

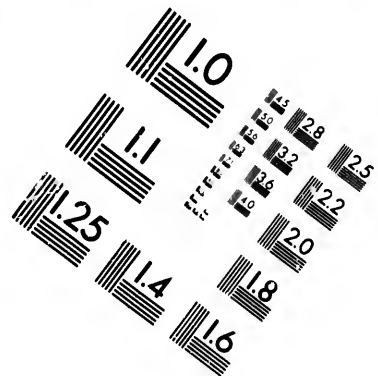
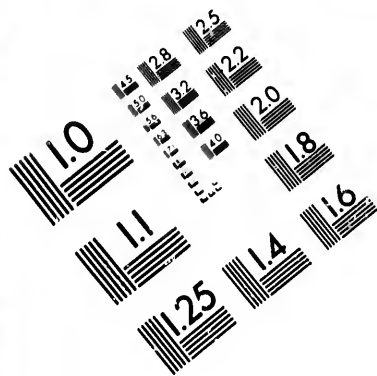
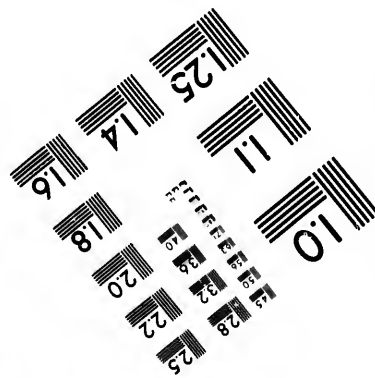
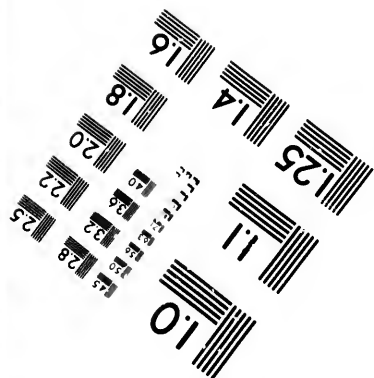
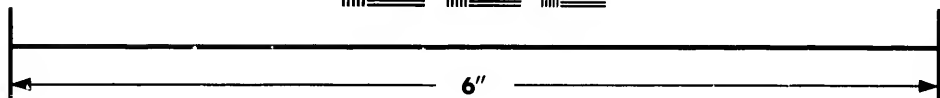
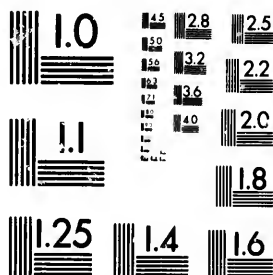


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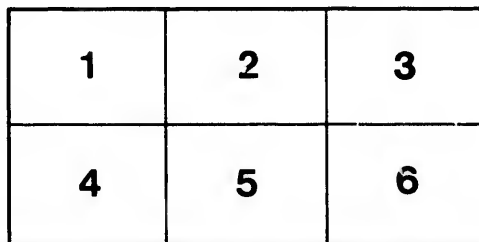
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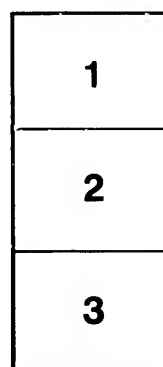
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SWEET NELLIE,

MY HEART'S DELIGHT.

BY

WALTER BESANT AND JAMES RICE,

AUTHORS OF "THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY," "WHEN THE SHIP COMES HOME,"
"TWAS IN TRAFALGAR'S BAY," ETC., ETC., ETC.



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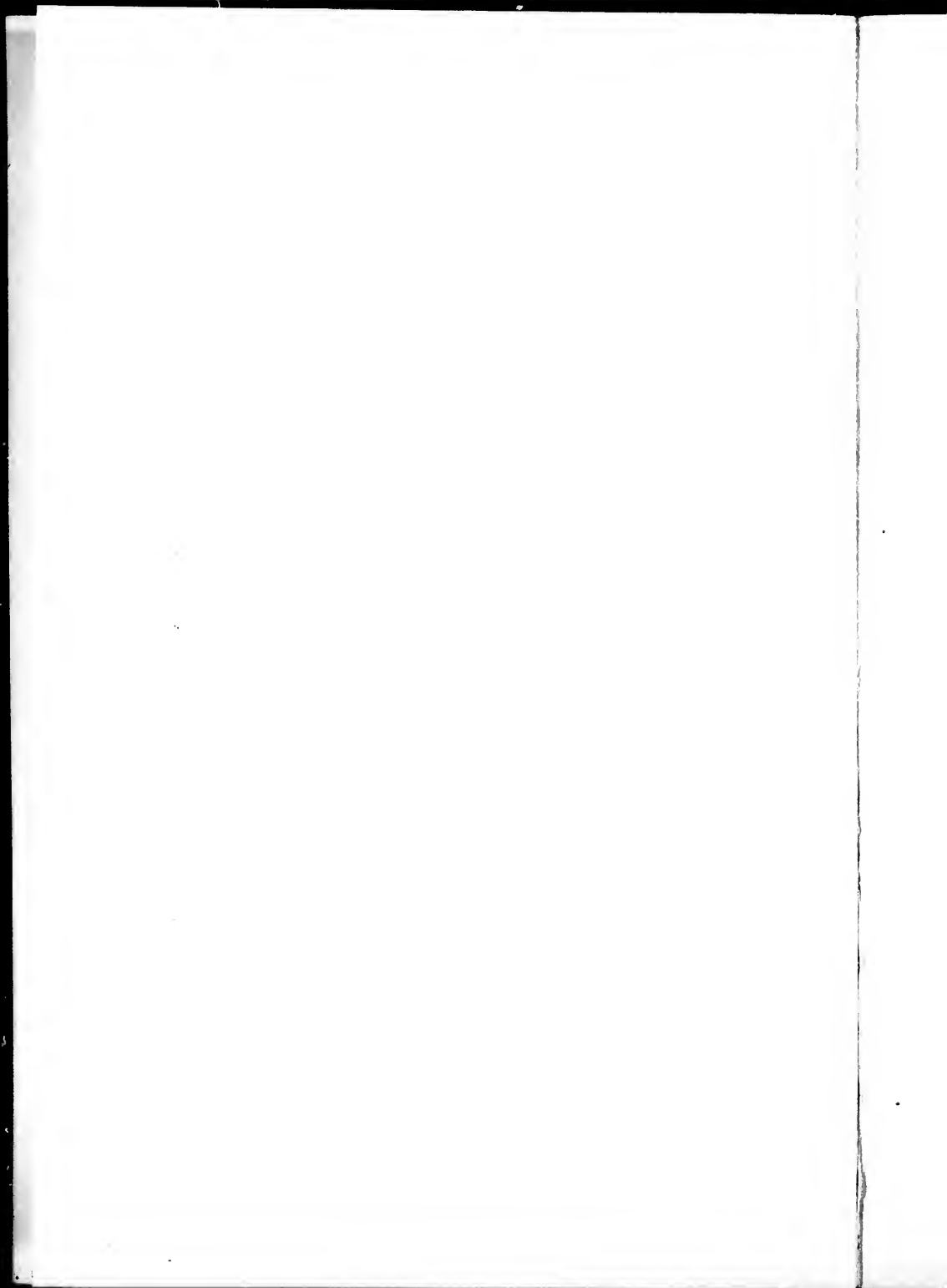


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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
IN SACKCLOTH AND SLAVERY	5
CHAPTER II.	
ON TOWER HILL	22
CHAPTER III.	
CHRISTOPHER MARCH	44
CHAPTER IV.	
MY LORD EARDSLEY	61
CHAPTER V.	
HONEST THOMAS	73
CHAPTER VI.	
A DAY OF FATE	91
CHAPTER VII.	
BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH	104
CHAPTER VIII.	
HOME AGAIN	119





SWEET NELLIE, MY HEART'S DELIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

IN SACKCLOTH AND SLAVERY.



IN a trackless country, through a forest stretching away for hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of miles—for no traveller has ever yet crossed the great continent of America and measured its breadth—there journeyed, slowly and with pain, a woman who sometimes carried and sometimes led a little girl four years old. The woman wore no hat nor hood, and her clothes were torn to shreds and tatters by the thorny briars through which she had made her way. Her eyes were wild, and her face, save when she looked at the little child, was set stern: her lips moved as she went along, showing that she was engaged in some internal struggle. The forest since she first plunged into it had changed its aspect. Everywhere now were pines, nothing but pines, growing in clumps, or in belts, or in great masses, in place of the oaks, maples, hemlocks, and birches through which she had passed. There were no longer any wild vines; the air was resinous to the smell; the ground was soft and yielding. In some places the fugitive drew back

her foot in dismay, because the soil sank beneath her weight.

The sun was making rapid way down to the west; the shadows were long; the child dragged its steps, and presently began to burst into a little crying; the woman soothed her. Presently the little cry became a great sobbing. "Nelly is hungry," she sobbed.

Then the woman sat down on a fallen trunk, and looking round her, wrung her hands in despair, for she was quite lost; she knew not where to go, and she had no food.

"I thought to find revenge," she cried, "and I have found death and murder. Heaven is just. I shall sit and watch the little one starve to death—the child will go first—and then I shall die. Oh! wretched woman, why wast thou born? Child, child,"—she burst into tears of despair, and clutched the little one to her heart—"curse me with your dying breath. Oh! my little innocent, my lamb, I have murdered thee, for I have no food, no water. Hush! hush! Try to sleep."

She soothed and rocked the little one, who presently, weary with the long day's march, dropped asleep, hungry as she was.

Then the sun sank lower; a little more and he would have disappeared altogether, and the woman would have been left alone for the night with the starving child: but while the red colour was beginning to spread in the west, she saw, emerging from a clump of pines before her, an old man.

He was a white man, but his skin was now dark with exposure to the sun and air; he was clad in skins; he was very old; his hair and beard were long and white; he leaned upon a stick as he went; his steps were feeble; his eyes wandered up and down the glades of the forest as if he were afraid of being watched. Presently he saw the woman and the child, and after a moment's hesitation, he made his way, in a curious and zigzag fashion, across

the green space which lay between himself and the woman, and accosted her.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"A runaway," she replied.

"Show me your hand."

She held out her left hand; he held out his; on both was the same mark—the brand of a convict.

"I am a thief," she said; "I was rightly punished."

"I am an Anabaptist," he replied. "I was punished by the law of the land. Who is the child?"

"I stole the child. It is my master's. I stole it for revenge because they were going to flog me. I have brought it all the way. My food is exhausted and so she will die. And now," she added, with a despairing cry, "I am a murderess as well as a thief and the companion of thieves, and there can be no more hope for me in this world or 'he next.'"

The old man shook his head, and looked at the child still asleep.

"Come with me," he said; "the little one shall not die. I have a hut and there is food. Both hut and food are poor and rough."

He led her with the greatest care across the treacherous quagmire by steps of which he alone knew the secret. "Here I am quite safe," he explained, "because no one except myself can cross the place. Safe, so long as I am in hiding. This place is an island of firm land in the midst of a bog."

There was a hut standing beneath pines which grew on ground a little elevated. It was furnished with a few skins, and an earthenware pot of the rudest kind. There was, besides, another earthenware vessel containing water. In the pot was meal. The old man mixed the water with the meal.

"When the child wakes," he said, "give her some, and take some yourself at once. Now sleep in hope: to-morrow I return."

"Oh! do not leave us alone," said the woman.

"You are quite safe. I go to fetch more meal; there are some friendly blacks who will provide me. Sleep in peace."

Then he disappeared, and the woman, laying the child upon one of the skins and covering it with the other, sat beside her wondering, and presently fell fast asleep. In the morning when she awoke the sun was already up, and her host was standing in the doorway. Then the child awoke too, and presently sat up and ate her breakfast with a hearty good will. The old man leaning upon his stick thereupon began a very serious and solemn discourse. He told the woman what a wicked thing she had done in carrying away a helpless child to the great Dismal Swamp, a place inhabited by none but runaways, and those scattered about, difficult to find, and poorly provided. "Here," he said, "the whites who have exchanged slavery for this most wretched freedom live separately, each by himself; they are jealous of one another, they suspect each his brother; and the blacks, who live together in communities, change their quarters continually for fear of being caught by the planters, who come out with guns and dogs to hunt them down. I have had to lie hidden here without fire or food for days, while the hounds followed my track until the morass threatened to swallow them up. You, who might have courted such a life for yourself, did you think what it meant for a child?"

The woman shook her head.

"I have been here twenty years and more. I have lost the count of time; I know only the seasons as they follow. I think that I am over seventy, and when I can no longer beg meal of my friends, I must lie down to starve. I have spoken to no white person except to you during all this time. When I came I had a Bible. That was lost one night of storm. Since then I have had nothing but my meditations and my hopes; and you—

what would you have had? The continual memory of a murdered child."

"What shall I do? what shall I do?" she cried.

"Take back the child; whatever happen afterwards, take back the child."

The little girl looked up in the woman's face, and laughed and clapped her hands.

"I have sinned," said the woman. "Let me take her back. God forgive me! She shall go home to her mother."

She rose at once as if there was not a moment to be lost. The old Anabaptist put up some meal in a bag of skin, and led her again over the treacherous path.

"You have lost your way," he said. "I will be your guide."

He led her by paths known to himself, across forty miles and more of thick forest. When they came near any cleared land, they rested by day and travelled by night. After four days of travelling they came to their destination.

The old man took the child in his arms and solemnly blessed her in all her doings. Then he prayed with the woman for a while, and then, grasping his stick, he disappeared in the forest.

The woman, left alone, began to tremble. Before her were the broad fields of tobacco belonging to the plantation. On the fields she saw the gangs of men and women at work; the overseers going about among them armed with their heavy whips. Some of the labourers were white, like herself; some were black. Far away, beyond the fields, she saw the house. It was afternoon. She retreated to the forest and sat down, thinking. Finally, she resolved to delay her return until the day's work was done and the gangs had left the fields.

It was past seven o'clock and already dark when she came to the house. She told the little one to be very quiet. There was no one in the portico; but there were

lights in the state room. The woman opened the door and set the little one down.

"Run to your mother, child," she whispered.

A pattering of little feet, and a wild cry as the mother snatched up her lost babe, and then the woman, leaning against the door, sighed heavily and sank to the ground.

They found her there—those who came running at the cry of the mother—and brought her within the room.

"It is the woman Alice Purview," said the master.

"Leave her to me, husband," said his wife. "If she she carried away the child, she hath brought her back again. Let me deal with her."

Madame dealt very gently with her. Her past offence, whatever that was, received pardon; her wounded and torn feet were bandaged and cared for; her broken spirit was soothed. When she recovered she was taken from her former office of nurse to the sick ward, and made nurse to the little girl; and, as the sequel will show, no girl ever had a nurse more faithful, loving, and true.

The woman was my nurse; I was the little girl; that journey to the Dismal Swamp is the first thing I can recollect; and when I read of Elijah, I think of the poor runaway Anabaptist, whose face, I am sure, was like unto the face of the prophet.

It was my fortune to be born in His Majesty's Plantations of Virginia. I am persuaded that there is not anywhere upon this earth a country more abundantly supplied than this with all that God hath provided for the satisfaction and delight of man. It is not for me, a simple woman, to undertake the praise of this happy colony, which has been already fitly set forth by those ingenious gentlemen whose business or pleasure it is to recommend the place for the enterprise of gentlemen adventurers, planters, and those whose hearts are valiant though their fortunes be desperate. Yet, when I contemplate the hard and cruel lives led by so many poor people in the great

city of London, I am moved to wonder that His Majesty the King, who with his council is ever considering the happiness of his subjects, doth not order the way to be made plain and easy for all who are in poverty to reach this happy land. Who, for instance, in the hope of a few pence, earned with trouble and sometimes with kicks and blows, would cry up and down the street dry faggots, small coal, matches, Spanish blacking, pen and ink, thread, laces, and the like, when he might with little toil maintain himself in comfort on a farm which he could get for nothing? There is room for all on the banks of the Potowmac, the Rappahannock, and the James Rivers. Yet the crowd of the city grows daily greater, and the forests of Virginia remain uncleared. Or when learned men demonstrate that, at the present rate of increase, our own population long before the end of this eighteenth century will be so vast that there will not be enough food for all, and thousands, nay, millions, will yearly perish of starvation, I am constrained to think of those broad tracts which are ready to receive thousands upon thousands of Englishmen. Sure I am, that if those at home knew the richness and fertility of the American colonies, every newly-born English child would be regarded as a fresh proof of Heaven's benevolence to this country, and another soldier in the cause of liberty and the Protestant faith.

I was born in the year one thousand seven hundred on my father's great Virginian estate. It stretched for six miles and more along the banks of a little river called Cypress Creek, which runs through the Isle of Wight County into the James River. My father, Robert Carellis, Esquire, was a Virginian gentleman of old stock, being a grandson of one John Carellis who came to the Province in the ship which brought the first company of Gentlemen Adventurers. There were, alas, too many gentlemen on board that vessel, there being fifty of that rank to a poor three of labouring men. They were too proud to

dig, being all armigeri and esquires, although younger sons. Some of them in consequence proudly perished of starvation; some fell fighting the Indians; a few, however, of whom John Carellis was one, survived the first disasters of the colony, and became lords of vast territories covered with forest, in a corner of which they began to plant tobacco. It has been said of the Virginian gentlemen that they would all be kaisers, and obey none. In sooth, they are all kaisers, inasmuch, as they live each on his own estate—the lord and seigneur whose will none questions; the owner and absolute master of slaves whom they reckon by hundreds. When I read the narratives of those unfortunate men who have served in captivity to Turk or Moor, I think of our slaves in the plantations; and the life of the Turkish bashaw, in my mind, greatly resembles that of his honour, Robert Carellis, save that my father was ever a merciful man and inclined to spare the lash.

Those who worked for us were, of course, all slaves. They were of many kinds, white, black, and copper-coloured. They were English, Irish, Scotch, French, Africans—men of every country. First, as regards the negroes. There are some, I know, who doubt the righteousness of this trade in men. Yet it cannot be denied that it must be a laudable thing to bring these poor creatures from a land where they live in constant danger of life, to one where they are maintained in security; and from the most brutish ignorance of religion to a knowledge of the Christian faith. I am aware that the Rev. Matthew Marling, Master of Arts, our late learned rector, held that it is uncertain, the Church not having pronounced upon the matter, whether black negroes, children of Ham and under his curse, have souls to be saved or lost. Yet, I have seen so many proofs of intelligence, fidelity, and affection among them that I would fain believe them to be in all respects, save for their colour, which for this life dooms them to a condition of slavery, like unto ourselves.

Side by side with the negroes worked in our fields the white slaves sent over to the plantations from the London and Bristol gaols—the forgers, thieves, foot-pads, shop-lifters, highway robbers, passers of counterfeit coin, vagabonds, and common rogues, who had by their ill-doing at home forfeited their lives to the law and lain in prison under sentence of death. They had been respited by the King's mercy, some of them even rescued at the very last moment, when the noose that was to kill them was already hanging from the fatal beam, and the bitterness of death was already tasted, and the dismal funeral service had been already commenced by the ordinary. The Royal clemency gave these fortunate wretches a reprieve, but they were pardoned only on condition of being sold for a term of years to work on the plantations of Virginia, whither they were conveyed after being branded in the hand, and sold on their arrival by public auction to the highest bidder.

It might be thought that desperate creatures such as these, the offscourings of the country, would prove troublesome, mutinous, or murderous. But the contrary was the rule. No one, seeing their obedience, their docility (to be sure the overseer's terrible whip was always present before their eyes), would have imagined that these men and women had once been hardened criminals, common rogues, and vagabonds. For the most part they worked cheerfully, though they lived hardly. Some of the more prudent of them, when their time was out, took up small plantations of their own, grew tobacco, and even advanced so far as to become themselves the owners of slaves, as well as of lands. Then would they fain forget the past, and, in company, when they thought themselves unknown, would even try to pass for Gentlemen Adventurers.

There was a third class of plantation slaves of whom my father would have none. I mean the men sold into captivity for religious opinions or for political offences. It was a most dreadful thing, my father said, that men

whose only crime was a lack of reasoning power should be driven to work under the lash. Therefore he would never buy any Papists, Anabaptists, or Quakers, although on other plantations there were plenty of these gentry. And while other planters had servants who had been out with Monmouth, or were concerned in some of the little conspiracies of that unquiet time, my father would have nothing to do with them. Once, indeed, in the year one thousand seven hundred and sixteen, he bought and brought home with him half-a-dozen gallant gentlemen (though they were at the time greatly cast down and unhappy in their appearance) who had been engaged on the wrong side in the rising of the Pretender. These, I say, he brought home to his house, and then, calling for wine, he made them a speech: "Gentlemen," he said, "it grieves me to see you in this piteous case. Yet believe me it might have been worse, because, although I have bought you, and, for so many years, your services are mine, yet I cannot find it in my heart to subject persons of your consideration to the rigours contemplated by your judges. I cannot, however, break the law and give you your freedom. I propose, therefore, to establish you all together on a piece of land which you will cultivate for yourselves, according to such rules as you choose to establish for your own guidance. There I will help you to what you want for necessities. And now, gentlemen"—for all began to cry aloud for surprise and joy—"here is wine, and we will drink to the health of the King—and on this side of the Atlantic we must all, whatever our opinions, add—'over the water.'"

It would seem a fine moral school for the young to be always surrounded by criminals undergoing their sentence, to have always before your eyes the spectacle of what crime leads to. So, in a sense, it was; yet there was danger lest one might fall, as most of the Virginians do, into pride. Everything belonged to his honour, to madame, and to me. Black servants were ready at hand,

to flatter and to serve. It seemed to me, as a child, that I was removed far above the laws and the dangers which surrounded these poor fellow-sinners working in our fields. I saw how great a lord was my father, for whom not only the slaves worked, but also the overseers, foremen, and clerks, so that he had nothing in the world to do but to call for his fowling-piece and go a shooting in the woods, or a fishing with his rod in Cypress Creek, or to take his pleasure and his ease with his friends, over claret of the finest and tobacco of the best.

We lived in a large house built entirely of wood, like all the houses in the country, and embellished with a wooden portico after the Grecian style, erected in front; this served instead of the verandah which most Virginian houses possess. The great chimney, which served for all the rooms, was built of brick outside the house. The room of state where my mother sat was a low room, forty feet long, lit with five windows, opening upon the great portico; in the summer the glass windows were replaced by green jalousies; the ceiling was plastered white; the walls were painted of a dull lead colour; the fire-place and mantelpiece, which were very grand, were made of walnut-wood richly carved by a London workman, in flowers, fruits, and the arms of the Carellis family gilt. In the winter there was a screen and a carpet before the fire, but in the summer these were taken away; the tables and chairs were all from London; there were portraits of our ancestors on the walls; there was a genealogical tree carrying back the family of Carellis to a patriarch who lived about the same time as Abraham (it was so stated on the tree), but who is passed over in the sacred narrative because as I always supposed his estate was far from that of Abraham and they never met; and outside, in the portico, were chairs made of hickory wood with sloping backs, where, in the summer evenings, my father sat with his friends and smoked a cool pipe of his best Virginia.

One does not look for books on a Virginian estate; yet

we had a goodly library, consisting of Captain John Smith's History of Virginia, Speed's English History, Livy done into English by Several Hands, the History of the Turks, the History of the Spaniards' Conquest of Mexico, and the True Relation of Bacon's Horrid Conspiracy. These books served for lesson books for myself, though I do not remember that anyone else ever read them. As for our overseers and people, my father was ever of opinion, in the which I agree with him, that the arts of reading and writing should only be taught to those who are in a position of authority, so that they may with the greater dignity admonish unto godliness and contentment those placed under them. The Church Catechism warrants this doctrine, to my thinking,

Our house was, in fine, a country seat which any English gentleman would be proud to call his own, furnished with guest chambers, dining-rooms, and every sort of convenience and luxury. Behind it lay a great garden planted with fruit trees, vegetables for the table, and herbs for the still-room. Before it was the square, a large cleared ground on the three sides of which stood the houses of the overseers and the slaves. All these houses were alike, built of logs, the windows without glass, the brick or mud-built chimney standing at one end, each with a little projecting verandah or lean-to, and some with a small garden, where the people grew what liked them best. There were stables, too, and coach-houses, with horses, mules, cows, turkeys, ducks, geese, fowls, and pigs. A running stream ran through the square, and, ~~water~~ providing drinking-water above the clearing, became, below it, a gutter to carry off refuse. The pigs ran about everywhere, save in the gardens of the house; and here and there were enclosures where fattening hogs lay grunting and eating till their time arrived. It was like a great farmstead only there were no corn ricks; the barns held meal (but it was not grown on the estate) and home-made pork

and bacon; the pigs and cattle, like the slaves, belonged to his honour; all was for him.

Beyond the house and square lay the tobacco-fields, and beyond them forest, everywhere forest. Save on that side where you rode down to the banks of the great James River running into Chesapeake Bay, you had forest on all sides, boundless and without end. Unless you knew the forest very well, unless you knew the Indian compass, the hemlock tree, which always inclines its head to the east, and unless you could read the blazings of the trees which pointed to the homestead, you could lose yourself in the forest in five minutes, and then wander round and round in a ring of twenty yards, thinking you were walking straight ahead for miles, till starvation seized you and you fell down and presently died. There were oaks, beeches, ash trees, gum trees, maples, hemlocks, in the woods; but mostly there were pines, standing about four feet apart, rising up straight and stately, their branches meeting over head so that the sun and moon and stars and blue sky were never visible, but only a tangled web of greenery which shed a soft green light upon the under-wood. It was very beautiful wandering in that forest, but there were dangers beside that of losing yourself, for there were rattlesnakes and adders in it, and though the pigs, which ran about almost wild, kept down the serpents, yet they themselves were also a danger.

The Virginian manner of life was simple, yet plentiful. It becomes not a woman to think over-much about eating, yet I own that the English breakfast-tables seem to me put poorly provided compared with those of Virginia. Here, indeed, you have cold meat and small ale in plenty, with bread and cheese, and, for the ladies, a dish of tea; there you had daily set forth fried fowl, fried ham, bacon and eggs, cold meat, preserved peaches, quinces, and grapes, hot wheaten biscuit, short-cake, corn-cake, griddle-cake soaked in butter, with claret or small ale for the gentlemen, and milk or milk-and-water for the women and

children. Our wine, our malt for brewing, the best sort of our beer, our spices, our sugar, our clothes, our furniture, all came from England. For it is a grievous fault in Virginia, and one which I hope may be some day remedied, that whereas the country is able of herself to produce everything for necessity or luxury, yet, like that first ship-load of adventurers, she is ashamed to work, and will do nothing but grow tobacco; so that the woods which flourish here, fit for the finest furniture, stand neglected and uncut, the fruits which would grow with the smallest care are forgotten, the sheep go with their wool unshorn, and the rich-scented gums, the sugar-bearing maples, waste their sweetness in loading the balsamic air of the forest unheeded. The grapes, which might be used to make good wine rot upon the vines; the apples, which might be pressed into cider, drop upon the ground and are eaten by the pigs; the hides of the cattle are thrown away and wasted; the very birch-brooms, the very dairy bowls, are brought from England. Truly it is a wasteful and a prodigal country.

It has been divided into parishes—not like your little London parishes, which consist of half an acre of houses, but great broad districts half the size of an English county. To each parish is a clergyman of the Established Church. No dissenters are allowed, nor any meeting-houses save one of Quakers. Our clergyman was paid ten thousand pounds of tobacco for all his stipend; and as he could sell it for threepence the pound, you will perceive that the clergy of Virginia are better paid than those of England. In addition to their stipend, they receive two hundred pounds of tobacco for a christening, three hundred pounds for a wedding, and four hundred pounds for a funeral. Add to these advantages that the clergyman was not expected, as is too often the custom here, to rise from the table at the third course, or to drink less wine than his host and the other guests. As, also, it was impossible in so large a parish for more than one or two estates to attend the same

church, the rector would make his rounds from place to place, bringing with him sermons full of sound doctrine wherewith to admonish his parishioners. As for our white servants—the convicts—they had their own minister, a Cambridge Master of Arts, and a regularly ordained clergyman of the Church of England, who for a crime of some kind was condemned to the gallows, and, out of respect to his cloth, reprieved and sent to the plantations. Here the rough hardship presently brought him to repentance, and being like unto the Prodigal Son when he sat among the husks, it occurred to him that he might, being still a convict, exercise his spiritual function among his fellow sinners, by license of the rector and his master. This being obtained, he held weekly service every Sunday in a barn. I was but a little girl at the time, yet I remember how I used to read the prayers as having nothing to do with me at all, but wholly with the convicts. They were the miserable sinners; they were those who implored for forgiveness; it was for them that our convict prisoner prayed, and to them that he preached. Certainly my father would never have conceived that his own servant should dare to preach to him and his household. He was very eloquent, I remember, and sometimes the tears would run down his cheeks. Yet when his time was run out, and he had gotten possession of a plot of ground on which to grow tobacco, with a sow pig, a calf and a cow, he presently lost his humility, and came to live gallantly and like a gentleman; and I never heard that he continued in his days of prosperity the godly custom of exhortation to his fellow sinners. Mostly, I believe, when he grew old and respected, he sat in his own verandah and drank mobby punch.

Thus, then, and in so great state, did we live, in the enjoyment of every luxury that can be procured in England, together with those which are peculiar to America—notably, the soft sweet air of Virginia. We were, on our estates, our own builders, carpenters, gardeners, graziers,

bakers, butchers, brewers (only we used English malt), pastry-cooks, tailors, and boot-makers. We had every variety of fish, flesh and game; we drank Madeira, Canary, claret, cider, peach brandy, and apple wine; we formed a society of gentle folk, separated and set apart from the settlers who had been our bought servants, and who bore in their hands the brand which no years can ever efface. We had been cavaliers in King Charles's time, but we stood up for Church and State, and welcomed the Protestant hero, great William the Deliverer. We had scant sympathy with those who would trouble the peace for the sake of a Papist Pretender, who, if all reports were true, was no son of King James at all, but had been brought into the Queen's chamber in a warming-pan. Open house was kept for all comers—all, that is, of our own station, for no peer in England was prouder of his rank than we of Virginia are of ours—and should there be a decayed gentleman of good family among us, he might still live at ease and gallantly by journeying from one plantation to another, only taking care never to outstay his welcome. And this, provided he were a man of cheerful disposition, or one who could sing, shoot, drink, and tell stories, would be difficult, or well nigh impossible, in a Virginian house.

So we lived, and so I grew up; bred in such courtly and polite manners as were familiar with my mother, the most dignified gentlewoman in Virginia; taught to read, write, cypher (but indifferently), to work samplers, to make puddings, pies, and preserves, to distil strong waters, to brew home-made wines, to say the Catechism and respect the Church, and, naturally, to believe that there was nowhere on the surface of the earth, except, perhaps, the King of Great Britain, a man of nobler birth and grander position than his honour, Robert Carellis, my father.

But at the age of nineteen a great misfortune happened to me. The overseers brought from James Town, where

they had purchased them, six men who, though we did not know it, were suffering from gaol-fever. They all died; two of the overseers died; many of the people died; lastly, my father and mother caught the infection and died too.

Then I was left alone in the world.

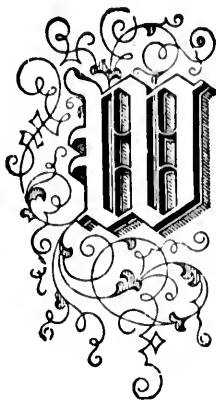
I had many cousins to whom I could go, but by my father's will—made while in full expectation of death and in true Christian resignation—I was to be sent across the Atlantic to our agent in London, there to remain as his ward until I was twenty-one, when I was to be at liberty to do what I pleased with my inheritance.





CHAPTER II.

ON TOWER HILL.



WE had a favourable voyage of five weeks and two days, with fair weather and no adverse winds until we arrived off the Nore, where we were compelled to lie-to and anchor in the Roads, together with over a hundred other vessels, small and great, waiting for the wind to change, so that we might beat up the river to the port of London. If I was surprised at the sight of so many ships gathered together in one place, you may think how much more I was astonished as we slowly made our way up the crowded river, and finally dropped anchor in the Pool over against the Tower of London, in the midst of so many masts and such a crowd of ships as, in my ignorance, I had never dreamed of. There were East Indiamen, dusky colliers, brightly painted traders with France and Spain; prodigious great ships in the Levantine trade, armed with long carronades; round Dutch sloops, with every kind of pinnace, tender, smack, hoy, brig, schooner, yacht, barge, and ferry boat. On all these ships men were running about, loading, unloading, painting, repairing, fetching, carrying, shouting, and swearing. It has ever seemed to me strange that the profession of the sea, in which one ought continually to contemplate the danger of sudden death, must needs bring with it, as if it

Were a thing unavoidable, and, as it were, belonging to the trade, this profane and useless habit of swearing. I was not then, however, thinking much about the language of the boatmen, being intent upon the prospect of that great London of which I had heard so much. There, before my very eyes, rose the White Tower, of which Speed speaks so much; London Bridge was on the left; beyond it the Monument to the Great Fire; then the dome of St. Paul's, and then innumerable spires, steeples, and towers of this rich and prosperous city. I remembered, standing on the deck of the ship and seeing all these things for the first time, how we colonists had been accustomed to speak in our boastful way of America's vast plains. Why, is the greatness of a country to be measured by her acres? Then should the Dismal Swamp be more illustrious than Athens, Virginia more considerable than Middlesex, and the Potowmac a greater river than the Tiber or the Thames. What have these new countries to show with the old? Why the very stones of the old Tower, the narrow arches of the bridge, the towering cathedral, even the roofs of the houses, cry aloud to the people to remember the past, how they fought for liberty and religion, and to be jealous for the future.

It was late in the afternoon, about five o'clock, when we finally came to anchor in the Pool, and I began to wonder what was coming next. My guardian's name was Alderman Benjamin Medlycott, and he lived on Tower Hill. He and his had been agents to the Carellis plantation since we first settled there. They were far-off cousins; John Carellis the Gentleman Adventurer having been a first cousin of Carellis Medlycot, the alderman's great grandfather (he lies buried in the vaults of St. Olave's, where there is a tablet to his memory, and where he founded a yearly dole of twelve shillings and sixpence to be distributed every Christmas among the deserving poor of the parish); so that I was not going among strangers, but my own kin.

What was he like, this formal merchant whose letters I had read? They were full of the prices current; they advised the arrival of cargo, and the despatch of wine, spices, furniture, clothes, wigs, saddles, guns, swords, sashes, and all the things which were required in the settlement of a Virginian gentleman of rank. But nothing about himself or about his family.

I had not long to wait in suspense. Presently, standing on the quarter-deck with Nurse Alice, I saw the captain shake hands with a young man soberly attired in a brown square-cut coat, with long calamanco waistcoat down to his knees. I had time to look at him, because he conversed with the captain for a few minutes before the latter led him aft and presented him to me. I set him down at once as a messenger from my guardian, and I made up my mind that his dress, which was by no means so splendid as that which my father habitually wore, was in the fashion of London merchants. There was no finery; the cuffs were wide and large; steel clocks adorned the shoes; the stockings were silk, but of dark colour; his peruke was long and curled, but not extravagant; a black silk cravat, of the kind they call a steenkirk, was round his neck, and his laced linen cuffs were of a dazzling whiteness. This splendour of linen, I learned afterwards, was thought much of by London citizens. On his hands, which were white, he wore a single signet ring. He carried no sword, but a short stick was under his arm. His hat was trimmed with silver galloon. As for his face, I could only see then that his features were straight and handsome. Was he, I thought, a son of my guardian?

After the exchange of a few words with the captain, and receiving a packet of papers, he climbed the companion, and, taking off his hat, bowed low.

"Mistress Elinor Carellis," he said, "I have the honour to present myself as the alderman's chief factor, though unworthy of that position, and your most obedient servant. My name is Christopher March."

I made him a courtesy.

"I hope," I said, "that my guardian is in good health."

"He suffers from gout, otherwise he is well. I trust," continued the chief clerk, "that you have had a favourable passage, and as much comfort as is possible on board a ship."

These compliments exchanged, Christopher March—I call him so henceforth, because he never received any other style or title—informed me that he had waiting alongside a boat to carry me ashore and, that the ship's officers would see all my boxes brought up to the house as soon as was convenient. Upon that I took leave of my friend the captain—an honest, brave sailor, and less addicted than most seafaring men to the vice of swearing—and so into the boat with Alice, my nurse.

The little voyage lasted but a few minutes, and we were presently landed at the stairs. Our conductor led us through a narrow lane, with tall warehouses on either side, and paved with round stones, which were muddy and slippery; then we turned to the right, and found ourselves in a broad and open space, which was, he told me, Tower Hill, the place where so many brave and unfortunate gentlemen's heads have fallen. On the other side I saw the beefeaters in their scarlet embroidered uniform. But I was so bewildered with the noise and the novelty of everything, that I hardly saw anything or heard what was said to me. But we had not far to go. We passed a warehouse four storeys high, and from every story a projecting beam with ropes, which made me think of the gallows. But the beams were only for the pulleys and ropes by which bales were lifted up and down.

"This," said Christopher March, "is Mr. Alderman Medlycott's warehouse, and this"—he stopped at the door of a private house next to the warehouse—"this is Mr. Alderman Medlycott's residence."

He spoke of the alderman in tones of such great respect, that I began to feel as if part of my education had been neglected, that part, I mean, which teaches respect to the

aldermen of London. A thought also crossed my mind that this excessive respect for his master was useful in exalting his own position.

However, there was no time to think, because the door was presently opened, and we found ourselves in a large and spacious hall, containing chairs and a fire-place, with a stand of strange weapons ; horns, heads of buffaloes and deer, and curious things of all sorts brought to Tower Hill by the Alderman's captains, hung upon the walls. Then the maid opened a door to the right, and I found myself in the parlour of a great London city merchant.

The room was lofty, and had two windows looking upon Tower Hill ; the walls were wainscoted and painted in a fashion strange to me and unknown in Virginia. A soft Turkey carpet was on the floor, a bright sea-coal fire was burning in the fire-place, though the air was not cold to one fresh from the sea breezes ; there was a high mantel-shelf, on which were displayed more curiosities from beyond the seas, and above them wonderful specimens of ladies' work in samplers, representing peacocks, birds of paradise, landscapes, and churches, all in satin. Seated at one window were two ladies and a gentleman, who rose to receive me. Christopher March, I observed, left me at the door with a profound bow. We made deep reverences to each other, and then I blushed because, although Alice had dressed me in all my best, I felt at once how country-fied and rustic was my appearance compared with the fine new fashions of these London ladies,

The elder lady, who was about forty-five years of age, and had a most kind face, with soft eyes, held out her hand.

"My dear," she said, "I am Mistress Medlycott, the wife of your guardian, the alderman, who is now ill with the gout, but will see you shortly ; and this is my daughter Jenny, who desires your better acquaintance."

Jenny here in her turn took me by the hand. She was a little thing, and so pretty and agreeable was her face, with

bright laughing blue eyes, light brown hair, a dimple in her chin, and saucy lips, that I thought I had never seen the like. Good heavens ! I thought. What must they think of me—ill-dressed, tall, and ungainly ?

" Mistress Elinor," said Jenny, " If I were tall enough I would kiss you. As I am not, I hope you will stoop and kiss me. We shall be very good friends, I hope."

" I may present my Lord Eardesley," said madam, with dignity. " His lordship being here upon business with the alderman, hath requested permission to see"—here she stopped and smiled very kindly—" to see the Princess Pocahontas of Virginia."

At that little joke we all laughed. His lordship was a young man about the same height as Christopher March, but very much unlike the chief factor. For while Christopher had a way of dropping his eyes when he met your own, and of hanging his head, and in many other ways of showing that he was not perfectly at his ease with ladies, the young lord looked you frankly in the face and laughed, and was not only happy himself in being with two girls, but also made us all happy as well. Only this knowledge came later.

" I must call you Nelly," said Jenny, pressing my hand.

" Elinor, or Mistress Elinor, is too long. How tall you are ! And oh !"—she broke off, and with a sigh and a laugh—" Nelly the hearts of all the men will be broken.

" Pray Heaven," said my Lord, " that the fragments of one at least, be put together again."

" This is idle talk," said madam. " Mistress Elinor will despise us after the grave discourse, to which, no doubt, she has been accustomed in Virginia."

" We had grave discourse," I explained, " when the Reverend Matthew Marling came to see us twice a year. At other times we talked about the crops, and my father's sport, and such topics."

Presently Lord Eardesley took his leave with more compliments. When he went away it seemed as if some of

the sunshine of the room had gone with him. To be sure, a great deal of the colour had gone ; for his coat was of scarlet silk, and he wore a crimson sash for his sword.

"Do not think, Nelly," said Jenny, in her quick way, "that lords associate every day with City merchants, or that we know more than one peer. Lord Eardesley has had money affairs with my father for many years, and the custom has grown up for him to call upon us whenever he calls at the counting-house. Oh, Nelly ! they did not tell us what to expect."

"My dear," I said, "you will make me vain. And, indeed, I am not so pretty as you."

"Oh, I? I am a City girl, little and saucy ; but I know what a beautiful lady of family should be—she should be like you. You ought to be Lady——"

"Jenny," her mother interrupted, "for shame. As for Lord Eardesley, Elinor, he is an excellent young man ; but he is, unfortunately, very poor, his father having gambled away all the money and most of the estates. Poor young Lord Eardesley will probably have to take service with the Austrian."

Jenny shook her head.

"He had better carry the Virginian colours," she said, with a laugh. "Come with me Nelly. I will show you your room."

They had bestowed me in the best room on the first floor, which had a little room beside it for Alice. I was at first much awed by the magnificence of the bed, which was much finer and more richly hung than any in our Virginian home. But familiarity presently reconciles us to the most majestic things. Here I found my boxes and trunks, which had been brought ashore, and here was Alice taking everything out. Jenny looked on, naturally interested at the display of dress, and though she kindly said nothing, it was plain to me that she found my frocks of a fashion quite impossible to wear in London. Presently, however, we came to my jewel-case, wherein

lay all the family treasures, which had been my mother's, and her delight was extraordinary when she had dressed herself up in all the necklaces, bracelets, rings, chains and glittering gauds which had been worn by many successive matrons in the Carellis family. She then threw her little head back, waved her hands, and went through a hundred posturings and bowings.

"I am Mrs. Bracegirdle, at the theatre," she said. "This is how she looks and carries her fan, and makes eyes at the beaux in the pit."

However, we could not stop playing there, because madam sent word that the alderman was ready to see me.

It was now past six, and candles were lit. Madam herself led me to the back of the house, where was a covered way to the counting-house. Here the alderman himself was sitting with his clerk, Christopher March. One foot was wrapped in flannel, and lying on a cushion; a stick stood by the side of the arm-chair in which he sat, with a pillow to give him ease; bundles of papers were on the table before him.

"Come in, my dear," he said, in a cheery voice—"come in. Leave her here, wife, to talk to me. Send for her when you take your dish of tea. Now, Christopher, your day's work is done. Good night to you, and be off."

The words were peremptory, but the tone was gentle. Christopher March bowed low to him, and lower still to madam, and departed. Meanwhile I looked to see what manner of man this guardian of mine might be. He was a man of sixty or so, and he had a monstrosly red face, but his nose was redder still; his lips were thick and projecting, his wig was pushed a little off one side, which made him look, somehow, as if he were going to say something to make everybody laugh. His eyes were kind and soft, and his voice, though a little rough, was kind, too. In fact, as I afterwards found out, the alderman was well known for being the kindest man who ever sat on the bench of magistrates, or ruled a great house with many clerks and servants,

The first thing that he did, however, was not re-assuring. He clutched the arm of his chair, leaned forward, and gazing upon me with intense eyes, he shouted :

"Death and zounds!"

Naturally, I shrank back, frightened.

"Do not be alarmed, my dear," said his wife calmly "It is his only relief when a pinch seizes his toe."

I thought he would have a fit, for his eyes stood out of his head, and his face became quite purple. But he recovered suddenly, and, with a sigh of relief, resumed the benevolent expression which the redness of his face and his puffed cheeks could not altogether conceal.

"Sit down, my dear," he said. "I am better now! Phew! That was a pinch. If you want to know what gout is like, take a hairpin from your pretty head and put it in the fire till it is a white heat. Then put it to the middle joint of—your thumb will do for illustration—and hold it there tight; and if you find that any method besides swearing will relieve you, I shall be glad to know what that method is. Sit down, my dear, and let us talk."

I took a chair opposite to him, and madam left us alone. He arranged his papers, and began to talk to me about my affairs.

First, after some kind compliments on my beauty (which I may pass over), he told me of his grief on receiving intelligence of my father's death, by which unhappy event he had lost a much esteemed correspondent. He had always hoped, he said, to see my honoured father some day at his poor home, and offer him such hospitality as a London merchant, with the aid of his company—that of the Grocers—could command. He added, with much consideration, that it would have been his duty to recommend my father to the hospitality of the Lord Mayor, as a Virginian Gentleman Adventurer of the highest position; and he gave me to understand that in the important matter of turtle soup and fat capons, without speaking of

venison, turkey, Christmas ducks, small fowl, haunches of mutton, and barons of beef, and without dwelling on the hypocras, loving cups, and their vast cellars filled with such wine as even kings cannot equal, the Worshipful Company of Grocers stood pre-eminent among the City guilds.

"Our kitchen motto," he added, with a fine feeling of pride, which somehow, seemed to reflect credit upon him, as indicating a thrifty habit as well as a large enjoyment of good things, "is one which should be engraven on the heart of every one who loveth the good gifts of Heaven, 'Waste not—spare not;' so that while the reputation of the City be maintained, we may ever remember that there are others outside our hall not so richly favoured as ourselves. And you may see, my dear, within a stone's throw of Grocers' Hall itself, boys and even men who have, poor wretches to make a dinner off a penny dish of beef broth, with a cup of small ale added by the charity of the cook,"

After this digression, he proceeded with the main thread of his discourse, which was to the effect that, although I had some two years to wait before I attained my majority, it was his duty to lay before me an account of my affairs and of his stewardship.

And then occurred the greatest surprise of all my life. Of course I knew without being told that the daughter of Mr. Robert Carellis,—his only child,—was certain to be what in Virginia would be called wealthy. I could not live in the rough splendour of the plantation without looking on myself as belonging to the ranks of those who are called rich. But I was not prepared for the greatness of the fortune which my guardian announced to me.

The successive owners of the Carellis estate had all transmitted their tobacco every year to Medlycott and Company. The merchants received the cargo, sold it, and after remitting to Virginia all those things which were required, invested the remainder of the money as

advantageously as was possible. Mine was the fourth generation of this annual consignment; and though some years might be poor, some cargoes might be wrecked or spoiled, yet in the space of a hundred years the profits of the tobacco had grown up to a vast amount of money. In a word, I was a very great heiress. My guardian held in trust for me over one hundred thousand pounds, and my plantation in Virginia produced, even under the careless and easy rule of my father, more than a thousand pounds a year.

"You are worth," said Mr. Medlycott, looking at the figures with admiring eyes, "you are worth more than a Plum." He smacked his lips over the word. "A Plum, my dear. How few of us, unworthy and unprofitable servants that we are, achieve a Plum! And how many things can be bought when one has a Plum in one's hand to buy them with."

By a Plum, I learned afterwards, he meant a hundred thousand pounds.

"But what am I to do with all this money?" I cried, aghast.

"You will buy, my dear," he said, laughing, "falbalas for your frocks, quilted petticoats, gold kickshaws, china, pet negro boys——"

"Oh, no," I said, laughing; "I have had quite enough of negro boys already."

"Then there is one expense saved. And as for the rest, why, my child, unless we take heed, your husband—nay, never blush—will show you how to spend it. There are gamblers enough, I warrant, among the gallants of St. James's who would cock their hats for our Virginian heiress, and leave her in the end as ragged as any fishwife. But fear not, cousin Elinor. Here shall we keep you under lock and ward, safe from the Mohocks."

Presently he stopped, and I, fearing to trespass longer on his patience, rose to go.

He took my hand, and was about to raise it to his lips, when another twinge of gout seized him.

"My dear ward—— Death and zounds!"

When I returned to the parlour I found Jenny waiting for me.

"Come," she said, "let us sit down and talk. We shall be alone for half an hour, and we have so many things to say that one does not know where to begin."

I noticed then that there was some appearance of preparation.

"It is our evening for cards," Jenny explained. "Most ladies in the city have one evening a week; and, indeed, my mother, who is fond of the game, generally plays four or five evenings in the week. But, for my part, I love better to sit out and talk."

Two silver candlesticks were on the mantelshelf, lighted, and four more stood, ready to be lighted, on a card-table, set out with counters and cards.

"Have we," I asked, "so much to say?"

"Why, surely, Princess Pocahontas. We are to be friends, and to tell each other everything. Now, show your friendship by telling me how you like the name—the name"—here she blushed and laughed—"of Lysander."

"Of Lysander?"

"And Clarissa? Lysander and Clarissa, Do they go well together? I will show you his poems, and on Sunday next I will show you—himself."

I began to understand. It was a little love story that was to be confided to me.

"And does no one know anything about it?"

"Hush—sh!" She opened her eyes very wide and shook her pretty head, "No one. Christopher March receives his letters and gives them to me privately. I send mine to Will's Coffee House. It is like the novel of Clarinda, or the Secrets of a Heart, all in letters. And on Sunday mornings we sigh at each other across the pews while the people are singing the Psalms."

The young man, Christopher March, then, was assisting to deceive his master by secretly receiving letters for his master's daughter. This was very remarkable in so good a young man. But I could say no more then, because the company began to arrive. They were all ladies, except Christopher March himself, who had assumed a gayer coat for the evening; and, still with the exception of that young man, they all came to play cards. A little delay, at which some waxed impatient, happened, while I was introduced as the Virginian newly arrived, but presently they were all seated at the table and deep in play. Among them were one or two quite young girls, no older than Jenny or myself, and it surprised me to see them staking and losing little piles of counters, which meant, I knew, money. The ladies were very finely dressed, with patches set on artfully—some of them with more paint than I could approve—and their manners were stately. But, Lord! to see what a change the chances of the game presently wrought in my hostess's face, which had naturally so much kindness in it. For her colour came and went, her eyes brightened, and her mouth stiffened. She represented in turns, and in a most lively manner, the varied emotions of hope, terror, indignation, joy, and despair. The other ladies were like her, but they concerned me less.

"Look at my mother," whispered Jenny. "That is the way with her every night. She says there is no other joy so great as to win at cards. Let us play and sing."

She played the spinet very prettily, and presently sang with great spirit, "As down in the meadows I chanced to pass."

Christopher March applauded, and then asked me to sing. I declined, because I wished to do nothing but look on that first night. Then he began to talk to us, and paid compliments, at which Jenny laughed contemptuously—it was clear that her father's clerk was a person of small position in her eyes.

At twelve o'clock the chairs came, and the ladies pre-

sently rose to go. After what promised to be an endless shouting of bearers and link boys, with more swearing, the chairs were got away at last.

Madam sank into a seat and pressed her hands to her head.

"Did ever woman have such luck?" she cried, lifting her face.

"You have lost, madam?" asked Christopher, with a grave face.

She groaned.

"I shall want to see you to-morrow morning, Christopher," she said. "Girls, go to bed. Elinor, my dear, I thought you would bring me good luck."

To be sure, as the sequel proved, my arrival was the beginning of the worst luck in the world.

All night I lay awake listening to the rolling and rumbling of carts and coaches, which never seemed to stop. About three in the morning there was a lull, but the noise began again at six, and at seven it was at its height again, with shouting of men and cries of the streets.

"Oh, nurse!" I cried, "is London always so full of noise?"

"Always," she replied. "There is never any lull from year to year. It is the labour of the world which makes this noise."

She dressed me, and I went down stairs. No one was there yet, although it was already half-past seven, and Betty, the maid, when she came to clear away the card-tables and set out the breakfast, was astonished to see me so early. I waited a little, and then took refuge with Jenny, who was lying awake, reading Lysander's last.

"It is beautiful, Nelly," she cried with sparkling eyes.

"How should you like to have a man writing to you—verses, you know, not prose—beautiful verses like this

Sure, Jenny hath some secret charm
That she doth guard, but not discovers.
To raise the hopes and soothe th' alarm
Of all her sighing, anxious, lovers.

It did not seem to me very real, or if the poet meant it; but it would have been unkind to say so. She read me more, but I have forgotten them; and then she began to dress, prattling to me in her pretty way without stopping.

"When my mother loses at cards," she told me, "she always sends for Christopher March. He gives her money without my father knowing anything about it. What she does with the money which she wins, I cannot tell. They do say that money won at cards always flies away of its own accord, and brings no good to the winner. I am sure that money lost brings no good to the loser."

Then we went down stairs and had a dish of chocolate for breakfast. The chocolate was good, but I missed the abundant and plentiful provision of things which we had in Virginia. Not that one wanted to eat more, but in America, as I have already said, there is always on the table a prodigality of good things, as if nature was lavish with her gifts. England, as the alderman often said, has much to be grateful for in the matter of things to eat. Yet, I think, England, lacks canvass-back duck, and has no preserved peaches. I noticed one thing at this breakfast, that, in spite of the dreadful noise outside, we had no necessity for raising our voices, and talked as quietly as if we were on the silent shores of Chesapeake Bay.

After breakfast I stood at the window and looked at the people. There was a company of soldiers in red coats going through drill; at the right-hand side, a little in advance, stood the fugleman, with a pike, and it seemed to me as if the men were all copying him; in front of them was a sergeant, brave with ribbons, giving the orders in a hoarse voice, and with him a drummer boy, smart and ready. The open space north of the Tower was crowded with groups of sailors waiting to be hired by the captains of trading-ships, who marched gravely about among them asking questions of one and another, and sometimes engaging one. In one corner was a bear tied to a stake,

and they were baiting him with dogs—a cruel sport—but the people of London are thoughtless of suffering, and rejoice to witness a hanging; or to pelt with eggs and dead cats a poor creature set up in a pillory; or to follow while a wretch is flogged at the cart's-tail; or to make a ring round two fish-wives fighting; or to compass the slow death of a cock by throwing sticks at it. Then there were grave merchants who met and discoursed, standing behind the posts; dapper clerks, dressed in light broadcloth, and quill pens stuck in their perukes; burly porters carrying sacks and rolling casks; great waggons clattering over the stones with a thunderous roar. In one place a quarrel and a fight, quickly begun and soon ended; in another a pump, whither I see a crowd haling a boy with shouts and laughter, and presently pumping upon him till he is half-drowned. Then they let him go, and he creeps away, wet and faint with ill-usage.

"It is better" quoth Jenny, who has joined me, "than hanging him. He is a pickpocket."

And everywhere boys, ragged, uncared-for boys, their hats, when they had any, slouched and uncocked; dirty, yet merry-looking, like the sparrows ready to fly at the approach of a stranger, yet bold enough to venture anywhere; they danced round the bear and shouted to the dogs; they imitated the soldiers at drill; they rushed to see the fight; but they hung back and looked abashed, as well they might, when the pickpocket was held under the pump.

"They are all thieves together," said Jenny. "They live by picking pockets, shoplifting and begging; they work in gangs and help each other; they all end on the gallows, unless they go to the plantations. Make their acquaintance, Nelly, if you will, while they are boys, because, of a surety, there are many whom you will meet later on in Virginia."

"But doth no one look after them?" I asked.

"No one. If they ever had any parents, they have

been clean forgotten ; they sleep in the ashes of the glass houses of Rosemary Lane and Ratcliffe Highway ; when they are caught they are flogged until the alderman or the magistrate of the court knocks on the table with a hammer. Only a week ago Molly, the cook, had her pocket picked of all she had saved—a bag full of silver pennies, ninepenny pieces, fourpence-halfpenny pieces, and thirteenpence-halfpenny pieces. The poor creature is not yet done crying.”

Then, when I had tired of looking out of the window—and, indeed, it saddened me to think of these poor boys, destined by a hard fate to wretchedness in this world and the next—nothing would please Jenny but that I must go a-shopping in Cheapside. It was already eleven of the forenoon, and the streets were filled with people. I was so rustic and ignorant that I was for stopping at every shop and gazing stupidly at every crowd, so that people had much ado not to run against me. However Jenny made me take the wall, and by leading me through the narrow lanes and passages which make this wonderful city like an ant-hill, she conveyed me safely to Cheapside, where for two hours we were shown the most wonderful things ; and I laid out a great sum of money, by Jenny’s advice and instigation, all to make me fine. There were wadded calico wrappers, a musk-coloured velvet mantle, lined with squirrel skins ; falbalas, laced shoes with high heels, roundabout aprons with pockets, hoods, satin frocks, whalebone hoops ; a gold repeating watch, with a gold chain ; a gold etui for needles and scissors, and all sorts of vanities, the like of which I had never before dreamed of ; and yet they pleased me, Heaven knows, being a girl, and therefore by nature prone to love these worthless yet pretty things. Besides, as Jenny, said, “You are a great heiress, my dear. It is fitting that you should dress so that no one will mistake you for a poor penniless country maid.” I wanted to present her with something to hansom friendship, but she would have nothing except an ostrich

egg, set in a rim and feet of silver, which took her fancy, together with a silver-gilt box for carraway comfits, to be taken during long sermons; the lid, I remember, was beautifully enamelled with a Cupid fishing for hearts. And one little thing she bought herself. It was a ninepenny-piece, bent both ways by no less a person than the great Lilly, the fortune-teller. Jenny bought it for luck at langter-a-loo. But I never heard that it brought her any, and I fear that the man who sold it was dishonest—perhaps Lilly never saw the coin, and the dealer himself may have bent that piece. As for lip-salves, rouge, and all the things which we were asked to buy, I would have none of them; and, indeed, Jenny owned that I needed not the artifices with which some of the pale City madams are fain to heighten and set off their graces.

The next day we went to church at ten in the morning. The streets were quieter than in the week—that is, there were no carts and waggons, no bear-baitings, no criers of things. But there were the church bells, and these all jangled together and out of tune with each other, inso-much that one began the service, which should be embarked upon with a quiet and undisturbed mind, in a flutter of spirits unworthy of the place or time. The church of our parish was that of St. Olave, a beautiful structure, built by that great architect, Sir Christopher Wren. Our own pew was square, with straw hassocks and red serge seats, high and narrow. I was astonished to see the ladies as they came in bowing to their friends in the pews. Nor did it seem to me becoming for gentlemen carrying their hats under one arm, and having their canes suspended from the button of their right sleeve, to take out little telescopes and look up and down the church spying out their friends. Several of these tubes were directed at our pew, and I saw Jenny suddenly drop her eyes upon her prayer-book, and assume an air of devotion which I had not thought to belong to her nature.

In Virginia we had service for all alike, the household,

the convicts, and the negroes, so that I was sorry to see in this church none but the well-to-do, with the respectable clerks and their wives. Surely, I thought free-born Britons of all kinds should be brought to the ordinances of religion as much as negroes and convict-slaves. The clergyman who read the prayers was a young gentlemen fresh from the University of Oxford, where, I learn, they for ever run after some new thing. The language of the Prayer-book was not, it seems, to his liking. He would have "pardons" instead of "pardoneth," and "absolve" for "absolveth;" but I think his taste was wrong when he chose to read, "endu'um, enrich'um, prosper'um," instead of "endue them, &c.," as I had been accustomed to read.

While the psalms were singing, Jenny nudged me gently with her hand, and I saw her turn her head half round and look straight across the church. Then she shut her eyes, and gently raised and dropped her head, and I remembered what she told me about their sighs in church. Sure enough, on the opposite side of the church, was a young gentleman who was affected in exactly the same manner. He did not appear to me to be possessed of a very noble appearance, being small, pale, and with a turned-up nose, a feature which in men should be straight, or perhaps Roman. When we sat down, our heads being well below the top of the pew, Jenny whispered to me that it was Lysander. The lesson for the day was a chapter of Proverbs, and there were in it certain verses spoken by King Lemuel which seemed a special rebuke for the frivolity of us girls. "Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."

The sermon, a very long one under five heads, was preached by the rector himself, in whose face and voice I seemed to perceive some resemblance to my guardian the alderman, for his cheeks and nose were red and puffed, and his voice was thick. He was, in fact, the chaplain of

the Grocers' Company, and, as such, was present at all their feasts. I daresay the discourse was learned and profitable, but I was so strange that I could pay no attention, and looked about me all the while, hoping that no one would notice. Jenny had her carraway comfits to eat, and, the better to raise her thoughts unto heavenly things, she was able to contemplate her picture of Cupid fishing for hearts. At last he finished the sermon, and we all got up and came away. If the ragged boys had not come to the service, at least they were standing outside the doors, and while we thronged the porch there was a cry of pickpocket, and one of them darted from the crowd and fled through some of the lanes, followed by two or three.

The next day, after serious talk with madam, I began to undertake the study of those things in which I could not fail to be ignorant. The most important were that I should learn to dance, and that I should be improved in music and singing, and for these I had masters. My dancing-master, who took the first place, and considered himself an artist of the greatest distinction, was the Sieur Isaac Lemire, a French gentleman of Huguenot descent, born in London. He was a man of little stature somewhat over the middle age, with thin features and bright eyes. He was very careful about his dress, which was always in accordance with the most recent French fashion; he spoke English as well as French; and when he went out to give a lesson he was followed by a negro boy carrying the fiddle with which he accompanied his instruction.

"Mademoiselle," he said with a profound bow, on being introduced to me, "I am charmed by the prospect of lending a fresh grace to one already possessed of so fine a figure and so beautiful a face. Mistress Jenny, I am your very humble servant. You will, I trust, assist us in our task."

Jenny always stayed, partly because she loved dancing and partly because the professor talked during the whole

lesson, and gave us the latest West End news, which we could not get from the *Postman* or the *Examiner*.

"A young lady dancing," said the professor, tuning his fiddle and occasionally allowing one foot a preliminary flourish as if for a treat! "A young lady dancing is a brandished torch of beauty. She is then most dangerous to the heart of man: she is then most powerful." Twang-twang. "You will now, mademoiselle, have the goodness to pay attention to the carriage of Miss Jenny while she treads with me the minuet de la cour." It is a beautiful dance, the minuet. My heart warmed for it at once; the stateliness of it; the respect for women which is taught by it; the careful bearing of the body, the grace of the studied gestures, which must be in harmony with the music; all these things made me love the minuet. That was our first lesson; but the professor was not contented with the minuet only, although that dance was the most important. We had, besides, the English country dances; we danced the Hey, with Joan Sanderson, the Scotch reel, the round, and the jig. He taught us, besides, the old-fashioned dances, such as used to be danced at Court, the saraband, which Jenny did very prettily, with the help of castanets, and the coranto, and the cotillon. And then he taught us figures of his own country, such as the Auvergne bourrée, the Basque step, and the jigs of Poitou and Picardy.

Once, when we were in the midst of our lesson, Lord Eardesley paid us a visit. Then it was delightful to practise with him as a partner, while Jenny played the spinet and the professor the violin. And his lordship and the professor, and Jenny, too, all said kind things of my grace and quickness in learning.

So began my new life, with kindness, hospitality, and affection, such as I had not looked for nor expected. When the alderman grew better, I found him the most delightful of companions, full of stories about the greatness of London, and the vastness of her commerce. I

was troubled, however, in my mind when I thought what he would say if he knew that his wife secretly took money from Christopher March, and that his daughter, by help of the same agent, was carrying on correspondence with a secret lover.

As for Nurse, she began by being heavy and dull, whereat I guessed, rightly, that she was thinking over that bad part which never left her mind. She spoke little of it, but once when we were crossing Tower Hill, and I gave a penny to a ragged brat, she began to cry gently, and told me that she had once a son who might have been like that poor boy, as friendless and neglected. "And their end, my dear, is to carry a musket for sixpence a day and so get killed in battle, or to go a-thieving and so get hung."

After a while, however, she cheered up and found her way to the place which most delighted her, the still-room. Here she sat among the bottles and compounds, making lavender water, ratafia water, decoction of primroses for toothache, cowslip wine, elderflower wine, and elderberry wine, preserving poppy heads and camomile for fever pains, horehound for coughs, and trying all the thousand receipts which a woman of her condition of life should, if she be a notable woman and take a pride in her own knowledge, understand perfectly. And madam said that she had never a still-room maid with half her handiness and knowledge.





CHAPTER III.

CHRISTOPHER MARCH.



ATURALLY, I had to unlearn a good many of the opinions which I had learned in Virginia. For instance, I thought there that in England everyone was honest except those few exceptions, who, being caught, were either hanged or else branded in the hand, well-flogged, and sent across the seas to us. I now learned that for one so caught there were a hundred thieves at large, and that every unknown person was considered dishonest until the contrary was proved.

As for my ideas of religion, it was always difficult for me to believe that the fine ladies and gentlemen in the City churches were so devout as our poor Virginian convicts. As for our amusements, I could not learn to like cards, because it seemed to me cruel to take the money of a player who could not afford to lose it. But I liked the City shows; when we could look on from a window and see the processions, the Lord Mayor's day of state when he sat in his gilded coach, preceded by the train-bands, the City companies, and the masons, singing, "Hey! the merry masons; Ho! the merry masons," as they went, while the cannon were fired and the bells clashed. On the Fifth of November they carried Gog and Magog through the streets with more bands. Sometimes the

butchers made a wedding merry-making with bones and drums; at Christmas the waits came at midnight—

Sing high, sing low, sing to and fro,
Go tell it out with speed;

and the mummers came without being invited—Turks, sweeps, kings and queens—and frolicked among us as long as they listed. And at the New Year we had parties at which the alderman would have no cards, but only the merry old games of blind man's buff, hot cockles, and country bumpkin. On Twelfth Night we looked for the bean in the cake. In the spring, when the flowers came, whenever there was a City rejoicing we had gardeners' walks made in the streets and lanes with green arches and rows of flowers—lupins, bachelor's buttons, peony roses, ribbon-grass, and the like. There was, indeed, no lack of amusement for me, a girl who had seen so little.

It took me long to learn the value of money. To teach it was the alderman's share in my education. He gave me whatever I wanted, but made me enter it in a book which he kept for the purpose. I put it down on the left hand side; and on the right I set out all that I had bought. It was a record of vanity, for the most part, and my cheeks burned while the alderman read it aloud.

"To laced gloves, two shillings; to satin for a frock, five guineas; to hoops, for ditto, twelve shillings. Truly, my dear, no husband will be wanted to teach thee how money may be spent. Let us consider how it has been made. These gloves of thine stand for eight pounds of tobacco; this satin for four hundred weight—a grievous load of tobacco for your slender shoulders. How many naked wretches have risen early and toiled all day in the sun beneath the whip to sow, plant, weed, keep clean, pick, and roll this tobacco before it could be sold or exchanged for thy satin frock? They have fared of the worst, these poor creatures, and toiled the hardest, all that

thou mightest go in satin and hoops. Of a truth, my dear, thy lines have been cast in pleasant places."

The alderman, to be sure, had his own weaknesses. I might have asked him, for example, why he ate turtle soup and drank the strong wine of Oporto, when so many boys were running ragged and uncared for about the streets. Nevertheless, his words were timely, and made me understand what a thoughtless girl was I who could, without reflection, thus waste and lavish the money which the labour of so many poor wretches had been given to save up. And yet, whether I spent the money or whether I saved it, made no difference to the convicts or the negroes. Their labour went on just the same. For my poor servants the curse of Adam might have been differently pronounced: "In the sweat of your brow shall ye earn your mistress's goods."

But the thing which most astonished me was the conversation of the young ladies who called upon Jenny and me, and were our friends. For, when we were all alone together, they talked about nothing but love-making and how to attract the admiration and attention of men. For my own part, I suppose that if I had ever thought about it at all, I had considered it likely that I should some day marry some one, and so dismissed the matter from my mind. The ordered course of things would come in due time. But these girls were continually thinking and talking about the lover of the present or of the future; they had their little secrets, and would show each other songs and verses addressed to their fair eyes, just as Jenny did; they discussed the beaux, their dress, their carriage, their impudence, or their wit (mostly, I believe their wit was impudence); and they openly pitied, or derided, any of their friends who had failed to find a lover, and was destined to lead apes in that place which frivolous and thoughtless persons are too ready to name lightly.

"Were you not so tall, Nelly," said Jenny, when I first remonstrated with her on this idle talk, "I would call

you little Puritan. But prithee consider. If it were not for the attention and thought that men bestow upon us and we upon them, what would become of the men? It is for their own good, my dear, more than for ours, that we seek to attract their foolish eyes."

Here, indeed, was a pretty turning of the tables.

"No man, my dear," she went on, laughing, "can possibly make any figure in the world until he begins to hope for our favours. Then, indeed, he pays attention to his figure and his manners, learns to talk, dresses himself in the latest mode, carries himself with a fashionable air, and becomes a pretty fellow. Then, to attract the eyes of one of us, he studies to distinguish himself, and when he cannot succeed he tries to be different from his fellows, and commits a thousand pretty follies. I have heard of some who, while they said their prayers night and morning, pretended to be atheists, just to be talked about; and of others who, with voices as clear as a bell, pretended to lisp or leave out their h's or roll their r's; and of others who, even while they were courting and imploring their nymph to appoint a day, would rail at large against the tedious chains of marriage; and of others who, to be thought men of fire, would join the scourers and Mohocks, and run about the streets breaking windows with half-pence, overturning constables, blackening sign posts, and fighting porters, and all to be talked about and seem clever or distinguished. Such, my dear, are a few of the benefits we confer upon our lovers."

Jenny stopped and laughed again, but she was half in earnest.

"What part does Lysander play?" I asked.

At that she smiled and blushed prettily. "Lysander," she said, "has offended his Clarissa. I have had enough verses, and I have written to say that if he wishes to gain my favour in reality, he must now, in person, inform me of his rank and name."

"Good heavens, child!" I cried. "Do you mean that

you have been in correspondence with a man whose very name you have not learned ?”

“ ’Tis even so,” she replied, laughing. “ No harm has been done, my fair Puritan princess ; Clarissa has written nothing that would hurt her reputation ; trust Clarissa, who is a Londoner, for taking care of herself. As Ly-sander prettily says, ‘ Clarissa doth command an awe, that would straight confound the great Bashaw.’ He may be a lord or he may be a templar ; I fear he is the latter. But what a noble air he shows, particularly when he sighs during the Psalms !”

I thought of his turned-up nose, and was unable to agree with Jenny, but did not tell her so.

“ Well, but, mad girl,” I said “ if the favours of fair ladies convert honest men into fantastic fops and midnight brawlers, I cannot see how their attentions benefit us.”

“ My dear, we make them study manners and behaviour. They, for their part, make us dress. Oh ! what a vast, what an incomparable blessing this is ! They provide us with continual reasons for new frocks and ribbons. Do you think it is to please myself that I am taking a world of trouble with this sarsnet hood and have spent all my money upon these double ruffles and this furbelowed scarf ? Why, for my own part, if I did not consider my duty, I would as lief go in a straw hat and a stuff petticoat, like Molly the milkmaid. Princess Pocahontas wore feathers mostly, I believe. But depend upon it, Nellie my dear, they were the finest feathers to be got. Dress is the handmaid of love, and we who would fain be loved must needs go fine.”

This was the burden of her song that she who would please the men must still go fine. Poor little Jenny was full of cleverness as well as of follies. She was a foolish virgin who ought to have been a wise one. The one thing which displeased me at this time was the constant intrusion of Christopher March into all our plans and

conversation. We could go nowhere without meeting him, and then he would walk with us; if we were playing or singing he would join us without being asked; he generally took dinner with us, and on madam's evenings was always one of the company. That did not matter much but for his attentions to me, which were incessant, especially before company. It was as if he wished the world to consider me as his property. Of course I was not so foolish but that I understood the meaning of his politeness; a week of Jenny's talk had been sufficient to remove the ignorance of my Virginian days; but naturally, being a Carellis, I was not so mad as to think of encouraging the mere clerk of my guardian, a paid servant, to aspire to such a thing as marriage with me. My only difficulty was to know how, without being cruel and unkind, I could get rid of the man.

I supposed, and rightly, too, that it was he who sent me verses and epistles written in the same extravagant fashion as that followed by Jenny's Lysander, and signed "A Lover." I kept them all carefully and said nothing even to Jenny. But I told Nurse Alice, and bade her watch and find out by what means they were conveyed to my bed room.

Alice presently informed me that they were placed on my table by Prudence, the housemaid. So I sent for the young woman and roundly taxed her with the fact, which she confessed with tears and promises of amendment.

"But, girl," I said, "who gave you the verses?"

At first she refused to tell me, but being pressed and threatened, she owned that it was none other than Christopher March. And here I made another discovery. Not only had this man won the alderman's complete confidence by reason of his industry and zeal, not only had he got a hold over madam by secretly giving her money, and over Jenny by conniving at her correspondence, but he had made the very servants afraid of him by acquiring a knowledge of their secrets and letting them feel that

their situations and character depended upon his pleasure. When I understood the state of the case I considered whether I ought not to let the alderman know, and to ask him whether it was proper for one of his servants to gain this footing and authority in his own house. And yet I dared not for the sake of madam, for I knew not how much money Christopher had supplied her with. I would that I had told him all and so saved—but that I could not know—the honour and the fortune of that good old man!

Well; I sent away the girl forgiven and a little comforted—be sure I did not ask the nature of her secret—and I determined to seek out Christopher March and explain myself openly to him.

I waited till one afternoon when madam and Jenny had both gone out a-shopping and I was private in the parlour. Then I sent Alice to invite my gallant to an interview.

He came straight from the counting-house, wearing his office brown coat, and looking exactly what he was, a merchant's clerk and servant. Yet he tried to assume a gallant air and stepped with as much courtliness as he could manage

"Christopher March," I began, "I have asked you to come here when I am alone because I have a serious discourse to hold with you."

He bowed and made no reply.

"I am an ignorant American girl," I went on, "and unused to the ways of London. But I am not so ignorant as not to know the meaning of those compliments and attentions with which you have honoured me."

"Oh, Mistress Elinor," he cried, sinking on his knees, "give your most humble adorer a little hope."

"Get up immediately," I said, "or I will leave the room. Get up sir, and stand or sit, as you will, but do not presume again to address me in that way." I was now really

angry. "Remember sir, if you can, that I am a gentleman, and you are a clerk. Know your position."

He rose as I bade him.

"In London," he said, in a soft, slow voice with down-dropped eyes. "young men of obscure family have a chance of rising. Many a Lord Mayor began by being an errand-boy. It is true that I have no coat-of-arms. Yet I am already well considered. If the alderman does not make me a partner, some other merchant may. No clerk in the tobacco trade has a better reputation than I have. I could bring your ladyship a good name and an honest heart. What better things can a man have than honesty and honour?"

"Assuredly, nothing. Give them, therefore, to some young woman of your own station. Meantime, Master Christopher March, take back these foolish verses and these letters. Let me have no more nonsense. There can be no question of that kind between us; none at all."

He received the letters with dark and gloomy brow.

"You will not only cease your letters; you will entirely cease your compliments and your attentions. You understand what you have to do?"

"And if I disobey your ladyship's commands?"

"In that case I must inform the alderman. I should, at the same time, ask him to consider the nature of that 'honour and honesty' of which you make such boast, when it permits you to advance madam sums of money of which her husband knows nothing, secretly to assist his daughter in a silly correspondence, and secretly to threaten his servants."

"You would then," he replied coldly, "do much more harm to the alderman's happiness than you would do to mine."

"Perhaps. But I should do all the harm to you that I wish; which is nothing but that you should continue to be the faithful servant which the alderman believes you to be, that you should not aspire beyond your station, and

that you should confine yourself entirely, so far as I am concerned, to your duties. Perhaps you had better return, then, at once to the counting-house, or the alderman may be examining the books for himself and find out where some of his money goes."

He turned suddenly white and glared at me with eyes which had as much terror as rage in them. Then he left me without another word. But I knew that I had made of Christopher March an enemy, though being young and foolish, I did not believe he could harm me. I have since learned that there is no man, however humble, who cannot at least do mischief. Some men, by their evil lives and base thoughts, may lose the power of doing good; but the power of wickedness never leaves us. I had, however, the good sense to tell Alice what I had done; she, though this I knew not till afterwards, began to watch the movements of the man until, long before the rest of us knew anything about him, she had learned all his secrets.

I told Jenny something of what had passed, and, to my great joy, she laughed and clapped her hands, and kissed me.

"Oh, Nelly," she said, "I am so glad. I have seen for a long while what was coming and I did not dare to warn you. Besides he threatened——"

"Jenny!" I cried. "Is it possible? Did you allow your father's servant to threaten you?"

"What could I do?" she replied. "He knows all about — about Lysander, you know."

"Oh! this is dreadful, Jenny. Go straight and tell your father, child, and then you can laugh at him." But this she would not do, fearing the alderman's displeasure.

The next thing I tried to do was to persuade madam to go to her husband for money to pay her debts of honour. The good lady was growing more passionately addicted to cards every day, and whether she played ill or had continued bad luck she seemed never to win. Then it was difficult for me, a young woman, to remonstrate

freely with her, and though I spoke a little of my mind once, Jenny being out of the room, I could not persuade her to tell her husband all. So that failed. Yet, had I succeeded, all the unhappiness that was to follow would have been averted. Fate, as the Turk calls it, or Providence, as we more rightly say, is too strong to be set aside by the efforts of a weak girl. We were all to be punished in a way little expected for our sins and weaknesses, and the wicked man was to work his wicked will for a little space.

"Alas!" said Jenny, sitting in my room where we could talk freely. "He is a dangerous man, and I would he were not so much in my father's confidence. Before you came, the attentions which displeased you were offered to me. He actually wanted me to marry him! Perhaps that would have been my fate, but for your arrival. The chance of getting a hundred thousand pounds for a fortune with such a wife as you turned his head, and I now fear him no longer. It would, indeed, be a rise in life for a gutter-boy like him to marry you, the Virginian heiress.

"Why do you call him a gutter-child?"

"Because he was, as much as any of those ragged little wretches playing out there on Tower Hill. He would willingly hide the story if he could; but he never shall, so long as I live to tell it for him. Such as those boys are, such was he; as ragged, as dirty, as thievish, I dare say: as ready to beg for a penny to get him a dish of broth. He was found lying on a doorstep one cold and wintry day in March, barefooted, bareheaded, stupid with cold and hunger. My father had him taken to the kitchen to be warmed and fed. Then, seized with pity for a boy so forlorn, he gave him to one of his porters to be brought up at his expense. Then he sent the lad to school, where he got on, being quick and clever. Finally he took him into his own counting-house, and gave him a chance to rise in the world, as so many poor boys have already done in London. Methinks he has risen already high enough."

Let us leave Christopher March for the present, and talk of more pleasant things.

I have said that Lord Eardesley once or twice called upon us when we were with Monsieur Lemire, the dancing-master, and took part in our lesson. During the winter he came but little, to my chagrin ; because, having then no thought of what was to follow, I found his manner and discourse pleasing. He brought new air to the house, and talked of things which otherwise we should not have heard of. It did us all good when his lordship came in the evening and took a dish of tea with us. Then madam forget her cards, Jenny put on her finest airs, and the alderman, who generally despised tea, joined us and told stories. The best tea-cups were set out—those, namely, brought from Canton by one of the alderman's seafaring friends—the reserve or company candles were lit, and the tea brewed was stronger and better than that which we allowed ourselves. After tea we would go to the spinet and sing, Jenny and I in turn or together.

Those were pleasant evenings, but there were few of them. My lord was a most cheerful and agreeable man, without any of the fashionable affectations of which Jenny had told me ; full of sense and understanding. He did not waste the time in paying us foolish compliments, and when he spoke of himself, he laughed at his own lamentable condition as an impoverished peer. He told us once, I remember, that he seldom dined at his friends' houses, because he could not afford the vails expected by the servants.

So the winter passed quickly away, and the spring came upon us with those easterly winds which in England do so poison and corrupt that sweet season. And with the spring of the year 1720 that fatal madness, which will ever be remembered, fell upon the nation like a deadly pestilence. Surely it was worse than any plague. I mean the madness of speculation, when all the world dreamed of nothing but sudden fortunes. The infection

spread through all classes ; and among those who trafficked in shares, stock, and scrip, were noble lords, knights of the shire, esquires, grave lawyers, and even divines, to their shame be it spoken. To everyone alike came the same delusive vision. Companies were to be formed whose shares should make everybody rich ; inventions were to be made by which one crown should become a thousand pounds ; henceforth there should be no more labour, toil, and thrift, but only spending and enjoyment. As if a whole nation were to be made suddenly rich, and the curse of Adam were to be removed from one people — and that people so wicked and undeserving as the English.

But, as the year advanced, the attention of everyone was settled upon that great bubble, the South Sea Company, whose stock advanced daily till it reached seven hundred, eight hundred, and even a thousand pounds. I knew little, indeed, and cared nothing, because I understood nothing, of the general greediness, yet we heard daily from the alderman, at dinner and supper, how the shares were fought for, and what prodigious prices they fetched. And once he took me to the Exchange, where I saw a crowd of finely-dressed ladies and gentlemen mixed with a throng of merchants and tradesmen, all struggling, fighting, and shouting together. They were buying and selling South Sea Stock. The street posts or the backs of porters served for writing-desks ; he who had a bunk or a stall commanded as much rent as if it had been a great house in Eastcheap ; and, in that crowd, a petty huckster of Houndsditch, if he had but a single share, was as great a man as a lord.

“ See, Nelly,” said the alderman ; “ the love of money is like the hand of death ; for it strikes at all alike, both rich and poor.”

The alderman, who believed that Sir Robert Walpole was the greatest and wisest of statesmen, took fright when he heard that the minister had spoken in the House vehemently against the South Sea Scheme, to which, be-

fore this, he had perhaps secretly inclined. "It was a project," said this great man, "which would lure many thousands of greedy and unwary people to their ruin; holding out promises which it never could keep, and offering dividends which no scheme ever devised could maintain." Where, too, asked my guardian, thus forewarned, were the open ports which Spain was to give for the South Sea trade? Why, if all this wealth was to be created, should not the Spaniard, who is not a fool, create it for himself? Out of what mines, fields, and cultivation are these precious things to come which are to make us all rich? If it were proposed to grow rich by trading with his Majesty's plantations and colonies, there might be something in it of a reasonable and modest kind, but to grow rich upon the Spaniard's leavings, that, if you please, said the alderman, ought not to commend itself to the judgment of a sober man. Therefore he refrained from meddling with the project, and, as need not be said, held aloof with equal scorn from the hundreds of projects by which men, as spiders catch the silly fly, spun webs to catch the heedless, the unreasoning, and the greedy.

While everybody else was mad with this dream of wealth, we in our house were full of our own thoughts, careless of the tumult which raged in every heart. As the spring advanced, Lord Eardesley came oftener, and would go with us when we drove out to take the air. London is a great city, indeed, but it is richly provided with fields, gardens, parks, and places of recreation. We could drive to the spring gardens of Knightsbridge, to the bowling-green of Marylebone; to the fields beyond Islington, where we bought cakes; or to those of Stepney, where there is another kind of cake; or to the walk of Chelsea, where there are buns. We could go farther afield and visit Cane Wood and Hampstead, or to the gardens of Bayswatering, beyond Hyde Park, where they sold syllabubs. We were a gay and happy party whenever we had his lordship with us. And for one thing I

am grateful, indeed, to Jenny, that though she suspected what was coming, she was so good as not to spoil the innocence of my happiness by telling me her suspicions.

One evening in April—ah! happy evening—Lord Eardesley took us to the theatre.

Suppose you were never to go to a theatre at all until you were nineteen years of age; suppose you had read of a dramatic performance, but never seen one: and suppose you had no idea whatever what it would be like. Then think of going—for the first time.

It was to Drury Lane. We drove to the doors, where we were met by my lord, in 'brave attire. He led us to the first row of boxes, where, for the most part, only ladies of quality are found, the wives of citizens commonly using the second row. Truly it passes my power to express the happiness of this evening and the splendour of the scene. The pit contained only gentlemen, but the boxes in which we sat were full of ladies dressed in extravagance of splendour of which I had never dreamed, nor Jenny either. But the patches spoiled all; nor could I ever, although for the sake of the mode I wore two or three small ones, reconcile myself to the custom of sticking black spots over a pretty face. The house was brilliantly lit with many thousands of candles. I say nothing about the play, except that the players did so artfully represent the characters that you would have thought the house, with all the audience, a dream, and only the play itself the reality. Yet I was astonished to find so many fine ladies whispering, laughing, and flirting with the fan, while the most moving scene and the most eloquent passages failed to rouse their interest.

"You know not your sex, fair Virginian," said Lord Eardesley, when I ventured to take this objection to the behaviour of the spectators. "The ladies do not come here to see, but to be seen. They are the principal spectacle of the house to the gentlemen in the pit."

And then I observed that, although I myself could see with the greatest ease whatever was done upon the stage, and the faces of the actors and actresses, a large number of gentlemen, especially those of the younger kind, were affected with a sort of blindness which forced them to carry to the theatre the little magnifying tubes which I had seen in church. And such was the strange callousness of these unfortunate young men to the piece performed, that many of them at the side of the pit stood with their backs to the stage, and, with their tubes held to one eye, surveyed the glittering rows of beauties on the first tier of boxes.

"Nelly," whispered Jenny, "you are the prettiest girl in the house. Half a hundred beaux are gazing upon you."

In the delight of the play I forgot the annoyance of this attention, and, perhaps, Jenny was mistaken.

When we came away at the falling of the curtain, we found the entrance-hall lined with a double row of pretty fellows, all hat under arm and right leg thrust forward. One of them stepped audaciously forward to the front and offered to lead me to the coach.

"This young lady, sir," said my lord, "is of my party. We thank you."

The young fellow said something about pretty faces and hoods, upon which our escort stepped forward and whispered in his ear.

"I am Lord Eardesley," he said aloud. "You can find me when you please."

I did not know enough of polite customs to suspect that the altercation might possibly, although so slight, lead to a duel.

Alas! that this custom of duelling should make every young man hold his life in his hand: so that it is less dangerous to cross the Atlantic Ocean, or to travel among the Indians of Western Virginia, or to serve a campaign against the Turk, than it is to live in London for a season

—I mean for a young gentleman of birth and rank. As for plain citizens, I have never heard that the custom of the duello has been brought into the manners of the London merchant.

I thought little that night of the matter, my head being full of the wonderful play. But the next day when I was sitting alone and feeling a little sad, as is the way with foolish girls after an evening of great happiness, Jenny burst in upon me in a half hysterical state of excitement.

"Nelly!" she cried. "Have you heard the news? They have fought, and my lord has pricked his man."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You remember the dapper little man at the theatre last night, who insulted us by calling us pretty girls—the wretch! As if we did not know so much already. 'Twas an officer in the Guards. Lord Eardesley fought him this morning in the Park with small swords, and ran him through the left shoulder. He is as brave as he is generous."

It was quite true. Our evening's pleasure had ended in two gallant gentlemen trying to kill each other, and one being wounded. Surely the laws of honour did not need so tragic a conclusion to so simple an adventure. Nevertheless, I was proud of Lord Eardesley, and rejoiced that he was so brave a gentleman.

He came that evening. Madam was abroad, playing cards. Jenny and I were alone; and presently Jenny rose and left the room. She told me afterwards that my lord had asked her to do so.

Then he begged permission to speak seriously to me, and my heart beat because I knew, somehow, what he was going to say.

That is, I knew what his speech would contain, but I could not guess the manner in which he would say it. He began by saying that he was the poorest man of his rank in Great Britain; that all his wealth consisted of a

barren mountain, a marshy valley, and a ruined castle in Wales ; that, in offering his hand to a rich heiress like myself, he should be accused of fortune-hunting.

"Nay, Mistress Nelly," he went on, "I must confess that at first my thoughts ran much upon the money of which you are possessed. That was the reason why, having had the happiness of seeing you, I came here once or twice, and then ceased my visits. But," he added, "I was constrained to return. And having come, I was drawn daily by irresistible ropes to the shrine of my affection." He took my hand and held it. "Nelly, rich or poor, believe that I love you tenderly."

I made no reply. Oh ! that life could be one long rapture such as that which followed when he took me in his arms and kissed my lips.

I cannot write more of that moment. It would be a sacrifice of that first baptism or sacrament of love when we promised our hands and hearts to each other.

Presently, however, Jenny came back, discreetly knocking at the door of the little witch !

"Jenny, my dear," cried my lord, "come kiss me." He laid his hands upon her shoulders and kissed the pretty little laughing thing as gaily as if a kiss meant nothing. Heavens ! what had it meant to me ? See this Princess of Virginia, this queen of fair maidens—she has promised, my pretty Jenny, to be my wife."

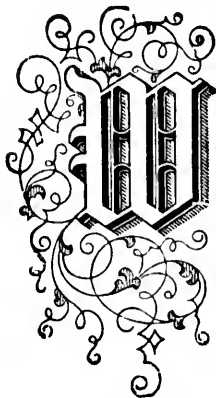
"No—not a queen at all," I murmured, while Jenny flew into my arms and kissed me again and again. "Not a queen—only my lord's handmaid. It may be that I have found favour in the sight of my king——"

"Not a queen ? No," he replied, kissing my hands. "No—not a queen—only my mistress, sweet and fond—only Nelly, my Heart's Delight ?"



CHAPTER IV.

MY LORD EARDESLEY.



WHEN my lover left me he immediately sought the alderman in order to convey to his worship the substance of what he had said to me. My guardian heard the story patiently, and then falling into a kind of muse, sat with his head upon his hands, saying never a word.

"Why, sir," said my lord with some heat, after waiting for a reply, "surely my proposal hath no dishonour in it. I can but offer Mistress Elinor what I have to give. It is little, as you know, besides my hand and a coronet,"

"Sit down, my lord," said the alderman gravely. "I have much to say."

He then proceeded in such terms as would give the young suitor as little pain as possible, to remind him that his own estate, save for the mountain and valley in Wales, were gone altogether, and that by his father's rashness over the gaming-table, so that had it not been for the small fortune left him by his mother his lordship would have nothing. But, said the alderman, the lack of fortune would have been a small thing, considering the ample inheritance of his ward, were he assured that none of the late lamented peer's weaknesses had descended upon his son. Lord Eardesley must excuse him for speak-

ing plainly, but it was rumoured, rightly or wrongly, that he himself was addicted to the same pernicious habit.

Here my lord protested strongly that the rumour was based upon no foundation whatever in fact, and that he never gambled.

"Indeed," the alderman replied gravely. "Then am I rejoiced, and I hope that these words of yours can be made good."

After this he became more serious still, and, speaking in a whisper, he reminded the young lord that there were other sins besides the grievous sin of gaming, that many—nay most of the young gentleman of rank took a pleasure and pride in deriding and breaking all God's laws; that they were profane swearers, professed atheists, secret Jacobites, duellists, deceivers of maidens, and contemptners of order; that the voice of rumour had been busy with his name as concerns these vices as well.

Here Lord Eardesley protested again. He would confess to none of these things. A duel he had certainly fought only a few days before, but that was in defence of two ladies—in fact, Mistress Elinor Carellis herself and Mistress Jenny, the alderman's own daughter; but, he added, he had spared the life of his adversary, and only given him a lesson. That personally he abhorred the cursed laws of so-called honour which obliged a gentleman to risk his life or seek to take another life at any fancied insult. As for the other vices mentioned by the alderman, he declared that he was not guilty of any of them; that his life and conversation were pure, and his religion that of his forefathers.

"It may be so," said the alderman. "Nevertheless we do well to be careful. The young lady is an orphan; she hath neither brother nor near relation to protect her should her husband use her ill; she is a stranger in the land and ignorant of the wickedness of this great town; like all innocent maidens, she is accustomed to look on every stranger, if he be a gentleman, as a good man; she

admires a gallant carriage, a noble name, a long pedigree, a handsome face—and all these, my lord, she admires in you. Then, she is a great heiress; her husband will have, with her, a hundred thousand pounds in bonds, scrip, and mortgages, and none of your perilous South Sea stock, besides a great estate in Virginia. Think of all this, my lord. Consider further that she hath been placed in my charge as a most sacred trust by my far-off cousin, Robert Carellis, now deceased, out of the great confidence which he was good enough to repose in me—and own that I do well to be careful. Remember that she is all virtue and innocence; and, that according to the voice of rumour, you, my lord—pardon the plain-speaking—are addicted to the—the same manner of life as most young noblemen. Why you would be a wicked man, indeed, if you thought that I should easily consent to her marriage and without due forethought.”

“Take all forethought and care possible,” said my lord, “I assure you the voice of rumour was never so wrong as when it assigned me the possession of those fashionable follies which, I may remind you, require the waste of a great deal of money.”

“True,” my guardian replied. “That is a weighty argument in your favour. Meanwhile, my lord, we thank you for the honour you have offered to confer upon this house. I am sure that his honour, Robert Carellis, would have wished for no higher alliance for his daughter, were he satisfied on those points on which I have ventured to speak. I go now, my lord, or I shall go shortly, to make such enquiry into your private life as is possible. I expect that, meanwhile, you will abstain from visiting this house or from making any attempt to see my ward. The delay shall not be any longer than I can help, and, if the issue be what your words assure me, there shall be no further opposition on my part, but, on the contrary, rejoicing and thankfulness.”

He bowed low to his lordship and conducted him to the door of the counting-house, which led to the outer office. Christopher March was there; he looked up, and seeing Lord Eardesley, he changed colour. The alderman, walking slowly back, beckoned his chief clerk.

"You told me," he said, that Lord Eardesley fought a duel the other day."

"Yes. On account of some quarrel over cards, I heard," said Christopher.

"Where did you hear it?"

"It was the talk at Wills' Coffee House. It was the talk at all the coffee houses."

"So they make free with his name, then."

"They make free with every name," replied Christopher. "Yes, sir, they call him gamester, like his father; duellist, like his father; profligate, like his father. Of course, I know nothing except what I learn from these rumours."

"Ay, ay," the alderman mused. "No smoke without fire. It is indeed, a perilous thing to be born to rank and title! We humble folk, Christopher, should thank heaven continually that we are not tempted, in the same way as our betters, to overstep the bounds of the moral law. No dicing, no profligacy, for the sober London merchant."

I understood presently, that I was not to see my lord until the alderman was perfectly satisfied as to his private character. This gave me no uneasiness, as I was so assured of my lover's goodness that I felt no pain on that score, and was only anxious for the time of probation to be passed. Moreover, he wrote to me. It was a great pleasure that he did not address me as Flavia or Clarinda, or by any of the names in fashion. I was plain Elinor, or my dear, and he was Geoffrey, Lord Eardesley. The letters stated over again, with the great candour which always distinguished my lover, the smallness of his own resources, compared with my wealth, and he regretted

heartily that he could offer me no more than his name and his rank. He forgot, poor fellow, that he was offering me himself, which alone was worth name, and rank and fortune, and everything. And what was I, I thought—a poor inexperienced maiden from the Colonies—that he should fix his affections upon me? “You are,” said the alderman, “a great heiress. You are worth a Plum.” His lips shaped themselves into a round O as if it had been an egg plum. “A plum does not drop into the mouth any day, my dear, nor does a great estate in Virginia. Moreover, you are a very beautiful young lady, and, I believe, as good as beautiful. Therefore wonder no more at my lord’s choice, but pray Heaven that he may prove worthy of thy love.”

Now a thing happened during the time when my lord was conferring with the alderman concerning his suit, which caused in my mind a little surprise, but which I thought no more of for the moment. It was this:

Outside the house my Lord’s servant, holding his horse, was waiting for his master. It was midsummer, and the evening was quite light. One does not in general pay much heed to men-servants, but this fellow caught my eye as I stood at the window and wondered what my guardian would say. When the mind is greatly excited a little thing distracts the attention for the moment and gives relief. Therefore I observed that the groom was a rosy-faced fellow not very young, but fresh of cheek, who looked as if he had come up from the country only the day before, so brown and rustic was his appearance. In his mouth there was a straw, and his hair was of a bright red, of the kind called shock. While I was idly noting these matters I saw Christopher March standing by one of the posts of the street looking, as men will do, at the horse. Presently the groom looked in his direction and a sudden change came over him. For his rosy cheeks grew pale and his knees trembled.

Then Christopher started and slowly walked nearer the horse. He spoke to the man, and began stroking the animal's neck, as if he were talking about the horse. I knew, however, by some instinct, perhaps because I now suspected Christopher in everything, that he was not talking of the horse at all. But what could he have to say to a country bumpkin, the groom of Lord Eardesley? I watched more narrowly. They were having some sort of explanation. Gradually my bumpkin seemed to recover from his apprehension and began to laugh at something Christopher said. And when the latter left him he nodded after him with a familiarity that was odd indeed.

Nor was that all. While I was still wondering, partly how the alderman would take it, and partly who this servant could be that he should be an old acquaintance of Christopher March, another thing happened.

Alice, who had been out on some errand or other connected with my wants, was returning home. I saw the dear old woman slowly walking along the rough stones within the posts and transferred my thoughts easily enough to her and her fidelity. Why, I should have something that night to tell her worth the hearing! Then, all of a sudden—was I dreaming?—she, too, stopped short on sight of Thomas Marigold, which was, I learned afterwards, the fellow's name, and gazed upon him with an air of wonder and doubt. Then she, too, stepped out into the road and accosted him. Again that look of terror on his face; and again, after a few moments' talk, the look of relief.

What they said was this, as nurse told me afterwards. She touched his arm and said sharply: "What are you doing here?"

Then it was that he turned pale.

"What are you doing, Canvass Dick?"

Upon this he staggered and nearly dropped the reins

"Who—who—who are you?" he asked.

"Never mind who I am. It is enough that I remember you and that you are Canvass Dick, and that what I know about you is enough to hang you any day."

Then his knees trembled and his jaws chattered for fear.

"It is nigh upon twenty years ago," he said, "since I heard that name. Too long for anybody to remember; and, besides what is it you know? Perhaps, after all, you are only pretending."

"Then will this help you? A man and two boys, one of them fifteen years of age, that is yourself, and one six or seven years younger; a house in the Ratcliffe Highway; a great robbery of jewels, planned by a man and carried out by the boldness and dexterity of the two boys; and——"

"Hush!" whispered the valet, "Don't say another word. Tell me who you are."

"They call me Alice," said nurse, looking him straight in the face. "That does not help you much. If you want to know more I am nurse to Mistress Carellis, who lives in this house."

The man stared hard at her. "No," he said; "I can't remember who you are. Do you mean mischief, or do you mean halves?"

"First, what are you doing here?"

"I am groom to Lord Eardesley." He grinned from ear to ear. "Who would think to find me as Tummas Mari-gold, honest Tummas, fresh from the country and grooming a nobleman's horse?"

"Groom to Lord Eardesley, are you? Oh!" and here a sudden light sprang into her face. "And what," she asked with a catch in her voice, "what became of the other boy?"

Honest Tummas hesitated. Then he replied, taking the straw out of his mouth and stroking the horse's neck: "Why—the other boy—the little 'un—he was hanged, he was, a matter of five years ago, on account of a girl's purse which he snatched in the fields behind Sadler's Wells."

"Oh!" she groaned with a kind of despair. "It was the end to be looked for. It is the end of you all."

"Ay," he said; "give us a long day and plenty of rope. Then we climb the ladder gaily and kick off the shoes, game to the last."

She shook her head. "Well," she said, "now I know where to find you, I must use you for my own purposes. Come here, if you can, to-morrow evening at nine, and I will ask you certain questions. Be sure that you answer me truthfully."

"Then you don't mean mischief."

"If you serve me faithfully I will not harm you. If you dare to play false I will tell his worship, Alderman Medlycott, who you are, and give evidence against you at Newgate."

The man still hesitated. Presently, however, he held out his hand.

Honour, he said, was the only thing upon which poor rogues and gentlemen of the road had to depend. And as he was satisfied that the good lady meant him no harm he would meet her the next day and take her to a quiet place in the fields where they could talk.

Here nurse laughed. "Thou art a villain indeed, Dick, but put that thought out of your mind. An old woman like me may be knocked o' the head, but suppose she writes a history of Thomas Marigold and lays it in a place where, after her murder, it might be found!"

Thomas laughed at this and protested that he was a most honest and harmless fellow, and that he would certainly come and answer all her questions.

That night, nurse, Jenny, and I had a long and serious talk together in my chamber; so long that when I went to bed the watchman below was bawling, "Past two o'clock, and a fine night." And all our talk was about my lord.

Nurse had foreseen what was coming; so had Jenny; so had everybody except the principal person concerned;

nurse was sure that he was as good as he was brave and handsome, and only owned to some misgivings on the subject of wine, which, she said, when gentlemen exceeded their couple of bottles or so, was apt to fly to the head and make them quarrelsome. Then, because she was a very wise woman and knew the world, she began to tell me how different my life would be when I was a peeress.

"Oh!" said Jenny with a long sigh; "I wonder if Lysander is a peer. There is an air about him; he may be anything."

Nurse went on to say that the great fortune which I brought to my lord would need to have careful husbanding, because, doubtless, he would wish to buy back some of his lands; and there were servants' vails to be paid everywhere; and prices always double for my lord, especially at inns; and the tribe of poets, writers, artists, and ingenious adventurers always dancing attendance upon a peer and begging for pensions—why, if nurse had been a maid in the best family of England she would not know more about it. I told her so, and she sighed in her quiet way, and said that she had been a lady's maid in her young days. It grieved me that I had said anything to remind her of that time in which, no doubt, she had grievously sinned, although I knew not in what way.

"Happy, happy, happy Nelly!" Jenny cried, kissing me before she went to bed. "To marry such a man, and to gain a title, and—oh! Lysander!"

She ran upstairs to her own room—and I began to undress.

"As for my lord's character," said nurse, "the alderman may make any enquiries he pleases. But I have a surer way to find the truth."

In two or three days she told me that she had learned all. Lord Eardesley was the most quiet and steady young man in London. He was studious, and read and wrote a great deal. In the evening he might be seen at a coffee-house or at the play. He went but little into

society. He neither drank nor gambled. He attended church. His friends were chiefly gentlemen older than himself. No character could have been more satisfactory. I was in the highest spirits. I did not ask nurse how she came by her information, which I trusted entirely; and I waited impatiently for the alderman to tell me that all was well, and that my lord was coming to the house as my betrothed lover.

It was bright sunny weather in early summer, I remember. The June and July of 1720, was full of splendid days in which every stone in the White Tower stood out clear and distinct and the river sparkled in the sunshine. They were all days of hope and joy.

Yet a week—a fortnight—passed, and the alderman made no sign. That is, he became more silent. He had an attack of gout upon him, though not a serious one. Yet it laid him up so that he could not get about.

One day I sought him in the counting-house and asked him, seeing that he was alone, what was the meaning of his continued silence.

“My dear,” he said, “I hope you will receive with resignation the news I have to give you. I would fain have spared you yet. But you force it from me.”

“Go on quickly,” I said. “Is Lord Eardesley ill?”

“More than that,” he replied solemnly. “He is not worthy of your hand. He must not marry you.”

He laid his kindly hand on mine to keep me quiet, while with sad eyes and sad voice he said what he had to say.

“He is a fortune-hunter, Elinor. He is a gamester; he is a wine-bibber; he is a profligate. Such as his father was, so is he; and the late Lord Eardesley was the most notorious of all the men about court twenty years ago. Such as his grandfather was, so is he; and the grandfather was the private friend and intimate of Charles the Second, Buckingham, and Rochester.”

"How do you know, sir, that the son inherits the vices of the father? You speak from some envious and lying report."

"Nay, child, nay. I would I did. At first I only had my fears on account of idle reports which reached my ears; now, however these reports are confirmed, and I know from a most certain, although a secret, source, the whole private life of this young nobleman."

I was silent, bewildered.

"Consider for a moment, child, what a dreadful thing it is to be the wife of a gambler. At the beginning of an evening's play he hath a noble fortune, say, perhaps, a hundred thousand pounds; at the close of the night all is gone—all gone. Think of that. The money which represents the patience of generations and the labours of hundreds of men all gone in a moment—in the twinkling of an eye, fooled away upon a chance. Why, girl, the profligate and the drunkard are better; they, at least, have some semblance of pleasure for their money; the gambler alone hath none."

"I do not believe," I said doggedly, "that my lord is a gambler at all." Then I remembered my nurse's discoveries. "Why my dear alderman, I can prove you are wrong. I have my secret way of finding out, too, and my information is trustworthy. What do you say to that?"

"I say, Elinor," replied the alderman, "that I cannot promise the hand of my late correspondent and honoured friend, Robert Carellis, to the young Lord Eardesley, and that I have written to tell him so. Believe me, child, it was the hardest letter that I ever had to write. Now it is written."

"In a year or so I shall be of age," I said bitterly. "Then I shall not want your consent."

"Be it so," he replied. "Let me do my duty meanwhile as it becomes an honest man. Go child. You are sorrowful, and with reason. The day will come when you will own that I have acted rightly."

I returned sadly. Jenny and madam knew what had been done, and we sat and cried together. Presently Jenny whispered, "What if Lysander should prove a gambler!"

"All the sorrow in the world," said madam solemnly, "comes from the extreme wickedness of man. What vice is so terrible as the love of gaming?"

I thought of her own passion for cards and wondered. I know now, that people are never so virtuously indignant as when they denounce the sins to which they are themselves most prone.

Before night a letter was brought to me. It was from my lord.

"Dearest and best of women," he said, and I seemed to feel again the touch of his hand and to hear his soft and steady voice, so that my head swam and my heart sank, "I have received a letter from the alderman in which I learn that I possess such vices as unfit me for your hand. I know not, in very truth, what they are. Have courage, my dear, and cheer your Geoffrey with an assurance that you will trust him until he can clear away these clouds. I have promised that I will not intrude myself upon your house. My intention is to do nothing for a week or two, and then to ask if the alderman will bring before me the reasons, clearly and certainly, for his bad opinion. So now farewell, and believe that I may be unworthy of so great a blessing as your love, but that I am not insensible to it and not ungrateful."

Had any girl so sweet a letter? Be sure I answered it with such silly words as I could command, telling him that I was altogether his, and that I firmly believed his innocence. And so, with lighter heart and with an assured hope in the future, I lay down to sleep on the first night after my lover was sent from me.



CHAPTER V.

HONEST THOMAS.



IT was hard upon us. We were at the mercy of two most hardened villains, who had no conscience, no fear, no gratitude, nor any principles at all of truth or virtue. One of them, of course, was the man who called himself Thomas Marigold; the other, as you will presently see, was Christopher March. So far, we knew no more against the alderman's factor than that he consented to receive Jenny's secret letters, advanced money to madam that she might pay her card debts, and knew all the little doings of the maids, so that he could threaten them into obedience. We were to learn before long that his power in the house, the confidence of his master, and his position, were all used for our own undoing, and that if seven devils possessed the spirit of Thomas Marigold, seventy times seven held that of Christopher March.

When the valet found that all the old woman wanted was authentic information on the private life of his master, he was greatly relieved, and swore that nothing but truth should pass his lips. And then he revealed so sweet a picture of a virtuous life, that the tears came into my eyes, and thankfulness with praise into my heart, when first I heard it from my nurse. An end, now, to those fears and anxieties which, in spite of faith in my lord would sometimes darken my soul.

But one day, shortly after her first discovery of the servant, Alice found out the chief cause of the Alderman's prejudice against my suitor. It was caused, indeed by no other than Thomas Marigold himself, at the instigation or the bidding of Christopher March.

It was in the morning, and the door of the outer office was open. Alice, who was in the fore-yard, saw the valet walk in, a letter in his hand; he handed this with a reverence to Christopher, who in his turn carried it into the inner office to his master. Alice waited, hidden behind some bales, looked, and listened.

Then the alderman called his clerk.

"Christopher," he said with a groan, "this will not last long. Make up to-day his lordship's book."

"Does he want more money, sir?"

"Ay, lad—more money—every day more money. And for what? It grieves me sore that so well spoken and frank a gentleman should be so ready to protest the thing which is not. Let me write to him."

Christopher left him and came back to the outer office, leaving the door open.

"Well, honest Thomas," he said, speaking loud, "how doth the noble lord, your master, this morning?"

"Ead, sir," said Thomas, shaking his honest shock of yellow hair.

"Speak up, you fool, you," whispered Christopher. Then, loud again: "I am sorry, Thomas, to hear it."

"Drunk again last night, sir," the man went on, in a louder key, "and at the gaming-table till three this morning. Such a life! 'twould kill an ox."

"'Tis pity," Christopher said, glancing at the door of the counting-house, where his worship was listening to the talk, pen in hand. "Pity. Tell me, good man, couldest thou not, respectfully, put in a word of advice?"

"Nay, sir," said Thomas; "I am but a poor servant, with my character to keep."

"But you might try. Is his temper quick? Louder, this time."

"As for his temper," Thomas lifted up his voice and laughed, "'tis a word, and an oath, and a blow. One poor fellow, as honest and sober a creature as walks, his lordship disabled by breaking three ribs, so that he now goes with short breath, and is nothing but a stable help or does odd jobs, and lives on cabbage-stalks."

Christopher groaned.

"A spendthrift, a gamester, a brawler, and striker—what a character is this for a Christian man?"

Just then the alderman came out with money in a little bag of brown sackcloth.

"Be careful, good 'Thomas," he said. "There is the money, and here is a note for his lordship. Be careful; rogues are abroad. But yesterday se'nnight an honest clerk carrying two hundred pounds to a goldsmith in Lombard Street was tripped up, so that he fell and dropped the bag, which when he recovered his feet was gone."

"I will take care, sir," said Thomas. So he made a leg and came away. But outside the house he found Nurse Alice.

"So," she said, "I shall, after all, have to make an end of thee for a black-hearted and lying villain."

"Why mother, what is the matter?"

"I have overheard all that you told Christopher March but now."

Thomas changed colour, but presently laughed and whistled.

"Phew!" he said. "Why, is that all? I have told you no lies, mistress. Be sure of that."

"Then why tell lies to him, for the alderman to hear?"

"That is a little business between me and the respectable Christopher, mother."

"You and Christopher? What has Christopher got to do with you?"

Now we all knew—nurse as well as the rest of us—that Christopher had been picked up out of the street; yet it did not occur to her that there could possibly be any acquaintance between the chief factor and this professed thief, so great is the power of fine clothes.

Thomas Marigold chewed his straw for a few moments before he answered.

"Suppose he wants the alderman to believe that Lord Eardesley is a lad of spirit and a gallant player, and suppose he pays me to say so; think you I should refuse his money?"

This seemed plausible, because the fellow never pretended to any kind of honesty. He would bear false witness, just as he would cheat, lie, and rob for money.

"He a gamester?" continued Thomas, with a laugh of superiority. "A dull and tedious gentleman, who spends his time a-reading. Now, mother, I don't tell you no lies. You go on a trusting of me, and never mind what I tell the alderman to please that Christopher. Set him up!"

"But tell no more lies about Lord Eardesley. Mind, Dick, that is my last word. If I find you out again I shall act at once."

"Between the pair of you," said Thomas, scratching his head, "a man's fairly sped. Look you, mistress, for a spell I must do what he wants." He jerked his thumb over his left shoulder to indicate Christopher. "Curse him! You don't think I like him. Running another man's neck into the noose, and keeping his own out." This he said in a lower voice. "Only you wait a day or two, and I do no more service for Christopher March."

"A day or two." She thought very little mischief could be done in so short a time. "What service doth he require of you besides that of lying?"

"None," he replied, quickly. "Oh, don't you go to think that I would do anything dishonest, mother. Come now, a poor man may repent and turn over a new leaf."

"Ay," said Alice, "he may. But he seldom does. And you, Dick, are, I doubt not, a rogue in grain."

The fellow laughed and swung himself away in his confident manner, being just as happy and assured, though his manner of death was nearly certain, as if he had been the most honest servant in the world. I have seen so much of rogues and vagabonds that I am no longer astonished when I find, as I have generally found, both in England and Virginia, the greatest villain to be also the most confident, easy, and happy of men. It is your small rogue, condemned to hanging for having stolen a bit of cloth, who frets and hangs his head. Honest Thomas, the valet, held his erect, and, no doubt, had an easy conscience.

Nurse told me these things, and we talked them over, but without any present understanding how best to act.

Meantime, I received daily letters from my lord. In them he assured me of his passionate love, and exhorted me to patience and constancy. As regarded himself, we knew, he said, the worst of him; that he was of a verity exceeding poor, and possessed of little beside a barren mountain, a swamp, and a ruined castle in Wales which he could not sell; that he was not versed in those arts by which men become rich; that he had no party in politics; and that he could court no man's favour for place or pension. Indeed, he spoke of himself at all times with the true modesty which ever attends virtue.

Jenny knew that I was in communication with Lord Eardesley, and delighted in the contemplation of an amour which possessed the first element of intrigue—namely that it was carried on in opposition to the will of my guardian. This reminded her of her own affair with Lysander, which seemed to progress slowly. About once a fortnight the swain would address her in a copy of verses (one time, I was sorry to discover, he stole them from the *Tatler*), which spoke of love's flames and darts, his captive hearts, fair nymphs and swains, with loves in twains, and

warbling brooks, and amorous looks, as glibly as if he had been Mr Alexander Pope himself. And every Sunday we saw him at church, languishing against a pillar, and trying his best to look as if the idea of his Jenny had driven from him his sympathy with the Church Service. Jenny used regularly every week to call my attention to his noble carriage, and the stamp of gentle birth which she remarked in his face. For my own part, this was not a fact so apparent. Nor indeed, did Lysander ever succeed in commending himself to my good opinion. Methought his face was mean and his bearing affected. But I would not tell Jenny so. Perhaps, too, the constant contemplation of that face which lay in my heart as in a mirror, made other faces seem small, as the moon doth extinguish the lesser lights. But Jenny was set upon her lover proving to be of gentle birth.

"Why," she asked once, "if the man really wants me, cannot he see my father and tell him so?"

"Because," I said, "that would be too commonplace a plan, and your lover would fain, being a poet, nourish his passion in rhymes a little longer—perhaps as long as your patience will allow. Pray, Mistress Jenny," I asked, "do you, too, reply with a madrigal, and send him a sigh in a sonnet."

Jenny blushed.

"Girls," she said, pursing up her pretty lips, "must not be asked the little secrets of their courtship. My Lysander is satisfied with the answers which I send him."

I was not, however, and it did not please me to be taking a part, however small, in an affair which was kept secret from the good old alderman and from madam his wife, whose only fault was her love of cards. And the sequel proved that I had reason to be uneasy.

We resolved, after Alice had spoken with the valet, to let matters go on as they were for the time named by the man. We should have gone to the alderman immediately and told him all. But we knew little of the great web of

plots with which this Christopher March had surrounded us all. We found it quite easy to understand that the man should wish the character of Lord Eardesley to be represented in the blackest light ; that was common revenge upon me. We also saw clearly that the alderman could easily be brought to believe that Christopher as well as himself had been deceived by the servant.

Now, two days after Thomas Marigold opened himself on the subject of Christopher March, he came voluntarily and frightened us out of our senses. First he said that he wanted the young lady to hear what he had to tell. When I was fetched, he told us that he was going to leave the service of his Lordship in a day or two; that as he could do no more for us than he had done, he wished to tell us that Christopher March was a black-hearted villain, who would stick at nothing; that he hated Lord Eardesley, and would do him an ill turn if he could; that he would never rest till his lordship was ruined, and that, in the end, he would be the ruin of every one who had benefited him.

Then Alice asked him how it was that he knew Christopher so well.

The fellow replied that perhaps he would tell her when next they met. Meantime, he said, he had warned us, and his mind was clear, "While I was with his lordship," he added, "no harm should be done to him; but after I leave his service I cannot answer for him."

Then we began to look at each other and to tremble, and I lined the man's palm with five pieces of gold for his honesty.

"I almost wish," he said, putting up the money, "that I had come to your ladyship first. Anyhow, them lies about his lordship are soon set right."

So he went away, and we began to consider what was best to be done.

"The man will tell us," said Alice, "no more than he chooses. If he goes away to-morrow from his lordship's

service, I shall not see him again. That is very certain. How can we prove anything against Christopher?"

Nothing would be proved, but it would be well to set Lord Eardesley on his guard and to inform him of what had passed. We decided, at length, that we would go ourselves to his lodgings on the morrow, and lay before him the whole matter.

So far, very little mischief had been done. The character of a man of honour and virtue had been maligned, but only in the ear of the alderman, who would easily be led back to his former confidence. That is what we said to each other. Alas! we little knew all the mischief that had been done, and was, even then, on the point of discovery.

While we talked, the alderman sent me an invitation to converse with him.

He was suffering from another attack of gout—an unfortunate thing in all respects, because it prevented him from getting about and making those enquiries into the private life of my lord, as he had promised. He was now, being dependent on the reports of Christopher March and the man, in great mental trouble about Lord Eardesley.

"I do not disguise from myself, my ward," he said "that an alliance with a nobleman of his exalted rank (albeit his estates are small) would have been gratifying to your lamented father, as it would, under other circumstances, to myself. Yet the profligacy of the young man is such that no hope can be entertained of his amendment before his final ruin overtakes him."

"You know of his profligacy," I replied, "only by report and rumour. Have you asked any of his friends about him?"

"His friends, child? I am a plain London citizen, and have no acquaintance with noblemen. Besides, they would be, doubtless, all of a tale. But I have clear proof. Not only hath his man confessed to Christopher March, in my hearing, that his master gambles, but to pay his

losses he sends to me sometimes daily, sometimes thrice a week, for money. Very soon, sooner than his lordship thinks, there will be an end. Doth he hope, then, to send your hundred thousand pounds after his own hundreds? My dear, should I be an honest guardian did I counsel thee to marry a gamester?"

The good old man! It was the last time that I received any admonition from him at all, almost the last time that I ever saw him; because his troubles began almost on that very day—with my own and Jenny's and my lord's and even my nurse's.

I confess I was staggered at first. I must needs believe in my lover's truth and fidelity. What has a girl to trust in, if she cannot trust her lover? Yet that he should send nearly every day to the alderman for money when he had so little left, and when his lodgings were so mean and ill-proportioned to his rank—why, what did that mean?

I went to my nurse and consulted with her. She, too, began to fear that the man might have played us false, and that the information which he gave to Christopher March was true. I say she began to fear it, because, although her words were brave, and she bade me go on trusting in my lover, yet I saw her kind eyes troubled as she sat down and bade me be silent while she thought.

"You must see him at once, my dear," she said. "There must be no time lost. You must see him somehow by himself, and speak to him, and ask him what it means. Let me consider."

I could not ask him to the house, because he had promised the alderman that he would not come without his permission. It would be best, on all accounts, to seek him secretly. I might go to the Mall, in St. James's Park, and trust to the chance of meeting him. But, then, the chance was small, and the mob was so great, and the manners of some who frequent that place are so rough and rude, that, although Jenny always liked to go there, I confess I could not approve the place, or feel easy while I

was among that crowd of painted, patched, and besatined men and women.

Then my nurse proposed a thing which, I own, I should have been afraid by myself to undertake.

It was our evening for cards. Alice advised me to make some excuse, while madam was entertaining and receiving her visitors, to slip out of the room. I was to choose a time when the tables were laid, and the ladies were in the first height and interest of the game. Thus I should not be missed. I was to run upstairs, where she would be in waiting for me, with dominos and hoods, in which she and I would take coach and go ourselves in search of his lordship. In case of necessity, I was to take Jenny into confidence.

I confess my heart beat when I thought of this adventure. For a young girl to go out alone, or protected only by an old nurse, was a perilous thing, indeed. It was only a week since some footpads had actually stopped a coach at Knightsbridge, and robbed a gentleman in it of his gold watch and chain, and twenty gold pieces. And there were stories of Mohocks, as the young gentlemen who ran about the streets at night to knock down constables and fight porters, called themselves. Once they made two ladies get down from their coach and dance a minuet with them on the pavement of a court in Fleet Street. After the minuet, they kissed them, and sent them on their way.

Still, we were not going into the country or as far as the fields of Knightsbridge, and we were not going to be out late at night. And then there was the necessity of seeing my lord as soon as possible. In fine, I consented to go. Glad am I now and thankful for a resolution which, if anything could have been, was an inspiration from Heaven, and served to save, out of the general wreck, at least one pair of happy lovers.

This, then, was decided. Nurse went away to buy the masks and hoods. I stayed at home and went on with my usual work. Madam, I remember, was more than

usually talkative, and detailed at length the great part her father, who had been Sheriff of London, took in the glorious Revolution of 1688, and her personal recollections of the Protestant Hero, William of Orange. Jenny was silent and abstracted. Once I saw her stealthily wipe away a tear. What had happened to her—a quarrel with Lysander, perhaps? But I was so selfishly full of my own anxieties, that I took little heed of poor Jenny.

At three we dined, as usual, the alderman being laid up, as I have said, with gout.

At four we all walked into the City to Cheapside, where we bought some ribbons and stuffs, and presently returned; we two girls being both silent and depressed, but neither noticing, till later on, the trouble of the other. At six o'clock some visitors called, and we had a dish of tea. The time seemed long before our guests arrived and the cards were laid out. I excused myself from playing, and after they were all sat down, and Madam's attention was entirely occupied with the game, I slipped out of the room, and found my nurse waiting for me with the masks and the hoods. I did not tell Jenny anything, and, indeed, thought nothing about her at all.

The hood was so long that it hid the whole of my dress and covered my head, while the mask, made of black silk, covered and concealed my face, except the eyes. It was impossible for anyone to recognize me. Alice was attired in exactly the same fashion; and, thus disguised, we slipped down the stairs and were out of the door without any one having the least suspicion of my absence.

It was just striking half-past eight by all the clocks together. We took a coach on Tower Hill, and ordered the driver to proceed to Bury Street, where Lord Eardesley had lodgings. We proposed driving to the very door of the house, so as to encounter as little risk as possible from fellows who think it no shame to address a lady who may be unprotected.

The streets were full, and the progress of the coach was

slow. In Fleet Street the driver got down to fight a drayman who refused to make way or to go on. The battle lasted for ten minutes, while we trembled within. The drayman defeated, his horses were drawn out of the way, and we went on. It was a rainy evening and dark; though in the middle of summer there was a high wind, and I remember how, to the noise and fury of the combatants and their friends, was added the dreadful shrieking and groaning of the great signs which swung over our heads. Surely shopkeepers might find a more convenient method of advertising their goods than by hanging out a sign which is so heavy that it threatens to drag down the front of the house, and so noisy that it keeps one awake at night, and so surrounded by the other great signs that passers by cannot see it.

When we got through Temple Bar we made better way, and after a little further delay at Charing Cross, we finally arrived safely at Bury Street.

But his lordship was abroad, nor did the maid know with any certainty when he would return. We sent for his servant.

When Thomas saw us, he became suddenly pale.

"Man!" cried nurse angrily. "What ails him? One would think he had never set eyes on us before."

He recovered, but showed such hesitation in his manner as made me sure that there was something wrong.

"You would see my lord?" he said. "His lordship is abroad this evening."

"Where can we find him, Thomas?" I asked. "Our business with him is urgent."

He hesitated again.

"I know where he is," he replied at last. "He went to the Royal Chocolate House, in St. James' Street, intending to go afterwards to the Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. But he met some friends, who have taken him instead to Covent Garden, to the house kept by one Denton."

"What is the house kept for?" I asked. "And can ladies get in?"

"It is kept for music, dancing, supper, and gambling. Ladies can go in if they have the pass-word."

"But how can we get the pass-word? Can we not send for my lord?"

Thomas shook his head. Then he considered, and presently said that he might be able to get us the pass-word, because the porter was a friend of his. He also assured us that though the company was not entirely what I might wish, we need be under no apprehensions of ill-usage or insult; and that ladies, especially court ladies, often put on a hood and mask, and so disguised, went to this house, or to Cupid's Gardens, or the Folly on the Thames, for a frolic—where they could see without being seen, and watch their lovers or their husbands.

Truly, it seemed a chance. If my lord was what this creature had told his confederate, now was the time to find him out; if not, then we had proof to the contrary in our own hands.

So, with Thomas on the box beside the coachman, we drove to Covent Garden—oh! the crowded, dirty place with its piles of cabbage-stalks!—and presently stopped at a door where there was no light. We got down and told the coachman to wait for half an hour. Then Thomas knocked gently, and the door was opened by one of the biggest and most ferocious-looking fellows I ever saw. After a little parley, he let us in, and called up the stairs, whereupon another tall bully appeared, bearing a light.

"This way, ladies," he said. "Up the stairs. Have no fear. There is goodly company here to-night."

There was, indeed, a goodly company. Many ladies were present, all of them like ourselves, with hoods and masks; some alone, but mostly in pairs. They walked about the rooms, which were en suite, and all brilliantly lit with wax candles, talking incessantly to the men, some of whom they addressed by name. The men seemed

to consist almost of the very rich class, so splendid were their laced ruffles and their coats; and upon their faces there was mostly that assured look which one never finds except among gentleman whose position and rank cannot be questioned. It is not pride, nor is it arrogance; it is simply the satisfaction which naturally grows upon one who can without challenge stand among the first, who is born to command, and who from childhood upwards is obeyed. I knew the look well, because the gentlemen of Virginia, born upon their plantations, and brought up among their convict servants and their black slaves, carried it in their faces, just as Lord Earlesley carried it, and for the same reason. Foolish little Jenny used to tell me that I bore myself like a queen. That was her way of saying that I inherited the same expression of face which had been worn by my father.

In the first room there was a band of music, which was playing a minuet as we entered. Four couples were dancing. I looked hurriedly to see if my lord was among them, but he was not. It was a foolish girl's jealousy. Why should he not dance if the fancy took him? We passed on, my nurse and I, while many a curious look was turned upon us, to the next room. Here there was supper laid out, with bottles of Port, Malmssey, and Bordeaux in plenty, apparently free for all comers. But no one as yet was eating or drinking. Then we came to the third room, where there were tables set with cards and counters and parties were sitting at them playing ombre and quadrille, just as madam at home, at that same time, was playing with her friends. Lastly, there was the fourth room. And this was crowded. For here they were gambling indeed. At a table sat one who held the bank; he played against all; a pile of gold was before him; a man stood on either side of him raking in the money and paying it out; round the table were clustered a group of players, men and women. Several of the women had discarded their masks and thrown back their hoods; one or

two were young and pretty, most of them were old or middle-aged ; but all alike, men and women, had stamped upon their faces the same eager look—that of the gambler. It is anxious, it is expectant, it is hopeful, yet it is despairing, because at heart there is no gamester but knows that in the end ruin awaits him.

I looked hurriedly round the tables. Lord Eardesley was not playing at any. But I saw him presently standing beside one of the doors, in company with a gentleman not young, whose star and ribbon, as well as his splendid apparel, spoke his high rank.

I moved nearer to him and listened. He looked handsome and noble, my love, and there was no trace in his clear eyes and lofty brow of the profligacy, drink and gambling with which my guardian charged him,

"Come," said his companion. "Shall we, for half an hour, try fortune?"

But Lord Eardesley shook his head.

"I think," he said, "that my House has had enough of the green table. You know that I never play."

His friend ceased to press him, and joined the throng at the table.

Lord Eardesley watched the play a little, and then, as if it had little interest for him, he began to walk through the rooms.

I would have followed him, but Alice touched my arm and pointed to another figure at the table.

Heavens! It was Christopher March. He was attired in a brave show of scarlet and silk, with a sword at his side, a wig fully equal to any other in the room, and laced ruffles very fine indeed. And he was gaming with a sort of madness. I watched him lose time after time, yet he never ceased to play ; his eyes were lit with a fire of anxiety ; his cheeks were flushed ; his hands trembled ; he played on with a sort of rapture. Once he turned round suddenly and saw Lord Eardesley. Then he started and half sprang from his seat ; but the voice of the banker

called him back and he turned round again, preferring play to revenge.

"What do you make of this Aliee?" I asked.

"This will be something new to tell the alderman," she said. "Do not let his lordship go before you can speak with him."

One moment I waited, because I saw another familiar face. There sat Jenny's Lysander.

He was winning. His sharp and mean little features were full of satisfaction as he raked in the money. He seemed, too, to be winning a great deal.

"Jenny," I thought, "this will be something new for you. Lysander gambles."

Then I hastened after Lord Eardesley. The black look of hatred which shot out of Christopher's eyes when they turned upon his enemy, as he, perhaps, thought him, warned me that the man Thomas had spoken the truth, and that Christopher would do him a hurt, if he could. I did not want to see my lord mixed up in a vulgar brawl at a common gaming house, got up by a City clerk.

Alice it was who accosted him.

"My lord," she said, in a low voice, "this is not a wholesome air for you. Better leave it."

He looked surprised. He did not recognize her voice.

"Why not wholesome, fair incognita?"

"Because, first, Mistress Carellis would not like it."

"What do you know of Mistress Carellis?"

"Come with me," she said, "and I will show you—what it will please your lordship to see."

I had descended the stairs, and was waiting. We went out, all three together. I got into the carriage and took off my mask.

"Nelly!" he cried, springing into the coach after me. "My Nelly! Here!"

"It is for your sake," I said. "There is mischief brewing against you."

"What mischief?"

"First tell me—nay, my lord, leave my hands alone. This is serious. Tell me why it is that you send your servant to the alderman thrice a week for money?"

He started at this.

"Thrice a week! Nelly, I have not asked the alderman for money these three months."

This was a pretty discovery of villainy. Then, who had forged the letters and drafts?

The man who brought them?

Alice said he could not read. We looked at each other, and I whispered, "Christopher March."

On the way back, my lord sitting beside me, I told him how we had detected his servant giving false information at the suborning of Christopher March: how the man had warned us against him, and how the alderman was grieved at paying those daily drafts.

"As for the drafts," said my lord, "there has been some grievous forgery. I will call on the alderman to-morrow. As for the factor, Christopher March, why does he seek my injury?"

"Because—oh, my lord! indeed, I gave him no encouragement—because he dared to fall in love with—a person whom you have thought worthy of your own love."

The drivers cursed and swore at each other; the rain fell; the sign-boards groaned; the people crowded and pressed in the narrow ways; the link-boys ran by shouting.

I heeded not the noise or crowd; for I had taken my love away from the place where his enemy might harm him, and he was sitting beside me, and I was ready to clear his character.

We parted at the alderman's door. The adventure had taken altogether about two hours; and, on my return to the party, I discovered that, as I had hoped, my absence had not been remarked. Only two hours, and yet how much had happened! But who could tell that my cheek was glowing with my lover's kiss, and

my eyes were bright with the fruition of hope deferred? The ladies were playing as eagerly as the company I had left at Dunton's house in Covent Garden. Outside the ring were sitting, in close conversation, Jenny and a girl who was always much disliked by me, because I never heard her talk of anything, so far as I can remember, but lovers, love-letters, love-making, and so forth. I would not be hard upon the girl, and in the end I heard that she married a substantial merchant, and brought up a large family in honest and God-fearing fashion. And truly, when a girl (as was her case) has been flouted and slighted by elder sisters and thoughtless brothers, the pleasure of finding herself so considerable a person as to engage the whole affection of a gallant gentleman is so great, that we may partly excuse this continual longing to obtain so rich a blessing.

I was greatly excited and out of myself, as they say, by what had happened. Yet I could but not observe that Jenny had red eyes, as if she had been crying. So I sat down beside her, and took her hand in mine.

"What is it, Jenny, my dear?" I asked.

She looked at me sorrowfully, and her eyes filled with tears again. Then she turned away her head and did not answer.

"She will soon recover," said her confidante, with a meaning smile. "Lovers' quarrels are but the renewing of love."

After our guests departed, Jenny ran away quickly, so that her mother might not notice her eyes. But madam was too full of the various fortunes of the evening to heed her, and she kept me waiting half an hour while she fought the battles over again.



CHAPTER VI.

A DAY OF FATE.



THE morrow was the day of fate. Could one read the future, each day would be a day of fate, full of issues important and eventful. But just as we cannot foresee the future so we forgot the lesser links in the chain of the past. Methinks he who would prophesy must first be able to remember.

In the morning Alice began to talk about the forged drafts. She said that, considering everything, how Christopher March was a gambler, how he hated my lord, and how he knew, or had some power over, Thomas Marigold, she could have no doubt that he, and none but he, was the forger. Indeed, who else could it be? But the difficulty would be to bring it home to him and prove it.

My lord was to call upon the alderman at twelve. A little before noon I went to the counting-house and found my guardian sitting, as usual, before books and papers, but with his foot still bandaged. His gout had not left him.

"My dear," he said kindly, "I am always glad to see you here. Sit down and let us talk. Nay, the papers can wait. Did you have a merry party last night?"

"Why, truly, sir," I replied, "I do not play at cards. But the ladies seemed to enjoy their game."



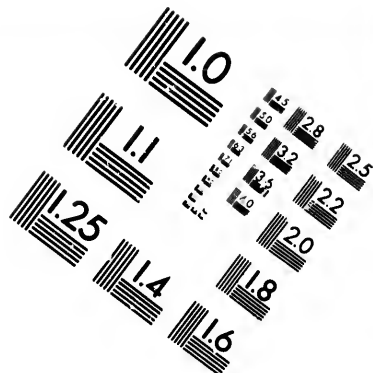
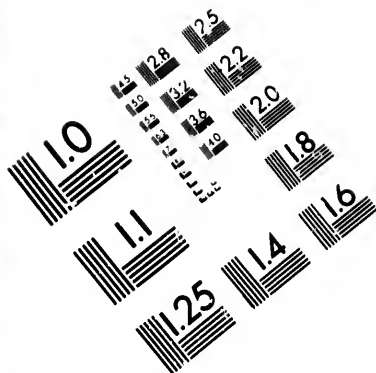
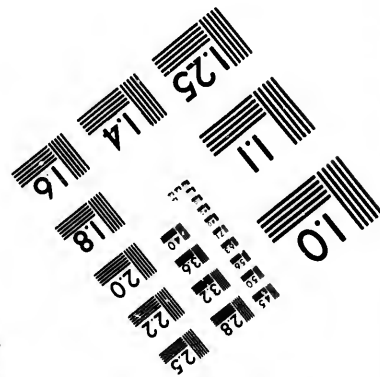
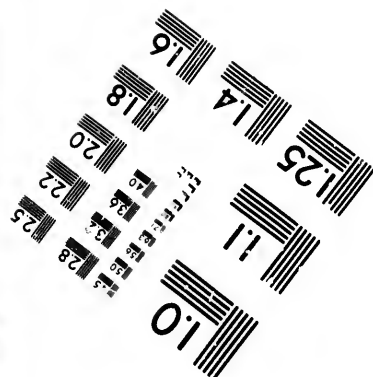
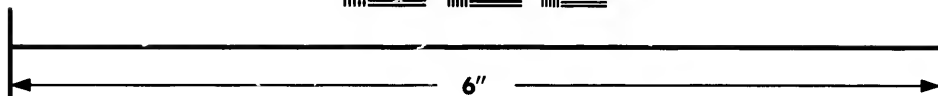
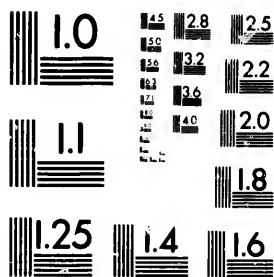


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"Ay," he said, with a cloud over his face. "Those who won doubtless enjoyed their game. Do not play cards, girl. Never play cards. You have an example in"—I thought he was going to say, "my own wife," but he did not—"in my Lord Eardesley."

"It is of him that I would speak with you this morning, sir," I said.

"Nay, Elinor. There lacks but a little while, a twelve-month or so, of the time when you will pass out of your minority. Let us leave your spendthrift lord till then. I have said my say and cannot alter it."

"Nevertheless, sir," I said, laughing, for I could very well afford to be merry now; "nevertheless I prophesy that you will alter your say before another half hour is over."

"Say you so, lass? Why, then, let us wait. Where lies the wind now?"

"Lord Eardesley is coming to see you, sir, at twelve of the clock. You will not refuse to see him."

"Not if he brings with him anything beyond his word."

"Alas! sir. Can you not trust the word of a noble man?"

The alderman shook his head but said nothing. And just then, as all the clocks began to strike twelvetogether, and there arose the mighty clamour which betokens the dinner-hour of all the craftsmen, lightermen, dock labourers, boatmen, porters, and carters who throng about Tower Hill, Christopher March opened the door and announced the arrival of his lordship. I snatched a glance at Christopher's face; nothing that would recall the eager, frantic gambler of last night; a calm, sober air such as befits an honest factor with conscience at ease. Yet I thought his cheek was pale and his eyes anxious.

"I hope," said my lord, "that all is well with my old friend."

"No," replied the alderman; "all is ill. I doubt if we shall ever make things well again between your lordship

and myself. Yet my ward will have it that you have an important communication to make."

"Mr. Alderman," Lord Eardesley said, "I have many things to say. But first because Mistress Elinor Carellis has told me a thing which surprised me greatly, let me know when last you honoured any draft of mine."

"Surely," said the alderman, "yesterday morning, and the day before, and twice last week, and I think three times the week before last——"

"Stop. The last draft I sent to you for cash was more than two months ago."

"What?" cried the alderman. "Say that again."

"I repeat that the last time I drew upon you for money was more than two months ago."

"Then there has been villainy. Elinor, go call Christopher March. Christopher," he cried, in quick and peremptory tones, "my lord's book, and quickly; and all his latest drafts, all his drafts of the last six months. Quick, I say."

The clerk obeyed, and brought the books, standing beside his master as if ready to answer questions. But his hands trembled and his eyes were dropped.

The alderman seemed changed suddenly. He, the most gentle of men, was now rough, quick, and even rude.

"Now, my lord," he said, snatching the drafts from Christopher's hands. "We shall see. Your man brought the drafts and received the money. Where is he?"

"Gone. He went away, without notice, last night."

"That is suspicious. Could he write?"

"No. He was a common country lad, out of Gloucestershire, he said."

"Well, then, here are the drafts, which we duly honoured and cashed. Look at them all, my lord."

Lord Eardesley looked them through. The earlier ones he laid aside. Those dated during the last eight weeks he put together in a separate pile.

"There" he said, "are the forged drafts."

They represented the sum of two thousand and fifty pounds, so that the moneys belonging to Lord Eardesley still in the alderman's hands now amounted to no more than three hundred pounds and some odd shillings.

"I wonder," said my lord, showing one to the alderman, "that so clumsy a cheat was not suspected."

"Why, indeed," the alderman was looking at the paper, "it is not like your lordship's writing. Christopher, you received and opened the letters. Had you no suspicion?"

"I looked at the signature, sir," replied the clerk; and if you will look at that carefully, I think you will agree with me that it is so like his lordship's writing as to deceive anyone."

"Let me look," I cried. "My lord, I have certain letters of yours by me which no one, I think, will deny to be your own." In fact there were then lying in my bosom a collection of the sweetest letters ever received by lovesick maid. I pulled them forth, and, taking one opened it and laid it beside the draft. "There my guardian," I said, "compare the two."

There was no comparison possible, because in the forged draft the body of the document was not in the least like Lord Eardesley's handwriting, and the signature alone had been imitated, but this so clumsily that even the slightest acquaintance with his hand should have been enough to detect the forgery."

"Why," said the alderman, "this is palpable. This is so gross a forgery that even—— Christopher March hast, thou taken leave of thy senses?"

"With submission, sir," said Christopher, speaking slowly and steadily, "am I to blame? I am imperfectly acquainted with my lord's hand; I received the letters from his servant: I opened them to save you trouble——"

"Ay, ay," said the merchant. "You did your best Christopher, no doubt. The house has been robbed, not you my lord. The house must bear this loss."

"Surely my kind old friend," Lord Eardesley went on, "you might have asked yourself for what purpose I wanted these constant supplies, for what extravagance and follies they were required."

"Alas! I knew too well. They were wanted, I thought, to repair your losses at the gaming-table."

Then I spoke.

"The alderman has been greatly deceived, Geoffrey, in this as in other things. I know that your servant, Thomas Marigold, suborned by a person who was also, I believe, the forger of these drafts"—here I glanced at Christopher, and his eyes, full of fearful curiosity, met mine for a moment before they fell again—"reported in the alderman's hearing, day after day, tales of drunkenness, gambling, and other wickednesses such as gentlemen practise who forget their Christian profession. And these stories he invented to suit the purpose of this other man with whom he shared the proceeds of the crime."

"We seem to be surrounded by villains," said the alderman. "Speak, Christopher, what do you know?"

"Nothing, sir. I suspected nothing. It is true that the man told me in your hearing the stories of his lordship's alleged profligacy."

"He did. But those other reports. Why, Christopher, 'twas you yourself brought them."

Lord Eardesley drew himself up, and turned towards the clerk, who was trying his utmost to preserve an appearance of composure.

"You—you spread reports about me? Pray, Master Clerk, what business have you with me?"

"None, my lord. Nor am I a carrier of tales. I but answered a question of the alderman's, and told him what had been said at the coffee-house."

Then my lord recollected what I had told him, that it was none other than Christopher March himself who had suborned his man, and was proposing to do himself some harm.

"Well," he said, turning it off for the time, "there will be something to be said another time between you and me, Master March."

"Mr. Alderman," I struck in, fearful that the villain should be too soon accused of the crime. "Let us address ourselves to the forgery. The servant was but the tool. We want to find the instigator and principal." The papers were lying close to the hand of the clerk. I snatched them up. "We must find the man who wrote the drafts; it matters little who presented them. I venture to advise that the alderman initials every one of them, and that my lord keeps them, and carries them about. It will not be difficult," I said this with an air of confidence, "to find out the man who wrote them."

"You are right, my child," said the alderman. "I will not keep those papers; Lord Eardesley shall have them, with my name to each. My lord, I confess to you that my opinion was formed by the bad reports brought to me by Christopher March, and by the tales I heard your servant tell, and by the rapidity with which your fortune was wasting away."

"Nay," said Geoffrey; "surely you should have known me better, who have known me so long. Do I look like a drunkard? Hath my face the open and manifest signs, legible to all the world, which belong to the man who drinks much wine? Believe, me, sir, on the honour of a peer, that I have never in my life touched cards or played with dice."

"I believe you," said the alderman, holding out his hand.

"If," interrupted Christopher, in a strange strident voice, "if Mistress Elinor thinks it easy to find the forger, she would perhaps kindly advise us which way to begin, for I confess I am at fault."

"You have to find out, Christopher March, in the first place a man who thinks he has an object to gain in robbing or inflicting other injury on Lord Eardesley; he must

'next' be one who had some previous friendship with the servant; he must be a man in want of money for his own secret vices; he must be wicked enough to conceive and bold enough to carry out so vile a plot. Indeed, I could lay my hand on such a man."

He lifted his face, and tried to meet my gaze, but he could not.

"All this helps nothing," he said.

"Well, Christopher," said the alderman. "Go now, and think, or consult a lawyer—leave me with his lordship."

Christopher took his departure. I longed to tell the alderman what we knew, where we had seen his clerk, and what we suspected; but I refrained. I thought the next day would do as well. Besides, my lord turned the talk away.

"Let us leave the forgeries awhile," he said. "Mr. Alderman, I have to speak of other things. Again I have the honour to ask your consent to marry your ward. You have seen that the worst accusations are false. Believe that the others are as unfounded and as slanderous."

"I cannot choose," said the alderman, "but believe. My lord, as the guardian of Mistress Elinor, I confide her to your care and protection."

He sat upright in his chair, and cleared his voice. We knew what was coming. On any occasion of ceremony and importance a London citizen loves to deliver an appropriate discourse. It is a goodly custom and laudable, inasmuch as it enables every man to magnify his own office and dignity. Now, the best safeguard against vice is, methinks, respect of oneself.

"My Lord Eardesley," he began, "and Elinor Carellis, my ward. The condition of matrimony (wherein the bond of love should be, from each to either, equal and lasting; and wherein the one should be well assured of the other's virtue and goodness) hath been specially designed by Heaven for the solace and happiness of the human race. Wherefore, if——"

Here he was interrupted by an admonition in the great toe, which demanded all his attention. He stopped, turned purple and even black in the cheeks, and presently thundered forth a volley of oaths, which seemed to linger about the corners of the room, and echoed from the walls, so that it was like a very tempest. When he recovered, the thread of his discourse was lost, and he could only murmur, lying back on his pillows, exhausted with his efforts: "Take her, my lord, and make her happy." Then he whispered, with the least little nod of his head in the direction of the door: "And never let her play cards."

Thus we were betrothed.

Alas! This day, which should have been the first of many happy days, proved the beginning of our calamities.

Had I not been blinded by my own great joy, I should have told the alderman all that we knew of Christopher March; but I had not the heart; and, besides, Alice was going to find out more about him, so that we should have overwhelming proof of his hypocrisy. Yet, had I spoken, some, at least, of our misfortunes might have been averted. In those events which are manifestly strokes of Providence, it is vain to mete out praise or blame to those who are the instruments of Divine justice. I was young; I was loved; I was affianced. What girl on such a day could think of aught else?

We left the alderman, and sought madam, to whom I presented my lord as my accepted lover. The good lady, who, in all but her passion for cards, was a most kind and unselfish woman, rejoiced with us, and wished us happiness, and then, by means of a pack of cards, told us our fortunes. The most important part of it was, that after surmounting certain obstacles and checks placed in our way by a dark man, we should undertake a long voyage, and meet with great prosperity ever after.

It is, indeed, strange how the chance disposition of foolish cards enables some to read the future. The dark man could be none other than Christopher. We had, immedi-

ately after our betrothal, such checks and hindrances as fall to the lot of few; we did make a long voyage; and we have enjoyed prosperity and increase. Yet it is against the divine ordinance to enquire of any oracle, and I cannot but think the punishment of witches in New England, of which so much has been said, was necessary, albeit severe.

Then Jenny came downstairs, and we had to tell her. She was very pale, and had dark rims round her eyes, with traces of tears. She fell on my neck and kissed me, and burst out crying.

"Why, Jenny, foolish child," I said; "why do you cry?"

"Oh, Nelly! I cry because I am glad for you and sorry for myself. Nelly, Nelly, I am a wretch."

I could not understand, but it was not the time to press her, and nothing would serve my lord but that we should all drive to his lodgings, there to dine, and afterwards to get such amusements as the town at that season afforded. Jenny excused herself, saying that she had a headache, and could not go. We left her at home, therefore, and took a coach—madam, my lord, and I. On the way we stopped at a goldsmith's, where Geoffrey presented me with a beautiful emerald ring, and so to his lodging in Bury Street.

Our entertainment was simple; the dinner being sent over from a tavern. Madam was in high spirits and talked and laughed. I was glad of this, because my heart was too full for talk. After dinner we walked in the Park, which was crowded with a collection of ladies of quality, beaux, gallants, and courtiers, with ragamuffins, pickpockets, girls selling flowers, women with curds-and-whey, soldiers, grave clergymen, solemn physicians, members of parliament, beggars, and common thieves. Everybody looked at us as we passed along with the stream of people. I was afraid there was something wrong with my dress, for, indeed, though I had been in London so long, I

was still somewhat distrustful when we went abroad. But Geoffrey said they stared at my face and figure, not at my dress. Many other pleasant things he said that day which I pass over. After the promenade in the park, which I should have liked better had I been alone with him, we went back to his lodgings; here a dish of tea was waiting for us; and after tea we went to the theatre in the Haymarket. The play was—but I forget play, actors, and everything. I sat in a dream, thinking of what had happened; wondering if it were true, and fearing that I did not possess attractions enough to fix the affections of so handsome, gallant, and noble a lover as he who sat by my side.

At last it ended, and we were on our way home. The streets were crowded with people—link-boys ran up and down; the coaches rumbled along the way; we passed out of the broad Strand into narrow Fleet Street, and in a few minutes were set down in Tower Hill, at the door of the alderman's house. My lord paid the man, who drove off, and we stood at our door waiting for it to be opened. It was about half-past eleven, or a little before midnight; the sky was clear, and there was no darkness—only twilight.

At that hour Tower Hill is comparatively deserted; there was no one in the street. Yet in the darkness of a pent-house higher up the Hill I saw the forms of two men lurking, and a thought of uneasiness crossed my heart. But only for a moment.

Madam went in as the door was opened; we stood outside, and my lord took my hand and held it.

"Will my Nelly, my princess of Virginia, always trust her love?" he whispered.

"Always and always," I replied. "Oh, who am I, I ask again and again, that you should love me so?"

"You are the dearest girl in all the world," he said kissing my hands. "You are my own sweet Nelly."

He drew me towards him by both my hands and kissed my lips. Then he tore himself away and left me. The maid—I hoped she had not seen the lover-like farewell—held the door for me. I stepped forward; then, moved by the impulse of love, I turned my head to catch a last glimpse of my betrothed. He was striding with manly steps over the stones. When he was just at the turning which led from Tower Hill, I saw the two men whose figures I had discerned beneath the pent-house rush out upon him, and I saw the gleam of steel in their hands. I rushed down the steps and along the road, crying "Geoffrey, Geoffrey! Help, help! They will murder him!"

It was my voice, thank God for ever, which saved his life, else he had been stabbed in the back. He turned, saw his assailants, and in a moment drew his sword and was on guard. As I still ran and cried, I saw his sword flashing in the moonlight, and one man fell; but his foot slipped as I reached him. I threw myself before him, and while my arms were thrown about his neck, the thrust which would have pierced him to the heart pierced mine instead.

That moment will live for ever in my memory. As the cruel cold steel ran through me I saw that the wounded man, whose mask had fallen off, was Thomas Marigold, and the other, my murderer, whom I knew, although he was masked, by his figure, his dress, his voice—as he cried out on seeing me—was none other than Christopher March. He fled at once, and was lost in the dark and winding lanes of the city.

They carried me home, Geoffrey and the maid, and sent for a surgeon. The alderman and madam wept and cried over me; Alice had me carried to my own bed, and cut away my dress—that bravery of silvergauze and crimson satin and lace in which I had been so fine all day—and tried to staunch the blood, while my lord bathed my face and whispered prayers until the surgeon came and turned him out.

He was a pompous man in an immense wig. After he had probed the wound and applied some lint, and instructed the nurse in other matters, he descended and found the whole household, servants, and all, waiting to hear his judgment.

"She will live," he said, speaking like an oracle, "through the night, I doubt not. In the morning inflammation will set in, and she will die."

They all burst into tears and lamentations.

"Where is Jenny?" cried the madam. "Go, call her, one of you. Let her come down and weep with us."

"Nay," said the alderman; "what use? Let her sleep on. As for my lord and me, we will wait with this learned gentleman. Do you all go to bed."

But no one went to bed that night.

Presently there was a knocking at the door. It was a pair of constables bringing with them a wounded man.

"He will be brought here, sir," they explained to the alderman. "We know not if your worship knows him."

"Know him!" cried Lord Eardelesley, "Why it is my own man, Thomas. You, too, among the murderers?"

"Yes, my lord," said the man, whose face was pale with death. "I'd rather help you to die than see myself hung. There was all them forgeries in your pocket."

"Who was the forger?" asked his master.

The fellow was silent.

"Man!" said the alderman; "you are on the brink of eternity. Let it be reckoned as proof of a death-bed repentance that you give up the name of the forger."

Thomas laughed. At the point of death he laughed. But it was a laughter without merriment.

"Honour among thieves," he said. "Let me see the woman, Mistress Carellis's nurse. I want to speak with her."

She would not leave my bed. But the doctor promised that if a change took place she should be called. And then she came slowly downstairs.

"Alas!" she cried, "that you should be a murderer, and that you should murder the innocent young lady."

"I did not," he said. "I tried to kill my lord, to save my own neck. And he hath killed me. So am I sped."

"And the other man! Who was he?"

"Tell me first," he said, "who you are, and how you know me for Canvas Dick?"

She bent over him and whispered:

"I was once, long ago, a woman of your gang. I was Kate Collyer."

"Ay!" he murmured, his face feebly lighted up. "I remember you now, Kate Collyer!"

"And who was the other murderer?" she repeated.

"He was the forger, of course; he was the villain who pushed me on; he threatened to betray me; he was the man who took all the money; he spent it where he spent his master's money—in the gaming-house, and lost it there. He has boasted to me that he has ruined you all—he is——"

"Christopher March?" asked my nurse.

"You've guessed it, Kate. But you needn't be too proud of it, now you do know it, although he is your own son."

"My son! Christopher March, my son!"

"'Tis true, Kate. Little Jack Collyer that was: the cleverest and safest young thief that ever cracked a crib, even before you was lagged, and cleverer since. Your son, Kate. Lift up my head." His voice sank. "I've cheated Tyburn tree. Yes, I never—could—abide—the—thought—of that—that cart—and—that—dance upon nothing."

His head fell back, and he was dead. Alice took no heed; her hands were clenched, and she murmured:

"The hand of God is heavy upon me—My son! my son!"



CHAPTEER VII.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.



VHIS, indeed, was a most dreadful discovery. Yet it was no time for poor Alice to sit and weep or think about her son. She had that gift, denied to men, and granted only to women, which enables them to repress and drive back for the time one grief, so that it shall not hinder the discharge of the present duty. Therefore my nurse forced herself to leave the matter for the time, and, after calling to the constables to remove the dead man, she mounted the stairs and returned to the chamber where I lay unconscious, and under the surgeon's hands.

The wound was right through the body from the back under the left shoulder, and when I recovered from the swoon I began to feel such tortures of pain as I did not believe were possible for the body to endure, and yet to live. For the passage made by the sword was like a rod of red hot iron.

All that night I lay and suffered, while Alice watched by the bedside, and my lord, the alderman, and madam, remained below, waiting for news. The news which the surgeon brought from time to time was the worst possible. "Inflammation," he said, "has set in with violent pain. It should be followed by fever: that will produce delirium: death will follow."

At break of day, when I was a little quieter, Alice went to the still-room and came back bearing a basket full of simples. I was not yet light-headed, and I knew that she was going to take me out of the doctor's hands and nurse me herself with the herbs in which all country women put their trust. She turned the contents of the basket upon the table.

"Patience, my dear, patience. Oh! patience for a little while, my pretty lamb. Here is St John's wort, and here is knap-weed to lay in the open wound, and plantains to close it up, and blood-wort if the knap-weed fails; and here is self-heal, but I doubt if it is strong enough; and comfrey, which never fails, and strong kiss-me-quick. Courage, my pretty. We have here what is better than all the 'pothecaries' shops."

Then I found that the pain was growing greater than I could bear, and I called upon my nurse to tear off the bandage and let me die. And then some good angel came to my bedside and helped me up and carried me away—far—far away—to sweet Virginia.

I was back on the old plantation. It was Sunday morning, and we were all going to church—my father, my mother, my nurse, and I, the convicts standing in a line to let his honour pass: the negroes chattering and grinning, who understood, poor souls! little enough of the service they were going to hear, but yet could sing the psalms, having sweet voices, and ears which caught the tune correctly; and in the pine wood pulpit was our convict-chaplain, proclaiming aloud that we—meaning everybody outside his honour's pew—were all miserable sinners.

How long I remained there I know not, nor have I any further recollection of what I saw in my lightheadedness, but the days went on and I was insensible. The tumult of Tower Hill began at daybreak and subsided soon after midnight, but I heard nothing. Every day the doctor said I should probably die before the fall of night; every day the nurse threw away the medicines which he

brought and went on with her simples, the blue succory infusion which drives away fever, pimpernel to clear the brain, spearmint for the faintness, and borage to strengthen the feeble heart. All that time my lover remained in the house, and was with me day and night, whenever the nurse would let him come to the sick room and sit awhile beside the pale creature with demented brain, who chattered, and wandered, and knew not what she said.

It was many days before my reason came back to me, and then I was weak and helpless indeed; though my nurse multiplied her infusions of galyngale for internal strength, and tea of thyme for headache, and snakeweed to keep me safe from infection, which is fatal to poor creatures just recovering from illness. Would I could describe the joy and thankfulness which I felt when, on coming to my senses, I found my lover by my bedside, and saw by his eyes that he had been weeping for me.

No one else was in the room. He thought I was sleeping. When he saw that my eyes were open, he thought I was still in my lightheadedness, about to prattle all things that have no sense. First of all I did not understand things, though I knew him, and wondered where I was, and how I came to be lying there, and he to be in my room. Then it all came back to me little by little, the attack upon my lover and my wound.

"Geoffrey," I whispered, "are you watching over me?"

He was like one who knows not what to say when he found that I was indeed in my right mind. But he had sense to command himself, and bade me, while he tenderly kissed my lips, keep silence, and be quiet. Then he thanked God solemnly, for my lord was never one of those men who think they honour themselves and gain credit among their fellows by dishonouring their Creator. And then he left me, and in a moment my nurse came back, and seeing that I was in my senses again, and that the fever had left me—hands and brow being cool and moist—she, too, burst into a crying for thankfulness, and fell to

kissing my hands and cheeks. Oh, poor woman! Because, now that my trouble was over, her own was to begin. I slept well that night, and next morning was stronger, and able to take broth and other things which my nurse got for me. Presently I remembered Jenny, and asked that she might be brought to see me.

Then Alice changed colour and pretended not to hear; and when I repeated my question, she said:

"Oh! Mistress Jenny is not at home. She has gone abroad on a visit."

With that I was fain to be content, although I saw that something had happened, and besides being still weak and faint, was glad to forego further questions and go to sleep again.

Next day, I asked after madam, and again my nurse became confused, and put me off.

This set me wondering. It was strange, indeed, that neither Jenny nor her mother came to see me, and no message from the alderman. Yet a week passed; and it was not till I was quite well enough to hear any kind of news, however bad, that my lord entreated my permission for him to tell me things which, he said gravely and grievously affected both himself and me,

He was, indeed, very grave, and told me the story little by little, fearful lest too many dreadful events at the same time might bring back my illness. Nor was it till many days afterwards that I was able to put every thing together, and to understand it all.

When the alderman, one of the most benevolent and charitable citizens of London, received the boy whom he found starving with hunger and cold (as seemed from his pretending) on his door step, he prepared for himself, even by this most Christian act, his own absolute and hopeless ruin. The boy, as I have said, rapidly received instruction, and proved himself a lad of astonishing quick parts, with great industry, sober habits, and respectful, obedient behaviour. The alderman, who made haste to put the boy

into his counting-house, thought he had never before been blessed with a servant more honest, more willing, and more capable; therefore he advanced him rapidly; and when his own confidential clerk and chief factor died, he put the young man, then about twenty-five years of age, into his place.

Christopher March had all the keys, knew of all the securities, bills, drafts, mortgages, ventures, debts, and profit of the house; he opened the letters, received the customers, and carried on the correspondence. So blind, in short did the alderman become; that he ceased, for the most part, to carry on his business himself, and was generally content with receiving his clerk's report.

The house held the private fortunes of many gentlemen of Virginia, besides that of my late father; it also held in trust the fortune of the Lord Eardesley, as we have seen, and of many widows, orphans, and poor pensioners, who had nothing to depend upon but the integrity of the alderman. Of, that, indeed there never was any doubt. The business of the house, again, was large, and the income of the alderman substantial. I know not what was the amount of his savings, but I have been well assured that there were few merchants even in the great and prosperous city of London who surpassed him in fortune. His condition would have been more splendid, but for the thousand charitable actions which he continually practised. However, there was a capital stock in the alderman's hands, including that accumulated by his own thrift, the principal employed in his business, and the moneys entrusted to him, amounting to near a quarter million of money.

There was one thing that Christopher March could not do. He might persuade his master to ventures; he might deceive him with false reports; but he could never persuade him to have aught to do with South Sea stock, nor could he make him consent to sign papers without first learning and approving their contents. Therefore, as Geoffrey told me, every one of the receipts, agreements

and papers of advance, with regard to South Sea stock, in the counting-house were forgeries. Nor could there be any reasonable doubt as to the forgeries in the sale and transfer of mortgages and securities. Forgeries! For two or three years, or perhaps more, this snake in the grass, this adder who turned to bite his benefactor's hand, had been secretly raising money by forging his master's signature to every kind of document by which money could be raised. No one knew what had become of the money. I, however, who had seen him at the gaming-table could make a shrewder guess than most. The man had gamed it all away. One fraud leads to another—one forgery to many; by the time that I arrived in England his last chance must have been by some successful night at play, or by some financial stroke, to win enough to pay back the moneys he had stolen, and to redeem the forged documents. It was a desperate chance, but gamblers live on desperate chances. Not to be in danger of daily ruin would be, to some men, a life without chance and variety.

I suppose this is the reason why men, who might otherwise have been patient and peaceful citizens, choose to become pirates, highwaymen, volunteers in great armies, or rovers among the wild Indian tribes of America.

When the books of the house were placed in the hands of accountants skilled in examining and detecting frauds, it was discovered that, not only were these robberies of many years' standing, with the falsifying of accounts, and the forgery of authority given under the alderman's own hand, but that during the excitement of the late few months, Christopher March, under cover of his forgeries, had been trading day after day, in South Sea stock, in bubble companies, and in any kind of reckless speculation. He had lent money for short terms of a week or fortnight on South Sea stock; he had bought the stock on account of his master; he held shares in a dozen schemes, each of which pretended to be able by itself to make the fortune of the smallest shareholder; there was no project so

wild and visionary, but that he must invest in it. Now, I do not believe that Christopher March was so foolish as to believe that his shares were going to make his fortune. Not at all; he was impelled into the struggle for shares by the desire to prey upon his fellow-creatures. They were like silly sheep; he was the wolf. He would sell his shares again when the price went up.

There were no methods of deception which were not tried by this wicked man. He received moneys and kept no account; he pretended to pay money, and put it in his pocket; the liabilities of the house remained unpaid, while the poor alderman was cheated by the books which told a lying tale; ships which brought rich cargoes were omitted in the books; great sales were not entered; and because Christopher March was the only man who in the later days approached the master, no one knew, no one suspected, what was being done; and those who thought there was something wrong in the house, once so respectable and of such tried integrity, attributed it to the speculation and madness of the hour, and hoped that Benjamin Medleycott would come well out of it.

None to speak to the old man; not one to warn him; none to remonstrate on the madness of his supposed investments—truly it was pitiful. And he, and all of us, living in a fool's paradise having no suspicion, not the least. We girls occupied with our little love affairs, madam with her cards, and the whole house rushing headlong to ruin.

The trouble began with my wound. Next day, when the alderman called his household together for morning prayers, Jenny did not appear with the rest. Her mother sent to call her, for a lazy lie-a-bed. The maid came running down stairs, scared and pale—Mistress Jenny had not slept in her bed all night. A note was found lying on the pillow. "Dear parents," said poor silly Jenny, "I hope you will forgive me, for I have gone off with my Lysander. Your affectionate daughter."

There were no prayers, and no breakfast either, that morning. The alderman said nothing, but went to his counting-house, without even asking who Lysander was, and then sat down in great unhappiness. And truly it was a cruel thing of Jenny thus to abuse the love and confidence of a father who had ever treated her with so much indulgence and affection.

"My ward," he said presently to Christopher March, "is lying at the point of death, being murdered by a villain. My daughter has left me. What is the news with you, man, that you look so pale?"

"Am I pale, sir?" asked Christopher. "It is, perhaps, the sudden shock of your news. Mistress Jenny gone, sir? With whom?"

"I know not. That is her concern. Ask me no questions, Christopher. Let us to business. We build our estates and pile up our gold, and we know not who shall spend it."

Alas! poor man! His own gold had been already spent.

"Well"—he tried to speak as if he were no longer concerned about his daughter—"and what about the great madness?"

"The stock is falling, sir," said Christopher. "There is a run upon it. It was yesterday morning at six hundred, and is now at two hundred and ninety. Yet I cannot but think it will recover."

"Recover!" echoed the alderman. "Can a burst bladder recover its shape? Can a felon recover his honour? Go to, Christopher. Let us thank Heaven that we have been spared this infectious plague, and have continued sober citizens—to make our money by thrift, and save it for our——," children, he was going to say, but he refrained, and groaned, "Oh! Jenny, Jenny!"

Then there came into his counting-house, two friends of his—grave and quiet merchants, well known on 'Change, and of his own company,

Christopher March bowed to them with humility, and immediately retired.

"How goes it, brother alderman?" asked one.

"Badly," replied my guardian. "It goes very badly."

"Why," said the other, "we guessed it, to our sorrow, and so we have come to render any help we can."

"It is neighbourly," said the alderman, "but the case is not one for friends. None can help me in such a plight. What is gone, is gone."

"Ay! That is true. Let us hope it is not as much as people have spread about."

"As much, man?" My guardian stared. "Why, what mean you?—as much as people say?"

"There are various rumours, Alderman Medleycott," the young man interposed. "Some say that a hundred thousand would not clear you. Others think you may stand the loss of fifty thousand. Your creditors, of whom I am one, as you know——"

"Nay—nay," said the alderman, putting his hand on a great book. "Not so, friend Patterson. We have your quittances here. But what does this mean? Have I not trouble enough but there must be rumours to touch my credit?"

The visitors stared at one another.

"Truly, alderman," said the first, "we do not understand you. Tell us first what is this trouble that you lament."

"It is that my daughter hath left me, to fly with I know not whom; and that my ward hath been foully wounded I think to death; and that I have been cheated out of two thousand pounds by forgeries. Call ye that trouble?"

They sat down, like the friends of Job, and were silent for a space.

"I would not," said the elder, "add to thy grief, my old friend. But it is right to bid you be up and doing, because your name is very freely handled this morning."

"But why—why?"

"Why—why?" His visitor spoke angrily. "This is childishness, alderman. Know you not of the fall in South Sea stock?"

"Ay; what has that to do with me?"

Was the man mad? Did he understand nothing since his daughter had left him?

"Alderman," said the younger, "think. Your reason is tottering under the blows of Providence. Try to speak calmly. That quittance of mine you spoke of—where is it?"

"Surely, here," said the alderman, opening the book, which contained receipts and quittances. "See—here it is—here—with your signature and date."

The merchant looked surprised; then he took the book in his hands, carried it to the window for better light, and looked at the signature.

"Here is villainy," he said; "that receipt is a forgery, alderman. I have not received the money from you."

"Forgery?—more forgeries?" murmured the alderman. "Call Christopher March. He is without."

He was not, however, without. He had gone away, leaving no message.

"Christopher March told me he had paid it himself," said my guardian. "But go on. Tell me more, if there is more. What is this about my credit? What is South Sea stock to me?"

"My friend," said the elder man, laying his hand on the alderman, "this is no time for trifling. We may all be ruined at any moment. Why—why did this madness seize you?"

"I think," replied the alderman, "since you came here. What madness?"

"Doth not all the world know by this time, although you kept the secret so well, that of all the adventurers in this new stock and these new projects, no one has been more venturous than yourself?"

The alderman looked from one to the other.

"Where is Christopher March?" he asked helplessly. "I cannot be going mad."

"Christopher March," replied his friend, "is the man who negotiated all your transactions for you."

"My transactions? Man, I have no transactions! I have neither bought nor sold South Sea stock. I have never meddled with the accursed thing."

While they were all thus gazing upon each other there burst upon them a third man. His wig was disordered, his ruffles were loose.

"Mr. Alderman," he cried. "I crave your indulgence for a day or two; or for a week, perhaps, when, doubtless, I shall be able to repay the money."

"The money, friend? I know not you, and I know not your money. Tell me more."

"The ten thousand pounds you lent me on security—of my South Sea Stock." He whispered this eagerly, looking with suspicion upon the other men.

The alderman gazed at him with a wonder full of affright.

"I lent you nothing," he said.

"Oh, pardon, sir. Believe me I would defraud no one. You have my securities; they were bonds worth nine thousand a-piece when I borrowed the money. Now, alas! they are worth but a poor hundred and thirty. But I will defraud no one."

And while he yet spake there came another, a creditor.

"I come," he said, "Mr. Alderman, from Mr. Ephraim Fouracre, your wife's draper, about your bill of five thousand pounds fourteen shillings and threepence, money lent on security of South Sea stock."

"Good heavens!" cried the first visitor. "Did he both borrow and lend on the stock?"

That it appeared was the case, for the very securities on which one man had borrowed ten thousand of Christopher March, had been pledged to this honest woollen-draper for five thousand.

"My friends," said the alderman trying to assume a calm which he did not feel, "help me in this trouble. Is there witchcraft in it, think you?"

"Nay," replied the elder merchant. "But such villainy as the world, thank Heaven! seldom sees. Where is this man, this Christopher March, that we may bring him to the gallows?"

He never came back. The game was up, he felt, when the stock, which was at one thousand on August 1, steadily went down and never recovered, day by day, its figure of the day before. Then despair seized him. Nothing now could save him. And on the morning after his desperate assault upon my lord, he vanished on the first appearance of visitors to his master.

I hardly know why he tried to murder Lord Eardesley. My fortune was gone; my lord's was gone; the moneys entrusted to the alderman were all stolen and wasted. As regards the forgeries, they were but a small trifle in comparison with the rest—the countless pile of frauds, forgeries, and deceits, by which he had carried on his wicked course, and lulled his master into confidence. Why, then, did he try to murder my lord? Perhaps, because this crime was the first discovered, and if followed up would lead to the discovery of all the rest. But one never knows the secret springs of action in the career of any man, even a good man. Let it suffice that Christopher March was a murderer, if ever there was one, though his victim escaped him.

Now, all that day the alderman sat, steady as a rock, in the counting-house. Little by little the whole truth was got at. One man after the other called; one after the other revealed a fresh tale of treachery. It is true that most of the frauds had been committed quite recently, and evidently with a view to meet the most pressing claims rising out of old ones, so as to put off the evil day as long as possible. By nightfall the poor old man knew all. He had lost not only his own fortune, but his good

name. Hardly a merchant of credit but had been cheated by him, that is, in his name; those who had entrusted their money to him—the poor widows and orphans—had lost it; the gentlemen adventurers of Virginia who had made him their banker had lost all their savings; men like Lord Eardesley who had deposited with him their few thousands found their little fortunes stolen. I, the great Virginian heiress, who had inherited the thrift and accumulations of three generations of prosperity, had lost every farthing. Of all my hundred thousand pounds, my much envied “plum,” not one penny was left.

This, all this, did the poor alderman have to learn and to endure. It took many days to get at the whole, to discover the extent of the ruin. Yet his creditors—the poor women whose daily bread was gone, the tradesmen who saw no way left except bankruptcy, and perhaps a lifelong prison—were kind to him. He had been so honest, he had been so benevolent, so religious, so charitable, that none upbraided him. There was no reproachful eyes upon him when, the accountants having laid everything bare, nothing more remaining to be learned, he called his creditors together, told them all, which indeed they knew already, and spoke his farewell speech.

“My friends,” he said, “I am old, and have been young; yet never have I seen the righteous man beg his bread. I have been righteous, according to my lights. God knoweth when we do amiss. As for this trouble that hath fallen upon you all, I pray you to remember that man is prone to err; I have been over-confident, and I have been deceived and robbed. In this cursed South Sea stock, remember, I pray you, that I had neither part nor lot in it. Forgeries, forgeries all around me—with forgeries have I been undone.”

His lips trembled as he tottered slowly to the door. Lord Eardesley, who was there, supported him from the counting-house to his own parlour. There sat his wife, sad and terrified.

They brought him wine, but he refused to drink it, sitting mute and sorrowful. His wife knelt before him, crying and sobbing, and imploring pardon for all her follies. He meekly bade her rise, saying that she had been a good wife to him, albeit fond of cards, and that during the years which were left to him and to her, there would be little fear of cards interfering between them. Then he turned to Lord Eardesley, and very piteously lamented the loss of his fortune, and that of his betrothed, myself.

"Nevertheless," he said, just and righteous to the last, "I lament not so much for you, my lord, and my dear ward Elinor, as for those poor women—those widows—whose honourable bread is gone. For who will help them? who will feed them, unless it is He who fed the prophet? And chiefly let us pray for that wretched boy, Christopher March, who hath brought this terrible trouble upon us, that he may be led to repent."

Neither his wife nor Lord Eardesley spoke. I think that at that moment they would rather have joined in prayer that he might speedily meet with the rope that was to hang him.

"Wife," he said, trying to rise, "let me to bed. I have much to think of."

They led him to his room, and presently left him.

All night long his wife sat beside him watching. His eyes were closed, but he was not sleeping, and from time to time he spoke. Yet at last he dropped asleep.

Early in the morning he sat up, looked about him, and asked, in his usual voice, if all was well. Being assured that all was well, he fell back, and slept like a child.

They awakened him at ten in the forenoon. His face was rather pale, but smiling and happy. And—oh! wonderful interposition of Providential benevolence!—he knew nothing of what had happened. My poor old guardian had gone mad.

Afterwards, when I was recovered, Lord Eardesley took me to a place where they kept him. His friends, the company over which he had presided, and the Court of Aldermen, could not bear to think that the good old man, reduced to the utmost penury, should suffer in his lunacy. They placed him in the house of a physician, where but a few madmen were received—not the great awful Hospital of St. Bethlehem's—and provided for him a room to himself, with such creature comforts as were judged best for him. Hither came, every day, to sit with him, soothe him, and please him, his faithful wife. Was it possible that this good, devoted, and honourable creature could have been the woman who once found all her happiness in cards, and all her hope in a good hand? It but was once that I saw him. We passed through a hall whose horrors were enough to drive faith in the goodness of Heaven away for ever from the breast, where poor creatures were chained by short lengths to the wall like wild beasts, and wandered round and round like them, crying and howling with rage and fury and despair. When we reached my poor old guardian's room, we found him playing a game of backgammon with his wife. He did that all day long; he never tired of it; she played with him, without a murmur. And when he won, he would laugh and crow.

He did not know us. He only invited us to sit down and watch the game.

His only sign of any recollection of the past that he gave was once or twice a week, when he used to laugh feebly, rub his hands, and say:

"Wife, I always said that South-Sea stock was no better than any bubble."



CHAPTER VIII.

HOME AGAIN.



IT was in August that I was stricken ; it was late in September that the fever left me ; it was in October that I learned all, the wreck of our fortunes, the ruin and madness of my poor guardian, the elopement of Jenny,

" My Nelly," said Geoffrey, " we have nothing ; neither you nor I. The very daily expenses of this house are maintained by money borrowed from a friend, who lends it, I know, willingly enough Will you come with me to my poor barren acres in Wales,

where we may live, somehow, like rustics, on pig, cow, sheep, garden, and orchard. The acres are broad enough, I know ; but they are overgrown with wood and corrupted with marsh. No one will take my farms ; there is not a tenant in the place. Yet what else can I offer you ? "

To me it seemed like a haven of bliss. Anything to get away from London, from this dreadful place of corruption whence, like the Valley of Hinnom, the stench and flame went up to the high heavens. Anything to change the current of my thoughts. Wales ! The broad barren acres ! Why, the place would be like Virginia. I should see, once more, forests and hills.

I hesitated not ; I would marry my lord where and when he pleased. We were married at the parish church,

at St. Olave's, by the good old clergyman, whose manner of reading the service reminded me so much of the alderman. He was proud to marry a nobleman, and though there was no wedding feast he made us a little speech in the vestry room. He reminded us that adversity, like good fortune, was a jade which came and went, according to the behests of high Heaven ; that we must not look forward to a continuation of those buffets by which our worldly effects had been suddenly and violently bereft from us, but rather must cast around for means to use that rank, to which it has pleased God to call my husband, as a stepping-stone to fortune. Above all, we might bear in mind that the world is for the young, that success is for the brave, and that where there is no ambition there is no struggle, and where no struggle there no glory. He meant well, the good old man, and when I took him aside and asked him if he knew aught of my poor Jenny, the tears ran down his cheeks and into the corners of his great fat lips. But he knew nothing.

We were married. There was no ringing of bells ; there was no wedding feast ; there were no rejoicings ; my old nurse was present, crying, my only friend ; the clerk gave me away ; no one was in the church ; outside, the carts and waggons drove up and down the narrow street ; the drivers swore ; the porters set down their loads and fought ; the signs hanging over the shop windows creaked and groaned in the autumn breeze ; and no one took any notice of it.

After the ceremony I bade farewell for a while to my nurse, who returned for the present to the desolate house on Tower Hill, and we took coach to my lord's lodgings in Bury Street.

Here we remained for a fortnight or three weeks. He had but few friends—where should a poor nobleman find friends ?—but these came to see me and invited us to their great houses, and were as civil as if we were rich instead of being paupers.

In those days we talked a great deal about our future. We were young, and laughed at the disaster of losing all our money ; at least, I did. We were to go, we said, to Wales ; we would repair a corner of the ruined castle, and farm such of the land as was not too barren ; we would live away from the world, forgotten, and cultivate the simple mode of life praised by philosophers. That was our dream. I thought so much of Wales that I forgot Virginia. But one day a sudden thought came into my head.

“ My dear,” I said, “ the man Christopher March could not have gambled away my estate in Virginia.”

He started. “ Surely not,” he said, “ unless your title-deeds were in his hands.”

“ I believe we have no title-deeds,” I replied. “ I should wonder, however, if any would dare to dispute the right of a Carellis. Geoffrey look into it. Oh ! my dear, we are not poor but rich. There is no estate like it in Virginia. It produces more than a thousand pounds by the year, and might produce two in careful hands. Geoffrey,” I added, laying my hand on his arm and looking into his noble face, “ shall we go to Virginia, you and I, and grow rich on our own lands ?”

Well ; he was strangely moved at the proposal, and went away to consult a lawyer. By this time all the poor alderman's papers were in the hands of attorneys. It was discovered that he had never possessed my title-deeds, which were still in Virginia. Here was good news, indeed ; and now my whole thought was how to get away from this London, this city of villany and rogues, and find myself back in my own country, where if we lived among thieves, which was true, they were in bondage and enduring hardness.

My husband reasoned with me soberly about it. He was at first averse to leaving England. He thought that if we had a thousand pounds a year we might live on his estate in Wales, build a house, and, though we could not

hope to make a figure, yet we might maintain a household in some degree worthy of our rank. I replied that I was as careful as he could be to keep up the dignity of a peer; but that we must remember how the plantation was governed by servants, who, though they might be now men of integrity, might also become through temptation men like Christopher March himself, and rob us of all we had. This was so true that, after further deliberation, it turned the scale, and my husband consented to embark for Virginia, there to become a planter of tobacco.

Now, after my marriage—though this I did not learn till long after—my nurse, free, at last to remember her own private troubles, set to work to find her son. She rightly guessed that he would, while the hue-and-cry was hot after him, take refuge in those dens and dark holes of London known to none but the professional rogue. She knew these places, and had lived in them in the days of her degradation. Now she began to seek them out afresh. She put on an old and ragged dress, carried a basket, assumed the manner of a decrepit woman, and ventured boldly into the dark dens where an honest person's life was not worth the chance of a fourpenny-piece.

Here she asked for her son by his old name. Some knew nothing of him; some remembered the name; some told, with pride, how he had become a great gentleman, and was robbing on the grand scale. This was no new thing among them; for though it was, perhaps, the first time that a pickpocket and common thief had become a City merchant, yet it was quite common for one of them, when he had gotten a gallant suit of clothes and a sword, to become a gamester and adventurer of the dice, and so ruffle it among the best while fortune lasted.

At first, however, she could learn nothing about him. But after patience for three or four days, she was rewarded. It was a woman, quite a young woman, who answered her whispered enquiries with a fierce question, and the

usual profane oath, what she wanted to know about him for.

"Because," said Alice boldly. "Because I am his mother."

"You're not," replied the girl. "His mother was hanged."

My nurse shook her head.

"I was not hanged," she said, showing her hand, which was branded by the executioner. "I was reprieved and sent to Virginia. My name is Kate Collyer, and I want to find my son. You know that the hue-and-cry is out for him, and the reward is proclaimed. They will hang him if they catch him. The mob will tear him to pieces if they can."

"How am I to know if you are his mother?"

"Because I say so. But that, I doubt, is not enough. See, then, tell him this." She whispered in her ear. "Ask him who could know that except his mother. Then take me to him."

She sat down in the doorway and waited. The girl with a look of suspicion and distrust, walked swiftly down the narrow and filthy street they call Houndsditch, and disappeared.

Alice waited for about an hour. She knew the kind of people. If she got up and went away, she would be suspected; if she remained where she was, suspicion might be lulled. Presently the girl returned.

"You may come with me," she said; "but if you have deceived me or betrayed him, I will kill you—remember that."

I know not where the girl took Alice. They passed from one lane full of rogues and thieves to another; everywhere wickedness, profanity, and drinking. At last the girl stopped at a house, and, opening the door, led Alice to a small room at the back, dark and dirty, where Christopher March was sitting alone.

His fine cloth coat and waistcoat were exchanged for a suit of common workman's clothes; a red cotton hand-

kerchief tied up his neck ; he had discarded his wig and grown his own hair ; he looked in his new disguise what he was, the thief and burglar of twenty years before—grown up, but not reformed.

When he saw Alice, he sprang to his feet with an oath.

“ You ? ” he cried. “ She said it was my mother. You ? The nurse ? ”

“ Yes ; it is I, my son.”

Alice sat down upon the bed and sighed heavily.

“ I only knew, on the night when you tried to murder Lord Eardesley, that you were my son.”

“ Dick told you, did he ? Then he knew, too, and kept it from me. Yet I thought I saw him killed.”

“ Such as he take time to die. They are allowed to live a little ; so that they may tell something of their wickedness before they die. He told me—he—that you were the boy whom, in an evil hour, I brought into the world.”

“ Well,” said Christopher, “ if you come to that, we were all brought into the world at an evil hour. We live and thieve, and then we get hanged. Fool that I was, when I might have lived honestly and died in my bed.”

“ He told me that when the gang was broken up——”

“ It lasted two years after you were lagged at Bristol. We thought you were hanged.”

“ They respited me at the last moment. I have been in Virginia.”

“ I know—go on.”

“ That when the gang was broken up a consequence of the cry after the great diamond robbery——”

“ My doing ! ” said Christopher, laughing. All the years of his education and work in an honest office had not destroyed that pride in a successful villany, which was taught him in his infancy, and by the poor woman who stood before him repentant and shamed.

“ You were sent, to get out of the way, into the very heart of the enemy’s camp, to the house of Alderman Medlycott, himself ; you were educated by him ; taken into

the house by him ; paid well by him ; and, in return, you robbed him."

"Why, mother," cried the son in great surprise, "you are not come here to preach—you !"

It was part of her punishment. Her very son, who had been for fifteen years and more under godly tutors, could not even yet understand that a wicked woman could even turn away from her wickedness.

She shook her head.

"No, no," she said, "I shall not preach. For you I can only pray. But this is foolish talk. Let us rather consider how you may best escape."

"Why," he replied, "I think I am safest here. Bess, here—but you don't know Bess—will look after me."

"You are never safe, where there are so many who know you. Why, there is a hundred guineas reward offered for your apprehension. Once caught, they will have no mercy on you, be sure of that."

"I am sure," he said ; "I knew it all along. Why, what odds a little danger ? I am not caught yet, and perhaps there is many a jolly day between this and the journey to Tyburn ; isn't there Bess ?"

The girl laughed uneasily. She was one of those who can never contemplate without a shudder the certainty of her doom, and the uncertainty of its appointed time.

"Confess mother," the hardened villain went on, "I have done well. A dozen years of good behaviour, with church on Wednesday and Friday evenings, as well as Sunday ; ten years of slavery and hard work, and then the reward came—a rich and unexpected reward : the confidence of the most confiding merchant in London ; a double set of books ; the handling of vast sums of money ; all day long robbing the alderman ; all night long gaming and drinking, and living like a lord. A fine time, Bess, wasn't it ?"

"Yes, it was," she said ; "pity it is over."

"I would have made it last longer. but my luck became so bad; I believe it was your girl, Elinor Carellis, who brought me bad luck. Little she knew that every evening some of her fortune was being melted away in Covent Garden."

"Why did you dare to make love to her?"

"He make love to her!" cried the girl, springing to her feet like a mad thing. "He make love to her?"

"Easy, Bess, easy—sit down." Christopher took her by the waist, and sat her on his knee. "You don't understand. Why, girl, I wanted her money to put back the rest, Lord Eardesley's, and the alderman's, and the others. Then we should have started fair again; he would have made me a partner, and all would have gone merrily."

She was not satisfied, and her colour came and went, while her breath was quick and her eyes bright.

"I should like to kill her," she murmured between her teeth.

"You need not be jealous," said Alice; "she is married and gone away."

"Ho! ho!" laughed Christopher, "without a penny piece. That's revenge worth having, isn't it, mother?"

Then his mother grew sick at heart and weary, and rose to go.

"I cannot see you any more. I cannot bear to look upon you, or to hear you talk. But I would aid you to escape before it is yet too late. Perhaps, if you escape now, your heart may be softened in after years. But I warn you. Among all the rogues and thieves who surround you, there must be many—try to think how many—who know where you are hiding, and who will be tempted by the reward. A hundred guineas! It is a great sum of money. Leave London; go where no one knows you. Go where you may find some honest means of livelihood. See, I have brought you all my savings." She drew out a little bag, and poured some money into her lap. Christopher and

the girl bent eagerly over it with greedy eyes. "There are ten guineas and some silver pieces. Take them and fly for your life out of the City of Destruction."

There was no hesitation about taking the money; not the least. Nor about promising whatever the man's mother wished.

"I will go," he said. "I will go this very evening. We will try the north. This will keep us for a while, and then we shall see. Yes, mother"—he thrust his tongue in his cheek for the amusement of the girl—"honesty is the only thing. You are right. Henceforth I am a respectable tradesman, ruined by the wicked directors of the South Sea Scheme.

She left him without taking his hand, or saying more words. And she looked to learn that he had broken his word, was still lurking in London, and had been captured.

All this she told me later, when we were far away from land on the blue ocean.

Then we began our preparations for Virginia. We wanted little, because everything was already on the plantation. My lord's interest procured us a passage on board the *Gloucester*, one of His Majesty's ships, under orders for Jamestown, and were to set sail at Portsmouth.

A week before we started a letter was brought to me by a meanly-dressed, poor little creature of a servant-maid. It was addressed to Mistress Elinor Carellis, care of Lord Eardesley.

Oh, heaven! it was from my dear, flighty, foolish Jenny.

"Dearest Nelly," she began, "I know not if I dare to address you as I used. Forgive me and pity me. I am very unhappy. I know about my father's bankrupt condition and his madness. Pray heaven it be not caused partly by my undutiful conduct. Come quickly to me, for I have much to tell you. My mother will not forgive me, and my husband is such a wretch that you will pity me when you know. But oh! that such a man as

Christopher March should have been allowed to live ! Your affectionate Jenny."

The letter was dated from a street near High Holborn, called Fetter Lane, where I supposed she had found lodgings. My husband, who would not let me go alone, accompanied me, and we carried with us the little half-starved girl in a coach.

Alas ! the street was narrow and noisy, full of shops, and crowded with rough people. Jenny's lodging was in a court leading off the street. Who, then, was her Lysander ? Could he have deceived her for the sake of the money, which it might be reasonably supposed she would have ?

The girl led us into a mean house with narrow passages and dirty stairs. In a room at the back, ill-furnished, squalid and unwashed, I found the poor girl. She was in dishabille, her hair hanging about her shoulders, her feet in slippers. Before her stood, cowering, the man who had carried her off. But was this Lysander ? Why, all the bravery had gone out of the man ; the ruffle and smirk ; the square carriage of his elbows ; the toss of his head ; all were gone. His clothes were shabby and common ; his wig lay on the table, and a handkerchief tied up his head. I think they had been quarrelling, for when Jenny heard our footsteps and turned to me, her face was flushed and her lips were quivering.

"Nelly !" she said, throwing herself into my arms. "Oh, Nelly, Nelly ! what a wretch—what a foolish wretch I have been !"

Then she tore herself from me passionately, and placed me in a chair, while she pointed the finger of scorn at her husband.

"Sit there. You shall hear, you and my lord, what I have suffered from this man."

Lysander looked as if he fain would escape, but knew not how. I do not think he was a brave man, because

his knees shook while his wronged wife poured out her tale.

"You know how he used to write me poems, Nelly? The poems were copied. You remember his letters? They were stolen from a book. The wretch hath no knowledge of writing, save of copying for a shop cashbook. He told me a tale of himself: he said he was the son of a country squire—oh! lying villain!—that his father wished him to marry a lady of title; that his only chance was a secret marriage, after which his father would certainly relent; that he would never be able to persuade the alderman to any secret course; and that if I would elope with him, all would go well afterwards.

"Nelly! you know what a fool I have always been, loving to read about men and love-making—all this went to my heart. It seemed so noble in a gentleman to fall in love with the daughter of a citizen: it was grand to be carried away. No secret marriage in London would do with my fine gentleman; no Fleet marriage, if you please; nothing but a coach and four, and Scotland.

"So I went. Oh! the long, long journey on the road; and the shaking over the roads; but who so grand as this great gentleman, if you please? His hand was ready with a guinea for the post-boy, and a crown for boots; while at the sound of horses on the road none so brave as he, with his sword ready loosened in the scabbard, and his pistols before him in the coach. 'If we are caught,' he said, 'if we have to fight, I will die rather than surrender my Clarissa.' I felt proud of being about to have a husband who, if he was little in stature, had yet so high a spirit.

"We got safely to Scotland, after many days, and there we were married.

"Then we came home again; but without the grandeur with which we went. This time we travelled to York by posting, and then all the way to London by the coach.

"When I got to town I learned all that had happened ; your wound ; my father ruin and illness ; the villany of Christopher March. I thought my heart would break to think of all the troubles that had fallen upon us. Yet there was some comfort ; I should not be a burden upon my friends, poor and in misery ; I should, perhaps, be able to help them ; it would be a little consolation for me in thinking of my undutiful conduct, that it enabled me to give some succour to my poor father."

She stopped, and the miserable man, now that the climax was approaching, trembled not only in his knees, but all over, while a cold moisture broke out on his forehead.

"One more misfortune was to fall upon me—one more trouble. I deserved it. I must not repine ; but it was harder to bear than all the rest. Oh, Nelly ! See him now. Does he look at all like the son of a country esquire ? Hath he any air of gentle blood and noble birth ? Does he look like a man who would marry a lady of rank ? I found out at length, but not until his money was come to an end. I found out, I say, from his own confession, who he is and what. Nelly, he made the money for our wedding journey by gambling. He was lucky, and won enough to pay for all in a single night. And he is not a gentleman at all. He is but just out of his apprenticeship. He is a hosier by trade. His name is Joshua Crump. I am plain Mistress Crump, wife of the hosier's apprentice, who was once Jenny Medlycott, and daughter of an alderman who has passed the chair ! Oh ! oh ! oh !"

She paused. Then, fired to fury with the thought of her wrongs, she cried again, with a passion of tears, "Oh, villain !" and gave her husband, one with each hand, two such mighty boxes on the ear that I expected, little as she was, some dreadful injury would be done to him. I pulled her from him ; for, indeed, she was now quite mad with passion, and no longer mistress of herself.

Joshua Crump, all this time, said nothing, only he gazed with appealing eyes to me, as if for protection.

My husband stepped forward while I was soothing Jenny.

"Tell me," he asked the man, "have you any money?"

"No, my lord, none, except a single guinea."

"And when that is done, what will you do next?"

"I know not, my lord, indeed."

"Are you not a pretty villain thus to carry away a young lady deceived by these lies?"

"I am, my lord. Yet I thought her father was rich, and would forgive us."

"Come outside, and speak with me privately."

They went outside, and I heard my husband speaking gravely. They talked for a quarter of an hour. Then my lord returned alone.

"Come, Nelly," he said; "the coach waits. Jenny, child, will you come with us and share our lot? Your husband will let you go, and it shall be as if you had never been married."

I dressed her hair and tied on her hat, and led her crying and sobbing down the stairs.

She never saw her husband again.

So, on a fine morning in late autumn, we left London for good; and rode, stopping at Guildford for the night, all together—my husband, myself, Jenny, and nurse Alice, with my husband's new man. And so we journeyed to Portsmouth, where we embarked on board His Majesty's man-of-war *Gloucester*, seventy-five guns, then lying off Spithead, and presently were standing gallantly across the open sea, all sail set, making for my dear Virginia.

My story is finished. It only remains for me to say a few words more.

First, I have been a happy wife in the affection of a great and noble husband. We lived on our plantation, without once wishing to leave it, for five-and-twenty years. At the end of that time, our affairs having prospered beyond our expectation, my husband was seized with a longing to go home and live the rest of his life

upon his own estate in Wales, where, he thought, he might build a house and cultivate the ground, and, perhaps, help the advancement of our eldest son. The second son we left in Virginia. He hath taken the surname of Carellis, and I hope that there may never fail a Carellis in the colony to illustrate by his own virtues and worth those of the English race. So, we returned, and, in the autumn of our lives, before old age dims my memory or impairs my faculties, I have written this story of my sorrows and my joys, and have called it, fondly, after the name by which my dear husband, who hath ever been my lover, still delights to call his wife.

About a year after we landed my husband had a letter from London in which an unknown correspondent informed him that he would be interested in learning the death of Master Joshua Crump, formerly a hosier's apprentice. I showed the letter to Jenny, who first looked grave, as was becoming, and then became joyful.

"After all," she said, "it was the only thing he could do to prove his repentance. I think better of him for dying, and perhaps I may forgive him altogether in time. But now I can think of nothing but that I am free."

She was ; and a few weeks later she married a young gentleman of great promise and a considerable estate upon the Potowmac river. She has brought up a large family of handsome children, and no one but myself and my husband ever knew the story of her elopement. Alice knew, of course, but Alice never talked. And here I may relate that when (after many years) we returned to London, the first time I walked again in Cheapside I espied a monstrous great sign of a golden glove hanging over my head, and read the name written below of J. Crump. I remembered Lysander, and moved with curiosity, I entered the shop. Why, there behind the counter, stood Lysander himself. He was little changed, except for a certain smugness of aspect peculiar to the thriving Lon-

don hosier. He bowed, and asked me what I might please to lack.

I leaned across the counter and whispered:

"Hath Lysander quite forgot his Clarissa?"

He trembled and turned pale, and his yard wand dropped from his hands.

"Madam," he whispered, "I know your ladyship now. Your are Lady Eardesley. For Heaven's sake! I am married and the father of ten——"

"Fear not, Lysander," I replied, "your secret is safe from me. After the death of her first husband Clarissa found consolation in the arms of a second."

So I left him abashed and confounded.

We had been in Virginia five years or so when our overseer came to me one morning, my husband being then shooting in the forest, with a tale about a certain convict servant whom he had bought at James Town, and conveyed, with others, to the estate. He was a man about thirty-three or four, who had been found guilty and sentenced to be hanged, but, by the clemency of the judge, was branded and sent to the plantations. The offence was shop-lifting. This gloomy story was too common to move my pity. But the overseer added, when the man heard that Lord Eardesley had bought him, he fell upon his knees, and begged that he might never be seen by his lordship.

A dreadful suspicion seized me. I bade the overseer lead me to the man. He was sitting in chains, waiting to be told off for a field gang. I never went near our wretched people on their first arrival, or when they were at work in the fields, for the sound of the lash, even though one knew that it was part of the punishment, or felt that if it was a negro receiving chastisement it was part of his education in religion and civilisation, never failed to bring the tears to my eyes.

The overseer called him and he lifted his head. At

sight of me he fell grovelling and crying at my feet. For it was Christopher March.

I said nothing to him, good or bad, but, being assured that it was the wicked wretch himself, thus placed by Providence in our hands, I left him and went home. When my husband returned I told him all.

It would be too long a story to relate how my lord sent for this rogue, whose sins had found him out, and discoursed with him upon his miraculous escape and the occasion mercifully laid open to him for repentance, and how the man with plentiful tears declared that he was already deeply penitent. We kept from Alice the knowledge that her son was on the estate until such time as the overseers reported favourably of the man's good behaviour and willingness. We then granted to nurse, for her own use, a strip of ground at the far north of our plantation, which had a cottage on it; and we assigned her own son to her as servant, so that no one on the estate should know of the relationship.

When she died, a year or two later, it was in the thankful confidence that her son was as deeply and sincerely penitent as she was herself.

I never greatly believed in the repentance of one whose sins showed so hard a heart, but I was glad that his hanging did not take place until after the death of his mother. He was executed at James Town, and hung in chains, for a highway robbery, quite unnecessary and wanton, because, at the time, he was in easy circumstances.

As I write these last lines, the setting sun is shining on the Welsh hills; in the gardens are playing my grandchildren; sitting about me are my three daughters, happy matrons all; walking up the broad valley I see my husband, and, with him, two gallant sons. My heart is full.

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