he was all in black; and together, at the gallop, they went into the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XIV

JUDAS GAP

THE first glad greeting ended, Roland Hood tore himself from his mother's arms, and returned to the stableyard. Then, he shouted for Thomas Timms; and Thomas Timms came twinkling out of the harness-room, with his braces down his back.

"Tom!"

"Your honor?"

"There are highwaymen on the road."

And Thomas's ears dived behind his whiskers.

"Was that where your honor got the horse?"

"Yes," said Roland. "They had about four shots at me, and missed."

And at one and the same psychological moment out came both of Thomas's ears.

"Your honor doesn't say so!" exclaimed Thomas.

"But I do," laughed Roland.

"Your honor does," said Thomas.

"Are you for it, Tom?" asked Roland eagerly.

"Every inch," was the answer.

"All right! I'll fetch you a brace of pistols from the house, and here's a horse. Get on a coat, man, and let's be off; they're not three miles from here!"

So saying, he entered the house; while Thomas twinkled into the harness-room, and pulled on a coat and a pair of long boots, that had stood in the window-sill, forming an almost completed circle side by side.

On returning to the stables, Roland found Thomas in the harness-room reading a letter by the light of the stable lamp. He was scratching the round bald patch that was situated exactly in the center of his head, and his face was more oval than it had ever been before.

"What have you got there?"

"A letter, your honor," was the answer.

"Come on, man!" cried Roland impatiently.

"This is no time to stand reading letters. There's work to be done."

But Thomas only continued to scratch his head.

"It came out of the wallet on the captured horse, your honor," said he; "and bless me soul if I can make head or tail of it!"

Roland took it from him, and by the light of the lamp he read the following words:

"The boat is to be at Judas Gap by ten o'clock. By then the tide will be nearly high. The wherry is to be under the Suffolk bank, near the wooden bridge at Manning tree, opposite the place where the Judas' Creek meets the estuary. The man at the Gap is to keep hidden among the rushes in the creek, until he sees a party coming from the direction of Jupe's Hill. In all weathers and at all costs, these orders are to be obeyed.

"Louis des Ormeaux."

Roland could hardly believe his eyes. Des Ormeaux! And yet he knew the man's writing well enough; and there it was as plain as day.

"To your horse, Tom; and quickly! We must ride for Judas Gap!"

"What's in the air, your honor?" cried Thomas, as he lifted himself into the saddle.

But "who knows!" was his only answer. "The devil's out to-night!" And Roland, loosening his sword in its scabbard, sprang into the saddle; and side by side they thundered down the drive.

They turned into the road like jockeys round a bend, and leaving the Wenham Hills behind them, came down the valley side. They had all the light they wanted. As the reader knows,

it was a star-lit night; and now the moon was up in the heavens; and it was all but bright as day. The cool night air filled their nostrils, and the trees went past like specters.

They took the hill on the Flatford road, leaving the village of Brantham to the left, and came out upon the road that runs parallel to the river above the marshes on the Suffolk side. As they passed Brantham Church the clock struck ten, and Roland called back to Thomas who had fallen some distance to the rear.

"How can we cross the river, Tom?"

"Up-stream at Flatford, your honor; or by the ford near Brantham Lock."

Roland pulled up; and soon Timms was at his side.

"There's no time for either," said he. "Can we cross the marsh?"

"On foot, your honor," answered Tom. "The horses would sink over their hocks."

"Then on foot it is," said Roland, leaping to the ground. "At all events we'll be able to discover what they are about."

Thomas followed suit and dismounted; and in a minute they had tied the horses to a stile and set off southwards toward the river.

They ran as fast as they could; and Thomas

with his short, fat legs was soon left far behind. But Roland, jumping dykes, and sinking again and again to his knees in mud, struggled on until he had gained the bank of the river Stour.

Directly facing him was Judas Gap; and he could hear the salt water falling over the green, warped wooden gates, and splashing into the river below.

The wind was from the south. From the direction of Jupe's Hill, on the Essex side, he heard the sound of the hoofs of galloping horses on the road. He listened. They appeared to pull up some little distance beyond the farm, which stands at the foot of the hill upon the skirting of the marsh. Suddenly all was still.

A light burned up from across the valley, flickered an instant, and then remained stationary and very bright in the clearness of the night.

After an interval, it began to flicker again, at the same time growing bigger and brighter. It was plain to Roland that some one with a lighted lantern was coming toward the Gap.

At last he was able to make out the figure of a man, who halted on the side of the Pool, placed the lantern upon the ground and then, putting his fingers to his mouth, whistled long and low.

Almost immediately, a boat shot out from the

salt-water creek, where it had lain hidden among the reeds.

"Is that you, Gipsy?" called the man from the boat.

"Aye," came the answer. "Jim Leake, ahoy?"

"Aye; and look out for yourself. There's some'un acrost the river, in the reeds."

"Don't believe it," came the answer, in the gruff voice of our old friend, "Gipsy" Yates. "An' what if there is? He can't get acrost to us."

"No; but he can put a bullet acrost, if he feels that way. So yer'd best keep down, out o' the light o' the moon."

The wind carried every word across the water to Roland's ear. He lay silent and expectant, listening to much splashing and grunting behind him that was drawing nearer and nearer.

It was only poor Thomas trying his best to twinkle in a two-foot depth of mud.

Finally, Thomas was at his side.

"Lie down, Tom," he whispered. "They've seen us!"

"Where are they, your honor?"

"On the other side of the river—in the salt-water creek. There's one in the boat, and another on the bank; and I think I hear some more

coming across from the road. But we can't do much good here. Is there no way of getting across? Can't we wade?"

"Wade!" exclaimed Tom. "It's ten feet deep if it's an inch! We can only lie still and watch their game."

Indeed this seemed to be all that they could do. For though they were within pistol-shot of each other, a deep swollen river lay between the parties. The Gap lies about midway between Flatford and Brantham locks; and if the boat made off down the creek, they would have to ride to the Manningtree Bridge, below Brantham, to reach the place where the salt-water creek joins the open estuary of the River Stour. Therefore, though they were but a few yards from Judas Gap, they might as well have been miles away for all the good they could do.

Suddenly a voice that Roland recognized at once—though it was many months since he had heard it—called out from across the marsh: "Hold up the light, you fool! *Parbleau!* But we are up to the knees in mud!"

"Keep to the left, me lud," answered Yates, "an' come down along the dyke."

Then upon the bank of Judas Pool, Roland Hood saw a sight that made his blood run cold.

For out of the darkness and the rustling reeds there stepped into the light of the lantern two men carrying the white, drooping figure of a girl; and the straight form of one was that of Louis des Ormeaux, with the moonlight dancing on the twisted hilt of his sword.

The man addressed as Jim Leake ran the boat under the bank; and the Vicomte and his companion carried the girl down, and placed her on the seat in the stern.

Then, standing up in the boat, he wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"*Mon Dieu!* but what a ride it was!" said he.

"And what a place!" threw in Jerry Abershaw, looking around him across the open, desolate marsh. "By Christopher! we could be caught here like rats in a trap. Give me the highroad and a straight gallop, and to the devil with all turnpikes and justices o' peace!"

"Aye," observed Mr. Yates. "I'm with yer there, Mr. Abershaw. To the devil with all justices o' peace! But me lud," he added, turning to the Vicomte, "d'ye happen ter know we're tracked?"

"*Comment?*" rapped out the Vicomte.

"There are men acrost the river, me lud—in the reeds."

The Vicomte, who was still standing upright in the boat, sprang suddenly to the shore. He took Jerry Abershaw and Yates aside, and gave his instructions calmly and in a low voice, little thinking that the wind carried every word across the stream.

"Where can you cross the river?" he asked of Yates.

"Flatford, me lud, up-stream," answered that gentleman; "and Brantham, down."

"Which is nearest?" asked the Vicomte.

"Flatford, me lud."

And thereupon my lord gave out his orders. "Abershaw, back to your horse," said he, "and across the river at Flatford! Yates will go with you to show the way. I leave it to you to clear those men out of the reeds, whoever they are. And if you are wise you will bury them in the marsh."

"As good as done!" said the highwayman.

And at that, without another word, the two men had disappeared in the darkness, while the Vicomte stepped back into the boat.

They heard the oars grating against the rowlocks, the stream of the river stirring the rushes and the weeds, and the water falling over the woodwork of the gap.

They saw Cicely's figure in the Vicomte's arms, in the stern of the boat upon the Pool; and as they looked, she recovered consciousness and called on Roland by his name.

"We must get back to the road, Tom! We must gallop to the bridge. They are going down to the wherry at Manningtree Bridge."

The young man was near distracted.

"We'll never do it in the time," answered poor Tom. "The road is miles around, and the creek goes straight to the sea. Oh! your honor, if we had only thought of this before!"

Tom's voice was thick with tears.

"We can only try," was Roland's answer. "There's not a second to lose."

Simultaneously, they sprang to their feet, coming out of the rushes into the full light of the moon.

"Halt!" cried the Vicomte from across the stream. "*Qui va là?* Who are you?"

But, he received no word in answer. The two figures turned from the river bank and, plunging into the mire, made off toward the higher ground on the Suffolk side.

The Vicomte, springing to his feet, discharged his pistols across the river. A duck got up at the shot, and went off into the night; while one

of Thomas Timms's most imprudent ears was cut clean through the lobe.

Timms drew up with the pain, and carried his hand to his ear. As he did so, he heard the wash of the boat, and the loud creaking of the oars, as Jim Leake's strong arms sent her shivering down the creek. Also, from across the Essex marsh, he caught the sound of the drumming of hoofs, as two horses galloped past Jupe's Hill Farm on the road that leads to the Flatford Ford.

Roland was already some distance ahead, knee-deep in bog; he struggled onward to the road. The sweat poured from his forehead, and his hands were cut and bleeding from the sharp grasses on the marsh, by means of which time and again he pulled himself from the mud.

At last, panting and smothered in mire, he gained the hedgerow, and without a moment's thought, broke through the brambles into the road, tearing his hands and face upon the thorns. Fortunately, he had come out upon a place not a hundred yards from where the horses were tethered at the stile; and in less than a minute he was once more across his horse.

But, even as he mounted, there broke upon his ears the sound of the hoofs, coming hard up the road from the direction of Flatford and the

Valley Farm. He was about to turn and fly, when he remembered Thomas Timms.

He paused to listen, with his ear towards the marsh. He heard Tom gasping and struggling in the bog. If he left him now, Timms would come suddenly upon the two men, fast drawing towards them on the road. And the Vicomte had advised them to bury him in the marsh. Turning his horse, Roland galloped to meet the men.

In a mad, furious gallop, he and Jerry Abershaw met upon the road. It was as fine a sight as ever the moonlight saw. Both were superb riders; both were mounted on thoroughbreds; and they thundered nearer and nearer to one another between leafy hedgerows, with the bright stars above them.

They came upon each other at a headlong charge. Captain Hood raised his pistol and pulled the trigger at a distance of thirty feet. The trigger snapped upon the nipple, but there was no discharge. Without a second thought he cast it into the hedge, and drawing his second pistol, tried to fire again. But again it was a misfire. The charges had been wetted in the marsh.

The horses' heads were now level. They

passed like a pair of swallows on the wing; and Roland Hood caught Jerry Abershaw, the king of the road, by the throat and hurled him into the dust.

He came down and lay in a crumpled heap, while his horse went madly on.

But Roland neither drew rein nor looked back on what he had done. He met Yates at an angle of the road; and as he came upon him, his sword flashed in the moonlight, and then buried itself up to the hilt, and carried the man across the cantel of his saddle.

Then he pulled up—so suddenly and violently that his horse all but fell. Leaning forward in his saddle, he turned, using his spurs, and once more set off.

He came upon the senseless form of Jerry Abershaw, huddled at the roadside. But he did not stop. He gave it naught but a glance as he flashed past. It was then in his power to have captured the famous highwayman; but there was other and better work for him to do.

He found Timms already mounted and on the road; and called to him loudly as he flew past him in the night:

“To Brantham, Tom! And ride for love and life!”

THE REFUGEE

And then he was gone again; and there was only the dust, hanging above the roadway in the moonbeams that broke through the branches of the tall, sheltering trees.

CHAPTER XV

BY THE COLD LIGHT OF THE MOON

ALL peace-loving folks in Cattawade had long since gone to bed, and only an occasional light burned in an upper-story window, when Roland Hood went through the village like the wind, and came out upon the open, mud-girt valley, where the North Sea has broken an inlet into the Essex & Suffolk coast. He was covered from head to foot in black, glutinous mud. His horse was dripping wet, and its chest and flanks were bespattered with white, soapy foam that flew off in the wind, and caught the brambles at the roadside on the way. He had ridden from The Tankard to Bentley Hall, and thence to Judas Gap. He had covered the greater part of the distance at the gallop; and now there was this wild, frantic ride along the Bergholt road, through Cattawade, to the old, wooden bridge across the Stour.

That once-famous bridge has long since been destroyed, and an iron railway-bridge has now

taken its place, but it was considered a masterpiece of construction in its day. Daniel Defoe saw it, upon his journey to Ipswich, and it is mentioned in his *Tour through Great Britain*. In the old days when Dedham was the weaving center of East Anglia, and the waterways were used more for traffic than they are to-day, the ponderous Flemish barges used to pass beneath it, and steal silently between the willows into the Valley of the Stour. Here, when Brantham lock was open, the incoming tide met the current of the river; and the salt water, mingling with the fresh, lapped the rush-grown banks in little wavelets, crested with creamy foam.

On this fateful night, destined never to be forgotten by at least one family on the banks of the sleepy Stour—and that lives even to-day by hearsay in the annals of the countryside—the old bridge spanned the river much as the eyes of the author of *Robinson Crusoe* had seen it, three score years before.

In the bright moonlight, its uneven profile threw a dark and curving shadow upon the flowing tide below. The rolling hillocks of Essex and Suffolk rose on either side against the starlight. At the mouth of the estuary, the lights of Harwich marked the boundary of the open

sea. Eastwards the masthead lights of ships mingled with the stars; but to the west the hills closed in about the river, and the soft beauty of the Valley was buried in the darkness of the night.

Between the foot of the hills and the river, where the rushes waved in the cool night air, stretched the open marshland, cut and drained by a thousand dykes. It was that No Man's Land, where only smugglers ventured, and that only the duck and the moorhen had a right to call their own.

The tide was still on the flow, and the ripples danced in the moonshine, and gnawed and fretted at the standing trestles of the bridge. Not a hundred yards below, lay a wherry, moored to the Suffolk bank. Her hanging sail, from time to time, beat in the breeze against the mast; and save for the lap of the water at her bows and under the wooden bridge, no other sound disturbed the silence of the night.

The tall figure of a fisherman stood at the stern, looking out expectantly across the river, toward the place where the estuary is joined by the creek that comes from Judas Gap.

For several minutes the man stood quite motionless. Then with an oath he turned impa-

tiently away and, going to the mast, picked up a lantern that burned upon the deck, and scanned the face of a great Flemish watch that he held in a broad and sunburnt hand.

Suddenly, from across the water, there came the grating sound of oars; and a few minutes afterwards, a boat shot out from the entrance to the creek, and began to cross to the Suffolk bank.

At that, the man raised the lantern over his head, and rocked it to and fro.

"Jim Leake, ahoy!" he let out.

And "Ahoy!" came from the direction of the boat.

A few more strokes of the oars, and Jim Leake was under the starboard quarter of the wherry. The Vicomte, with Cicely trembling at his side, was seated in the stern.

"Mademoiselle," said he, rising to his feet, and indicating the wherry with a motion of his hand, "I would that it was within my power to offer you better hospitality than this. Nevertheless, it will serve to carry us to France. The sea is serene and calm. *Mon Dieu!* I did never see a more perfect night than this!"

He raised her with his arm; and Cicely shivered as he touched her, though the night was warm and he had wrapped her shoulders in his coat.

The wherry, by reason of the fact that she carried no cargo, stood high above the surface of the stream. The man on board knelt down, and gave Cicely his hand. She took it. But she was very weak from the strain of the last two fearful hours; and the man was obliged to use all his strength to assist her to embark. In doing so, he gripped her wrist more tightly than he meant, for she drew quickly back again to the boat, crying out from pain.

"*Parbleau!*" thundered the Vicomte. "*Sacred name of a dog!* Do you wish that I spring on deck and run you through?"

The man fell back before this volley of abuse.

"Then how are you agoing to git the gal aboard?" he grumbled.

"Pig!" roared the Vicomte. "Have you no plank, no steps, no gangway—is it not?"

"Steps?" repeated the man, contemptuously. "Gangway? No. If we was accustomed to this kind o' cargo, p'raps we'd have a staircase, wi' bannisters and a carpet let down permanent-like at the wherry's side. But we ain't. Let me git hold o' the wench; I 'll pull her up right enough; and then the thing 'll be done."

"*Non!*" cried the Vicomte. "You will not again touch a hair of her head."

"I never arst to pull her up by the hair, governor," put in the man, aggrieved.

"Silence!" roared the Vicomte. "Is there no other way?"

"Land her on the shore if yer like, if she's too high and mighty for the likes o' me ter touch. The bank's low enough by the side of the bridge yonder, an' yer can step on ter the tow path and walk aboard, like the connubial couple a-coming out o' church."

The Vicomte, with a motion of his arm, ordered the boatman to row up-stream; and Jim Leake with a few strokes brought the boat alongside the bank, at a place where the gunwales were on a level with the ground, just clear of the archway of the bridge.

Cicely was so faint and weak that she was obliged to lean for support upon the man she feared and hated. He placed his arm around her waist, and almost lifted her bodily to the shore. And as he did so a horse came thundering down the hill.

He looked up sharply and, loosening his hold of the girl, carried his hand to the hilt of his sword. Upon the instant he was all alertness: his elbows were drawn back; his dark eyes peered

before him into the night. In a way, he resembled a cat about to spring at a mouse.

He may have thought for a second that it was Yates, coming in for his wage, for he laughed aloud, and threw off his attitude of alertness. He did not know that already Yates had been paid in other coin.

But now the mad fury at which the rider approached puzzled him. He looked sharply around, as if to see that Cicely was safe; and then, drawing his sword, he cautiously advanced.

He had not gone three paces on his way, when the horseman reached the end of the road, and came full into the moonlight on the bridge. The hoofs rang out on the wooden chasses and sounded across the marshland, like the beating of a monster drum, as the rider drew rein so suddenly and violently that he threw his steed back upon its haunches. As quick as thought he sprang from his saddle, and came down the ramp to the tow-path, where Louis des Ormeaux stood.

The ramp was of newly-laid gravel, and showed white in the moonlight. And against this background, the Vicomte recognized the figure of Roland Hood.

"*Ma foi!*" said he, and quickly drew back a pace.

THE REFUGEE

Past a doubt the man was as cunning as a fox, and retreated only to allow his rival to reach the bottom of the slope, in order that they might meet on level ground.

Roland Hood's sword came from its scabbard; and he hurled himself upon the Vicomte with all the pent-up fury that had spurred him on his ride. So that it was all the other could do to keep him off.

When the first savage onslaught had been beaten back, Louis des Ormeaux laughed—the old, false laugh that they all had known so well. But after a while he became silent, his features set in a grin; and there was no sound save the shuffling of feet in the mud and that of the constant ringing of steel.

Roland held the offensive, pestering him like a ferret at a rat, thrust following thrust, hot and fast upon the Frenchman's chest—while Cicely stood by with blanched cheeks and parted lips, and watched it all. Louis des Ormeaux's sword-arm rocked and swayed, as he turned his opponent's thrusts aside; and though he did it all with a grace and agility that proved him a master in the art, his teeth began more and more to show as, step by step, Roland drove him back toward the river-bank.

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Step by step, Roland drove him back toward the river-bank



"It is time this came to an end!" he cried, and lunged forward as he thrust.

"Then end it," growled Roland savagely, "—if you can!"

Once more the Vicomte laughed.

"I will!" said he.

At that, he leaped backward, so suddenly that Roland, plunging forward, thrust into the air. And before he had time to recover himself, the Vicomte was upon him, seizing the advantage and pressing his adversary with a violence only equaled by his own.

Surprised and angered at finding the young Englishman still able to keep him off, he flung prudence to the winds; and his thrusts came so close upon each other that he must have loosed his grip upon his sword. Roland followed a parry by a quick and sudden turn of the wrist, that, had it failed, would have left his chest open to his foe. But evidently the Vicomte had never looked for it, for the action sent his sword shivering from his hand.

Roland rushed in upon him, with a cry that was half a sigh of relief and half a cheer. If the Vicomte had stayed to attempt to recover his weapon, past a doubt his adversary, whose blood was fully roused, would have run the villain

through. And we are to imagine that the Vicomte was aware of it; for this is one of the few recorded instances on which he is known to have taken deliberately to his heels.

He sprang on board the wherry. He himself never gave the word, but the men, upon their own responsibility, did the thing that was the end of all his hopes, acting as quick as thought, and no doubt thinking that ignominious flight was the order of the day. Such fellows are easily panic-stricken; and perhaps Roland's savage onslaught had given them for the moment a little of the taste of fear; and this is the more likely since neither carried arms. Be that as it may, certain it is that the fisherman ran up the sail, while Jim Leake loosed the wherry from her mooring; and in a moment the boat was out upon the tide.

She took the slightest list to leeward as the breeze caught the sail, and shot off from the bank like a ship newly launched, her bows cutting the water in a long, feathery wave.

Roland, in an instant, was at Cicely's side. The Vicomte from the deck saw them standing together in the moonlight on the shore; and this was the greatest blow of all.

The man, livid with rage, brought down his

foot upon the deck, and the moonlight sparkled on the scabbard of his sword.

"Mon Dieu!" he cried, across the widening space between them. "If it is so decreed that we ever meet again, and there be a God in Heaven above, you shall pay me back for this!"

And there was a God in Heaven above, Who fought on the side of Right.

CHAPTER XVI

A JOURNEY TO LONDON

THE historian, if he be wise, will accept nothing upon the testimony of a single witness, but will rather be searching constantly for corroboration even of those matters upon which his authority seems the most assured; for it is only by the judicious weighing of all the evidence obtainable that he is able to arrive at even the probability of the truth.

In the compilation of the present narrative nothing has been held of greater importance than that the reader be not deceived as to fact; and herein has lain the bulk of the writer's toil. For the noble family of des Ormeaux is now extinct; and all papers connected with the history of the house appear to have been destroyed when the peasants of the Savoy leveled the Château des Ormeaux to the ground.

Some trace has been found of a female member of the house who, turning Huguenot, fled to England for safety at the revocation of the Edict

of Nantes and married a doctor in Colchester, thereby lending a drop of French blood to a family that was sadly in need of a little vivacity and taste in matters of art. She seems to have been a very estimable lady, of great personal beauty and to have made, upon the whole, a most excellent wife.

But the discovery of her marriage throws no light upon the history of the Vicomte, and on that account falls not within the margin of this tale. He himself left no record of his doings; and for the complete story of the man's desperate *coup de main* we are forced to rely upon the verbal evidence of Thomas Timms, and that of Mr. Hercules Bannister—Sir Michael's butler, a gentleman whose testimony, it is feared, cannot be implicitly believed.

Jerry Abershaw sketched with cherries, upon the white-washed walls of his Newgate cell, several scenes from his daring escapades upon the road; but, strange as it may seem, he omitted any allusion to that colossal outrage at Nether Hall where an English country gentleman, together with his son, was gagged and bound at his own dinner-table, and his daughter kidnapped under his nose.

During that winter there hardly passed an

evening that Thomas Timms, with his ears rising and falling like a pair of rudimentary wings, did not run through the story before a breathless audience at the Bentley "Tankard." Thomas had found Gipsy Yates crushed and dying at the roadside, and had heard from him how the Vicomte had planned every detail of the business, and how Jerry Abershaw had been largely instrumental in carrying it out. Yates confessed to a full share in the villainy. Also he went on to tell how Monsieur des Ormeaux had for some months been in correspondence with those across the Channel who schemed the invasion of England. He admitted his own share in the treachery, and gave information concerning the signaling-station that had been established on Ramsey Height. He had nothing now to gain, one way or the other, and beyond doubt had some desire to make such peace as he could with God; for even then he felt the cold hand of Death upon his brow. He said that the Vicomte would betake himself to the headquarters of the French army in Holland, whence he would signal to Ramsey Height when de Winter's squadron was prepared to sail. Yates himself was to receive the message, and Abershaw on his gray horse was to carry the news to certain French sympathizers in the

South, where General Hoche was to land. Yates said that Monsieur des Ormeaux was a rogue, and that the unhappiest day of his life was that on which he had put the man ashore at Judas Gap. And after that, he turned over on his side, and breathed his last to the dust; for Captain Hood's sword had passed between his ribs.

As for the evidence of the butler, it is flimsy from the start, and only serves to show how one bold man may hold a pack of cowards in the hollow of his hand. Upon his own assertion, Mr. Bannister had gone into the pantry to fetch a "milk jug"; and there he was locked in. Taking it for the foolish prank of a kitchen wench, he became highly indignant, threatening the whole body of domestics—with the sole exception of the cook, who was beyond suspicion in the eyes of Mr. Bannister—with instant dismissal should the story reach their master's ears. These threats he precipitated through the key-hole, but wholly without effect; for nobody came to his aid. He was therefore obliged to look about him for some method of escape; and finally, after a series of gymnastics greatly to his credit in the face of the portliness of his build, he managed to land on his head on the gravel pathway, directly beneath the pantry window. Gathering himself to-

gether, he repaired hastily to the kitchen, where his indignation instantly gave way to astonishment on finding the door locked from the garden side. Fortunately the key had been left in the lock; and on entering the room, he was confronted by what he himself afterwards described as "the most distressin' spectacle as ever came under his observation." The entire feminine portion of the establishment was in floods of tears, while Mr. Whitehead, the footman, excessively white in the face, was asking them all to lean on him for protection—advice that apparently only Betty, the housemaid, had deemed it safe to accept.

In a great many breathless words the cook informed Mr. Bannister that no sooner had he left the kitchen than there entered a man in a green-hooded riding-coat, with a black mask upon his face, who informed them that he would shoot dead the first of them that attempted to leave the room. Whereupon, he produced a murderous-looking pistol from his pocket, shook it in Mr. Whitehead's face and then went out, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

This is the story as the cook told it to the butler; and, no sooner had she finished, than Mr. Whitehead burst suddenly into fits of the most

immoderate laughter, declaring to the company that he "knowed it was Mr. Bannister all the time."

But as Mr. Bannister not only refused to own up to the deception, but also himself turned a sickly green color in the face, the laugh died gradually out upon Mr. Whitehead's lips, and the housemaid was heard to observe, "There's no knowin' but what we won't all be dead and gone ter-morrer."

No one ventured to contradict this melancholy assertion; and all eyes were turned upon Mr. Bannister as the one man who had it within him to grapple with the situation.

Mr. Bannister rose nobly to the occasion.

"Mr. Whitehead," said he in a faint voice, "go and see who's in the passige."

This Mr. Whitehead stoutly refused to do, saying that his place was by the side of ladies, where he was resolved to remain "to the last."

Whereupon, Mr. Bannister, before all the company assembled, called Mr. Whitehead a "cowid" to his face and adding in a choking whisper that he would go himself, walked boldly to the door.

There, with his hand upon the handle, he suddenly remembered that he had not said good-by to the cook. He therefore returned to the center

of the room to make good this oversight, and bade a touching farewell to them all—with the exception of Mr. Whitehead, upon whom he cast such a withering glance that that gentleman shifted uneasily upon his feet and mumbled something about “savin’ the wimmin and children.”

Before Mr. Bannister had completed his farewell oration, which was very protracted and dismal, the cook, altogether overcome by the nobility of his behavior, flung both her arms around his neck, and begged and prayed of him not to go. Whereupon, Mr. Bannister owned that he had not the heart; he could not resist, he said, the sight of a lady’s tears—more especially the cook’s—and would remain precisely where he was. But he had been surprised and hurt beyond measure by Mr. Whitehead’s conduct throughout.

“What does it matter,” observed Mr. Whitehead apropos of nothing in particular, “so long as the wimmin are saved?”

Whereupon, Blunt, the groom, knocked so suddenly upon the window that Mr. Whitehead immediately shut himself up in the kitchen-cupboard, while the cook fainted away in Mr. Bannister’s arms.

Blunt had come round to tell them that the

Vicomte's mare was gone from its stall; but on being informed of the appearance of the masked man, he came through the scullery door, and led them all out into the garden where they discovered, through the opened bay windows of the dining-room, what a calamity had actually occurred, exactly twenty minutes after the Vicomte and Jerry Abershaw had got away from the house.

A quarter of an hour later, Sir Michael, Anthony and the groom were armed and mounted in Dedham street. But there they were able to discover no trace of the fugitives; for in point of romantic interest, it is not the least noteworthy item of all this terrible business that the Vicomte carried Cicely across country, taking the jumps in the moonlight, until he had gained the lower Manningtree road.

Sir Michael, suspecting that the Vicomte's plan was to escape to his native land, set off with his party eastward, and came by chance upon the mare, at the osier-beds, near Jupe's Hill Farm. Hence they proceeded on foot to Judas Gap, but arrived too late to find anything but the footprints of their predecessors in the mud.

The chances were that the fugitives had gone off down the creek in a boat. Hurrying back

to the road, Sir Michael and his party galloped to the Cattawade Bridge, and there found Roland and Cicely safe and sound.

Further pursuit was beyond the question; for by then the wherry must have gained the open sea. They were about to return to Dedham when Thomas Timms came in with the story of how he had found Yates on the Bergholt road, and heard both his dying confession and the alarming news that Jerry Abershaw, the Highwayman, was abroad on the Suffolk side.

So it happened that, though "Gipsy" Yates had been sent to his account, both the greater villains had managed to escape—the one to the land that had given him birth, and the other to that highroad by the "Bald-Faced Stag" that the fear in the breasts of peace-loving citizens had caused to be called his own.

From that night forth Thomas Timms was one of the powers that be. Largely through his agency a national danger was averted. For a large body of troops was hurried to Colchester; the signaling station on Ramsey Height was destroyed, and a frigate-of-war deputed to watch the Hook. Indeed, so stringent were the precautions taken, and so well was the East coast guarded, that from that time forth no other

descent upon the Essex flats was seriously considered.

As for the Vicomte, for the time being we lose all trace of the man. Certain it is that he returned to France, or else to Holland; and how he made his peace with the Directory and Generals Humbert and Hoche is best known to himself. All the good he had done was to lose the life of a smuggler, and set an even higher reward upon the head of the most notorious highwayman of the day.

Beyond doubt he had no further business in England; indeed in that country his life was now in jeopardy. But he returned as we know; for having in his mind the constant memory of a fair English face, he threw discretion to the winds. And now, in addition to the love he bore the English girl, that drew him back to the scene of his discomfiture, there was established in his breast an unutterable hatred for his rival, the young officer of marines who had proved himself the better swordsman and the better man. It was an open question whether he longed most to see Cicely at his feet, or to pass a rapier through the heart of Captain Hood. Be that as it may, the fire within him smouldered in secret, since for some months no trace of him could be found.

Throughout the campaign of 1795, by reason of the fact that Holland was now in the hands of the French, England was unable to land an army on the continent; and though the Mediterranean fleet rendered all the assistance it could, the gallant Austrians were left to bear the brunt of the matter alone.

A week after the famous night when he first crossed swords with Louis des Ormeaux, Roland Hood rejoined a ship at Chatham that was refitting for Admiral Duncan's fleet. With England and Austria at war with the world, it was no time for officers to be on leave, despite the fact that aching hearts and tearful eyes were left behind them.

And no sooner had the young officer bade farewell to his love for the second time, than a letter came to Nether Hall from Mr. Pitt, suggesting that Anthony should go up to London and become resident in Lincoln's Inn—as the Prime Minister himself had done. Thence he could attend at Westminster Hall; and the following year Pitt, in the best interests of the Tory party, could offer him a seat in the House for a certain borough in the West of England.

Sir Michael was fully pleased with his son's prospects, and accepted for Anthony there and

then. Nor was that young gentleman himself at all unwilling to go. He desired above all things to see something of the great city of which he had heard so much. And therefore it was in the month of June that John Constable and Anthony Packe journeyed to London together; the former to complete his studies in art; the latter, to prepare himself for that political career which in later years, under the administration of Lord Liverpool, led to so much honor and distinction.

So it came about that Anthony Packe left the village where he had been born and bred. And as for the Squire, though the old man had seemed to love storming at his son, he grew so desolate without him now that not even Cicely could make him happy and content. So he married the widow—a fact which, having nothing whatsoever to do with this tale, is here mentioned for the second time—twice and for all.

The journey up to London in the year 1795 was no joke. The mail-coaches had not been long in existence and competition was only beginning to grow keen. In the first place, they were invariably over-loaded; for in addition to passengers and luggage, inside and on top, they carried "outside" passengers at a reduced rate

in a basket, termed the "conveniency," suspended at the back. As for the so-called "flying-coaches," they were considered so dangerous that no one in his right senses would travel on them. The roads, in those days, were only kept in repair in the near vicinity of towns; and as often as not, in bad weather, the coach sank up to the axle trees in mud, the passengers having to alight and put their shoulders to the wheel to get it out. In dry weather the ruts upon the roadway so strained the wheels that they sometimes—and frequently in the case of "flying coaches"—came off on the journey; whereupon the coach overturned and the passengers were sent "flying" into the ditch. In such cases, the "outsides," traveling at half-price in the "conveniency," came off best; whereas the gentleman on the privileged seat next the driver as often as not came off with a broken head.

But the greater danger, especially in crossing the tracts of waste land, which at that time lay around the capital, was from the highwaymen who, even in the broad light of the sun, fell upon the coaches and post-chaises on the road. Wimbledon and Putney Commons, Hounslow and Hampstead Heaths were alive with these "gentlemen of the road." From the time when trav-

eling had become general in England, there was not a day passed that some outrage was not perpetrated; there was not an inch of country road in all England where the traveler could for one moment consider himself safe. Claude Duval, Jonathan Wild, Jack Sheppard and Dick Turpin: each in turn was the terror of the road; and in his day, the name of each was used as a bugbear to naughty children, though it cost even the parents themselves a tremor to get it out.

But perhaps the greatest villain, though at the same time, by reason of his youth and extreme good looks the most romantic figure of them all, was Jerry Abershaw. At about this time his name was in all men's mouths. All efforts to bring him to justice had signally failed. On two occasions he had been tracked to a house in Clerkenwell; but on the premises being searched from cellar to attic, no trace of the highwayman could be found; and though he had been seen to enter by the front door the two constables, who remained without, had been ready to swear that he had not returned that way.

In those days there was no organized body of police. Law and order were left in the hands of watchmen and parish-constables, as often as not greater rascals than those they were there to



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oppose. Sometimes a troop of cavalry were dispatched to the scene of some particular daring robbery on the highroad; but the soldiers, with their heavy accoutrements and trappings, proved next to useless in pursuit of the well-mounted gentlemen of the road. If Abershaw came to London, he came within reach of the arm of the law. There were magistrates in plenty, and there was Newgate Gaol; but these were of little use when there was no one capable of catching the rogue. They found no difficulty in arresting poor, miserable debtors and putting them safely away under lock and key where they could incur no more liabilities, and pay only their first great debt to God by giving up their lives in the pestilential atmosphere of the cells. But robbers and highwaymen were more desperate blades than the times had the wherewithal to cope with. They were allowed the free run of the roads; and travelers had to fend themselves. On that account, to journey to London in 1795 was a very serious affair.

Anthony and John Constable picked up the coach at the county turnpike, but a few yards from the gates of Nether Hall. It was that same turnpike that Jerry Abershaw had jumped, on his famous ride from Boxted Heath.

A young man, stepping out of the door of a wayside inn, hailed the coach as it passed



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It was a glorious day, in early summer, with the trees in full leaf, and the buttercups golden in the fields. The road was dry and dusty, and the coach swung merrily along.

Having changed horses in Colchester, they were not three miles clear of the town when a young man, stepping forth from the door of a wayside inn, hailed the coach as it passed. The driver immediately pulled up; and the stranger, explaining that his horse had gone suddenly lame upon the road, asked if they could take him on to London whither he was bound.

He was exquisitely dressed and carried himself with the airs of such a fine gentleman, that the driver called him "my lord" upon the spot, and a seedy-looking individual on the seat behind Anthony and Constable volunteered to travel in the "conveniency" if the newcomer would refund him his fare with a bit in addition for himself.

This the young man gladly consented to do; and after a delay, sufficient to allow of the requisite change of places, the coach went on.

The young man immediately got into conversation with the boys, entertaining them with stories of London—the great city which each was then approaching for the first time in his life

with feelings of awed expectation. He seemed to know every tavern and coffee-house in the town, and told them anecdotes of the clubs, of the high play there was at White's and of the extreme difficulty in becoming a member of Almack's.

Anthony, who seemed rather impressed with the stranger's gallant appearance, asked him if he himself was not a member of this most exclusive club.

"No," replied the young man. "Even I can't get in. Though my pedigree's one of the longest in England, they say it's not good enough for 'em. And, egad, where's the shame in it when they've blackballed my Lord March, and the Duchess of Bedford! Think o' that! My name's Boothby—Barton Boothby—I daresay you've heard of me often enough?"

He turned to the boys for an answer. But they knew as little of the celebrated Mr. Barton Boothby as they did of the Earl of March or the Duchess of Bedford, or any one else of all the grand people who lived in London town.

"Ah, perhaps not!" sighed the young man. "I fear we have got to look upon our little parish of St. James's as the greater half of the world. But, egad, we're wrong! Ye may be well

enough known in Brookes's, but it don't thereby follow you're a famous man. It takes a bit o' swallowing; but, faith, it's as true as the deuce."

After that, he was silent a while, as if in spite of his words he was somewhat hurt that his notoriety had not extended as far as the Valley of the Stour. But he soon brightened up again and began to point out to the boys all the places of interest on the road. He appeared to know the name of every village and inn; and Anthony, with a perfect frankness, asked him how it was that he came to be so accurately informed.

"Oh, I'm always on this road," he laughed. "Fact o' the matter is I've got an old invalid uncle living in Colchester. Poor old boy's all alone in the world. I'm his particular favorite nephew, you know—well, and you can guess the rest."

Anthony ventured to remark that perhaps they knew his uncle.

But the young man shook his head sorrowfully. "You would n't know him," he sighed. "In point o' fact it's a delicate case. Egad, but, to tell 'ee the truth, the poor old boy's not quite right in the head. Used to be in the Army once. Touch of the sun in the Mysore War. That's

why I have to keep an eye on him," he added in confidence. "Never saw him for six months once; and when I did run down—egad, I found him planting out cabbages on his dining-room carpet, and repeating to himself that flowers were the joy of life and made the world bright and happy, as it were! Poor old fellow! Poor old lad! Delicate case, egad!"

Both the boys tried their utmost to look distressed at the serious form the old gentleman's illness had taken. However they had some difficulty in doing so; and when the stranger himself burst into a fit of the most uproarious laughter they joined in readily enough.

"Faith, yes," laughed Mr. Barton Boothby, "I have to keep an eye on him; and I run down on the coach every month just to see that he's not planting oak trees in his kitchen!"

Anthony wondered that, since he used the road so much, he had never had any mishaps.

"I never fell in with a highwayman yet," said he; "and to tell you the truth," he added in another burst of confidence, "I'd not care a fig if I did."

At that they came to an inn where they were to change horses and where the passengers could alight for a meal. Mr. Boothby swaggered into

the place as if it belonged to him, and kept the landlord bobbing and scraping until he grew red in the face and his bag-wig nearly fell off his head. He ordered ale for as many of the "outsides" as wanted it, and sat down with Masters Anthony Packe and John Constable to a cold boiled fowl and a bottle of wine.

During the meal, they continued their talk of highwaymen and the dangers of the road; for the boys were naturally interested in the subject, this being the first journey either had taken in his life.

Anthony told Mr. Boothby how Jerry Abershaw had robbed the Ipswich coach and how he had been chased by the Suffolk Hunt over Flowton Brook. Then he went on to tell how the same daring villain had broken into his father's house and kidnapped his sister from under his father's nose.

Mr. Boothby listened in rapt attention, ever and anon throwing in such ejaculations as "the wicked rascal!" "Egad, the knave!" and "I' faith, he did!" And when the story was done and the meal was ended he rose to his feet and looked at himself in the glass. "*By Christopher!*" said he, "I would like very much to come face to face with this Jerry Abershaw of yours!"

At which Anthony thought him the very finest of fellows.

Mr. Barton Boothby asked both to dine with him the next afternoon at Slaughter's Coffee-House in St. Martin's Lane. Constable excused himself saying that he had arranged to meet with a cousin of his, who had promised to introduce him into that colony of famous artists that, before the foundation of the Academy, congregated in the vicinity of Greek Street, Soho. But Anthony accepted with pleasure, and promised to present himself at the coffee-house at the hour named.

After that they returned to the coach where, as the dusk was upon them, they wrapped themselves in their coats; and after an uncomfortable night, with many delays and much changing of horses, they arrived at their destination driving down Ludgate Hill as the morning sun was touching the dome of St. Paul's.

Anthony's sleep had been but intermittent throughout the night: in the first place, the coach jolted; in the second, unused to traveling he awoke whenever the coach pulled up; and thirdly, he could not for the life of him remember when and where, on a previous occasion, he had heard a man swear "by Christopher."

CHAPTER XVII

"THE OLDE HOUSE IN WEST STREET"

IT is not easy, in the face of the well-ordered, systematic London of to-day, to imagine the same streets a hundred years ago. We can barely realize the hardships and discomforts that our grandfathers had to put up with; and on that account, perhaps, the days of George III seem merrier than they were.

Of course we have progressed. The old, more violent, vices have died away under the watchful eye of the police; men no longer run each other through in taverns, or get drunk in each other's arms. To-day we think of "battle, murder and sudden death" as among the most terrible things we know. We take everything more seriously than our grandfathers did. We look upon life as a grim and earnest struggle for existence, though at the same time we have not half the need. They regarded it all only as an irresponsible, blustering joke—a joke that at any moment might end with the sharp shot of a

pistol or six inches of cold, hard steel in the dark. It was the old familiarity that bred the contempt. They had a supreme contempt for the dangers that were all around them; and we, for the same reason, look down upon our very security from a pinnacle of disdain.

In this twentieth century we fly in motor cars along the country roads, where once the highwaymen were wont to lie in wait; and the worst that can befall us is a policeman with a notebook, or perhaps a punctured tire. To some of us even a Jerry Abershaw would come as a relief. Nowadays, if we see a friend off upon a journey, we ask him if he has a newspaper. The old question was, "Were his pistols ready primed?" In a hundred years the very face of social life has been transformed—for the better; we would not deny it if we dared. In a hundred years we have stridden an epoch on the road of civilization; we have passed from the age of pistols and highwaymen to that of newspapers and policemen; but, if we have but a shade of the old love of adventure still dormant under our black umbrellas and homely bowler hats, it is difficult to believe that the "good old days" were not, after all, the best.

To-day "The Olde House in West Street" could never exist. Its reputation would instantly reach the ears of Scotland Yard, and in ten minutes it would be gutted from roof to floor. In 1795, though all men knew of it by repute, they passed it by with a shudder, as an evil that was and apparently had to be.

It was situated in Clerkenwell in the neighborhood of Saffron Hill. In former times it had frequently been used as a place of refuge by Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild, and was noted for its trap-doors, sliding panels and hollow walls, with which appurtenances no house is built with other than evil intent.

Toward this house, in this same year of 1795, there stepped the young man we have already met upon the coach, dressed in the very height of the fashion of the time. His hair was nicely powdered and done up at the back in a queue; a rapier hung at his side, the hilt of which was adorned with gold, and in his hand he carried, with all the grace in the world, a silver and ebony cane. He might have but just stepped out of Brookes's or White's, and seemed vastly out of his element in such a district as that of West Street, Clerkenwell.

Suddenly, he stopped before the door of "The Olde House," and gave it three sharp raps with his cane.

Almost immediately it was opened; and the beau, with a quick glance up and down the street, slipped in.

He found himself in a passage that was pitch dark, though it was still early in the afternoon. No sooner had he entered than the door was slammed behind him; and the noise went echoing through the house.

Then a very high and squeaky voice came from out of the darkness.

"Any news?"

"Aye," was the answer.

"From the Stag?"

"From where else, you fool? Is my man here?"

"He's in the room on the right. Step in, Jerry; step in, me lad."

At that, the man began to grope in the dark about the passage wall. He seemed to be searching for a spring that was not easy to find. He succeeded in the end however; a panel slid easily back, and the passage upon the instant was flooded with light from a room beyond. But, it was not the light of day. It came from a tallow

candle, stuck in the neck of a bottle, that burned upon a table in the center of a large, low-ceilinged room.

"Step in, Jerry," repeated the man with the squeaky voice. And Jerry Abershaw swaggered into the room, with his buckles and his sword and his powdered hair, as if for all the world he was but newly come from court.

Jerry Abershaw, who of course was never the celebrated Mr. Barton Boothby at all, was only then twenty-two years of age; yet by his looks he might have been even less. And surely, in all the brawling, cut-throat London of 1795, if we passed this handsome fellow in the street, he would be the very last that we would suspect as the most hardened ruffian of his day. He had a pair of big brown eyes, as widely-opened and wondering as a child's; a finely chiselled nose, and a small, full-lipped mouth. If there was a fault in his features it was that his chin was a trifle bold. As he entered he bowed to Louis des Ormeaux, who sat at the table on the only chair in the room.

"At your service," said he.

"*Bon jour*," said the Vicomte. "At last we meet again."

The man with the squeaky voice now came

forward into the light. He was extremely thin, and bent nearly double with age. His face was as wrinkled as a raisin, and very much to one side, as if in early years he had received some shattering blow. Indeed his lower jaw was so much out of the straight that it seemed as if he might almost have been able to crack a nut between his left lower molars and his right upper ones. We might be fully justified in this belief, on the sole condition that he had never opened his mouth; otherwise, we had seen at a glance that he had no teeth with which to crack anything at all. This lopsidedness was general throughout his features; for instance, his nose went very much to its right, and his left eye was altogether gone.

"Tinsell!" said Jerry to the one-eyed man.

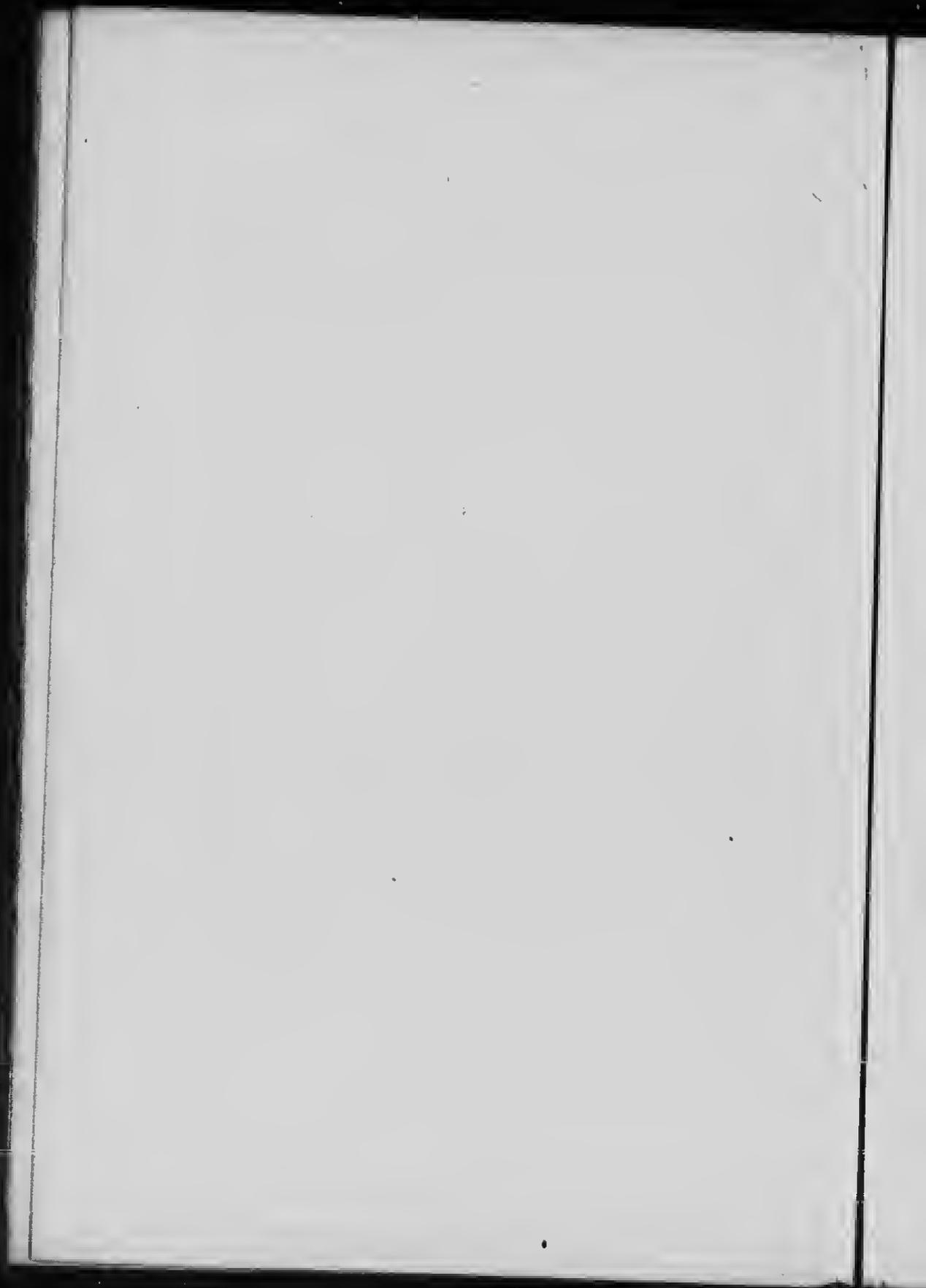
"Yes, Jerry."

"Close the door, and let 's be alone."

Whereupon Tinsell, turning his head almost completely round, rather like a duck when it preens its feathers, examined the wall with his only eye. Finally, having apparently found that for which he sought, he touched a spring and the panel slid silently back to its place; so that the three men were altogether enclosed



“Close the door, and let 's be alone!”



by walls. There was neither a door nor a window that opened into the room.

The Vicomte looked round with a smile of satisfaction.

"Here," said he, "we shall be able to arrange matters—amicably."

"Not a word," cried Jerry, "until you've handed over the dibs!"

"The what?" cried the Vicomte.

"The dibs, my lord! Let's see the color of the dibs!"

"The color of the dibs!" echoed the astonished Vicomte. "*Mon Dieu*, are they painted then, these 'dibs' of which you speak?"

Jerry smiled, but did not openly laugh.

"Dibs is money, and money is dibs," squeaked Tinsell, drawing towards the table, and rubbing the palm of his hand across his crooked chin.

The Vicomte burst into laughter.

"Money!" he cried. "So dibs is money!" Then, ending his laugh, he added, as if in reflection: "My word, but you are a curious people, you English! How is it you commonly use a word like 'money,' when you have so poetical, so pregnant a substitute as 'dibs'?"

But neither Jerry Abershaw nor Tinsell ap-

peared to have any reply. So the Vicomte continued, with many magnificent waves of the hand and constantly showing his teeth: "For money I have the most sincere respect," he cried. "It is the root of all endeavor; the father of effort; the mother of vice, and the very sinews of war. It is the most potent power there is. But, *dibs!*" he continued. "The word ennobles me, transfigures me; lifts me into a higher plane. For '*dibs*' I have the most supreme contempt."

At that, he slipped his hand into his pocket and, drawing it out, buried the table in a flood of paper notes.

Tinsell's skinny hand shot out like the claw of an owl. But, Jerry Abershaw took him by the neck, and sent him across the room.

"Hands off, old friend," cried he. "The most of this belongs to me."

He then gathered the notes together with the greatest respect and care. Many of these were the *assignats* that had been issued by the French revolutionary authorities against the property of *émigrés* and the crown. They were next to worthless, and two years later, were called in at a four thousandth part of their original value. Jerry may probably have suspected this; for he

took more particular stock of such of the notes as were payable on the Bank of England and, evidently deeming these sufficient wage, said not a word in protest.

"Where's the money for your lodging, Jerry?" pleaded Tinsell, keeping at a safe distance from the highwayman nevertheless.

"Here," answered Jerry; and he handed three of the *assignats* over to Tinsell, and pocketed all the rest.

The old man lifted the papers, one after the other, up to his only eye.

"*Domaines-nationaux?*" he spelt out. "What's all this about?"

"*Payable au porteur,*" threw in the Vicomte. "Pay the bearer."

"Yes, exactly; but, who's going to pay me in London?" cried Tinsell, more than a little alarmed.

"I wonder," said Jerry, serenely. "Do you think that with only one eye you'll be able to find the man?"

"No, I don't," let out the other, so violently that his squeak ran into a falsetto that resembled the top note of a penny whistle in the bare uncarpeted room.

But, "Never despair!" was all the comfort Jerry could offer. "It will give you something to do."

The old man came down the room in a paroxysm of rage.

"Is this the way you treat your friends?" he screamed.

"No," laughed Jerry; "but *this* is!" And he caught the old man a stinging blow with his cane across the face. Tinsell went back at a bound, and crouched low in a corner of the room—a revolting, pitiful sight.

"My good friends," cried the Vicomte, rising to his feet, "we must not quarrel among ourselves. I give you my word, the *assignats* are good."

"Do you hear that, Tinsell, you dirty dog," cried Jerry. "The *assignats* are good!"

Tinsell got slowly to his feet. He said nothing, but there was a malicious light in his only eye.

The silence was broken by the Frenchman, who burst once more into laughter.

"The episode is ended!" he cried. "I see you are like myself, Mr. Abershaw. We impetuous men do things we are often afterwards sorry for; but then we are not capable of deceit."

Jerry looked him up and down.

"By Christopher," said he. "I would n't trust you a yard."

But the Vicomte only continued to laugh—while Jerry Abershaw whistled, and tapped his shoe with his cane.

"Well," asked the Vicomte at last; "and what news?"

"I came back from Colchester yesterday," said Jerry. "The girl is still unmarried, and the Marine, as far as I could discover, has gone back to the wars. More than that, I traveled up with the son and a friend of his—a bright pair of youngsters of very divergent tastes. The one talked of nothing but sunsets, and the other expressed the greatest interest in your humble and obedient servant."—Here the highwayman paused to make the profoundest of bows.—"Had I known he was coming to London," he continued, "it might have saved me a very unprofitable journey, for I got no more than five pounds on fifty miles of road, lamed my horse and was obliged to pay my own fare back. But the lads were highly entertaining—so much so that I treated them both to a meal!"

"Ah!" cut in the Vicomte. "Impulse again!

You have a warm heart, a truly generous disposition."

"Fiddlesticks!" observed the other. "They've both got more money about them than they know rightly what to do with. Mr. Packe dines with me this evening at old Slaughter's; and after dinner, I'll lighten him of his purse in Leicester Fields."

"I see," smiled the Vicomte. "You will repay yourself, as it were. And now to business. You are willing to assist me again?"

"If you're equally willing to pay?"

The Vicomte waved his hand.

"You have just had proof," said he, "that I am as good as my word."

"Maybe," said Jerry, with a shrug. "But I don't much fancy this French paper money of your lordship's. The Bank of England's good enough for me."

"As you like," said the other. "It is all the same to myself."

"Well then, what's the game? Another invasion?" And the highwayman cocked his head and smiled.

The Vicomte jumped from his chair and began to pace the room.

"If there's a difficult thing in this world,"

said he, "it is to kill two birds with one stone. I am resolved never to try it again. For the future I have one aim, and one aim only. You say the old man is alone with his daughter. Very good. Our task will be supremely easy. There are several men-servants, of course; but I know their ways. The butler would hold up his hands if you held a darning-needle to his throat. If necessary we can again enter the house. I have a duplicate key of the little side door—on the path that leads to the shrubberies. There is neither lock nor bolt on the inner side. Name of a dog!" he cried, "if I have to go through fire to get her, I take her from her father's house!"

He was very excited. His face was livid; and his eyes were hot and bright as living coals. He could not stand still, but restlessly paced the room.

"I ride to the East coast before the end of the week. Since Yates has failed, I must find this man Leake, to carry me over to France. Leake lives in Ramsey. You will meet me at the King's Arms at Frating, on the main Harwich road, at six in the afternoon on the twentieth of July. I give you that amount of time since Leake may be at sea. I know of no one else I

can trust, and intend to run no risk. That is all. The twentieth of July. You will not forget?"

"I'm your man," said Jerry. "And now I must be off. Tinsell, you old dog, leave off sulking, and open the wall."

Without a word the old man shuffled across the room, touched the spring and slid back the panel.

"A most charming residence," threw in the Vicomte.

"At times," said Jerry, "more than a handy one."

"Past a doubt," said the other. "I find it so myself. Tinsell has a disguise for me: a black beard, a black wig and a black cloak—of impenetrable black. I am here as an Austrian. Frenchmen being unpopular in England at the present time, my identity must not be discovered. After the mismanagement of our last affair, I am wanted as much as you."

"Then," said Jerry, "stick to the Olde House in West Street, highly recommended by Mr. Louis Jeremiah Abershaw and all the leading and cultured gentlemen of the road. Tinsell will look after your lordship, and there's plenty of room for yourself and other acquaintances you may have brought with you from France.

This room will hold about ten, and there's another one, the same size and furnished with equal taste, on the other side of the passage. I am sure Tinsell will do his best for you. He's a clever old scoundrel is Tinsell. He could disguise a parish beadle so that his own wife would never know him, and I've shown you how to pay the rascal: a few of your worthless *assignats*, my lord, and a cut on the face with a cane. So, good-day to ye both—good-day."

With which oration, Jerry Abershaw swaggered out of the room.

A moment afterwards, they heard the front door bang.

"An arrogant knave!" said the Vicomte. "But the very man I need."

Old Tinsell so screwed up his ill-favored countenance that he looked like a snarling hound.

"Curse him!" he muttered. "Curse him!" And he carried the palm of his hand to the side of his face.

CHAPTER XVIII

SLAUGHTER'S COFFEE-HOUSE

SLAUGHTER'S COFFEE-HOUSE was situated on the west side of St. Martin's Lane, where Cranbourne Street now lies. In those days St. Martin's Lane was one of the most important thoroughfares in that part of the town, and one of the first of the London streets that was paved.

The pseudo Mr. Barton Boothby had mentioned the hour of six; and Anthony Packe made his appearance at the coffee-house as the clock of St. Martin's Church struck the hour. But no sign of Mr. Boothby was anywhere to be seen.

Anthony remained standing near the entrance. No one in the place took the slightest notice of him, except an extraordinary looking individual, with a very black beard and very white teeth, who was seated at a table by himself, and who, raising an eye-glass to his eye, surveyed the new-

comer in such critical and suspicious fashion that Anthony began to feel self-conscious, and shifted uneasily upon his feet.

This man smiled at Anthony, and his teeth looked whiter than ever. The black beard seemed to take root in every possible part of his face. Indeed, there was very little of the gentleman to be seen, save his teeth and his beard and a long, black cloak that reached to below his knees.

As for the rest of the occupants, they were far too engrossed in a game of draughts that was being played between two gentlemen—and on which a great many bets had been made—to pay any attention to anything else.

Anthony, finding, himself so little at home in a place where everyone seemed to know everyone else, had turned to go, when the black-bearded stranger rose suddenly to his feet and came toward him.

“Pardon,” said he. “Were you expecting to meet anyone?”

He had bowed very politely, and spoke in the thick, guttural accent of a German.

“Yes, sir,” answered Anthony. “I was to have met a Mr. Barton Boothby here. Perhaps you know him?”

"By name only," said the stranger. "Solely by repute."

"He is very well known, is he not, sir?"

"His reputation exceeds the limits of the town," said the other.

"I expect," reflected Anthony, "he has forgotten he asked me to dine."

"I think not," said the stranger. "I have heard very false reports of Mr. Boothby if I am to believe he cannot keep his appointments. Rest assured he is unavoidably delayed and will be here in a moment. But will you do me the honor of taking a cup of coffee with me while you wait? It will give you an appetite for one of the famous chops with which they serve you here."

Anthony readily accepted, and was soon seated at the stranger's table. On questioning the gentleman about London, he found he knew little or nothing of the place. He was, he told him, an Austrian, and had come to England on a visit to a friend on the Austrian embassy. But he must shortly return to his native land and take his place in the ranks of the army, opposing those perfidious regicides—the French.

He was in the midst of a diatribe against the French nation and the horrors of the Revolu-

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tionary period, which he protested was a disgrace to a civilized age, when Mr. Barton Boothby himself burst suddenly into the room.

"Egad," cried he, "a thousand apologies to you, I'm sure! I was most deplorably put out by a hackney coachman who drove me to another quarter of the town."

The fact of the matter was that he had come face to face with a constable whom he knew to be on his track, and had been obliged to reach Slaughter's by a vastly circuitous route.

"Don't mention it," said Anthony. "This gentleman told me he thought you would come."

At that Mr. Barton Boothby—or Jerry—drew up as straight and stiff as a larch.

"Egad, he did!" said he. "And who, if you please, are you?"

The stranger bowed in a very courteous manner.

"Hulcher," said he. "At your service, sir."

"Then, faith, Mr. Hulcher," cried Mr. Boothby, "I'm sure I'm much obliged to ye for looking after my young friend during my absence, and I take this opportunity, sir, of thanking you. Egad, kindness o' that sort is so rarely to be met with nowadays that I'd ask you to join us at a chop, were it not that we must be

in a hurry over our dinner; for I have arranged to take my young friend to Drury Lane to see *Medea*, a very alarming tragedy, as no doubt you 're aware, and all the talk of the town. But very improving to the mind, egad—I am all for improving the mind!"

And at that he hailed the landlord, and ordered another table for himself and his friend on the other side of the room. Anthony wished the stranger good-by, and then rejoined his host who was talking to the landlord at the top of his voice, and abusing him roundly for not having better victuals to eat.

When Anthony approached him, he sent the landlord about his business and, taking the boy by the shoulder and casting a furtive glance in the direction of the Austrian gentleman, he whispered quietly in his ear that he was glad he had got him away, since the man was nothing better than a well-known pickpocket, adding that he hoped that Anthony had not already lost his purse. Whereupon, the boy felt his pockets. But his purse was still there all right—a fact that Jerry Abershaw was genuinely glad to hear.

So after that they sat down to their meal; and though the host expressed the greatest dis-

approval at every dish that was set before them, Anthony ate with a hearty relish while he listened to the celebrated Mr. Barton Boothby's unceasing flow of talk.

Mr. Boothby had just finished the famous story of how Mr. Fitzgerald, having been black-balled at Brookes's, had threatened each individual member of the committee with a duel unless they elected him, and was laughing until he was obliged to hold his sides, when he broke off and a look of the utmost astonishment came suddenly over his face.

"*By Christopher,*" said he, "it's an uncomfortable little world!"

Anthony turned his eyes in the direction of his gaze. And who should have entered the room but Roland Hood, accompanied by a very old man with lank, snow-white hair. The old man was leading a little girl by the hand.

Roland saw Anthony at once, and came cheerfully towards him.

"Why, Anthony!" he cried.

And in a second Anthony had his friend by the hand.

"Why, what brings you here?" he asked. "I thought you were at Chatham."

"So I was," said Roland. "I've been sent up

to the Admiralty on duty. Who's your friend?"

"Oh," said Anthony, turning to Jerry Abershaw. "Mr. Barton Boothby whom I met on the coach. I am proud to have the honor of making you known to one another. Captain Roland Hood of His Majesty's Green Marines."

"At your service, sir," said Jerry with a sweeping bow.

Roland also bowed.

"Strangely enough," said he, "I too have just met an old traveling companion." And he smilingly indicated the little girl.

"Pon my body and soul," said Mr. Barton Boothby, "what a delightful and dainty infant, egad!"

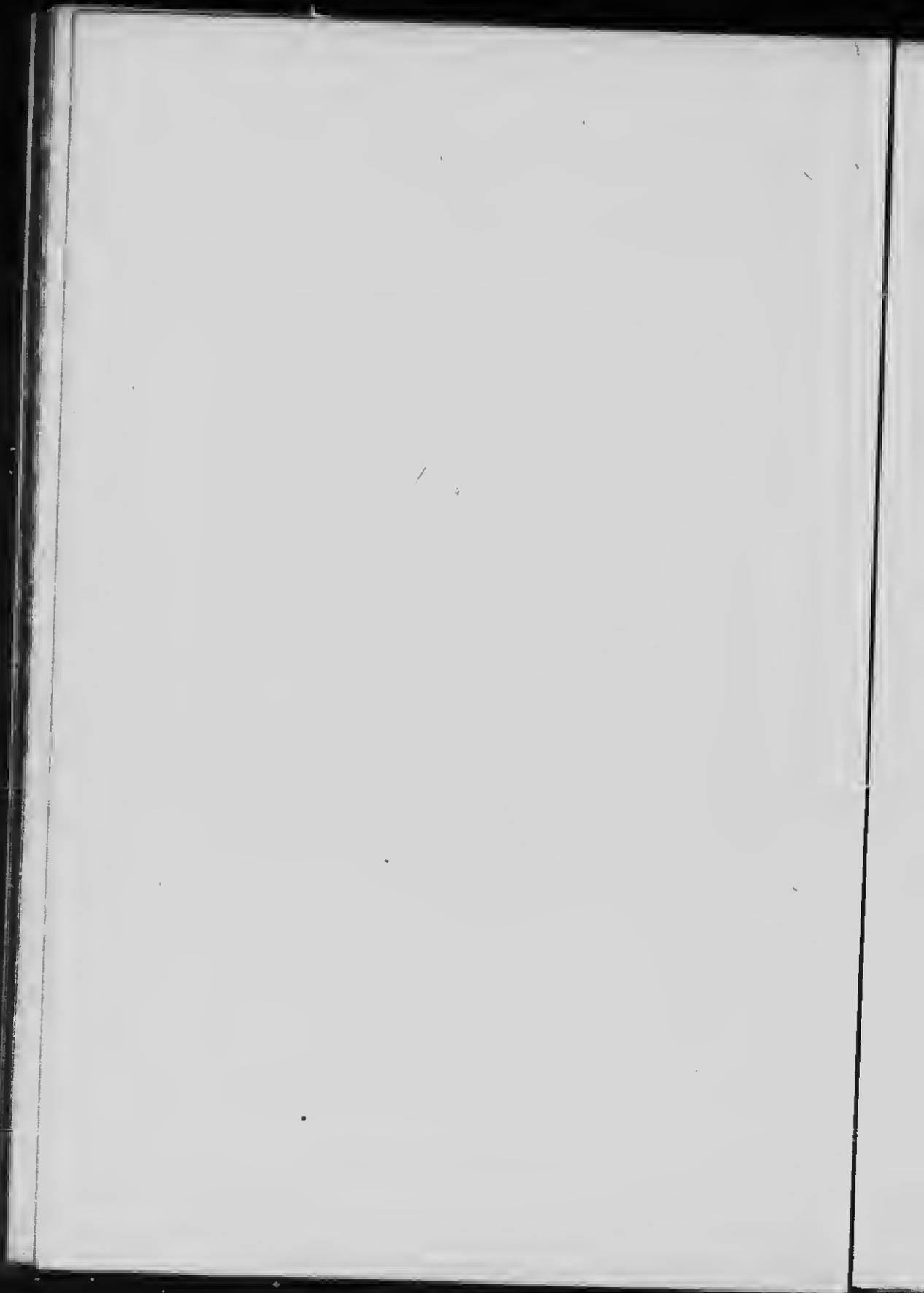
But the little girl, who was was staring hard at the highwayman, was very white. Suddenly a look, partly of recognition and partly of fear, flashed upon the childish face.

Jerry, who had seated himself again, got quickly to his feet.

"There's a friend o' mine in the street," said he; and in two steps he was out of the door. As he passed the little girl, she screamed and clung to the old man's coat. The Austrian gentleman, on the other side of the room, was laughing mer-



As he passed the little girl, she screamed and
clung to the old man's coat



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rily by himself, his ivory-white teeth showing in his beard.

"What is the matter?" asked the old man, trying his best to comfort her. "What is it, my dear?"

But the child was unable to speak. She was whiter than ever and trembling from head to foot. The gentlemen who had finished their game of draughts, crossed the room to see what the commotion was. Fear seemed to have thrown the child into a kind of convulsion, during which all she could do was to clutch violently at the tails of the old man's coat. In a very few seconds there was a ring of customers around her. Everyone in the place had left his seat. The Austrian came forward—but he laughed no longer; he looked alarmed. One gentleman brought some brandy; another offered her chocolate, whilst a third, who was evidently a bit of a wit, suggested a pinch of snuff.

At last, she found her voice, coming out with a kind of a shriek.

"Oh, grandfather!" she cried. "It was he! It was! It was!"

"Who, my child? Who was it?"

"*The highwayman!*" she cried. "*The man who robbed the Ipswich coach!*"

"Jerry Abershaw?" gasped the old man.

"Yes!" cried the little girl. "The man who robbed the coach!"

It was as if a thunderbolt had fallen into their midst. Those elegant draught players went back like a bunch of ninepins, bowled over by a word: the circle doubled its diameter, and one or two of the timid ones held to the tables for support.

"Jerry Abershaw!" came almost simultaneously from every lip. There was not one of them who was not more than a trifle scared.

"No, no!" cried the Austrian. "Gentlemen, I can put your fears at rest. That gentleman was Mr. Barton Boothby. I know him exceedingly well."

"One of my best and most frequent customers," added the landlord.

"You are mistaken, my dear," said the gentleman who had offered the chocolate. "We do not have highwaymen in Slaughter's. We are men of taste and honor here."

But the little girl only shook her head.

"What makes you think it was the highwayman?" the old man asked.

"I know," she persisted. "I know it was."

"But how?"

"When I came in, I heard him laugh," she answered. "He laughed like that when he was going to shoot the officer—before I hit the pistol with my doll."

"She's right!" cried Roland, "the same laugh! It comes back to me."

"Tut," cried the landlord, who was evidently solicitous for the world-wide fame of Slaughter's.

"That is nothing; many men may laugh the same."

"Yes," said the little girl, gazing as it were into space. "But all men, who have the same laugh, have not a big red scar under their chins."

"You saw that?" cried the old man.

"I saw it on the coach, grandfather," she said, having to some extent now got the better of her fears; "and I saw it as he passed me when he left the room."

"No, no," expostulated the Austrian. "This is all a hideous mistake!"

"Gad, we'll hunt him down!" cried one of the draught players.

"What's the use?" said the wit. "He's gone."

"But you, sir," cried the landlord, appealing

to Anthony; "I take it you know Mr. Barton Boothby? You were his guest. You know this to be all a mistake?"

"I believed that to be his name," faltered Anthony Packe. "He told me so."

"He lied, then!" cried the old man, rapping his stick on the ground. "He lied; or how comes it he is gone?"

Then, the truth came upon Anthony Packe, something after the manner of a blow.

"Two days ago," he got out in jerks, "he stood before a looking-glass, in an inn on the Ipswich road, and said he would like very much to come face to face with Jerry Abershaw."

Once more the circle widened, like a ring upon the surface of a pond around the place where a stone is thrown. The Austrian turned away and muttered under his breath in French, "*Ma foi!*" said he. "I'd rather lose my arm."

"Egad," cried someone. "Sure enough it's the man!"

"We'll hunt him down!" cried the gentleman who had made the same remark before. And, "What's the use?" said the wit; "he's gone."

They all went out upon the pavement; but there was nowhere any sign of the highwayman to be seen. It would be as useless to search for

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the proverbial needle in a haystack as for Jerry Abershaw in all the length and breadth of London town.

Suddenly three constables quickly came up St. Martin's Lane. They saw at once that there was some commotion abroad, for the bulk of Slaughter's customers, in the middle of the road, were talking at one and the same time in the highest state of excitement and throwing their arms in the air.

In two words they had told the constables what was in the wind.

"He's the very man we are after," they answered. "Which way did he go?"

That nobody knew. No one had even noticed whether Jerry had turned to the right or left.

"Let's scatter and search the whole town," suggested a very untidy gentleman at the back of the crowd, who evidently was an artist of sorts. Two constables regarded him with inexpressible contempt, and the third told him to "scatter himself."

"Confound your insolence!" exclaimed the artist. "I offer a feasible suggestion, and you have the impertinence to ridicule it!"

The constable was perfectly calm. It did not seem as if it were possible to anger him. Poor

fellow! Perhaps, he had turned a page of the book of Fate, and already knew that his days were numbered to the hour.

"I meant no disrespect, sir," said he. "I was only disappointed; for there 's a good reward set on this man's head. He was recognized an hour ago." He turned to his comrades. "Our only chance is to search the Olde House in West Street, Clerkenwell. What d' ye think, mates?"

"Like as not he 'll be there," said the second constable.

"It 's worth trying any way," said the third.

"Gentlemen," said the first, "we are about to search a house that we know this man frequents. I don't mind saying the place is a regular death-trap. We shall be glad of all the help we can get."

And thereupon, the hunt of Jerry Abershaw began. In two minutes all were hastening eastwards; and St. Martin's Lane was empty, save for the Austrian under the lamp, showing his teeth as he hissed an oath in French.

Neither Roland Hood nor Anthony Packe had guessed it, and even Jerry Abershaw himself had been deceived, but the teeth were those of Louis des Ormeaux, and the disguise—the black wig and the black beard—belonged to Tinsell, the

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landlord of the house whither they all were bound.

Louis des Ormeaux looked after them for an instant with a searching glance—and then took snuff, seeming to be in deep thought.

“Yes, even at my own risk,” said he at length, “I must save this fellow, if I can.”

At that he loosened his sword in its scabbard and joined in the pursuit, setting off at a run.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CUP AND THE LIP

THOUGH they all started off in a spirit of the greatest enthusiasm, the good gentlemen from Slaughter's very soon got tired of the chase. Before they were out of St. Martin's Lane the ranks of the pursuers were greatly thinned. In Holborn many remembered that they had important engagements to keep and that it was still a considerable distance to Clerkenwell. As for the remainder, they were got as far as the Gray's Inn Road when it suddenly occurred to one gentleman, who was getting exceedingly sore in the feet that after all the highwayman might not be there.

They pulled up to discuss the question. They thought that in all likelihood the gentleman with the sore feet was right; and if the truth be told, they hoped he was, for none of them were now as brave as they had been. The artist, who had been offended by the constable, reminded them that, since all the town knew that Abershaw had

escaped from this self-same house before, the chances were that he would not go there a second time; and if he did, since he had escaped once, he would probably do so again.

This last settled it. It was an impetuous age. Jerry Abershaw went out of their heads as quickly as he had entered; and they became possessed with but one idea: to get back to Slaughter's and play draughts.

So back they went, shouting and singing, down Holborn to St. Martin's Lane. By the time they were once again at the coffee-house, they were all hot and short of breath; so they ordered more liquor than was good for them, and became noisier than ever. For when all is said and done, they were a headstrong, rowdy gang, for the most part students of art or young men of letters, whose wont it was to spend the long hours of the day over their palettes or scratching away with their pens, making up for lost jollity after sunset, when the taverns were all aglow. It was Grub Street, as well as St. James's, that could beat the watch or whitewash the statue of the King.

The landlord was at his wit's end that such a notorious rascal had been discovered under his roof. At first the gentlemen tried to console

him; but judging this useless, they dispersed to the taverns in the various parts of the town, and later on turned into bed, little thinking of the great event they had missed, the news of which the following morning was to set the whole town by the ears, from the White Horse Cellar to Ludgate Hill.

Meanwhile the three constables, accompanied by Anthony Facke, Roland Hood, the Austrian with the black beard and one other gentleman—the sole survivors of a crowd of twenty—stood in the Gray's Inn Road, holding a council of war. They discussed the matter for several minutes; and in the end it was decided to continue to search. Since on two former occasions Abershaw had somehow managed to escape from this house in Clerkenwell, it was arranged that Anthony and the Austrian should remain outside the front door while one of the constables and the other gentleman entered an adjacent street and stationed themselves in the backyard of the Olde House. Thereby, if Abershaw were inside, escape was rendered impossible; and, after giving the constable and his companion plenty of time to take their posts, Captain Hood and the two remaining constables were to enter the house and search it from roof to floor. All this was ar-

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ranged in the Gray's Inn Road. Everyone was armed with a brace of pistols and a sword; and after engaging the services of two link-boys the party set off at a steady pace.

In those days the City by night was as dark and as silent as the grave. Further west in the vicinity of the Haymarket and Covent Garden, the lights of the taverns flared across the streets, and the mingled sounds of laughter, singing and revelry lasted throughout the night, frequently ending only with the dawn. But not so in the City. Then as now, it was the business quarter of the town. Men went thither to work, and they worked hard; for at that time England was on the threshold of a great commercial fame. In the evenings, all men flocked to the West End to amuse themselves after the boisterous fashion of the day, leaving the narrow City streets deserted and dark as pitch; for the hanging lamps were few and far between, and people for the most part trusted to the link-boys to light them on their way. Gas had only just been invented but, as yet, was utilized nowhere save in a shop at the corner of Piccadilly, which in consequence was one of the most wonderful sights of the town. A few years later, Almack's Assembly Rooms in King Street were lighted by gas in cut glass

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lusters; though it was not for many years that the new invention was adopted in the houses of the nobility and richer merchants. At this time the link-boy was the little king of London. Without his services by night and in the fogs strangers were unable to move a yard, and even Londoners themselves often had the greatest difficulty in finding their way about. In consequence link-boys were indispensable to guide our little party safely through the labyrinth of narrow streets into the inky darkness of Clerkenwell.

They found West Street with hardly a light in a window. There was no moon. A heavy wind was blowing that whistled round the chimneys and sent large sheets of torn paper dancing along the street, flying into the light of the torches and back into the darkness whence they came, like white, ghostly specters hurrying through the night.

As they approached the Olde House, they ordered the boys to put out the torches, giving them orders to light them again as soon as the members of the party had entered the house.

At the corner before the Olde House, the party separated, one constable and the gentleman going round to the parallel street. After waiting sev-

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eral minutes, at Roland's suggestion one of the link-boys was sent to see if the others were in their places.

They waited for about a quarter of an hour. Then the boy returned. He had had some difficulty in finding the house; since they were all alike at the back. He had been obliged to try several. Finally he had found the constable and the gentleman, directly at the back of the Olde House, with drawn swords and their pistols ready primed in their hands. Roland, who as the holder of the King's commission was the acknowledged leader of the party, told the boy to go back and stand by the constable, with flint and steel in readiness to light his torch, if so he was ordered to do.

At that the rest of them set out, each one with a heart beating fast with expectation, until they came to the famous place itself.

Even in the darkness of the street the Olde House seemed to stand back from the other houses as something darker and more sinister than them all. There were no windows on the ground floor. A smooth, coal-black wali rose from the ground like an impenetrable sheet of steel, at the base of which they could just discern the outline of the door. It was brass-bound and

of oak. It seemed to defy, and at the same time invite, entrance; but the invitation was such as the spider gives to the fly. It was a dangerous-looking door.

They tried it, and found it locked. One of the constables came forward with a crowbar he had got from a house in Holborn. He was a powerful man and almost a giant in stature. It was he who had acted as spokesman outside Slaughter's. With three blows he sent over the door, splintered from its hinges.

Upon the instant he dropped the crowbar and sprang forward into the passage eagerly followed by his comrade and Roland with a re-lighted torch in one hand and his horse-pistol in the other. The noise of their boots upon the bare floor went echoing through the house.

There was a flight of wooden steps before them, but no sign of a door on either side. Fast on each other's heels, they dashed headlong up the stairs.

Upon the first landing they paused. Here there were three doors, obviously leading to separate rooms. Clearly they must take them one by one.

In two quick words it was decided that the



As quick as thought, he had caught the torch from Roland's hand, and dashed it into the constable's face

constable should remain outside, while Roland and the other searched each room in turn.

They entered the first. It was absolutely bare, destitute of furniture and smelt of rats and straw. They looked in every corner and cupboard, but there was no sign of anyone having entered it for years.

They were about to enter the second, and the constable actually had his hand upon the handle of the door, when it was suddenly flung open from the other side, and a man in a black mask sprang forth like a tiger under their eyes. As quick as thought, he had caught the torch from Roland's hand, and dashed it into the constable's face.

Then all was inky dark, and they heard him go down the steps, three or four at a time, laughing and calling to them to make themselves at home.

"Look out!" shouted Roland. "Look out, below there, in the street!"

The Austrian, at the door, drew his sword; and Anthony Packe, though he little knew it, stood within an ace of his life.

Roland groped about him for the torch, found it, and made off down the steps after the fugi-

tive, with the constables following fast upon his heels. Anthony and the Austrian, they knew, were at the door. Assuredly, Jerry Abershaw was caught.

But, when Roland and the constables reached the end of the passage, Anthony and the Austrian—who was laughing—were ready to swear that no one had passed out. It was useless for Roland to protest that he had heard, if he had not actually seen, the man go down the stairs. They held firmly to their opinion: they had remained one on either side of the doorway; they had not moved for an instant, and no one had passed through since they had been there.

There was nothing for it but to light the torch anew, and go back and search the house. The constable's face was burned, but he was not seriously hurt. The man had come upon them so suddenly and unexpectedly that not one of them had had time to fire. He had gone down the stairs like a cat over a garden wall.

They explored the place from attic to cellar; they ransacked the cupboards, and rummaged the drawers. They found several furnished rooms, and food and ale and bottles of wine—some full and some emptied—but no single living soul was anywhere to be found.

Finally they came back again to the passage, and were about to leave the house, when a panel slid softly open in the wall and a hideous old man, bent very low with age, with only one eye and a very crooked face, suddenly appeared in the flaming light of the torch.

The five of them were in the passage. The Austrian made a motion as if to run the old man through with his sword. Anthony and Roland dashed through the opening in the wall. They found themselves in a small room furnished as a bedroom. The bed was very much ruffled and had evidently been slept in. Upon a table in the center, were some dirty plates and glasses and the remnants of a meal.

They looked everywhere, under the bed, behind the chest of drawers; but, there was no one there. Evidently the old man with the crooked face had been the only occupant.

They returned to the passage where one of the constables held the old man by the throat.

"Empty?" asked the constable.

"Not a soul," said Anthony.

At that, the old man laughed—a squeaky kind of a laugh.

"If you catch Jerry Abershaw," he squeaked, "what will they do to him?"

"Hang him," said one of the constables, which was brief and to the point.

"Sure?"

"Sure," was the answer.

"Ye'll not let him get away again?" the old man croaked.

"Not if we once get him," answered the constable.

"If Jerry gets away from prison," piped the old man, "he'll flay me alive—sure as death he will. But he struck me to-day and he shall pay for it!"

The Austrian drew near to the old man, and, unobserved by the others, whispered in his ear.

"Betray him at your peril!" he said.

Tinsell looked up sharply, with a look of alarm.

"Silence!" came from the black beard in a gentle hiss. "Silence—or, *mon Dieu*, you die!"

The old man seemed to think.

"No," he let out. "He struck me, and he'll pay for it! Let me go!" he cried with an oath. "Let me go, an' old Tinsell will be even with Jerry yet!"

The constable did as he bade him. The old man's crooked face was yellow in the torchlight; and a look of the most malicious hatred had come to his only eye. Without a word, with naught

else but a hideous toothless grin, he shot back the panel in the opposite wall. And there, in a corner of the room beyond, with a bundle of straw at his feet and a pistol in either hand, stood Jerry Abershaw, the highwayman, caught like a rat in a trap.

The next few seconds were such as Anthony Packe was never likely to forget, and yet of which he could afterwards give no adequate account. It seems that Anthony and the two constables, shoulder to shoulder, came upon the highwayman in a rush, while old Tinsell, from the opening in the wall, the foot of which was some short distance from the level of the floor, held the flaming torch above his head.

Four pistol shots rang out in quick succession, filling the place with the smoke of the powder, and waking the neighbors in the street. Anthony fired, and one of the constables fired; but, it appears, they discharged their weapons as they dashed forward, and in consequence missed, the bullets splitting the wood on either side of the highwayman's head. Jerry for an instant held his ground, to all appearances perfectly calm and cool, firing deliberately, first one pistol and then the other. The tall constable pitched heavily forward on to his face, and then lay quite still;

the other went back with a cry of pain, carrying his right hand across to his left shoulder, where his coat was quickly stained with blood.

Anthony's charge was unimpeded, and he seized the murderer by the throat. But in an instant, he was shaken off and hurled against the wall. Jerry Abershaw snatched up the wooden chair and dashed across the room to the door that was guarded by Roland and the Austrian; and there stood Tinsell, with terror stamped on his face and the torch trembling in his hand. Anthony saw the old man crouch low and heard his piteous cry for mercy. He saw Jerry Abershaw lift the chair, and bring it down with all his force upon his betrayer's head. He heard the snapping of the wood, and a loud, piercing cry of pain; and then the light went out and once again they were in darkness.

It could only have been a few seconds before the torch again flamed forth, showing Tinsell's distorted face with streaks of blood where the chair had struck him upon his hollow, haggard cheek, and Roland Hood—wounded, on the passage floor. For, it was in that minute, during which they stood in utter darkness, that Louis des Ormeaux stepped, with cold deliberation, knee-deep into the slough of common crime.

As Jerry bore down upon the unhappy Tinsell, with vengeance in his eye, and the chair swung high by the legs, Captain Hood, leveling his pistol fair at the robber, took quick but certain, aim.

These next things passed as lightning flashes. Roland fired; and the black-bearded Austrian struck the muzzle upwards with his fist: the bullet was buried deep in an oaken beam above. Almost simultaneously, the chair came down on Tinsell's head. Then, the wild shriek; and then, the light went out.

Less in anger than astonishment, Roland had turned for an instant to the man who had thus saved the highwayman's life. Seeing that the Austrian, of his own free will, was there to capture Jerry, Roland at first thought that there was some mistake. One glance, however, was enough to banish this.

The man had drawn back into the passage: his white teeth were showing in his beard; and his eyes were filled with hate.

Roland had had no time to draw and defend himself. The long blade flashed; and the thrust came straight and sure for his heart. It was then the light went out. The young officer, on a sudden bathed in the cold sweat of fear, struck

desperately before him; and Providence in that dark passage guided the smoking barrel of his pistol. Steel rang out on steel: the sword was beaten down; and the blade passed through his thigh.

At that, with a cry of pain, Roland threw himself forward, and seized his would-be murderer by the throat. They came down to the floor together, struggling for life, the Austrian uppermost.

When Tinsell rekindled his torch, Anthony and the constable hastened to the scene. Abershaw who had reached the street door turned back, and pressing upon Roland's chest forced him to let go his hold.

As the Austrian rose, Roland grasped his beard, which came off, there and then, disclosing the features of their old enemy, the Vicomte Louis des Ormeaux.

Roland was, at first, unable to rise.

"You villain!" he cried, the red blood flowing from his wound, and a feeling of weakness creeping over him. "*You villain!*" He could say no more. He fell back, as if he fainted, his head striking dully on the floor.

Des Ormeaux never stayed. He laughed; and

Anthony listened to their footsteps growing fainter in the street





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then, with Jerry Abershaw, made off into the night.

Anthony followed them to the doorstep, where he stood and listened to their footsteps growing fainter in the street. Then he turned back to tend to Roland Hood.

CHAPTER XX

MR. BLATHERWICK'S MISTAKE

ON the night that Abershaw escaped, Anthony Packe was more than a little alarmed lest his friend should faint from loss of blood; for no sooner had Roland got to his feet than the wound opened afresh and so strong a feeling of dizziness took hold upon him that he was obliged to lean for support against the wall.

Fortunately, however, by this time the gentleman, who had been stationed with the third constable at the back of the house, had come round to the front by way of the passage, in all haste to learn the conclusion of so much shouting and noise. He looked hugely alarmed when he saw the havoc that had been done: the tall constable lay dead upon the ground with his face buried in the straw; the other had buttoned his forearm inside his coat, for the collar-bone was broken and the limb was thereby useless; and the young officer of marines, with a blood-stained bandage round his thigh, was deathly white in the face.

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"Egad!" he exclaimed, "and he has got away!"

He never guessed that the Austrian with the black beard had changed sides at the eleventh hour and struck a coward's blow.

He was soon told of these things, however, which made him wonder none the less; and then, being a kind-hearted man, as well as a brave one, he offered such assistance as lay within his power.

They helped Roland to the street. In that quarter of the town, and at so late an hour, there was small hope of finding a hackney coach. But as luck had it, a hawker chanced to pass, and for the sum of a shilling they got the use of his barrow. This served very well to convey the young man to Long Acre, to the house of a surgeon of noted skill who, after dressing the wound, assured them that the patient would be well again in a week.

Nor was the surgeon wrong; for in six days Roland Hood was the same man who had strolled into Slaughter's with the little girl he had met on the coach—save for a red scar on his leg and a stronger desire than ever to rid the world of Louis des Ormeaux.

By this time Anthony was both comfortably settled in his chambers in Lincoln's Inn and embarked upon his studies which, by the same

token, were not overmuch to his taste. He found frequent opportunity to call round upon the invalid, who had taken up his abode at an hotel in Covent Garden very much patronized by the country gentlemen of the time.

It was upon the day that Roland was first able to walk without the aid of a stick, and he and Anthony were seated in the coffee-room upon the first floor of the hotel, that a porter entered, and said that a gentleman waited upon them below.

The visitor was shown up; he entered with his hat under one arm and a leather satchel, such as is used for papers, under the other. A great seal dangled at his fob. He was a pale man, clean shaved and on the better side of thirty, though stooping and dilatory both in his manner of walking and his speech.

"Mr. Blatherwick," said he. "At your service, gentlemen"; and he bowed.

Our friends got from their chairs, not entirely at their ease, Roland muttering something to the effect that he knew the name very well.

"Indeed, you should, sir," said the gentleman quietly; "for I am the Prime Minister's agent, and am here on my master's concerns."

"Mr. Pitt!" they both exclaimed of a breath.

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"The same. And when I say my master's concerns, I mean of course the nation's. The terms Pitt and England are, as I may say, synonymous; and I hope you will not think I take too much upon myself by saying so. With your permission I'll take a chair."

He seated himself, and laid his satchel before him upon the table. Anthony was too taken aback to speak. He had his father's letter of introduction to the Prime Minister in his pocket; he had been six days in London, and had not yet plucked up sufficient courage to knock on the great man's door. He felt, in a way, in disgrace; but Mr. Blatherwick put him at once at his ease.

"You, sir, I take it, are Mr. Anthony Packe. We look forward, sir, to a day—at no distant date, I hope and trust—when you are to take your place in the Tory ranks. I've heard of your father, sir; in his time, an ardent politician, forcible and fearless. To Captain Hood," he went on, turning to Roland, "I need no introduction. I have had the privilege of overlooking Admiral Hotham's dispatches. I congratulate you, sir, from my heart, and without any more preamble, get straightway to business. But first, I think, I'll close the door."

He did so, and locked it, taking the preliminary precaution of seeing that there was no one in the passage without.

That done, he came forward, rubbing his hands. "Gentlemen," said he, "we are alone. That which I have to say is not for the public ear."

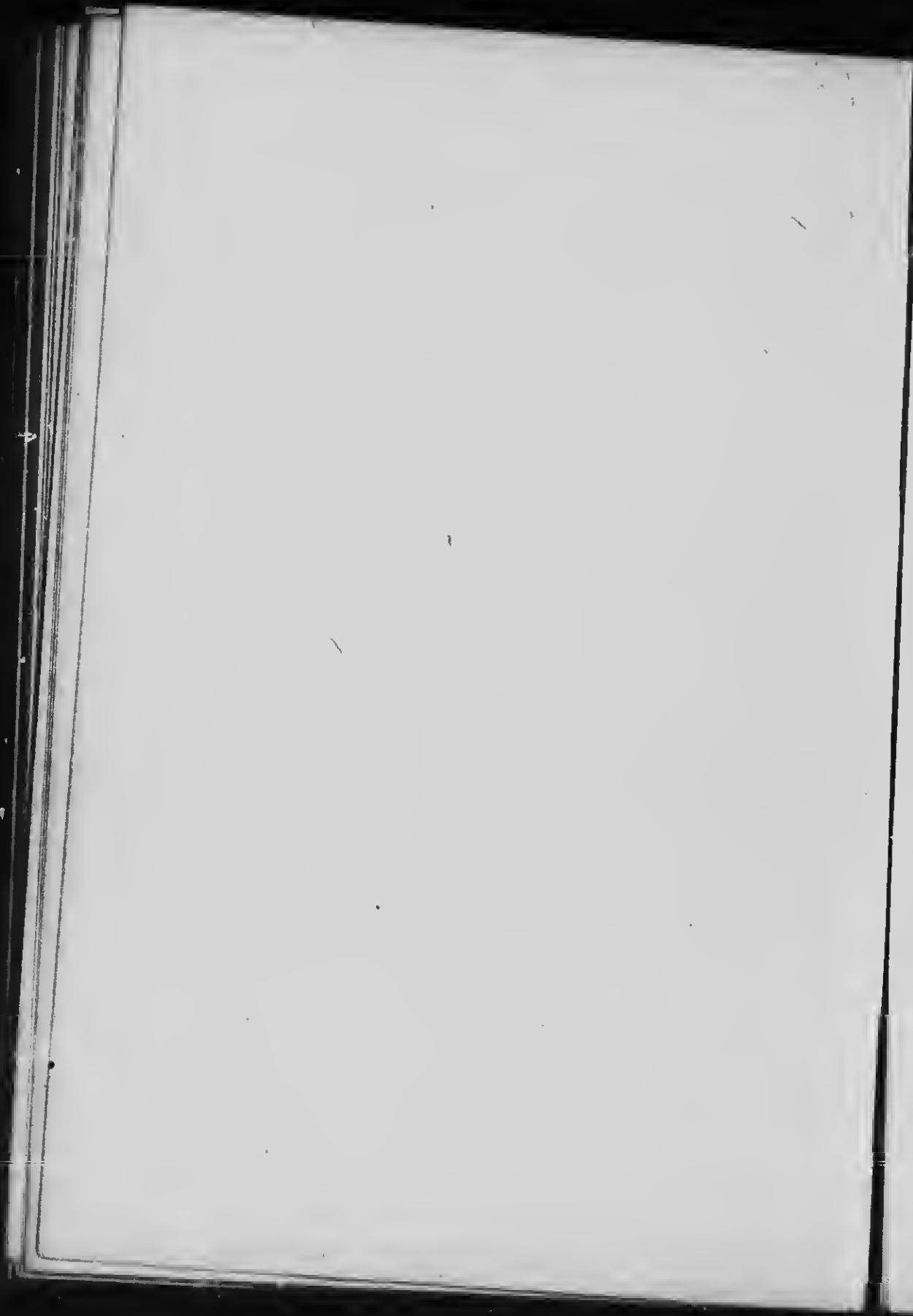
He opened the satchel, and covered the table with papers, with which for some time he busied himself, picking them up and putting them down again with almost tender care, and rubbing his hands the while.

When he had placed them all to his satisfaction, he lay back, and opened his hands before him.

"There," said he, "we have evidence enough to hang Satan himself. I refer to a certain *ci-devant* Vicomte, a refugee and a rascal, who landed in our country in the year '92, being put ashore by smugglers on the Essex flats, at a place called Judas Gap—a very appropriate name, for a Judas, in truth, he is. In consequence of the discovery of a signaling station on Ramsey Height, established by this man during his term of residence at Dedham, certain investigations have been made that have led to most alarming disclosures. It is, perhaps, needless for me to



Picking them up and putting them down again with almost tender care, and rubbing his hands the while



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add that the conduct of this inquiry has been entrusted to your very humble and obedient servant: such, if I may mention it, is the nature of my special duties. It appears that in his own country, in the days of the Monarchy, the man's reputation was none of the best. At the outbreak of the Revolution the Jacobins thirsted for his blood; and 'pon my soul and honor, that they never got it is much to be deplored. Well then, he flies to England for safety and, while under the protection of an Engashman's roof, seeks to lend a hand to those who contemplate the invasion of our shores. I will not dwell upon the perfidy of such behavior. It has now come to light that this man is the most active spy in the country. You are well aware that invasion threatens us on every hand. Mr. Pitt finds the weight of office heavy upon him; yet I assure you, gentlemen, he is not the man to flinch. This fellow must be caught: he must swing from a gallows' cross-tree; he has become a national danger in himself."

At that, Mr. Blatherwick lay back in his chair, and vigorously rubbed his hands.

"He shall swing from a gibbet," he repeated, as if he relished the project. "But first," he added, archly, "he has to be caught."

"The other night," growled Roland, "I might have had him, had I known."

"So I have heard," said the agent. "The constable has put me in complete possession of the facts. That is why I am here. It is necessary, in the public interest, to arrest these rogues. For five days those whom I employ have been scouring London, from Hyde Park to London Wall—without success. I have obtained permission from the Admiralty, Mr. Hood, to enlist your services on my behalf."

"Mine!"

"Precisely. You know Abershaw by sight, and you know the Vicomte exceedingly well. You are resolute and daring; and also, if I am to believe everything I hear, you have some private cause for animosity."

"Indeed, I have," said the other, the blood rising to his face. "And I think, sir, if I may venture to say so, you have shown a nice discrimination in your choice. I'll not rest till I've put that villain out of the world," he cried with vehemence; and he banged his fist upon the table.

"Just as it should be," drawled the agent. "Just—just as it should be," he repeated with a different scansion. "And I would stake my shoes you will."

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"I want only good horses and good men," said Roland.

"You shall have both. Abershaw and the Frenchman are probably together. If the watch gets news of either, they have instructions to communicate with you at this address. You will then be free to take your own course. And now I must go. I wait upon the Prime Minister at six o'clock."

He got to his feet, gathered his papers together, and put them back into the satchel. With this under his arm, he bowed to each in turn, unlocked the door and then strolled lazily on his way, seeming in no haste to keep his appointment with Mr. Pitt.

It was about an hour after this, when Roland had dressed for dinner and sat waiting for Anthony who was coming to dine with him, that a waiter approached with a piece of folded paper in his hand.

"I think, sir," said the waiter, giving the paper to Roland; "I think, sir, this is yours or your friend's."

Roland looked at it, and was about to protest that it was not his, when it fluttered to the ground from the waiter's hand. And Roland's eye became fixed upon the printed words:

THE REFUGEE

THE BALD-FACED STAG.
ROEHAMPTON.

"I think, sir," said the waiter, "if it is not yours, it must belong to the gentleman who called, for I found it under the table."

Roland picked up the paper, there and then; thanked the man, and told him he could go. Then, in his dress clothes, and a white cravat, he sat and thought it out. Anthony found him seemingly immersed in thought.

Now, Master Anthony, at times, was a bit of a wag; moreover, he thought he knew the world. He heaved a love-sick sigh—and then guffawed. But much to his astonishment, Captain Hood did not appear to notice him.

"As bad as that!" said Anthony.

Roland looked up.

"As bad as what?" he asked.

"'Though last, not least, in love,'" sang Anthony. He had come across that in his father's library: he had thought of Roland at the time.

Roland, who was generally annoyed at these impertinences, ignored him. He spread open the paper before his young friend, and pointed a forefinger to the letters that spelled "THE

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BALD-FACED STAG." Anthony's face changed in a trice.

"Do you know that name?" asked Roland.

"Why, yes. It's the notorious inn where Jerry Abershaw is said to go!"

"Precisely," calmly answered the other. "And I have a shrewd suspicion that this is one of Jerry Abershaw's accounts—unpaid, you will observe."

"How came it here?" asked Anthony; and the answer completely deprived him of breath.

"Mr. Blatherwick brought it," said Roland, "this afternoon."

"You're joking!"

"Not at all. Do you remember I once struck the table with my fist? Well, it was then that this must have fallen to the floor. When Mr. Pitt's agent departed, he left it behind. The waiter brought it to me; he thought it was mine."

But Anthony could not as yet piece this evidence together. Roland had the advantage of him by a quarter of an hour, during which time he had thought the matter completely out, and was now arrived at a very definite conclusion.

"But those papers," exclaimed Anthony, "were state documents!"

"How do you know?" asked Roland. "Did he show you one?"

And now the truth was dawning. Roland went on: "He made a great show of spreading his papers all over the table; but he took very good care that neither you nor I saw what they were. They were all probably old bills and rubbish, such as this."

"It's a trap!" cried Anthony, drawing back.

"I think so, too," said Roland, who never moved. "This man had such accurate information—indeed he knew more than we ourselves—that if he did not come from Pitt, he came from Louis des Ormeaux himself. This paper strengthens my suspicion that the latter is certainly the case. However, I may be wrong, and you must go by hackney coach at once to the Prime Minister's house. Present your letter of introduction, and find out whether the Mr. Blatherwick, who called here this afternoon, is a fraud or not."

Anthony never waited to hear more. So certain was he that they had been duped, that they had stumbled upon a foul and underhand conspiracy, that he was all impatience to put it to the proof. He found a hackney coach in Bedford Street, and a minute afterwards was trundling down the Strand.

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As for Roland, he waited twenty minutes, and then going down to the coffee-room, ordered dinner for one. He saw no need to wait for Anthony. Mr. Pitt's father, the great Earl of Chatham, had been an intimate friend of Sir Michael Packe; and there was no knowing how long the Prime Minister would keep the boy.

The young marine officer was about half-way through with his meal, and was thinking that if Anthony did not return, he would step round to White's Club in St. James's Street, of which he had just been elected a member, when the same porter who had announced the arrival of Mr. Blatherwick, entered and crossed the room.

The coffee-room was crowded. Gentlemen were seated at every table. Next to Roland was a well-known pugilist—Jemmy Isaacs—who, in spite of the fact that he found himself in the company of his betters, was quite the lion of them all, an object of both interest and curiosity. The gentlemen narrowly observed his manner of feeding, seemingly not a little alarmed lest he should imperil his digestive organs, the truth being that many there were his backers in a great fight that was to take place in two days' time on Hampstead Heath.

But the porter, as he crossed the room, had a most important face. He bent down, and whispered in Roland's ear.

"There is a constable below, sir, who says he must see you without delay."

There was no need for so much secrecy, however; for hardly had the words left his mouth than the constable himself entered, hat in hand, and stepped briskly across to Captain Hood.

"Captain Hood, sir?" he asked.

"The same," said Roland, signing to the porter to go.

The constable put his hand to his mouth.

"We've news," he whispered.

"Of whom?"

"Of the highwayman. And the other is with him. They lie to-night at a house in Southwark, and can be taken in their beds."

Roland remained in his seat.

"Good!" said he. "We'll move on as soon as it is dark. What about men?"

"There's my mate below, sir, and another man in Southwark, watching the house. I understood you had a friend?" he added, looking around.

"I have," said Roland. "He will be here in a minute or so."

"Very well, sir. If he comes, too, that will

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make five of us. Both my mates are the same size as myself."

Roland looked at the man. He was dressed as a constable. He was about six foot three in height, and proportionately broad—a Hercules of a man.

By this, Roland did more than suspect. The man's inquiry after Anthony, his suggestion that five men were enough to capture Abershaw and the Frenchman, the very mention of Southwark, the most benighted quarter of London—all confirmed him in his belief that this was a trap to lead Anthony and himself to their death.

For all that he had a mind to test the man.

"I think," said he, drumming his fingers upon the table; "I think—just to be on the safe side—I'll get some friends of mine—notable pistol shots."

"I would not do that, sir," said the constable, quickly.

"And why?"

"Well, you see, sir," he jerked out awkwardly. "Me and my mates know the game. Ah, many's the time," he cried, raising his hands in deprecation, "many's the time I've seen a hardened criminal escape—because we had called in outside aid."

There was now no room for doubt. He and his "mates," as he called them, were in the employ of Louis des Ormeaux, whose object it was to decoy Roland and Anthony into the dark region of Southwark, and there to put them out of the world. If there were need of any further proof, he who was best able to supply it at that moment entered: Anthony Packe, hot in the face and out of breath, came brushing past the waiters down the room.

He was about to speak, but Roland, still seated calmly at the table, held him silent with a look.

"Here is my friend," said he, with a wave of the hand.

The so-called constable clumsily shifted upon his feet.

Roland turned to Anthony, and unobserved by the constable, raised his forefinger for an instant to his lips.

"Well," said he casually, "did you see your tailor?"

Anthony thought for a moment. Roland evidently wanted to know the result of his interview with the Prime Minister, and had made it perfectly plain that the gigantic constable, who stood at the table, was to be kept in the dark. He had

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seen Mr. Pitt; had brought him from his dinner, in fact: a thin man, with a sharp nose, and a face flushed with wine—and, *to the Minister's knowledge, no such man as Blatherwick existed.*

"Did you see your tailor about the coat?"

"Yes," said Anthony. "But it does not fit. It will not do at all. It was made for another man."

This was all that Roland wanted to know.

"Have you got your pistols?" he asked.

"No," said Anthony. "I left them in my rooms."

"Ah," said the other, "that is unfortunate, for you will have to go back and get them." He then turned to the constable. "You are well armed, of course?"

The constable produced a brace of pistols from under his coat.

"Loaded?"

"Loaded—both."

"Silver heel plates!" exclaimed Roland. "Very elegant arms for a constable, surely?"

The man looked somewhat abashed.

"May I see them?" asked Roland.

He could not very well refuse, but handed them over to Captain Hood. At which, that officer

sprang suddenly to his feet, and pressing the muzzles upon the big man's chest, called upon him to hold up both his hands.

Every gentleman in the coffee-room—including the pugilist—got from his chair, and gathered around. The tall man stood with his knees knocking together, his arms outstretched above his head and his face gone ashen white.

"Gentlemen," said Roland, perfectly calm. "I must ask your kind assistance. This ruffian is no officer of the law, as I will very soon prove to you, but one of a gang of thieves. At any rate give me the chance to prove it."

The verdict was writ on the man's face; and his words proved him a coward and nothing more.

"Put down those pistols!" he let out. "I'll turn King's evidence! I swear I will."

They bound him hand and foot.

"Gentlemen," said Roland, "it will oblige me if no one leaves the room." He then turned to a waiter. "Go downstairs," said he; "and in the hall you will find another man also dressed as a constable. Ask him to be so good as to step up here. Tell him that Captain Hood wishes for a word in his ear."

At that, the pugilist stepped forth.

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"I'll do that part of the business," he volunteered, rolling up his sleeves.

"Ay, ay," cried the gentlemen; "when he comes in, let Jemmy say 'how d'ye do.'"

The waiter departed, napkin on arm, though a trifle nervous at heart. The gentlemen clustered on either side of the doorway, chuckling in merriment, rather like schoolboys playing a practical joke. The prize-fighter, feeling his muscles, stood with his neck craned forward like an angry bull-dog on a chair.

"Jemmy will hurt the infant," said one of the gentlemen. "'Pon my soul, he will."

"Egad, yes," lisped another. "Jemmy will surprise the lad."

At that moment "the lad" entered. He stood about six feet five: a desperate-looking blade. And Jemmy, catching him under the chin, laid him out full length upon the floor.

Before he had time to rise a half-dozen country squires were seated upon his chest, and in little longer time than it takes to write it down, they had him securely bound.

This man was of more stubborn demeanor. He said not a word of King's evidence, though he had been taken equally by surprise. He swore a great deal in a husky voice; and when he was

told that his comrade had already owned to being a bogus constable, he growled out that "Jack Pierce always was a chicken-hearted rogue."

A short time afterwards two genuine constables came in from the market. They identified the men as notorious ruffians; but, when they heard that Jerry Abershaw himself was in the hollow of their hands, they looked seriously at one another; and the surly fellow caught their look.

"Yes," he sneered. "Jerry's in Southwark and you can go and take him, if you 've got the pluck."

There was no question as to this; though by reason of Abershaw's reputation the constables deemed it advisable to get some further assistance.

In consequence of this delay, nine o'clock had been called by the watch when Captain Hood, with Anthony Packe and six constables, left the hotel in Covent Garden, taking with them the man called Pierce, who had been persuaded to act as guide.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW THE TABLES WERE TURNED

THE story of that eventful evening may be very simply told. The party, guided by the man Pierce, with the barrel of a loaded pistol not a hand's breadth from his backbone, crossed the river and set forward into the borough of Southwark, on the southern bank of the Thames. No one spoke; they hastened, bunched together, through dark, unrighteous streets. Wayfarers stopped and watched them: a body of constables, a man with his wrists lashed behind him, and two gentlemen of fashion with pistols in their hands. Assuredly somewhere mischief was afloat. The denizens of Southwark had small love of the law; and in their eyes this swift patrol was like a hunting beast that scented out its prey. They spat as the constables passed, and then went more quickly on their devious ways.

On a sudden a halt was called; they were come to the very street. Here, it will be remembered, was to be found a third accomplice who made

pretence to watch the house. It was necessary to take him silently—without noise or firing which would serve to give the alarm.

Anthony looked down the street, and saw this fellow leaning against the wall on the darker side.

Captain Hood went forward alone and, when close to the man, seized him with one hand by the back of the neck and clapped the other over his mouth. He was a person of small physical strength, and Roland brought him back like a naughty child, kicking peevishly and spluttering for breath.

They took him some distance away, under a hanging lamp at a tavern door; and there much that was both astonishing and contradictory came to light: first, upon the evidence of Roland and Anthony Packe, this man was none other than Blatherwick, alleged confidential agent of Mr. Pitt; and second, as every one of the constables was perfectly ready to swear, he was a well-known highwayman whose favorite hunting-ground was Hounslow Heath.

So much for Blatherwick. They bound him hand and foot and left him with Pierce in charge of two of the police.

After that they approached the house itself. It was three stories high and built of wood, and all in darkness save for a light that flickered in a ground-floor window. Next to the house was a stable-yard.

They crowded upon the threshold, each man with the barrels of his pistols uplifted, their faces all expectancy; and Roland Hood knocked upon the door.

There was no answer, and he knocked again. The light in the ground-floor window suddenly went out; and a moment afterwards, they heard shuffling feet in the passage, and the door was opened an inch.

"Is that you, Jack Pierce?" said a voice.

"Yes."

"No, it ain't!" came quickly; and the door was slammed.

But Captain Hood's foot sent it back before there was time to turn the lock; and trooping into a narrow, draughty, evil-smelling passage they found themselves in the presence of an old woman, a withered hag, who held a burning tallow dip in her skinny, trembling hand.

"Mercy on us!" she gasped; and carried the other hand to her heart.

"Be quiet!" whispered Roland; and taking her gently by the arm, blew out the candle and led her forth into the street.

There they gathered around her—great brawny constables and an old woman, of four score years, clothed from head to foot in rags. Beyond a doubt cold fear had entered into her bones, for she stood before them hunched and trembling, her toothless jaws smiting the one against the other.

"Now then," said Roland, "who are you?"

"I keeps a lodging-house," she piped, and then, forthwith sank down upon her knees. "Oh, mercy!" she let out. "He 's always paid his rent like an honest man, and I've never asked no questions. Is it likely as I should? He has shot men dead upon the highroad—I know all that an' more—an' there 's blood on his handsome hands—but it ain't my concern. I only gives him shelter, an' he keeps his horse in the stable yonder.

Roland took her up.

"Enough," said he. "You have nothing to fear from us. But who is this that has shot men upon the highroad?"

She got back upon her feet.

"D'ye mean you don't know?" she asked, as if relieved.

"Jerry Abershaw," said Roland, simply; and she drew away from him.

"You've come to take him?" she asked.

"Yes."

"He'll shoot on sight," she gasped; "and he never misses. Ye can't spill blood under my roof. I would never sleep again."

"For all that," said Roland, "he himself meant to do murder there—to-night. But the tables are turned against him."

"As like as not," she muttered, and said it again and again.

"Is there any one with him?"

"No," she answered. "He's gone. He went an hour ago."

"Who?"

"I don't know his name. I think he was a duke, though," she said.

"How long was he here?"

"Three days. He never went out. He sat in the best parlor reading books—poetry," she added, "all of 'em."

So des Ormeaux was gone. Roland looked at Anthony, jerking his head like a gambler who

has lost, and then followed by the constables he led the old woman back into the house.

At Roland's bidding she entered the kitchen which looked out upon the stable-yard. There, Jerry Abershaw, with his coat off and his pistols laid out upon the table, sat before a round of beef and a large pewter mug with the froth running over into a plate.

"Jerry," said she; "there's visitors."

He got to his feet with a pistol in either hand.

"I was expecting 'em," said he, quite calm.

"Not these," she got out, and began to tremble afresh. "Not these, Jerry, lad. They are n't the visitors you want."

His face changed.

"What do you mean? What's this?" he asked.

"The Law," she said.

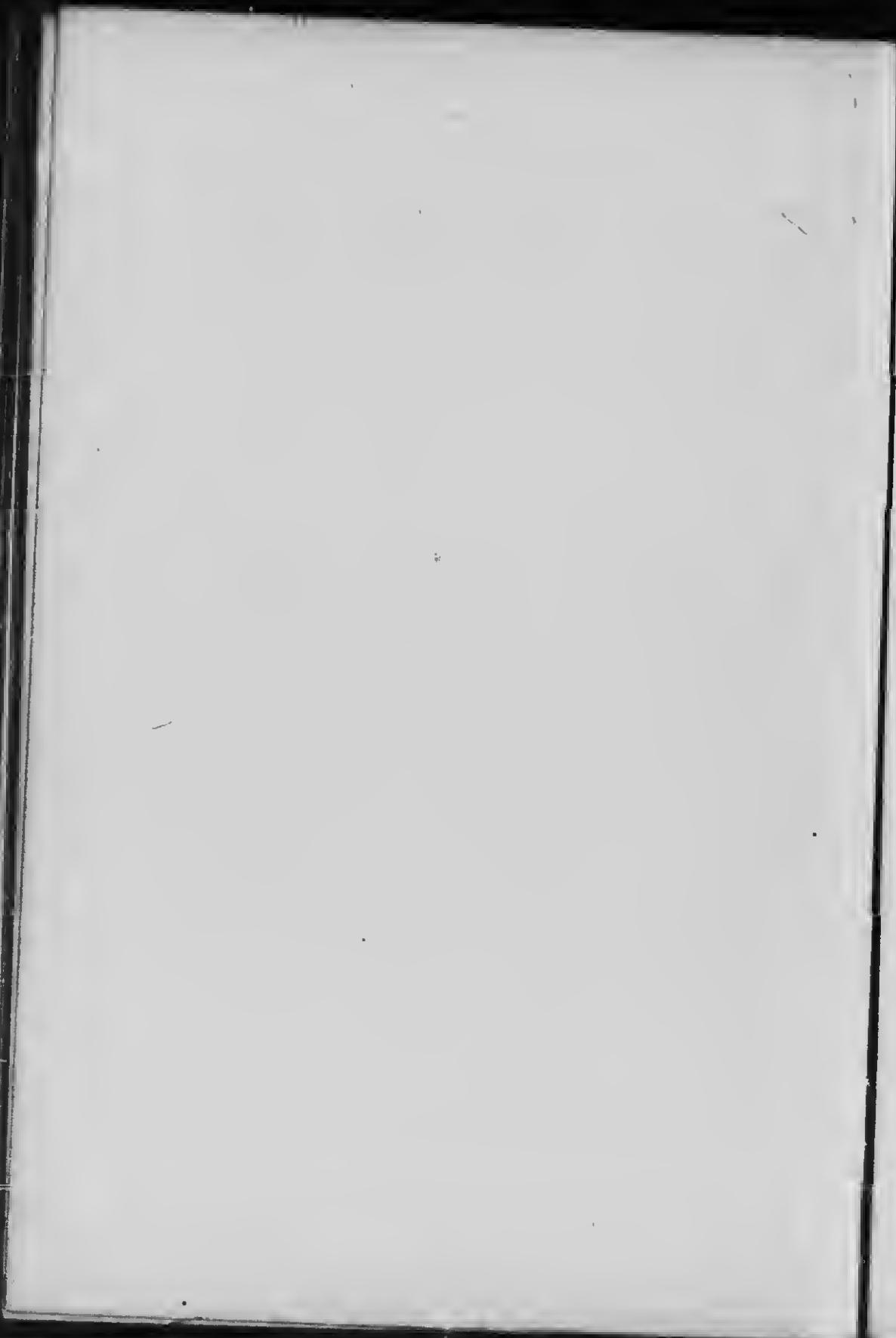
"The Law! By Christopher!"

He whipped round sharply, as if he meant to fight to the last. But he was all too late; both his wrists were seized, and four black and gaping pistol-barrels were thrust before his eyes. The old woman sank down weeping into a chair, burying her face in her apron.

Jerry never struggled. He saw the vanity in all attempt to escape. He knew well enough that



Jerry never struggled



now his brief career of crime was ended, that he would never again be free of the road to rob post-chaise and coach; and he knit his brows in a scowl.

"Who sent you here?" he asked.

"The landlord of The Bald-Faced Stag," said Roland Hood serenely.

By then his hands were bound.

"A lie!" he cried. "I know him better than that."

"Oh, no," said Roland. "You should either pay your bills—or tear them up. At any rate it is hardly wise to entrust them to Mr. Blatherwick—of Hounslow Heath."

Jerry must have guessed. For all that, he said not a word one way or the other, but stood as grim as Death. Then suddenly, without warning, he let fly with his foot in a passion, sending a chair across the room.

"This comes," he roared, "of taking foreign gold! I would never have been caught like a rat in a trap," he burst forth, "if I had stuck to the open road. Don't think that I repent," he went on; "I'm sorry for nothing—I tell you that. I've made my bed; and I'll lie on it—and be hanged."

In the meantime, one of the constables, who

had been turning out the highwayman's pockets, had come across about three hundred pounds in notes, many of them *assignats* issued by the French Directory.

"No need to ask whence these came," said Captain Hood.

"Perhaps not," answered Jerry, as surly as a bear.

At this juncture, two constables who had been searching the house returned, and reported that no sign of the Vicomte was to be found. Though he himself had undoubtedly laid the trap and sent Blatherwick to Roland Hood, Louis des Ormeaux, with that nicety for which he was ever distinguished, had left the work to more hardened—though not more base—criminals than himself. Beyond a doubt in some secret place he now awaited news that his hated rival was dead. The animosity he bore to Roland was inhuman to a degree: it had been kindled, in the first place, by jealousy—the jealousy of an unsuccessful suitor; upon Stour bank, he had been driven back at the point of Roland's sword, and his prize snatched from out of his arms; and then again, at the Olde House in Clerkenwell, not only his crime but his identity had been detected. And now rage, mortification and a sense of his dis-

grace—all drove him to the ultimate depths of perfidy; and yet enough of shame remained within him to keep him from the place where his hired assassins were to do his foulest work. This, for the time being, was the saving of the man; for Jerry Abershaw, who did not forget that at Clerkenwell des Ormeaux had come to his help, could not now be prevailed upon to speak and disclose the Vicomte's whereabouts. Threats proved useless: the highwayman only laughed.

As he stood with his back to the wall, erect with his chin uplifted, it was not easy to believe that this man with the youthful face, the well shaped mouth and wide-set eyes, was the most hardened criminal of the day; and that, this very night, he had been hired—and paid in advance—to kill.

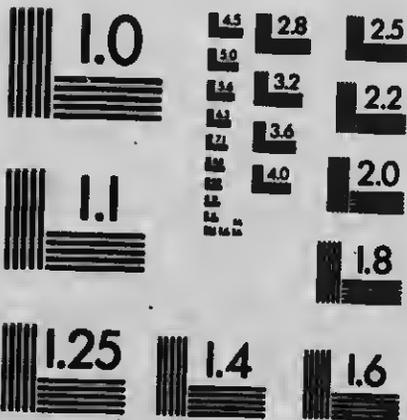
Since he refused to speak they led him forth, Jerry flattering himself that though his own days most assuredly were numbered, the Frenchman at least was safe. For in his heart he had some manner of respect for Louis des Ormeaux, who had been the only man that had ever dared to threaten him to his face.

It seems that the Vicomte, when first he met the highwayman, had accused him boldly of robbing the Ipswich coach. Whereat, Abershaw had whipped out his pistols and, reminding the



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Vicomte that dead men could never be called as witnesses, had ordered him there and then to make such peace as he could with God. But Louis des Ormeaux had stood quite unperturbed: he had merely taken snuff, and showed the highwayman how they might work together to their mutual satisfaction. The Vicomte, going smoothly on, had flattered Jerry's vanity: he admired brave men, he had said, wheresoever he found them.

And vanity was Jerry's weakest point. He had once found a doctor struck with a sudden illness at The Bald-Faced Stag. This doctor was determined to ride that night to Putney Hill to attend upon a patient, an old man who lay at the door of death. Jerry had endeavored to dissuade the doctor from going, pointing out that the patient could hardly be worse than the doctor himself. But the doctor, who had a very grand idea of humanity and duty, had turned upon his would-be guide, philosopher and friend.

"It is useless," he said. "I am so resolved to go that, even were Jerry Abershaw himself upon the road, I would not stay."

Jerry never forgot it. Three weeks afterwards he held up a solitary rider coming from the direction of London town; and when this

proved to be the kind-hearted doctor whose acquaintance he had made at the inn, he forthwith let him go. As for the doctor, he told the story again and again to his patients: of how he had been waylaid by a man in a black mask, that as like as not was Jerry himself, who had done him no further mischief than to cut a brass button from his coat that he said he would like as a keepsake.

And this story is told, not to show that there was such a thing in Jerry as any redeeming trait, but, because in itself, it is a thing to wonder at. Three things—and three things only—are known to Jerry's credit: this, and how he doffed his hat to the daughter of the Master of the Suffolk Hunt, and third, how he refused to betray the Frenchman who once had saved his life.

As far as this last was concerned, however, all his reticence was wasted; for when they were come to the tavern, where the other prisoners were, it was discovered that Jack Pierce knew something of the matter.

Abershaw and "Blatherwick" were taken to Newgate gaol while Roland and Anthony cross-examined Pierce, who remained behind in charge of two of the constables.

The man at first showed some diffidence in

speaking. But when he learned that the Frenchman was a spy, there being a grain of loyalty in his composition he confessed openly to all he knew, humbly expressing a hope that what he said would serve to earn a pardon for himself.

Louis des Ormeaux had conceived the whole idea. Blatherwick—whose real name was Forrest—had got his instructions direct from the Vicomte. Pierce and his “mate”—a man called Sykes, as chance had it—had been told by des Ormeaux to call at the hotel, disguised as constables, not less than two hours after Blatherwick had left in order that Anthony might have little time in which to meet with Mr. Pitt. It is probable that no suspicions would have been roused had it not been for the paper and the printed words: *THE BALD-FACED STAG*; and Roland and Anthony would have accompanied the bogus constables to the house at Southwark, there to be set upon by Jerry Abershaw and Forrest.

Pierce, probably to shield himself, smoothed over this part of the business, and did it exceedingly well; though, for all that, he might have spoken true. He insisted that they had never intended to commit the crime. Jerry himself

had given it out that it was a lesser sin to be paid for nothing than to rob a man on the road. They had taken the Vicomte's money, but would never have done his work.

And then he came to the crux of the matter, the very thing his hearers wanted most to know. *Jerry was to meet the Vicomte at midnight at the cross-roads, east of Leyton town*, where the Frenchman was to be told of the death of his rival. Then he and Jerry were to ride upon some secret mission of their own, of which Pierce knew nothing beyond the fact that he had heard des Ormeaux say that "there would only be old Sir Michael to tackle, for the men-servants one and all would run away at the sight of Jerry's mask."

It was probably only when Anthony and Roland heard this that they fully realized what complete salvation had lain in that piece of paper which had fluttered unseen to the ground when Captain Hood had struck the table with his fist. It was now for the first time that they truly realized with what manner of man they had to deal: he was so desperate and determined that nothing could cause him to desist; he would stoop to any means to gain his ends. They had but one thing more to learn: that defeat and dis-

appointment would drive the man to something akin to madness.

They left Pierce with the constables, to be conducted to Newgate, and proceeded by hackney-coach to the hotel in Covent Garden.

Here Anthony Packe snatched a hasty meal; for he had had nought to eat since midday. After that, he returned to his rooms in Lincoln's Inn, where he got into boots and breeches, and armed himself with a brace of pistols and his sword.

No sooner was this done than his friend rode into the square, leading Anthony's horse, saddled and bridled.

Roland had been to Newgate to see the Governor of the prison on matters relative to Abershaw's arrest, and to ask for the assistance of constables to capture the spy at the Leyton cross-roads.

The Governor, a courteous gentleman, had said that he had no power to order the police to act beyond the jurisdiction of the London magistrates; for such, at that time, was the law. The peace of the township of Leyton was in the hands of the local rural authorities. The Governor said that special constables could be detailed for the business, seeing that des

Ormeaux was a known traitor and a spy; but there was no time for such formalities, since Captain Hood must be at Leyton by twelve o'clock that night.

Roland told the Governor that he had a friend who, like himself, was willing to ride through thick and thin to run this fox to the death. The Governor admired the young man's spirit, and assured him that he would acquaint the Home Secretary of the matter, that the ports might be watched and the Customs' officers put upon their guard, lest des Ormeaux should escape them and endeavor to cross to France.

Roland thanked him and rode in all haste to Long Acre, whence he led the horse he had hired for Anthony to Lincoln's Inn.

Two minutes later the two young men were mounted. They started off at a brisk canter eastwards, for there was little time to spare.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LAST RIDE

THE city streets were dark and silent and echoed noisily the clatter of the horses' hoofs upon the cobble-stones. Here and there a light that flickered shed its warmth and brightness from an upper window; and now and again, from the opened doorway of a tavern, sounds of revelry and laughter streamed forth into the darkness. The watchmen were abroad, with the moths fluttering round their lanterns as they called the hour in husky voices to poor, starved and homeless outcasts, stretched on doorsteps sheltered from the wind that whistled down the streets.

Anthony and Roland moved forward at a canter. Sometimes they passed a chaise bound for St. James's, the postillions busy with the whip, in all haste to come to the journey's end; within, some nocturnal traveler, a gentleman of quality, perhaps, fast asleep with opened mouth

and head rocking from side to side like an inverted pendulum that kept inconstant time.

In Hoxton, they met the Lincoln coach—crowded, outside and in—rolling into London with all on board, except the driver and conductor, sound asleep.

When they came out into the country, the night was spread around them. There was no moon; black clouds near to earth raced across the sky, so that only here and there for an instant did a lonely star peep forth. The wind was moist and warm and at their backs, blowing a gale from the southwest and rustling the leafy branches in the trees. Many a ship in the Channel was like to be in distress.

A clock struck the hour of midnight as they passed to the north of Forest Gate.

At that they set spurs to their horses, and were soon through Leyton and climbing the long hill to Barking Side.

They came upon the cross-roads unexpectedly. It was so dark that they were startled by the sound of the Vicomte's voice.

"*Ma foi*, how late you are!" he said; and his voice trembled. "I was tired of being alone.—And," he added, after a pause, "I do not like the sound of the wind."

It seemed as if he shuddered. Indeed, his conscience played the ghost. As he sat on his horse at the cross-roads, as like as not he had heard the spirits of those he thought he had killed, groaning dismally in the trees. At all events, some such fancy had so played upon his nerves that he already was unmanned. On that account the familiar sound of the voice of Captain Hood came something as a shock.

"Hands up!" cried Roland; and leaned forward, and seized the bridle of the Frenchman's horse; while Anthony leveled his pistol at the man's dark, uncertain form.

Des Ormeaux came out with a kind of a shriek, mingled with the fury of an oath. He threw himself back in the saddle, jerking violently at the bit; so that his horse reared high into the air.

Anthony's pistol flashed; and they saw the red smoke in the darkness curl back from his braided coat. Des Ormeaux was not touched though his clothes were singed and torn. His horse took fright, plunging forward so suddenly and strongly that Roland had either to release his hold upon the bridle or be thrown to the ground.

He let go; and des Ormeaux drove his spurs

into his horse's flanks, and vanished in the night.

For an instant, the two young men sat undecided. The thing had happened in a trice.

The sound of the hoofs of the Vicomte's horse was drumming in their ears. On a sudden, when the man was not more than twenty yards away, he pulled sharply up and turned. There was a brief silence. And then two fiery flashes, and instantaneously two loud reports; and the Frenchman's bullets came singing past their ears.

At that they hesitated no longer; they plunged forward together. Des Ormeaux turned again and fled, they after him, Anthony filling the night with a long-drawn "Tally-ho!"

For the first hour they rode like men demented. They were all fine horsemen—the Vicomte probably the best. They were all well-mounted, but here the Frenchman's superiority was unquestionable, as the first half hour gave proof: in ten minutes, he had drawn well away; and it was only by means of a free use of the spur that they kept within the range of hearing. Roland's horse, however, soon began to fail him, but Anthony pressed on.

They reached the main road at Romford—the

Vicomte first, still gaining ground, Anthony second and Captain Hood last with his horse roaring badly.

They still went at a mad, headlong gallop as if borne forward upon the raging, howling wind. It was plain that it could not last. At any moment one of the three gallant beasts might stumble, trip and then fall dead in its tracks. If this should be the Frenchman's mount, the chase would be ended then and there; but as yet, des Ormeaux was riding the strongest of the three.

Near Ingatestone, he reined in upon a hill-top and listened. He could hear the sound of a horseman, approaching at a headlong pace, faint in the distance but growing louder and nearer as the seconds flew.

He was undecided at first. There might be two horses, or there might be one: it was difficult, in so great a wind, to tell. And, then, there came to his ears a still fainter sound—a second horseman, far behind the other also coming on. At that he slipped lightly from the saddle, and his teeth set in a fox-like grin.

Passing his arm through the reins, he reloaded his pistols, and stood in the roadway waiting,

peering with screwed eyes and knitted brows into the thickness of the night.

The dark form of Anthony Packe high in the saddle loomed suddenly before him. He fired—twice; two jets of fire sprang forth from the barrels of his pistols, and the night was filled with the piercing shriek of a wounded horse.

Des Ormeaux never stayed. A second later, he was once again across his horse, and streaming madly on.

We know from this that the man was now consumed with but one desire—that had taken upon itself the likeness of a frenzy: to get to Nether Hall. That was his wild and savage aim; else he had turned upon Anthony, and fought him on the road.

It may have been that now revenge was all that was left for his invention. He was foiled and forever disgraced. It may have been that, as the wounded stag will take to the higher ground, he recognized himself for lost and yearned only to see once again the sweet face that had wrought such turmoil in a dark and evil soul. As he rode forward through the windy night he may, or he may not, have contemplated the desperate thing he did. We cannot say. We only know that

blind to all else, caring for nothing, he rode fifty miles till his beast dropped dead at the gates of Nether Hall.

But to return to Anthony: he had been thrown violently upon the road. His horse was shot in the brain; and the life had gone out with that wild and awful shriek.

Five minutes afterwards, Roland drew rein upon the spot. He dismounted in alarm, thinking that Anthony was hurt, and was much relieved to find that no damage was done to the boy beyond a bruised shoulder and a painful hurt to the knee.

That much off his mind, he made inquiries of the Vicomte.

"How far ahead?" he asked.

"Not far," said Anthony. "You can hear him now."

They listened: occasionally, whenever there was a lull in the wind, they could hear des Ormeaux far ahead, forging madly on.

It was as if they tasted something of the bitterness of defeat. For the man had slipped through their fingers, and there they were, left behind upon the road with one horse dead, and the other broken down. Roland shook his fist in the darkness. He felt helpless and alarmed;

and helplessness is a sorry state for a young and active man. It was Anthony who got the inspiration of the hour.

"Brand!" he cried, and that was all.

Roland let out a shout of joy, and clapped his friend upon the back; it seemed little short of a miracle that one single word could bring about so great a transformation.

The matter was simplicity itself. They were, they knew, somewhere between Brentwood and Ingatestone—something the nearer the latter place, and therefore not far from the great square-built house that was called "The Hide," where the High Sheriff of Essex had once been wont to live. Timothy Brand, High Sheriff in the reign of George I, had long since joined his fathers in the family vault at St. Mary's Church; but Thomas, his son, now reigned in his mighty stead. Sir Michael knew Tom Brand well, and so did Anthony. And as for Roland, he had paid a visit to the Hothams—the family of the gallant admiral under whose orders he had served in the Mediterranean—and had a very perfect recollection of looking over "The Hide" stables one Sunday afternoon. It was the memory of that afternoon, and Tom Brand's well-groomed hunters, that filled his heart with

gladness; and in spite of the lateness of the hour, they resolved to set out towards "The Hide."

It was near upon two in the morning when they reached the house. The wind still roared; and the trees beat and swayed in the gale.

They came up the drive, Roland leading his horse. He had made an effort to ride on ahead, but the poor beast was so exhausted that he had not the heart to kick it into a trot.

For several minutes they banged upon the door, but not for the life of them could they get an answer. Hence, they were brought face to face with a puzzle: upon that side there were twenty-six windows, all in darkness; and they had no manner of telling in which room the master of the house might be asleep.

It is to be remembered that their case was desperate, for the Vicomte was free of the high-road and riding for the Stour. And this should stand by way of apology for Master Anthony Packe, who picked up a stone from the gravel and smashed it at random through the window over the door.

Now had a man been within all might have been well, but such was not the case. The stone struck a mirror, and carried it over, and it fell to the ground with a crash. The room was occu-

ped by an elderly lady guest—Tom Brand's second cousin, to-wit—who woke up with a shriek and, springing out of bed, rushed down the corridor, crying out that robbers were breaking into the house.

In five minutes, though Roland and Anthony knew nothing at all about it, Tom Brand had all his men about him.

Two parties, having stealthily issued forth from a door at the back of the house, crept round the sides, and fell upon our friends with sticks and staves without a word of warning.

It was useless to struggle; they were given not a moment to explain; but found themselves stretched full length upon the gravel pathway, each with over thirty stone of serving-men upon his chest.

They were there for only an instant. They heard Tom Brand in cheery voice give orders, and were hoisted into the hall, and there cast like mackerel upon the floor.

A butler approached with a lighted candle, his knees knocking together like castanets.

"Hold the light steady, Harris," cried Brand. "By all that's marvelous, it's Michael Packe's one and only boy!"

Anthony sat up, and shook himself. The

servants fell back in a wider circle. As for Brand, as soon as he had recovered from surprise, he burst forth into a fit of boisterous laughter.

"This beats horse racing!" he roared at the top of his voice. "Harris," says he, ceasing suddenly to laugh, and whipping round upon his butler; "Harris, how many bottles of port did I drink to-night?"

"Only one, sir."

"*One!* Are you sure?"

"Well, there was about half the other one gone as well."

"Well then," said Brand, taking off his night-cap and rubbing his shiny head, "that's not a drop more than a Christian gentleman ought to take, and I'm as sober as Daniel in the den of lions. And yet," he cried, with a motion of his hand towards the intruders, "there's Michael Packe's one and only; and here, if I mistake not, is young Hood of Bentley, both caught red-handed breaking into my house in the dead of night, and scaring my cousin Maria out of her wits."

"For goodness sake, sir," said Roland, "permit us to explain."

"If you're sea-lawyer enough to excuse your-

self, fire away and be quick. It's a mighty draughty night."

Whereupon, Roland, in the fewest words, made him master of the truth. Brand knew of the outrage at Nether Hall, how the French guest had turned out to be a spy and how, assisted by a highwayman, he had carried Cicely Packe in a faint from her father's house. Brand had heard all this, and at the time had fumed in indignation. And now he learned that this very man was on the road, and his midnight visitors in pursuit.

At that he wrung his hands, complaining bitterly that they had never told him before, and that so much valuable time was wasted. Not only should they have the two best horses in his stable, but he himself would sleep no more that night. He too would ride to Dedham to see the matter out.

A few minutes later Anthony and Roland were mounted in the stableyard upon two of the finest horses in the county, while Tom Brand raced up his oaken staircase shouting to one servant to get his boots and breeches, another his pistols and a third his wig.

In the passage he came face to face with

Cousin Maria, her hair in papers and very white in the face. With both her hands upon her heart, she asked him if all the burglars were dead and done for. Whereupon Brand called her an old fool, which was indeed most impolite, and slammed the door of his room in her face.

Captain Hood and Anthony set off at a gallop when they reached the highroad, and never drew rein until they were come to Widford Church. Nor by that time, was the jovial master of "The Hide" fully prepared to start. First, he must have the pistols that Lord Clive had used in India, that had come to him from an uncle who had fought at Pondicherry against the French; then, on second thoughts, he would also take a sword—the one with the silver hilt, and finally, he had to change his spurs. So that by the time he was fairly under way, Roland and Anthony were fifteen miles upon the road the other side of Chelmsford.

For two hours the wind raged and whistled, and the riders forced their horses through the night. They dashed through Witham, Kelve-don; they passed the Dunmow road. They covered miles at the gallop, and only walked their horses when they came to the steepest hills—until at last physical exhaustion laid so strong

a hold upon Captain Hood, who still was weak from his wound, that it was all he could do to sit his horse. Yet he would not consent to halt for rest, but galloped on and on.

And if it was so great a ride for them, what must it have been for des Ormeaux—for the man who, through town and hamlet, up hill and down, rode like one demented, lashed his horse into a frenzy equal to his own and kept abreast of the wind? He never paused nor once looked back, but sat strongly in the saddle with his eyes fixed before him and his features set in a grin.

As Roland and Anthony drew near to Colchester the wind abated, the trees were silent on the wayside and the air became filled with the freshness of the dawn. And presently, before them in the east, the gray arms of morning were outstretched across the sky.

The dawn grew apace. Once through the town and on the Ipswich road, the morning seemed immoderately still, with all the summer sweetness in the air. A little further, beyond the Carl Cowper Inn, it was light enough to see the trees with broken branches here and there—tokens of the fury of the storm.

When they had left the Birch Woods behind

them and approached the place where Jerry had robbed the coach, the east on a sudden turned a rich and glorious red. It was as if a crimson limelight had been flashed upon the sky. There was no slow and varied change of color, such as in common heralds the approach of day, but a spontaneous transformation wherein the drifting clouds in the wake of the storm, and all the vast, illimitable sky beyond, seemed turned upon the instant to glowing, fiery red. It was as if a wave of fire had burst athwart the sky.

Sunrise! They rode forward, side by side, with their faces turned to the east, dumb in admiration, with the birds around them bursting into song and all the rich, green countryside spread on every hand.

And then like an avalanche, overwhelming and cold as ice, the truth rushed down upon them. It was a fire! For now, the red flames sprang forth above the tree-tops and clouds of smoke rolled high into the air.

Anthony Packe sat back in the saddle, his eyes wide and staring as if his wits were gone.

"Look!" he gasped. "Look!"

Captain Hood was no less white than he. It was some time before he was able to speak; the

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words were frozen on his lips, and when they came, they came in jerks, as if he choked.

"O God! It is Nether Hall!"

And then they plunged forward, side by side, like men gone wholly mad.

CHAPTER XXIII

REVENGE

THE household of Nether Hall was always up betimes. 'Sir Michael himself was an early riser. In his younger days, when he lived in London, an early morning gallop had been his constant practice.

Cicely, too, was often up with the lark. When she had been mistress in her father's house, her duties had brought her down. But now, though she had resigned the household keys, and all domestic cares along with them, to her step-mother—Roland's mother, who was now my Lady Packe—she was very loathe to break off a habit that she flattered herself was a good one.

On this particular morning, in the gray, half light of dawn, the tall trees in the garden had hardly taken upon themselves distinct and separate form than, after much drawing back of bolts and bars and clashing and jingling of chains, the front-door was thrown open; and it

was Mr. Bannister who deigned to sniff the morning air.

"Lor'," said he; "what a night! Lor', such a night as I never did see in all my mortil days!"

And having thus soliloquized, he turned and came face to face with Cicely, who had come lightly down the stairs.

"Good-morning, Bannister."

"Good-morning, Miss Cicely. You is early! Why, the sun ain't up yet!"

"I never slept," she answered. "What a wind there was in the night!"

"Indeed, miss," said Bannister, "it howled that dreadful it were n't possible to sleep."

"I saw from my window," she went on, "that one of the branches of the big cedar is completely broken down."

"What a calamity, miss," exclaimed Bannister, lifting his hands. "I have always regarded that there cedar tree as an hornimint. But maybe," he added, in an outburst of optimism, "its beauty is improved, miss, by the haccident—same as the famous Venus de Medecine."

Cicely laughed and, saying she was going round the garden to see what other damage had been done, passed on; while Bannister, a moment afterwards was joined by Betty.

"An angil!" Mr. Bannister reflected, looking after Mistress Cicely. "An angil, that's what she is!"

In Betty there was a little of the original Eve, and a modicum of natural common-sense.

"I'm sure, Mr. Bannister, we all love her," she pouted; "but, when all's said an' done, and the more credit to her, say I, she's only flesh and blood, the same as me and you."

"Nonsense, my 'gal." said Bannister. "She ain't."

With which astounding assertion, he departed into the house.

Cicely seated herself on a garden seat, close to the river bank, and looked back upon Nether Hall. It was the house in which she had been born, the only home she had known. Every spot in the garden had its own childish recollections; here she had cried pitifully, when Anthony killed the squirrel; and there, the humble-bee had stung her when she was nine—she had picked it up in her fingers, because Anthony had said that humble-bees were never able to sting; the very tree beneath which she was seated was that on which as children they had been wont to have their swing.

Thence, she could see the old house, built in

the reign of Elizabeth; with its ivy-covered, red-brick walls; its stone-mullioned windows, its gabled roof and tall, stately chimneys dark with age. Small wonder that she loved it. And small wonder that she never dreamed she looked then for the last time upon her home!

She busied herself for some little while in the garden. Trees were broken; branches snapped, and the blossoms from the orchard had been blown across the lawns.

And then, she returned to the front of the house, where she found Betty, still upon the door-step.

She went into the drawing-room hung with chintz, as was the fashion of the day; and there she found that several bricks had fallen down the chimney during the night, and lay broken in the grate.

Though the daylight was now far spread without, the sun was not yet risen, and this room upon the western side of the house still lay half in darkness. On this account she went to get a lamp; and that small event was at the root of all the evil that was to come.

As she returned to the hall, whence she noticed that the girl upon the door-step stood as if she listened, Cicely passed into the drawing-room,

set down the lamp and then came back to the hall.

"Oh, miss, what ever 's this!"

It was strange after such a night of storm how still the morning was; for though everywhere the birds were singing joyfully, no breath of air stirred even the slenderest branches of the trees.

In that same stillness, a certain sound struck sharp upon the morning air. They were but a little distance from the highroad; and thence rapidly growing louder, came the violent clattering of a galloping horse's hoofs. They were alarmed; for the rider, whoever he might be, came forward as if the nether regions were loosed upon his heels. He was on the Gun Hill—a hill as steep as any in the county; yet he never drew rein, but rather seemed to increase his headlong velocity. Either the horse was bolting or the man was riding for his life.

When he reached the foot of the hill, they expected he would pass the turnpike, and thought to hear him thundering over the bridge. But to their alarm he turned to the right along the Dedham road that passed the gates of Nether Hall.

Betty ran in and called to Bannister, who

came to the door from the kitchen. Cicely, she knew not why, moved down the drive towards the gate where she stood with straining eyes and her hands clasped upon her heart.

And presently the rider himself came madly round the angle of the road. His horse, with neck stretched forward, was white with foam from its mouth. His boots were thrust to the insteps through the stirrups. His hat was gone; the powder had been brushed in patches from his hair. His feet were working wildly, and there was blood upon his spurs.

At the gate of Nether Hall, he reined in with all his strength, throwing back his head. His face was livid green. The horse, endeavoring to check itself in the midst of such tempestuous course, slid on with straightened fore-legs sending a shower of stones across the road; and then came down upon its knees, turned over and lay upon its side with its flanks going like bellows, its nostrils bleeding and distended, and its eyes as if about to spring from out its head.

The rider was upon his feet and came staggering as though in wine, toward the gate. Cicely gave him one look and then, with something that was half a sob and half a shriek, turned and fled to the house. It was Loius des

Ormeaux, his face drawn and haggard, his eyes bloodshot, his teeth set upon his underlip.

She came into the hall as pale as death, her fingers twitching in her dire distress. It was Bannister to whom she cried.

"He has come," she got out. "He has come again!"

"Who, miss?"

"Monsieur des Ormeaux!"

She swayed. She was forced to support herself with a small, white hand upon the wall.

"Go," she cried. "Tell my father. Quick!"

The old butler hesitated. Faint-hearted though he were, he hardly dared to leave her then.

"O merciful powers!" he groaned, and stood by, helplessly wringing his hands.

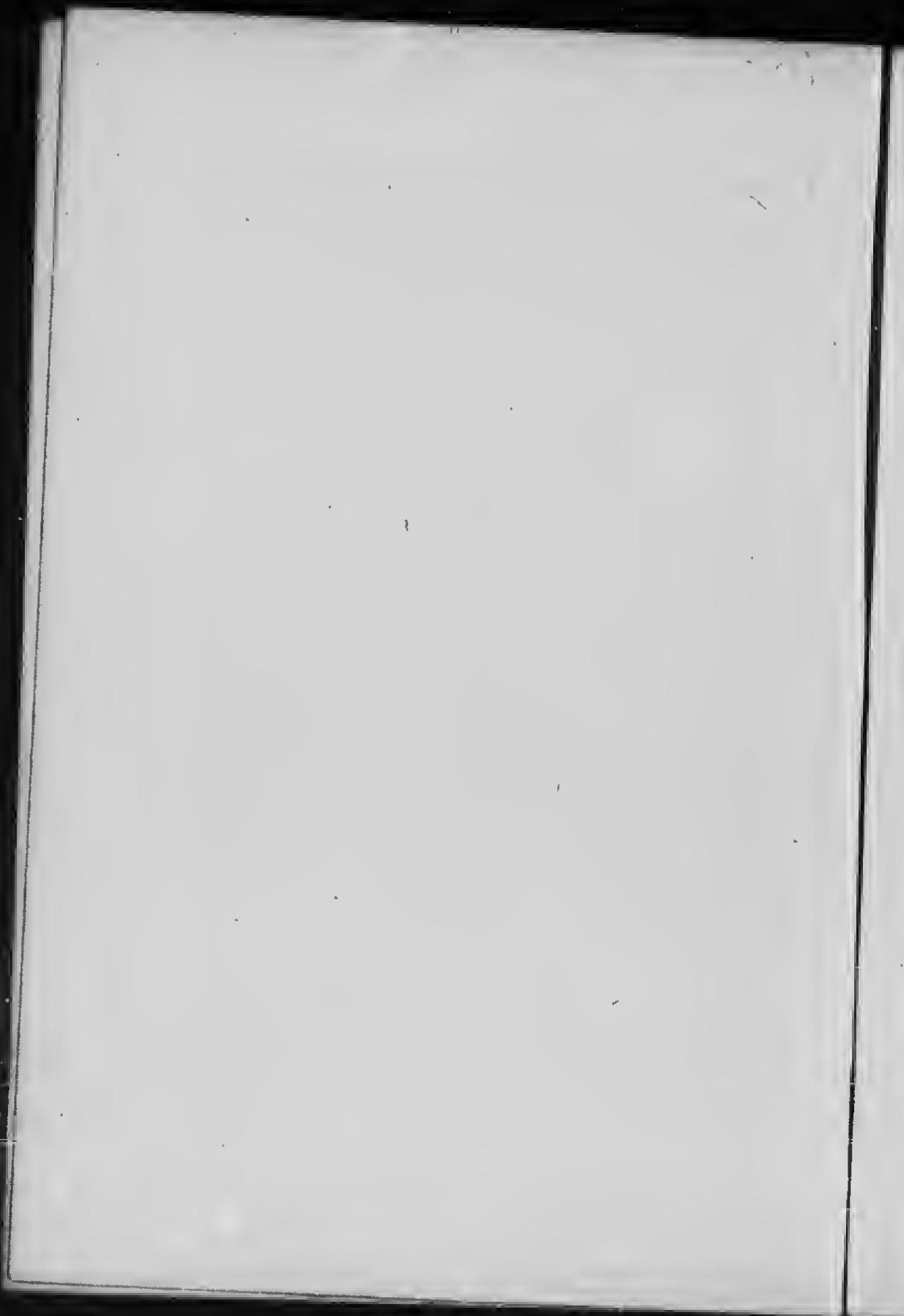
"Go, Bannister! Quick!" And there was panic in her cry.

She herself had tried to move towards the stairs, but she had not the strength. She stumbled: it was as if her limbs were no longer governed by her will.

Bannister stood in doubt no longer. The man's footstep was upon the gravel without. The butler turned and rushed headlong up the stairs.



“ Mademoiselle, I have not yet accepted my defeat ”



All this time Betty had stood like one struck paralyzed and dumb. She now fled into the kitchen; for at that moment des Ormeaux stepped into the hall.

Cicely drew up and faced him, stiff and proud and white as driven snow. The man—dirt-stained as he was and all but broken down—took three steps forward and bowed with all his old address.

“Mademoiselle, I have not yet accepted my defeat.”

“What do you here?” she asked, in a voice so faint as to be hardly audible.

“Why ask?” said he. “Why ask?”

“My lord, you must go. We do not wish to see you here.”

“Wish!” he repeated. “*Ma foi!* Since when must I consult the wishes of others?” He then drew closer to her and spoke in a voice quite low, as though a mountain weight of love were pressed upon his lips. “Mademoiselle, when I saw you first I loved you. I came here to tell you that.”

“I know,” she said.

“No! You do not;” he cried loudly. “You do not know what kind of a thing is this love that you despise. Listen,” he went on more quietly

still. "Yonder is the daybreak. There is nothing you or I can do to stop the rising of the sun. Nor can my love more easily be stayed. *Ma foi*, I was sought after, in palaces and courts! I was among the greatest in the land, the friend of ministers, the companion of a prince. Am I not therefore worthy to aspire to the hand of the daughter of an English squire?"

"You are a spy," said she.

At that, all the rhetoric went out of him. He had ended in something akin to a sneer. He now stepped back, and out came his snuff-box.

"I must live," said he with a shrug.

"Dishonestly?" she asked.

And he turned upon her with his eyes aflame and his lips working fast.

"You are not wise to taunt me," he rapped out. "You know already there are no lengths to which I dare not go. I am not here as a mewling lover. I am come for revenge alone."

He moved forward, his brows knit together. She stood her ground defiantly; and when he was close, she snatched from the wall one of her father's hunting-crops and struck him across the face.

He went back with a soft oath, carrying his

hand to his face; and then on a sudden drew his sword.

It may, for a second, have been in his mind to kill her where she stood; for the man was blind to what he did. Be that as it may, he had taken one step forward with eyes afire and the drawn sword in his hand, when a loud voice held him to his ground.

"Stop, by Thunder, or I put a bullet through your heart!"

He looked up; and there on the stairs was Sir Michael, coatless, with a burning face and a heavy pistol leveled at the Vicomte's chest.

Des Ormeaux sprang quickly back; for a moment seemed to hesitate, and then passed into the drawing-room, and closed the door.

Sir Michael came down, tried to force the door, but found it locked. He was about to go round to the window when he heard the key turn; and once again the Vicomte stepped forth into the hall.

He met Sir Michael face to face, and bowed as was his wont. He even smiled.

"I have to ask your pardon for this intrusion," he began. But the old Squire took him up.

"What does this mean?" he roared. "If I

spare to shoot ye, 'tis only because hanging's the only death ye merit."

"Shoot, Monsieur," cried the Vicomte. "Here is my heart. At this distance you cannot miss."

He stood upright, with his feet together, and both his hands extended on his breast. It looked as if Sir Michael was in half a mind to fire.

Instead, he jerked out an oath and pointed to the door.

"Out with ye!" he roared. "You've come here of your own free will; 'tis only that which saves ye. And though I've a score to pay, I let ye go scot-free, though I found ye with a sword drawn upon my gal."

"Your magnanimity disarms me," said the Vicomte with a sneer.

"Out with ye! I want neither your long words nor your company. I'll not have vermin here. Ye came to my house nigh three years ago, an outcast from your own benighted land. I found ye first in my son's room yonder and listened to your lies. I took ye in; I gave ye all the hospitality that lay within my power; I treated ye generously and well. In return, ye thieved my daughter and brought robbers into the house. And all the time ye was a spy! By

Heaven, my blood boils when I think of it all! Out of me sight, ye limb!"

"Monsieur," said the Vicomte, "I have stood here and listened to your insults, and possessed my soul in patience. *Ma foi*," he cried, with a rap of the foot, "I am but flesh and blood! I must ask you more carefully to pick your words; else, *mon Dieu!* old though you are, I call upon you to draw."

"Draw!" roared the Squire. "I would sooner do the hangman's work than cross swords with a knave like you. If fight I must, egad, I'd never fight with a traitor and a spy."

The Vicomte was black as a cloud. Clearly he only refrained from rushing in upon the old man, sword in hand, since he knew that the Squire would shoot him down.

"You have the advantage," he got out between his teeth. "I am without my pistols."

He stood there shaking in silent rage. And all this while, a smell as of burning had slowly extended throughout the house. And now, something fell in the drawing-room with a crash.

"What 's that?" exclaimed the Squire.

"What is it?" said the Vicomte. The same words! And the same look stole upon his face

that they had seen that night at the dinner table, when the key had turned in the lock.

In the Squire's face there flashed a still alarm.

"Put back your sword!" he cried.

The Frenchman never moved; and the Squire's pistol was leveled at his head.

"Put back your sword—or, by the Lord Harry! you 're as good as dead."

The old man's face was purple in his wrath. Des Ormeaux's sword rapped sharply home to the hilt.

Cicely, who all the time had stood by, her breast falling and rising and her face white to the lips, rushed past the man and flung back the drawing-room door.

A cloud of smoke gushed forth into the hall. The house had been set afire.

CHAPTER XXIV

PHENIX

WHEN the milk is spilt the housewife, if she be wise, will think of saving what remains in the jug before she boxes the culprit's ears. And so was it now with the household of Nether Hall.

During the altercation that had taken place in the hall between the Squire and the Vicomte, a large body of servants had gathered on the stairs, whence they viewed the quarrel with looks of the utmost consternation. Now, upon the sudden outcry of "fire," one half of these—wholly women, be it said—rushed up to the topmost story to save their trinkets and gewgaws, while the remainder, among whom were Bannister and Whitehead, came down in all haste to the hall and followed Sir Michael into the burning room. But not one had a thought—nor, for the matter of that, the courage—to lay hands upon des Ormeaux.

The Vicomte, laughing like a madman,

stepped out to the drive whence he contemplated the black smoke rolling from the windows of the house. He knew well enough that the fire was already too far gone to be quenched and that nothing now could save the house. He had not been in the drawing-room longer than a minute, but in that brief time, he had taken the burning lamp from the table where Cicely had set it, and applied it to each of the curtains in turn. The flames had leaped forth upon the instant, spreading quickly to the chintz about the room; and by this time, the beams across the ceiling and the woodwork in the walls were fairly all alight.

Sir Michael, with no other thought than that to save his house, marshalled his servants, making such dispositions as would enable him best to combat the flames. He formed a long string of men and women from the drawing-room to the scullery, where two strong men were set to work the pump; and buckets of water were passed by hand to the Squire himself, who stood in the midst of the smoke.

But despite their most strenuous efforts, the fire continued to spread. The flames pierced the ceiling and ran up the walls of the room above. Thence they extended right and left, so that the passages and corridors were filled with smoke

and fumes. The smoke rolled forth from a dozen windows; and living flames darted from the chimney-tops.

Before this the Squire had been forced to evacuate the drawing-room. He came into the hall, his hair singed, his clothes burned, black from head to foot from smoke.

Even there, the heat was near insufferable; and the only man who remained to the last by his master's side was Thomas Timms, who now was in charge of the stables of Nether Hall.

"Timms," said the Squire, the perspiration pouring from his brow, "we must give it up, me lad. The house is gone. We must save as much as we can."

They passed round to the eastern wing. There, from a side door, that opened on to the lawns, a narrow flight of stairs mounted to a long passage, called the "Ladies' Gallery" since the days of good Queen Bess. When that sovereign stayed at Nether Hall—as indeed she did—here were lodged the ladies of her court.

This part of the house was as yet untouched by the flames—a fact that had already been turned to the best account. For the bulk of the domestics—the men from the stables as well as those from the house—were assembled at the door; and

upon the grass was a great pile of valuables: ornaments, silver and plate. Indeed, it was surprising how much had been already saved—and highly creditable to Cicely and Lady Packe, for it was they who had gathered together those men who were not fighting the flames with Sir Michael, and set them about the work.

Had these ladies not taken such prompt, decisive action, everything would have been destroyed. For at that moment there came a series of gusts from the west—the aftermath of the gale—that fanned the flames and blew them like a tide across the house.

A great body of people now came running, helter-skelter, from the town: men and women, old and young; lame men, hobbling on their crutches, and blind men, led by the hand. They swarmed through the gates of Nether Hall, trampling down the flower-beds, and then stood idly by with open mouths and staring eyes.

And then over the place where the fire was kindled, part of the roof fell in; a great jet of fire sprang forth and mingled with the rays of the rising sun. Walls tumbled and showers of sparks and embers danced into the sky, to be carried far away upon the wind. Ever and anon beams and oaken rafters broke like minute guns.

They could see the red fire curling from the windows and shooting upwards to the roof; while clouds of smoke rolled towards the town.

Yet it was at this juncture that old Sir Michael dared to enter the burning house. He had a mind to gain his office which was situated at the further end of the "Ladies' Gallery," at the head of the oak stairway that descended into the hall. Here he had many valuable documents—title deeds and the like; also a cash box, filled with money and notes.

The smoke was rolling forth from the door even as he entered; yet, the old man boldly climbed the narrow stairs. The fumes all but suffocated him but he struggled on, and at last gained the passage-head.

A moment later he staggered out breathless, with red-hot embers smoldering on his coat. It was some time before he could find his voice; and then he pointed frantically towards the house.

"That man's in there!" he cried. "He seems to live in the flames!"

Now of all that crowd of rustics there was not one who did not know the story of Nether Hall, and who would not, with a right good will, have struck the traitor down.

The truth was known among them, passed by

word of mouth: namely, that the Frenchman had returned and set the place afire. He must have been some time within the house, for no one had seen him enter. That he was in there at all and alive, was nothing short of a miracle. For all that, one thing was sure: he must come out or burn to death.

Suddenly a window, as yet untouched by the flames, was flung wide open. It was that which was at the eastern end of the "Ladies' Gallery," over the door. And there, before them all, stood the man himself, burnt and grim and black.

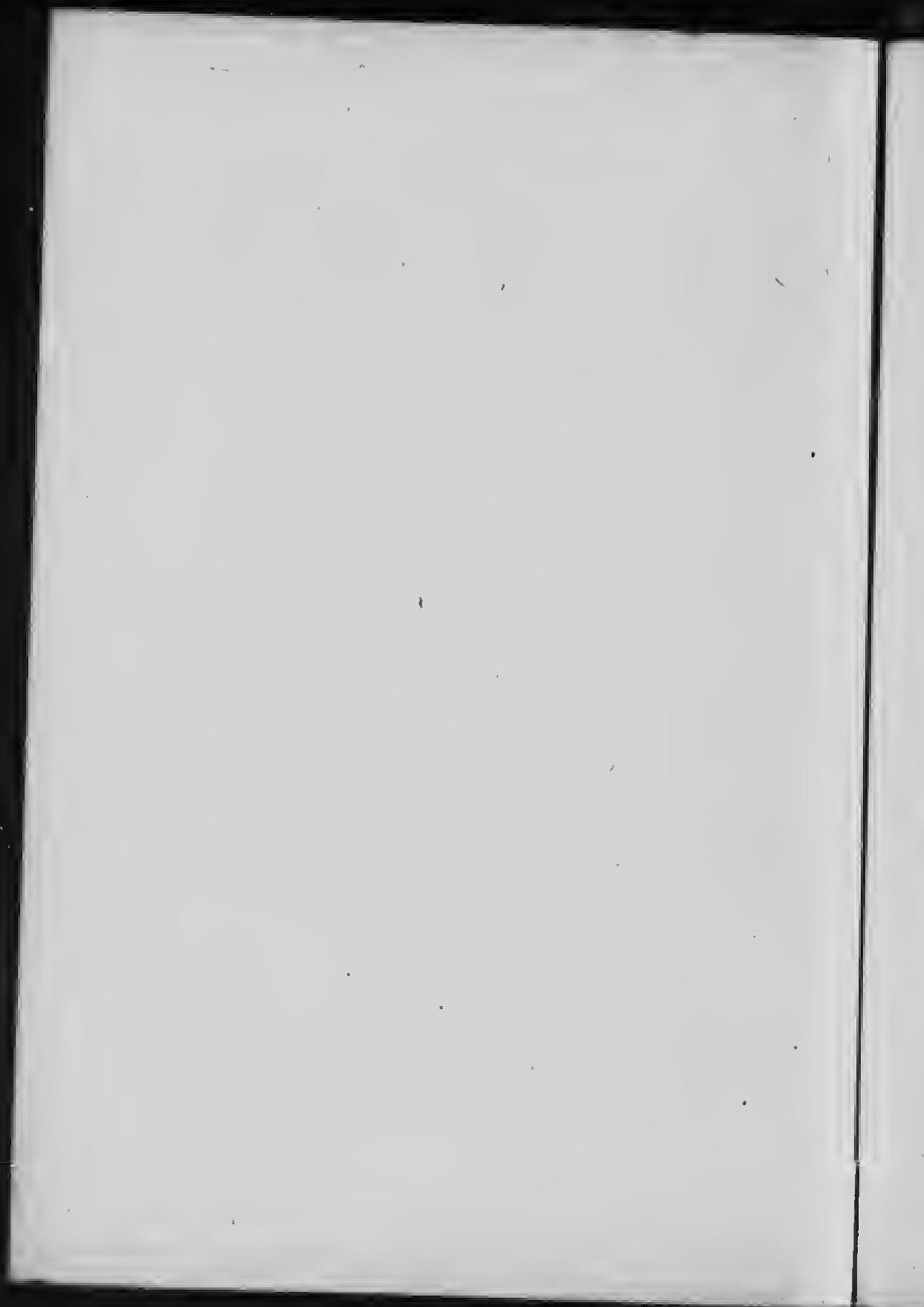
The crowd raised a great cry—a cry of rage and hate. Fists were shaken towards him; and a hundred curses showered upon his head. They dared him to come out.

But he only laughed—madly—and waved his arms in the air. And at that a silence fell upon them all: they stood face to face with Tragedy in its most fearful mask; and those simple-hearted yokels, whose lives ran commonly in uneventful course, were rooted there in awe.

There was no doubt of the truth: des Ormeaux had made his way to the Squire's private office with intent to gain possession of certain documents, the value of which he must have known. For it was there that Sir Michael had found him,

They turned at a breakneck gallop into the Dedham road





seated at the desk with all the drawers open and ransacked, and money upon the floor. Angry words had passed between them; and then the Squire, unable any longer to remain within the room, had been driven forth by the fumes that filled the air. As he said time and again, to his dying day, the most wondrous thing he had ever seen was "that man" alive, like the Phoenix, in the flames.

For all that, it was the Squire's intrusion that brought des Ormeaux face to face with his danger; and when he went to the passage window, and saw the great crowd there assembled, ready to tear him limb from limb, he must have seen that the end was come.

None the less he would not come forth: to be clubbed to death by a village mob was never the death he would covet. He stood and jeered at them, always laughing, and casting insults in their teeth.

It was Captain Hood with Anthony Packe close at his heels who then came down the Gun Hill as if they raced for life.

They turned at a breakneck gallop into the Dedham road, and a moment afterwards rode in at the gates of Nether Hall where a dead horse lay stretched upon the ground.

Roland drew rein on the open lawn. Anthony was but a second later. The boy's face was white and his teeth were set upon his lips. After so short an absence this, indeed, was a tragic home-coming! He went straight to his father and sister who, with his step-mother, were now face to face with the reality of it all, and almost bowed with grief.

Des Ormeaux, seeing his old and hated rival, cried out that revenge was sweet; that he had brought the house about their ears, as he had warned them he would do and, though he himself must die, the victory was his.

At that, Roland drew his sword and moved quickly towards the door. Cicely saw his action, and rushed towards him as if to hold him back. He never saw her, but passed in and up the stairs.

He found the Vicomte in the passage; and the man fled at his approach. Courage—his only saving quality—seems to have deserted him at the last; for his sword was at his side, but he could not draw.

The heat scorched them to the bone. Their mouths were filled with smoke. They could hear the falling rafters all around them, and the crackling and the roaring of the fire. Moreover,

their lives were hung upon a thread, for the flooring burned beneath their feet, and any moment might fall in and they be hurled into the burning mass below.

Des Ormeaux fled down the Gallery until he could go no further by reason of the flames. There he turned, and then again looked back. Behind him was the raging fire; before him Roland Hood, his eyes flashing defiance and a drawn sword in his hand.

The man arched his back like a cornered cat. He glanced around him for some loop-hole of escape, and finding none, whipped out his sword and came forward step by step.

The swords clashed together amid the savage chorus of the flames.

Both men were desperate and seemed to fight with something of the fierceness of the furnace all around. Teeth were clenched, and eye was fixed to eye. Des Ormeaux pressed forward, thrust following parry with almost lightning speed. No one but a master swordsman could ever have kept him off.

On a sudden Roland sprang back, dropping the point of his sword. The man lunged short; and then gave out a short cry of pain. Before he could recover his guard had been struck aside;

and the other's sword passed through his heart.

Roland stayed but for an instant, then turned and fled.

As he reached the head of the staircase, the "Ladies' Gallery" fell through amid a great upheaval of sparks and living flames.

He came forth of the burning house with the red sword in his hand, and a face that was grave. For the shadow of death was behind him; and the dark soul of a traitor rose with the smoke to the clouds.

The villagers, pressing around him, cheered him to the echo.

He passed through them; and seeing Cicely, with Anthony and the Squire, he cast his sword aside.

She came towards him with a white face, wet with tears, and Love shining in her eyes; and forgetful of the crowd, the burning house and of all the world beside, he took her in his arms, before them all.

CONCLUSION

AND this is the end of the story of Nether Hall.

If you go to Dedham in Essex to-day, and walk from the foot of the Gun Hill to "Freeman's Corner," you will come to the place where tall trees overhang the road. Here upon the left, a large field drops down from the road to the river bank, in which if it is summer time, the corn will rustle in the breeze.

This field was once the site of Nether Hall; but now, nothing remains: the stately trees that once adorned the garden have long since fallen under the axe; the gravel pathways and the open lawns have been cut time and again by the plough, and the wheat grows and ripens where Sir Michael Packe and his old time friends, with their lace ruffles and powdered hair, had once been wont to walk.

To say that Sir Michael never felt the loss, were to set down that which is very far from the truth, but he was a rich man for those days, a

great landlord, besides money in the funds; and within a short time, he had built a house on the Suffolk side, where he ended his days at a ripe old age, though badly touched with the gout. And that was after the Battle of Waterloo.

Roland and Cicely were married in Dedham Church; and that was a great day for Dedham, for the place was gay with flags, and the company at the Sun Inn and the Marlborough Head kept it up to daybreak at the Squire's expense.

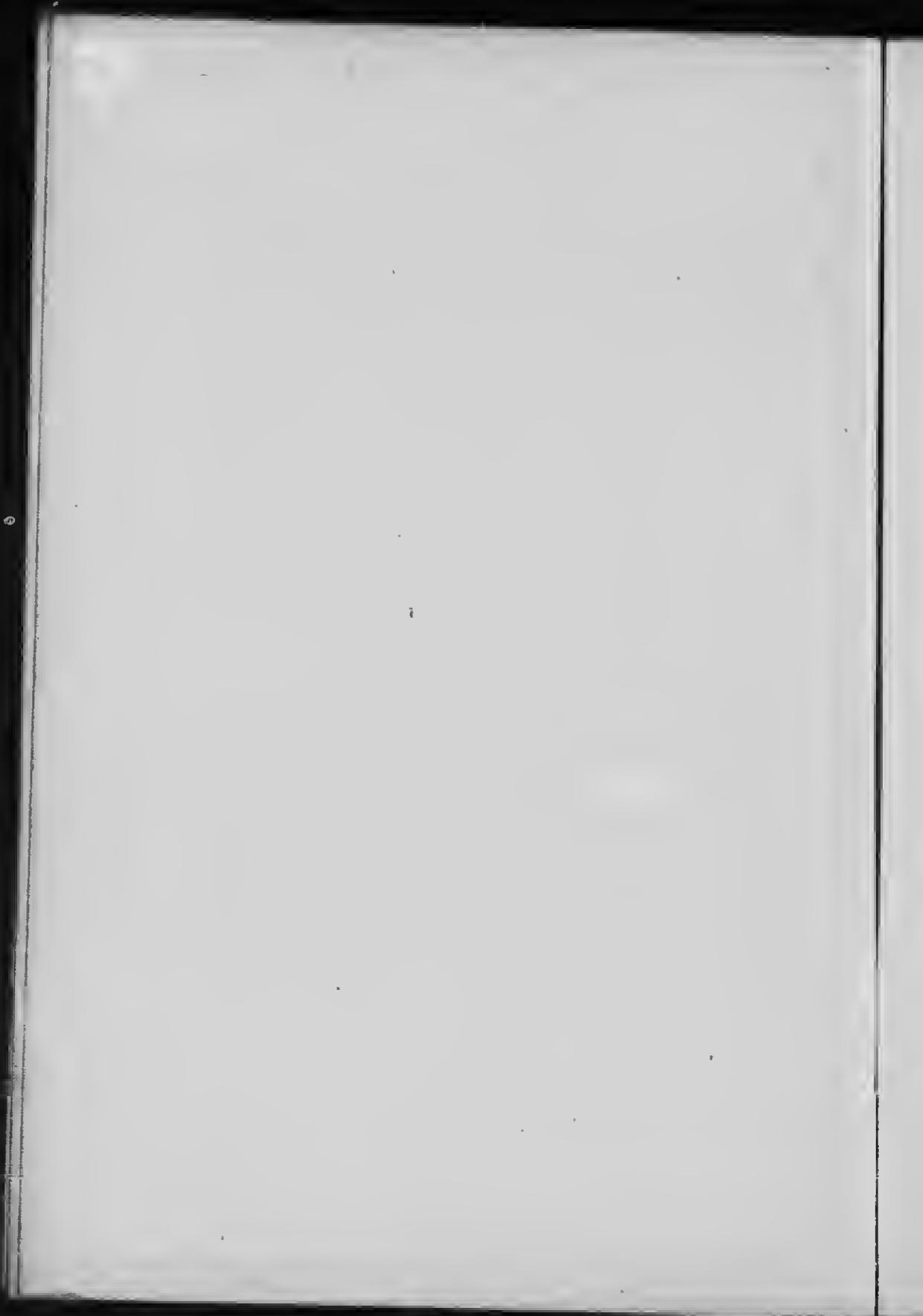
Anthony, though he had shown small taste for it at first, greatly distinguished himself as a politician; and during Lord Liverpool's administration was promoted to cabinet rank, holding no less exalted a post than that of Secretary of State for Preservation of Foxes and Feathered Game.

Thomas Timms married Betty, the housemaid; and Mr. Whitehead retired to London in disgust. Bannister, the butler, married the cook and set up at "The Compasses" in Dedham Street. Mrs. Yates, at the instigation of Sir Michael, was safely housed and cared for in the Manningtree Hospital for the Harmless and Inoffensive, where she persisted in blacking her eyes with the blacking brush, as a tender token towards the dear departed.

Of John Contable's fame, all the wide world



Roland and Cicely were married in Dedham Church



knows. And there remains only that one slim figure, with the black mask and the hooded riding-coat.

Throughout his trial, Jerry Abershaw preserved an expression of complete indifference and unconcern; and when the Judge put on the black cap, he imitated his lordship's serious face, and put on his own black mask and hat, so that all the spectators laughed.

He was hanged on Monday, the second of August; and went to Kennington Common with a flower in his mouth, jesting and laughing with the dense crowd that thronged the road.

If he had been famous throughout his lifetime as a daring thief, the extraordinary coolness and intrepidity with which he met his well-merited death only increased his notoriety, so that his name was for some time used as a synonym for all that a hardened villain could be. And in order that his end might serve as a lesson for all the fraternity of the road, his body was set on the gallows on Putney Common that passers-by might see.

THE END

