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38.

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ROYSTON GOWER.

VOL. I.



ROYSTON GOWER;

OR,

THE DAYS OF KING JOHN.

An Historical Romance.

BY THOMAS MILLER,

AUTHOR OF "A DAY IN THE WOODS," "BEAUTIES OF
THE COUNTRY," ETC.

~~~~~  
"Under the greenwood tree,  
Who loves to lie with me?"  
~~~~~

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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TO

SAMUEL ROGERS, Esq.

THESE VOLUMES

ARE HUMBLY DEDICATED,

IN SINCERE GRATITUDE,

BY

THE AUTHOR.



INTRODUCTION.

THE Author has ventured to appear before his readers in a new form in the present work, and can only hope that the fare he has provided will prove acceptable. Having won as much praise, as a rural sketcher, as might satisfy any one possessing even more than a moderate share of ambition, he trusts that he shall not be found fault with, for having placed a few figures in the fore-ground of his landscape.

In writing this work, the author has fulfilled one of his boyish wishes: for it was long a

dream of his youth to accomplish an undertaking, the scene of which should be fixed in Sherwood Forest, in the days of Robin Hood. How he has completed his task, it remains for others to decide ; for he is not ignorant that his tiny footmarks have had to follow the deep imprint of a giant.

He has availed himself of much new matter for his subject, such, he believes, as no other writer has ever attempted to weave into a romance, namely, **THE ANCIENT NORMAN FOREST LAWS.**

It will be seen, in the perusal of this work, that (to the best of his ability) he has studied them carefully, not merely as a code of almost forgotten laws, but as to the effect such tyrannical mandates were likely to produce upon a brave, yet oppressed people. He may be wrong, but he has looked upon the Norman Forest Laws as being the cause of their own downfall, and sinking through that overbearing

and disproportioned weight by which their power was balanced; and, that when they began to fall, their very ruins hardened into one of those stepping-stones which led to the passing of *MAGNA CHARTA*.

Before commencing so great an undertaking as the present, the author spent some time in that national, and truly beneficial institution, the British Museum, and perused several scarce and ancient works, which gave him a great insight into the manners and customs of the period about which he has written. His learning only just served him to understand some old English book; so that many valuable documents, of which a scholar would have availed himself for the present task, were to him sealed books. Thus his Latin will always be found ready translated at the end of Johnson's Pocket Dictionary; the devices on the shields of his warriors will be easily deciphered; and his war-cries need no learned com-

mentator. An early acquaintance with a rare black-letter edition of Chaucer, however, enabled him to master nearly all the difficulties that occur in reading the old English writers.

Although the author has attempted to give a quaintness to his dialogue, and to model his phrases as much after the old style as modern usage will permit, yet he has been careful in rejecting all such words as would need notes of explanation ; or so contriving the arrangement, that the following sentence generally reveals the true meaning.

He deemed it necessary, in writing on so remote a period, that the language and similes should smack of another age ; and that but few or no modern allusions should be put into the mouths of his characters. Thus many of our Saxon words become plain to almost every reader, through the very simplicity of the thoughts they express. Nor would any one, who has only slightly studied the manners and

customs of the period of which the author has written, make a throat-cutting, mail-covered old baron say, "Shall I have the pleasure of taking wine with you?" or "'Pon honour I cannot drink more." No! they drank healths out of cups deeper than their own helmets—swore by saints, whose names were as rugged as their own manners—uttered curses by the rood—and if they had fought in Palestine, died in full assurance of heaven, by trusting to the heathen blood they had shed.

An author, therefore, is compelled to blend his mind with the barbarous age; to divest his thoughts of modern imagery, and embellishments, so far as regards the external formation of his work; but even in these things, he trusts, that he has been careful never to caricature nature. The human passions must still remain the same—hope and fear, despair and love, revenge and hate, need not the key of learning to reveal their secrets. The materials

with which an author works upon the heart are not to be found in the schools; they must be furnished by the mind alone. Hair-breadth escapes, perils and incidents, spring up of themselves, providing the broad way, on which the author makes his characters to move, is a natural one: for there is something romantic even in the life of a recluse; and marvellous events often spring from the most trifling casualties.

It is by adhering to this notion, that the author has hopes of his work proving, in some measure, successful. The events which he has strung together, strange as they may seem to this age, were of every-day occurrence, at the time of which he writes; and to kill a deer within the royal forest, unlawfully, was then visited with greater severity, by the Norman law, than the murder of a man. Take the whole of the civil code of laws, just before the passing of Magna Charta, and see how

few and inefficient they are, compared to those which were enacted for the preservation of game, one might deem that the fate of England depended upon the safety of its herds of deer ; or that her kings only ruled over a realm of forests.

The trial of Hereward the Saxon, in the Court of Eyre, for killing the hart-proclaimed, will be found in every point to agree with those forest-laws called the Assizes of Woodstock, which, according to Manwood, were passed during the reign of William Rufus ; and others, which were formed by Glanvil, about the time of Henry II. Many may consider an old book on forest laws but poor material on which to found a romance ; but the author thought differently, and has hopes that many of his readers will arrive at the same conclusion, before they have perused these volumes.

Some may, perhaps, think that the author

has introduced the character of the outlaw chief at too recent a period, and may not be aware that he could cite several authorities, who date his existence at the time of Henry III. Others, again, may consider it delicate ground, after the masterly manner in which he has been handled by the immortal "Author of Waverley:" this the author feels; but he had no alternative: perhaps he might have given him another name; but few, he thought, would care about Sherwood Forest, unless Robin Hood and his merry men moved through its green glades.

When it is also taken into consideration, that the principal intention of this work is to show the tyranny of the Norman Forest Laws, it will be readily seen that no other period was so favourable for the purpose, as the eve of passing the Great Charter.

Further, the author considers, that in making the Outlaw Chief the terror of the Forest-keepers, and a bold defier of the laws of the

chase, he has placed him in his true character. His own earliest recollections of the brave freebooter are from "Robin Hood's Garland," which, embellished with rude wood-cuts, represented this early reformer, as shooting deer, fighting rangers, and rescuing prisoners from the forest officers. Thus, in writing about the Forest Laws, at so remote a period, the character of Robin Hood seemed to thrust itself into the work ; for, as Drayton says,

Unto the end of time, the tales shall ne'er be done
Of Scarlet, George-a-Green, and Much the miller's son ;
Of Tuck, the merry friar, who many a sermon made
In praise of Robin Hood, his outlaws and their trade.

In sketching the character of King John, the author has endeavoured to bring him forward in one of the most important parts of his reign—his struggle with Cardinal Langton, who, with the exception of Pope Innocent, was undoubtedly one of the greatest men of that age. In describing the Interdict, and all those

terrible forms to which the Church of Rome had recourse in that day to establish her power, he has adhered closely to history, and only attempted to set the appalling sentence in a dramatic form, by putting it into the mouth of Langton.

Some may think that King John is made to pay too little reverence to the Church of Rome; but those who are acquainted with the writings of Matthew Paris, or, indeed, almost any author of that period, will find that his character is kept within the probable bounds of history. The monarch who is reported to have murdered his own nephew, Prince Arthur, and of whom it is upon record that he drove nearly all the prelates from England who obeyed the Interdict, and set the whole power of Rome at defiance, had, we must conclude, but little veneration for the creed of any church. Nor, from his conduct in the latter part of his reign, when he knelt at the foot of Pandulph

for forgiveness, reinstated Langton in the See of Canterbury, and resigned his crown to the representative of St. Peter, have we much reason to believe that his motives were sincere, or tended to any thing further, than the means of being revenged upon his rebellious barons.

He was mean, cruel, hypocritical, passionate, revengeful, libidinous, and cowardly; and possessed not an atom of that daring decision which so strongly marked the character of his father: nor can the opposition which he showed to Rome be considered, for a moment, as arising from a spirit of true bravery.

Langton, on the other hand, was bold and decisive; nor did his ambition alone lead him to seek his own aggrandisement; but, when he had once firmly grasped the reins of power, he drove onward, in spite of the menaces of the pope, or the threats of the king, and did more towards the passing of Magna Charta than any other individual of that age. The author had

at first an intention of bringing down his work to that eventful period, but he feared that doing so, would throw more characters into his story than he could well manage; and, moreover, require a greater knowledge of those events, than came within the compass of his limited learning.

Those mail-clad senators (perhaps unintentionally) began to lessen the burthens of the people by throwing off their own. Or it might be that the monarch, jealous of the power the barons had assumed, began to pay more attention to the grievances of the lower classes; not from any motive of love, but that he might hinge his vengeance upon their complaints, and thereby avenge himself upon their feudal lords. King John rarely did an act of kindness, unless he was compelled to it, or had some motive of deep policy, or private pique, or could lessen the power of some one he hated by the deed.

Some of the oaths uttered by this monarch may at first seem startling; but they are such as he is said to have used, and scarcely any historian, which the author has read, has omitted to mention them: they seem essential in the working out of his character, and are highly characteristic of those stormy bursts of passion, to which he so often gave vent.

The learned critic will easily perceive that the author has played a few tricks with the solemn architecture of history; but this became essential, to render his story amusing. He who writes to please, is compelled to have recourse to his own invention: a little love, and a few dangers, are as necessary for his purpose, as the scenes and decorations are to a theatre; they are the gilded frame in which his picture must be placed, to draw even the slightest attention.

Thus he has been compelled to add, here a turret, and there a pillar; and sometimes he has

stuck in a window at random, without regarding the form of its arch, or even knowing whether it would let in the light to some splendid apartment, or only ornament a dead wall: he can but hope that fancy will "lend enchantment to the view." Whether he succeeds or fails, he has done his best; and some must lose, that others may win: for he is but a drop in the great ocean of talent that now rolls over England. If he has failed in furnishing what is termed a complete romance, he still has some faith in a few of the scenes which he has depicted, and more in the kind disposition of his critics and readers, who have hitherto taken up his humble productions, with that best of all feelings, a willingness to be pleased.

On one division of his story the author has much reliance: he has laid his scene in Sherwood Forest; and however timidly he may have trod among kings, and prelates, and barons, he has planted his foot boldly in the fastnesses of

the old woods. Sherwood Forest has long been to him one of those vast temples of nature, in which the heart fills with an overflowing worship—in which the spirit bows down before the solemn grandeur that pervades the silent space, and is hushed amid its own contemplation. And though now far away from its dim solitudes, he still remembers a few spots, with their green gloom, their sylvan beauty, and holy silence, which never were more lovely when Robin Hood blew his loud bugle, and marshalled his merry men under the greenwood tree.

Many of these pages were written during the last summer, amid those beautiful sylvan scenes that may yet be found around London, in the neighbourhood of Sydenham, Beckenham, Penge, and Norwood ; and, although the author was not overshadowed by such giants of the forest as stretch their broad arms over the wild glens of Sherwood, still he sometimes

found a goodly oak, a mossy stem, and a seat of green turf, and a silence as profound as ever reigned over the deep solitudes of the old forests. And amid such scenes as these, he was again enabled to conjure up some of those wild visions, which lighted up his happy, and boyish days.

Many and pleasant have been the hours which he has passed amid these scenes ; and if there are any passages in this work which may stir the hearts of his readers to a love of nature, and bear to their feelings a few of his own emotions, he has not laboured in vain.

Only last week the author visited one of those lovely spots where a portion of these pages were written, and sat on the very stem where the greater part of the first " Song of the Outlaws " was composed. Then it was the " sweet summer time, when leaves were green and long ; " the shadows of the trees slept lovingly in the tranquil waters that then divided

Penge Wood ; hundreds of fragrant wild-flowers were mirrored in the stream, and the woodbine scattered its rich odour upon the sleepy breeze. But now the charm is gone ! The bed of the rivulet is dry ; and where, before, poetry and beauty reigned, a barren railroad has bared its iron back, and, like one of the fabled dragons of old, is about to breathe fire and smoke over the spot, on which, for hundreds of years, the flowers have grown in silence, and the birds of summer have poured forth their music.

Man and money have been there ; and one of those horrid engines, (which groans along, like Time over-driven, and drags mankind in its rear, as if they were flying from a legion of fiends, or the beauties of nature were a plague) will ere long be seen smoking out every thing lovely from the spot.

There will soon be nothing left within five miles of London to point out the changes of Nature. The sweet hawthorn will be uprooted to

make room for houses ; where the spring-flowers now blow, there will be streets ; and instead of green-lanes and long hedge-rows, railways and smoke : the purple heath will be blackened with ashes. Trade, and tumult, and buildings will increase ; and generation after generation pass away, and no one at last be left who can remember that the merle once poured forth its music where the street then stretches, or that the yellow furze bared its breast of "lavish gold" beside the very hearth around which they are seated. Such are the changes wrought by time, and even in our own country we can point to spots where desolation now reigns, and exclaim,

" In yonder field below
A thousand years of silenced factions sleep."

THOMAS MILLER.

31, *Elliott's Row, Southwark,*
December, 13, 1837.

ROYSTON GOWER.

CHAPTER I.

It was a salvage wood of ancient growth,
With dreary paths, and caves, and thick-set trees,
And darkened miles of land from North to South.
Lord! how it roared, when loudly blew the breeze :—
There Romans did the Pagan Britons fight ;
There Druids dwelt, and it was Shirewood hight.

THOMAS OF TUXFORD.

THE ancient forest of Sherwood formerly covered the greater portion of Nottinghamshire, having only one general thoroughfare through it, which commencing on the borders of Yorkshire, crossed the river Idle at Redford, then passing

by Worksop, skirted the old town of Mansfield, and terminated near Nottingham. Even the latter place was surrounded with wild wooded scenery, which extended far away along the green banks of the river Trent; in whose waters hundreds of tall and beautiful trees were mirrored: their branches also sheltering the herds of stately deer, which in summertime frequented the cool margin.

It will be readily imagined that a road of such magnitude, running through almost every variety of savage and picturesque scenery, was traversed by the lonely way-farer with fear; especially at the period fixed upon for the opening of our story,—the early part of King John's restless reign. Hostelries were at that time few, and wide apart; and if the benighted traveller, trusting to find some rude Thorpe by the edge of the forest, attempted to prick his road through any of those winding and uncertain paths, which branched off on every hand, he often missed his way amid the mazes of the thicket. Sometimes, however, he was fortunate enough to meet with a wandering ranger, or swine-herd, and might obtain a night's shelter in their simple huts, and stretch his wearied

limbs until sunrise, on a mat of rushes. But a lodging on the broad fern or damp grass was not the worst fate that might befall him; for if he chanced to stumble upon the haunts of robbers, (numbers of whom infested the forests at that period), he was too often plundered, or found a grave in some dreary glen,—a silent spot that revealed no secrets.

The path which we have already mentioned was in many places overgrown with tall ryegrass, brambles, and thick entangling underwood; while here and there a short-stemmed tree, threw out its massy and gnarled branches, and seemed to dispute the way with the passing horseman. Occasionally the eye caught glimpses of green and luxuriant glades, or lost itself in the intricacies of wild leafy alleys, which led to solitudes only traversed by the outlaw or fallow-deer. Then again all prospect was shut out by the thick-set stems and closely-woven branches, which both eye and foot sought in vain to penetrate. In some places a brook rolled across the road, or went brawling through some neighbouring valley, growing darker and less distinct as it wound along under the overhanging trees, until it was

lost amid the gloominess of the forest. Sometimes a fallen tree was thrown over the water-course, and formed a rude bridge for foot-passengers, while the marks of timber wains and the dint of hoofs, pointed out to the mounted traveller the ford.

The scene was not without sounds which harmonized well with its solitude. The far-off sheep-bells, tinkling but little louder than the music of the stream; the distant winding of the swine-herd's horn; the loud bellowing of stags from the thickets; the chattering jay; and the merry laugh of the wood-pecker,—gave a voice to the wild scenery, which rendered the intervening silence more solemn.

Along the road thus imperfectly described, approached two persons on horseback. One, from the height in which he sat in the saddle, appeared to be a tall powerful man, with broad bony shoulders and long muscular arms, quite disproportioned to the rest of his body. There was a daring boldness enthroned in his fierce dark eyes, which quailed not before the sinking beams of a summer's sunset. His brow was clouded with an habitual frown, which seemed more the result of deep thought than anger, and

his upper lip bore that haughty curl, which may always be relied upon as the sure index to a proud unbending spirit. His features, although handsome, wore a minglement of something which seemed to awe the beholder,—a kind of indefinable haughtiness, as if he would hail nothing but danger as well met, or had a contempt for every thing excepting valour. He wore a beautiful suit of light ringed armour, or chain-mail, which shone like polished silver, and seemed as flexible to every movement of the body, as if it had been wrought in the loom. His helmet was flat-topped, and secured by a band of steel passing under the chin, while the ventail, or visor, which was seldom closed, excepting when in action, was removed. His huge triangular shield was slung behind him, and bore for a device a knotted and ragged staff, with a motto, which, when rendered into English, read “*I strike to wound!*” His arms were a long straight cross-hilted sword, battle-axe, and spear; from the latter of which floated a red swallow-tailed pennon, called the gonfanon, not unlike that of a modern lancer’s. A light-handled *martel-de-fer*, or pointed axe, which was occasionally used when in combat,

for picking holes through the armour, and breaking the links of mail, also hung from his saddle-bow.

The knight was mounted on a strong black horse, which seemed only built for so powerful a rider; and the white foam which he scattered so plentifully around, together with his occasional curvettings, the jerkings of his haughty head and beautifully arched neck, seemed to denote that he would rather be pawing in the front of battle, than traversing the quiet but uneven forest-path. The rider had checked his fiery steed several times, and gazed anxiously down some of those winding alleys already alluded to, as if he sought out some particular path, but was at a loss which one to pursue.

His companion was a lady, just rounding into the fulness of womanhood, yet retaining a portion of her girlish symmetry, like spring bursting half-abashed into the embrace of summer. Her face was remarkably beautiful, and accorded well with the pale pink gorget which was wrapped in graceful folds around her head and chin, and bound to her white and ample forehead with a band of gold, intimating that her birth was noble. Her hair was of a rich

bright brown, and fell behind her shoulders in two long plaits, which nearly reached to her waist. Her peplum or veil, was thrown aside, and occasionally blew in an arch as it caught the evening breeze, which gave to her face, for the moment, the appearance of Echo, or Iris peeping from between her bow. She wore a long super-tunic or gown, of green silk, sprinkled with small silver stars, gaudy enough for the proudest Thespian that ever dragged her tinsel-train over the tragic boards; over this was thrown a short rich cloak or tippet, edged with ermine; this was secured at the throat by a golden clasp. An ornamental girdle encompassed her waist, from which was suspended a small pouch or pocket. She also wore gloves, which were jewelled on the back; a species of ornament that may be traced to the monumental effigy of Henry II. Exposure to the air, and the exercise of riding, had called up an additional colour to her cheeks, which might have put to shame the loveliest blush ever worn on the apple-blossom. Her face looked as if it had been made from a smile; and although a shadow of sadness, or some serious thought, appeared to have clouded its natural sweetness,

yet you saw the brightness that beamed underneath as clearly as you may trace the sun under the thinnest vapour. She sat gracefully in her saddle; nor needed in the least the aid of her companion, who, however, neglected not every opportunity of seizing the reins of her palfrey, whenever any slight obstacle presented itself on the road.

The knight had again reined in his steed before the entrance of one of those paths, which, diverging from the main road, led deeper into the forest. The one by which they now halted was broad and beaten, and bespoke a greater probability of leading them to some hamlet, than any they had hitherto passed. His eye also swept narrowly the opposite barrier of trees, as if he sought for some mark amongst them, by which he might shape his course into the thicket. The lady also slackened her bridle, and her palfrey began to make the most of his time, by snatching a few mouthfuls of the moist green grass, with which that part of the forest was so richly carpeted.

“Said not the peasant, that we were to quit the high-road, when we had passed the scathed oak?” inquired the lady, in Norman French,

and in a voice which would have made music of the harshest language.

“The foul fiend fly away with the ignorant churl,” answered the knight, in an angry tone. “We have already passed three blasted trees, which time and tempest have marred into skeletons. Had the knave but possessed a jot more observation than his own swine, he might have pointed out some mark, by which we could have distinguished it from the rest, had it but been a cloven branch or a blacker stem. Be-shrew the varlet! I have half a mind to hurry back, and bray him with his own quarter-staff.”

“And leave me here, a prey to wolves, or outlaws, or the ghost of some old warrior which haunts these glades,” said the maiden with an affected affright, which drew a smile from the solemn countenance of her companion. “Marry, that would be courteous, and right knightly done, my noble kinsman, and would add a boar’s head to thy ragged staff, should you chance to survive a combat with an unarmed herdsman.”

“Thou art merry, maiden,” replied the knight, “and bearest thyself well, for one so young, and likely to repeat both vesper and matin in these wild woods, unless, indeed, we are fortunate

enough to thread our way through some of these perplexing paths, for by the length of our shadows, the sun will be down, ere we can advance another league.

The smile fled the lady's face, when she heard this announcement so seriously delivered, and the thoughts of having to pass a night in the forest, checked for a moment the gaiety of her spirits, and caused her to examine more cautiously the trees which they passed, for they had again resumed their journey.

As they rode along in silence, the sound of a distant bell smote their ears, and when they drew up to listen, it grew faint, and afar off, until it was lost amid the loud cooing of a ring-dove from the neighbouring thicket.

"By the Holy Virgin," exclaimed the knight, "if my ears err not, yonder sound is the vesper-bell of Newstead Priory, and we have already ridden far beyond the avenue which should have conducted us thither. I trust that yonder sound will waft to thee a portion of the devotion of the holy friars; for by the mass, it stirreth my memory, more to the remembrance of pasties than prayers. I can better think of sirloins than my sins, and would almost be willing to

don a priest's stole, if it would bring me nearer to the larder."

"Out upon thee, for a craven knight," said the maiden; "thou, who hast so often been proclaimed conqueror at the tournament, to talk of hunger. Surely, thou hast some little phial containing an elixir, that will support thyself, and steed, through the longest journey, heal every wound, and render thee invisible to either giant or griffin, like one of King Arthur's knights."

"I lack not one thing, which was as constant as their own shadows, to those enchanted horn-blowers," answered the knight, good humouredly.

"Thou wouldst say, a silly damsel, I doubt not," replied the maiden, with a stifled sigh. "Nay, thou might'st have added, one in distress; and yet you see, sir knight, I make but light of my troubles." Her countenance underwent a change as she spoke, which, in despite of what she had uttered, bespoke that her feelings were then serious.

"Nay! now thou interpretest too shrewdly for me," replied her companion; "and art leading me into un-knightly adventures. Few, methinks, in thy wildest romances, battled

with laws.—Thou art a ward of the Crown, and the splintering of a thousand lances would not alter the power, which is now in his Majesty's hands. Beside, De Marchmont is held in high esteem by the King, and he could not break the promise so solemnly given."

"I speak not of that," answered the maiden. "Anne of Burton was a ward of the Crown's, and yet, King John permitted her to bestow her hand on whom she chose, for payment of five-hundred marks. I would add double that amount to his exchequer, yet, he who breaks his oath and promises daily, cannot withdraw his pledge to this De Marchmont. But I vow to thee that before I will thus be wedded, nay, sold like a fatted oxen that hath no will of its own, I will sooner betake myself to the nunnery which my mother endowed, and give all my broad lands to the building and establishing of some monastery. I like not this king, nor will I be subject to these Norman innovations."

"And yet thy father was a Norman," replied the knight, smiling, "and a framer of these very laws. But come, put on thy palfrey, or the night will speedily overtake us."

“Are there not numerous bands of outlaws in these woods,” inquired the lady, readily changing the conversation, after a short silence which had ensued ; for she soon perceived that her kinsman had a yielding towards the side of King John.

“I hear that their numbers have increased of late,” answered the knight, “owing to De Marchmont’s having so rigorously enforced the forest-laws. But they will not, I trow, venture to attack one armed at all points like myself. They are but robbers, and cowardly curs, and the sight of a battle-axe would slacken a score of their bow-strings.”

“They must have been bolder men than thou holdest them,” said the lady, “who took prisoner Robert de Roos, and put to flight his followers, and after having rifled his mails, made him swear upon the holy cross that he would disafforest all his lands, before they would set him at liberty.”

“By my father’s bones ! they should have hewed me limb from limb, ere I would have sworn such an oath,” said the knight. “Better far had it been for him to have suffered death, than to grant such an inroad into privileges

which are daily slipping from our grasp. But assuredly mother church will absolve him from a vow made under such disadvantages."

"I speak it with sorrow," replied the maiden, "but there are those in the church too ready to deal out pardons, for even the worst of crimes. William of Summercoats purchased absolution, for having stabbed his cup-bearer, in a fit of anger, and now men meet him in the Folk-moot, as if he had done no wrong. I tell thee that if gold is thus taken to wipe off sins, (which the saints will assuredly avenge hereafter,) these evils will extend even further than the cruel ravages of the infidel Danes."

"I leave these matters to the priests," said the knight. "But beshrew me, if Robert de Roos, can disafforest those lands which he holds in tenure of the crown. Such a deed would bring him at once before the Court of Eyre."

"There thou art right," answered the maiden; "but if he hath sworn to allow those to escape scathless, who hunt the deer on his own estate, that is no affair to touch either the king or the forest-court. But methinks it were high time to quit this tedious road, and strike at a venture down some of these paths."

“Thou speakest wisely,” said her companion: “we can but at the worst take up our shelter for the night in some rude hut, and may, perchance, be fortunate enough to procure a guide to conduct us to the Priory.”

They again pursued their journey in silence, and at a brisker pace than they had hitherto gone; for the rays of the sinking sun fell lower, and here and there a deep shadow had usurped the place of the blue mistiness, and was fast settling upon the forest.

CHAPTER II.

Forest, and hill, and vale, and mountain wild,
Bore the deep foot-marks where the tyrant trod ;
The peasant wept when gazing on his child : —
The little slave played on the daisied sod,
Nor knew the doom reserved for after years.
Knew not, the world was filled with bitter tears,
Drawn forth by cruel lords, who only mocked their fears.

SILAS GEDDING.

OUR travellers had by this time reached a green glade, which spread out on either hand, and sloped with a lovely and pasture-like effect through the forest. Down that part which opened to the left, approached a rustic maiden, driving before her a herd of horned cattle ; she was chaunting some old ditty in a voice remarkable for its clearness, and which was given back with even a sweter sound by the sylvan echoes. Her face was browned through constant ex-

posure to the weather, and her long dark hair fell in wild, but not ungraceful disorder down her olive neck, while her arms, which were naked above the elbows, had caught the hue of ripe hazel nuts. Her features though not strictly beautiful, had an agreeable appearance, wearing the frankness of good-nature, which was evinced by the dimples in her cheek, the softness of her eyes, and the clear and open forehead, which from its breadth denoted no small intelligence. There was, moreover, an air of contentment over all, which spoke of happiness in her humble station. Her dress was simple, consisting of a long tunic of coarse woollen material, resembling the dress of a Christ-school-boy, with the exception of not being open in front, and having shorter sleeves; she wore rude sandals on her feet, which were secured by leather thongs.

The scene was worthy of the pencil of a Genius! The rays of the setting sun gilding the long forest glade, which was engirded with almost every variety of tree; some of them receiving a portion of the red golden light, while others were thrown into a greater depth of shadow, and contrasted beautifully with the

deep yellow sunbeams which fell upon the greensward, in unimaginable and picturesque forms. Now and then one of the herd halted to pluck a mouthful of grass, or elevated its head to crop an overhanging branch, while another, paused to low at the entrance of some winding dell, or moved along in an awkward waddling trot when struck by the slip of hazel which the damsel carried, until safe beyond her reach; when the same slow easy pace was again resumed. There was something graceful, and almost dignified in the maiden's gait; in the stately ease with which she stepped across the glade to fetch up one or other of her loitering charge, or crop a sprig from the fragrant wood-bines, that here and there hung waving over the road, and scattered a rich odour on the evening air. Our travellers reined in their horses to allow the herd time to cross the road, when the knight inquired of the damsel, the direction to Newstead Priory.

"You have ridden too far, noble sir," answered the maiden, "and should have taken the bridle-path by which the stream runneth; your nearest course will now be by the way my herd has taken, which leadeth to the village of Papple-

wick, from whence if you ride with fair speed, you may reach the Priory before it is dark."

Both the knight and lady were struck with the sweet voice of the maiden; and the correctness of her language, which far excelled the barbarous dialect spoken at that time by the peasantry. The lady stooped gracefully from her saddle, and taking from her pouch a gold piece, presented it to the damsel, saying, "Accept this slight token, kind maiden; it might have fared ill with us, but for meeting with thee; as the day is hastening apace, and we were unacquainted with the paths of this wild forest."

"It would ill become me, fair lady," replied the damsel, tendering back the gift, "to take guerdon for so slight a duty; the remembrance of your proffered kindness, without accepting it, is a sufficient reward for a Saxon maiden."

"Nay, by the blessed Mary!" exclaimed the lady, waving back the offered coin, "thou hast said enough; I will not now take back the trifle, for I am also Saxon, at least by my mother's side.—But tell me why thou, who appearest free-born, dost follow so rude an occupation?"

"'Tis partly my own desire, lady," replied the damsel, "my father claims the rights of free pasturage in the forest, and is withal eager in enforcing them, and our herdsmen have also had so many quarrels with the forest-keepers, that for his behoof, and the love I bear to peace, I took charge of the herd, although much against his will."

"Thy conduct is highly praise-worthy," said the lady, "and has won my esteem. Tell me thy father's name. It may be that I can render his house some service during these unsettled times."

"He is called Hereward the Ready, lady," answered the maiden, "through his readiness in opposing all innovations on the rights of commonage, and withstanding all oppression; and although it but ill becometh a daughter to speak his praise, yet is he well beloved by the inhabitants of the forest, and hath often taken part in their quarrels against the rangers."

"Ah," exclaimed the knight, turning half round in his saddle, and addressing the lady, for he had ridden a little beyond his companion, "By the bones of the holy martyr! that is he of whom we discoursed, who disputed the boundary mark with Geoffrey de Marchmont."

The knight was checked in his further reply by a sudden plunge made by his steed, which would have unhorsed an inferior rider, for a noble stag sweeping across the glade, between the knight and the advanced herd, was struck through the head with an arrow, and fell dead at his horse's feet.

"By St. Hubert," said the knight, "that is well done, and the missing of a foot in breadth might have maimed my good steed." Then falling back a few paces, he planted himself between the lady, and the thicket from whence the arrow was shot. In the next moment a rustling was heard among the branches, and an archer, parting the thickly woven hazels, stepped into the grassy glade, with a long bow in his hand, and stood boldly eyeing the group before him.

"Fore God! sir yeoman, thou art a bold archer!" said the knight; "an' thou hadst not have hit thy mark, I should have deemed that thou hadst taken my horse for thy target, and broken thy bones for practising thine archery so near me."

"Gramercy for thy courtesy, proud knight," replied the archer; "I could have saved my

bones, in spite of thy boast, by winging a shaft through thy ventail."

"By the holy rood! I may believe thee," said the knight, "after the proof thou hast already given."

The archer smiled at the compliment paid to his skill, and without appearing to take any further notice of the group, took his stand beside the fallen stag, while our travellers passed on. It was however evident, from the looks exchanged between himself and the maiden, that they were not strangers to each other, as a slight blush mantled the face of the latter when their eyes met. This did not escape the glance of the lady, who was in nowise deficient of that acute observation which interprets a look, or sigh, a gift which has descended with improvements to the gentle sex of our own time, whose commentaries on this art are tolerably accurate.

"If I read aright," said the lady, addressing the damsel, whose herd still kept in advance, and allowed her to fall back and converse with the fair traveller, without being heard by the knight,—“If I read aright, yonder yeoman wears a costume, somewhat at variance with that commonly donned by a forest-keeper, he bears

no emblem of servitude, and the rich tunic and buskins seem meet for one of high degree. Knowest thou to whom he belongs?"

"I may but guess, lady," replied the damsel, deeply embarrassed, "that yonder archer belongs to a band of free-rangers, who serve not the Norman, Geoffrey de Marchmont, but—"

"He is an outlaw," continued the lady, filling up the blank at which the maiden hesitated; "say I rightly?"

"So they are called by the Normans," said the damsel, "and we may not gainsay them."

"But art thou not afeard of journeying alone, or driving thy charge so near their haunts?" enquired the lady.

"None, beside the tyrant and the oppressor hath need to fear them, lady," said the damsel. "They war not with us, who have burthens heavy enough to bear in chiminage, talliage, and fines. They are bold men; and were it not for them, and the awe their names spread among our task-masters, it would be but little that the Saxon peasant could call his own. They have done many a daring deed, and many an act of kindness, which, I trust, will be recorded for the weal of their souls in heaven."

“ Kind maiden,” said the lady, looking intently on the damsel, and pausing as if undecided in her mind, whether or not to proceed ; “ I will deal truly with thee, not doubting but that in return thou wilt keep nothing from me, which I may require. Yonder outlaw is indebted to me for his life. I once preserved him from my father’s anger. I am Edith of Lincoln.”

“ I have heard thy name uttered with blessings in the secret fastnesses of these woods,” replied the damsel ; “ and many of the kind acts thou hast done since thy father’s death, have flown abroad. There are hundreds of ready hearts and strong hands within these forests, that would gladly do thee any service.”

“ I may too soon need their assistance, maiden,” said the lady with a sigh, “ and it is on this matter that I would speak ; for I cannot openly resist the power against which I am now opposed. Thy father, I have heard, hath great command over the rude people of this forest ; and hath, moreover, overthrown the machinations, and withstood the oppressions of the cruel Norman, Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont, into whose power I am even now fearful of falling.”

“ He is indeed cruel,” replied the damsel; “ ready to inflict and loath to forgive. Even his own followers obey him more through fear than love; and there are those amongst them who have ventured to reveal his secrets; others have fled his service in disgust, and are now numbered amongst the outlaws. I took charge of the herd to stop those quarrels which are ever breaking forth between my father’s household and De Marchmont’s rangers; for they seldom complain if the cattle wander into the forest-boundary while under my care. It is difficult to keep peace during these turbulent times.”

“ We are now nearing the village,” said the lady, “ and I thank the blessed Virgin for thus bringing us together. Thou wilt keep this glove,” added she, withdrawing it from her beautiful small hand; “ and when thou receivest its fellow, whether by day or night, be sure that I am hard bestead. Thy father knew something of my Saxon kindred, and it was my intention to have sought him out on the morrow. I would have thee reveal all that hath passed between us to him. The daughter of Adeleve will not plead before Hereward the Saxon, in

vain. He can do more for me than those who ride forth with a hundred mailed followers at their back."

"Heaven bless thee!" replied the maiden; "it shall go hard if I stir not up a few brave men in thy defence, humble though my garb and present occupation may be."

"Adieu!" said the noble maiden; "and should thy father need more assistance than those around can give him, send the token which I have delivered to thee, to Father Matthew, at the Priory. I may do that for others which I cannot achieve for myself, should my voice be required to reach even the throne."

They had by this time entered the village of Papplewick, and the knight having outstripped his companion a few paces, reined in his steed and waited her approach beside a stone cross, which looked down the straggling street, that consisted of a score or so of rude huts, formed of planks, and covered with thatch: and so thickly overhung with trees, as to be scarcely distinguished in the approaching twilight from the surrounding forest. The Saxon maiden followed the steps of her herd to the left, along a deep valley, at the end of which arose

the dwelling of Hereward the Ready, and which appeared to be much more extensive and better built than the others.

Our travellers bent their course through the village towards the Priory, and were followed by the wondering eyes of the few peasants who were looking out upon the calm evening scene from their humble homes, before they drew the wooden bar across their doors, or threw themselves down to rest upon their couch of leaves or dry grass. Such were the rude pallets on which our forefathers slept, until they were awakened by the crowing of the red cock ; or the bright sunbeams, that streamed in upon them through a thousand crevices, and announced the return of morning.

CHAPTER III.

Thus all the land appeared, in ages past,
A dreary desert and a gloomy waste,
To savage beasts and savage laws a prey,
And kings more furious and severe than they ;
Who claimed the skies, dispeopled air and floods,
The lonely lords of empty wilds and woods.

POPE.

THE archer, whom we left a few pages back, standing beside the fallen stag in the forest glade, having followed with his eye our travellers ; until a turning of the road shut out a further view, started from his half musing and apparently careless attitude, and lifting a bugle-horn to his lips, blew a loud peculiar blast, which made every dingle and dell to ring again, with their doubling echoes. After having waited the lapse of a few moments, four archers, similarly arrayed to himself, issued from an adjoin-

ing copse, each bearing a long bow, and stood before him. One of these he ordered to carry away the stag, and another to follow the steps of the knight and lady, and see that no harm befel them; and having inquired if their companions were at the appointed places, he commanded the remainder to hold themselves in readiness behind the clump of beeches opposite, and again resumed his former position; keeping, however, a sharp look-out, from time to time, in that direction which led deeper into the woods.

He had not long kept watch, before three forest-rangers appeared, distinguished by their badges, bearing the device of a white hart, the arms of Geoffrey de Marchmont. Between the two foremost walked a tall down-cast man, with his hands bound; while, behind him, followed the third ranger, leading a couple of strong hounds, which, from their looks, seemed half inclined to tear him to pieces, and were only withheld from their purpose by a dread of the stout quarter-staff, which he displayed. As they approached, the archer stepped from under the oak where he had stood, and confronted them.

Before, however, proceeding with our story, it will be necessary to make the reader somewhat acquainted with the Norman forest-laws, which were tyrannous and severe to such a degree, as partly to justify the conduct of those who set them at defiance. During the reigns of the Saxon princes, forest laws were first established in Britain; for while the Romans held possession of the island, it was free to the poorest hunter. The Saxon laws were, nevertheless, mild, and only useless wastes and untenanted wilds were set apart for the chase; and even the penalties inflicted upon those who invaded these parts, were so trivial, as to call forth but little resistance.

William the Norman was the first to destroy villages and churches, make slaves of the inhabitants, and turning their possessions into forests, guard his regal hunting grounds by cruel and vexatious laws. The devastation he made is recorded in the writings of Huntingdon, Brompton, Winter, Knighton, and others, some of whom were contemporaries with the Conqueror, who, although they vary somewhat in their statement, as to the ravages committed, all agree in remarking the general de-

struction. Manwood, who has written much on this subject, extracts a clause of the laws which were in force at the period of which we write. It runs thus:—

“ It is allowed to our sovereign lord the king, in respect of his continual care and labour for the preservation of the whole realm, among other privileges, this prerogative:—To have his places of recreation, and pastime, wheresoever he will appoint. For, as it is at the liberty and pleasure of his grace to reserve the wild beasts and the game to himself for his only delight and pleasure, so he may also, at his will and pleasure, make a forest for them to abide in.”

It will be readily imagined, that while the forests were governed under such arbitrary mandates as these, much disaffection reigned throughout those places which bordered on the chase; and that Sherwood, being one of the oldest forests, and containing moreover large herds of deer, there was no lack of murmurers in that neighbourhood. Many and terrible were the combats between the rangers, and those who daringly pursued the game, in the

very teeth of the law ; and as the Norman nobles were a proud and vindictive race, and all followers of the chase, the examples they too often made of those detected in the offence were savagely severe. In some cases the offender lost an eye, or hand ; in others, the law even extended to death, while fines and imprisonments were dealt forth as favours. It will be borne in mind that our story treats of that period in King John's reign, which preceded the passing of the Great Charter.

Although forests were formed, and laws made for the protection of game, it would be tedious to enter into the details of clauses which allowed rangers to pursue stray deer over the purlieus or cultivated lands, and all the vexatious privileges by which they were reclaimed. The boundaries were difficult, and almost undefined, consisting of a tree, a mill, a hut, or any other object, perhaps, a mile apart from the next mark ; and the imaginary line between these, in case of depredation, left too often to the decision of some tyrannical officer. Tolls were levied on all goods that passed through these places, and as many of the Norman invaders were comparatively poor, every species

of imposition was resorted to by their officers, to extract money from their less powerful neighbours under the plea of fines, dues, and trespasses. Pasture lands were also at this time either wholly open, or at the best but indifferently enclosed; and one may easily guess the many altercations which took place between the keepers, and those who wandered into the forests in search of stray cattle. If a man was found armed, or stationed in any suspicious part of the forest, or with the marks of blood upon him, or carrying a cord, or followed by a dog, which had not had its fore-claws struck off, he was amenable to the laws.

It will be well for the reader to bear in mind the few hints which we have thus hastily thrown together on the ancient forest laws, as they will serve to elucidate several points of the story which we have founded upon the manners and customs of this barbarous but chivalric age. It should also be remembered that many who had broken these mandates, had been proclaimed throughout the districts, and not having appeared at the given time, were held outlaws, whose punishment, if caught, was death; and that numbers had betaken themselves to the

forest, had united together, and repelling force by force, defied alike the Normans and their laws. Nor were their powers wholly levelled at the barons, and their forest-keepers; but imitating the example of their oppressors, they levied tolls upon travellers; generally, however, confining themselves to the rich and powerful, and often secretly executing more daring plans, than the Norman with all his retainers dared to attempt. But we will return to the archer whom we left confronting the forest-keepers, with their prisoner, in the earlier part of this chapter.

“How now friends!” said the outlaw, planting himself before the rangers, so as to stop their course, unless they deviated either to the right or left; “hold ye thief, or murderer in charge, that ye bind him thus securely? I fear me ’tis some heavy matter.”

“Marry, sir archer, what booteth it thee to inquire?” replied the old keeper, a man over whose head threescore winters had darkened; “an’ thou stoppest us by thy questions, we may be tempted to find him a companion in his confinement.”

“Nay, be not wroth,” continued the archer;

“I did but ask thee his offence, an’ thou turnest upon me angrily: of a surety one may inquire by what authority thou claimest him as thy prisoner?”

“Authority!” echoed the old man, “thou talkest to me as if I knew not the law. I trow thou wilt next demand by what authority I impound the cattle in fence-month. — Marry! ’tis like thine ignorance.”

“Nay,” quoth the archer, “I know somewhat of watch-and-ward at that time, when the Does seek quiet; but thy taking this man prisoner baffleth my understanding.”

“Well, an’ thou must know,” replied the keeper, rather awed by the bold bearing of the outlaw, “we found him within forest bounds, chasing the deer with unmaimed hounds; — art thou answered?”

“Nay, thou tellest not all the facts,” exclaimed the prisoner. “I did but drive the deer from my homestead, as they ate up the standing corn; and sounded the re-chase when they had gained the boundary, nor had I set foot within the forest, but to call off my dogs, when they obeyed not the horn.”

“By St. Christopher,” said the archer, “an’

he sounded the re-chase; he is no prisoner of thine, sir keeper, though thou foundest him within the boundary."

"Thou hadst best go thy way," said the keeper, who retained the hounds, "in place of putting thy questions like a Justice of Eyre, or thou mayest have to reply to them in the forest court thyself, unless I silence thy tongue with my quarter-staff."

"By St. Dunstan, if thou meanest so," said the outlaw, "an' thy fellow will lend me his staff, I will ring such a peal upon thy skull, as shall serve thee with music a month hence."

"Peace," said the old keeper, "I would argue a matter with this proud archer, who seemeth so learned in expounding the law, though I, God wot, have had to explain divers points, even to those who sat highest in court. Dost know that thou mightest be taken now on stable-stand?"

"Nay," answered the outlaw, "I may not deny, that I carry bow and shaft; that I have been within the thicket; but how wilt thou explain that my purpose was to kill a buck?"

"Gramercy to thy reasons," replied the keeper; "an' I found a wolf in the fold, how

might I prove that he came not to prey upon the flock ; or a fox in the hen-roost, that he came not to plunder ? Canst enlighten me, providing either vowed that such was not their intention ?”

“ Marry, thou hast not yet hit the clout,” rejoined the archer ; “ may I not carry my bow in my own defence ? or lean against a tree when I am wearied, and my thoughts be far from slaughtering the deer ?”

“ I will not gainsay thee,” replied the keeper ; “ but our laws would hold thee guilty.”

“ I fear me that thou speakest but too true,” answered the outlaw ; “ and that even thyself hath witnessed these things, and allowed them to pass by, although opposed by thy better judgment : nevertheless thou wilt release the prisoner, he being, according to thine own laws, free, after having sounded the re-chase. As to maiming his dogs, how ill thou wouldst brook having thine own feet pared !”

“ Nay, you persuade me not to that,” said the old keeper, shaking his head and looking thoughtful for the moment. “ It would but fare ill with me, when Geoffrey de Marchmont heard that I had given liberty to one found with un-

expeditated hounds within the forest boundary.”

“Name not the Norman tyrant,” exclaimed the archer, with a deep frown; “the Shire already groans under his evil deeds, and the dark donjons that gape beneath his lofty castle, are wet with the tears of his victims. Name him not, unless it be as the desolater of homes, the red dragon that comes abroad to gorge his fill, then flies to his guarded den for shelter. But let him beware! there is yet a Saxon shaft feathered, that may pierce his mail; and should that err, even a sunbeam would find its way to his heart, and strike him dead for his crimes.—Tear off those servile badges, and no longer do the bidding of so vile a master.”

“Marry! but you speak not so discourteously of the baron whose bread I eat, and escape whole,” said the younger keeper. And springing forward, he aimed a blow at the archer with his quarter-staff; but the latter bounded aside, and by a dexterous movement of his foot, overthrew his adversary, and while in the act of falling wrenched the weapon from his hand, and struck him on the head, before he had measured his length on the greensward.

Scarcely had his opponent fallen, before the outlaw slid behind the prisoner, and with a long whittle or wood-knife, which he drew from his belt, cut the bandages that secured his hands. The stranger no sooner found his arms liberated, than he grappled with the ranger who had hitherto retained him, and bore him to the earth; and having seized his bow and sheaf of arrows, threw himself into a defensive position, by pointing a shaft at the oldest keeper, who had not as yet struck a blow.

“By St Dunstan!” said the archer, “an’ thou so soon shakest off thine enemy, I marvel at thee becoming prisoner with so staunch a brace of hounds at thy side;” for the dogs no sooner found themselves released, than they flew at the old keeper, and would have torn him down, but for the interference of the outlaw.

“It had not happened thus,” replied the stranger; “but the cowardly ranger aimed a shaft at my dog; and I made no resistance, that I might save an animal which has served me long and faithfully by day and night; but trust me, the good service which you have this day rendered me, shall never be forgotten.”

“Thou shalt answer for this, proud outlaw,

—for such I know thou art,” exclaimed the old keeper, as he assisted his companions to rise : “thou shalt answer for it to the baron, who will hang thee upon the highest oak in Sherwood, for what thou hast done.”

“I regard not thy threats, old man,” replied the archer ; “and had but the Norman tyrant thy master have made the same boast, I would have sent back a swift messenger, that would have given the lie to his throat : — I war not with his slaves.”

“And as to thy companion,” said the younger keeper, applying his hand to his head as he arose, “though he escapes us now, his home still remains ; and not a rafter will be left of his roof, or a sheep in his fold, unless he gives himself up, by noon to-morrow.”

“Revengeful dog!” exclaimed the outlaw, “move but one straw from his thatch, and the bottom-most pit of thy master’s castle shall not protect thee ;” saying which, he entered the the opposite thicket, followed by his liberated companion, while the hounds ran to and fro, barking loudly, and jumping up to their master, as if they rejoiced at again beholding him free.

Twilight had by this time begun to deepen

over the forest, and the narrow winding paths, overhung with clustering branches, through which the outlaw threaded his way, were already dark. Sometimes their course led through low leafy avenues under which they were unable to walk upright, owing to the entangling branches of the dwarf-oaks, which had wound their arms around each other, and formed a canopy even impervious to the summer sunbeams. Scouts were however stationed at regular distances in these solitudes, and the archer occasionally paused, either to whisper the password or to bid them remove to other stations. Some of these were placed at the entrance of alleys, so narrow, that only one could walk abreast, and from the dense underwood that formed an impenetrable barrier on either side, there remained but little doubt, that these paths had been made by the outlaws, and were known to them alone.

After having traversed several tracks similar to these, they at length reached an immense thicket, formed of yews, oaks, hollies, and every variety of forest-tree, between the stems of which grew dense masses of copsewood, impassable even to deer. Along the border of this

wall of trees they pursued their course until they came to a clump of aged thorns, under which they were compelled to stoop ; and passing beyond these, they again entered a narrow path which led through the thicket and opened upon a beautiful oval glade, having the appearance of a rude sylvan amphitheatre.

In the centre of the glade blazed a huge fire ; before which a fat buck was suspended from three strong stakes, and appeared nearly ready for the evening meal. Around the fire were assembled a numerous band of the outlaws : some appeared busied in watching the progress of the buck ; others were seated on logs of wood, or piles of turf, a few were stretched at full length on the greensward. One was busily engaged in sharpening the point of an arrow ; another was fixing a new bow-string, while a third was humming to himself some sylvan song. A few had collected together, and were applauding two combatants, who were trying each other's skill in the best possible humour with quarter-staffs ; others were practising the art of fencing with long sticks, and showed no mean skill in giving or parrying a blow. Conspicuous among his compeers was a tall powerful man, near seven

feet high ; he was walking alone at the further end of the glade ; and observing the archer and his companion enter, he approached them.

“ This,” said the archer, addressing his companion, “ is one of my chosen followers, not the less faithful for being tall ; but only making our friendship of high-standing, and truly of long acquaintance.”

“ Marry, but I have met with him ere this,” answered the stranger, “ and have mine own reasons for remembering our acquaintanceship.”

“ By my troth, but thy cudgelling hath hardly yet left my bones,” said the tall outlaw, extending his hand ; “ and as we have been friends heretofore, I need but tell our captain that thou canst wield as good a staff as any one within Sherwood.”

“ If this be the captain thou didst speak of,” said the stranger, “ it is to his own hand that I owe my freedom, or at this time I had been prisoner to Geoffrey de Marchmont.”

“ Name not that,” said the archer,—“ name not that ; for by St. Dunstan, an’ thou hadst dealt but a few such blows, as thou didst ring on the skull of that ranger, thou hadst been no man’s prisoner long. But may I crave thy

name for the slight service thou art pleased to prize so highly."

"I am called Thomas-the-Carter," replied he, "and live near the Thorpe of Linbye, hard by the Lene; and if a strong arm can do aught to requite this good deed, be it high-noon or cock-crow, an' thou sendest for me, I will be at thy side."

"Thou art a worthy comrade," answered the captain, "and I need no further proof of thy valour than what I have seen. But, by St. Peter, an' thou fallest into the clutches of these rangers again, I'd give no more for thy chance than I would for the life of a buck at a hundred yards' distance, and my arrow already pointed. Hadst thou not better quit thine homestead and stay with us?"

Here the captain's persuasions terminated, for two of his band at that moment entered, leading between them an esquire in splendid livery; and having withdrawn the bandage from his eyes, they placed him before their leader.

"Ah! fly such hawks abroad?" exclaimed the captain, eyeing the captive; "an' I read thy dress aright, thou belongest to King John?"

"Thou guessest rightly," replied the captive,

undaunted by the numbers who had gathered around him ; “ and I was speeding on my royal master’s mission, until stopped by these robbers, who have taken from me the letter which I was sent to deliver to the baron, Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont.”

“ The king, your master, lacked brains,” said the captain, “ if he thought that you would pass safely through this forest, with so much gold on your surcoat, when his officers are for ever demanding trespasses and talliage. But how hath he come to send thee thus far, when he is now making his stay at York ?”

“ Nay, there thou art in the wrong,” answered the captive ; “ for I left him but an hour hence in his palace at Mansfield.”

“ Then he hath sped fast,” said the leader, musing ; and motioning two of the Outlaws to conduct the prisoner to the other side of the glade, he thus proceeded :—“ We must make this adventure our own ; for, by the holy rood ! it will benefit us but little, to let this proud baron meet with the king, after our affair to-day.”

“ Thou sayest sooth,” replied the tall outlaw ; “ and if we could but become acquainted

with the contents of this letter, it would in no wise be the worse to our purpose."

"By St. Christopher! I jump with thine humour," said the captain; "and what think ye, if we robe one of our own merry men in the splendid trappings of this varlet, and dispatch him to Nottingham Castle?"

"That would be cheating the devil with a vengeance," replied another, who was tuning an old harp, while eyeing the letter which the leader held; "but how sayest thou, my master? when thou hast once broken that broad seal, methinks the old Norman will smell a fox; and unless thy messenger has more wits than a cat has lives, he will feel the fresh air on his battlements."

"That we will leave to ourselves," answered the captain, breaking open the seal without ceremony, and glancing his eye at the crooked characters written therein. "The foul fiend fly away with their Norman, or French, or Hebrew!" continued he; "for I wot not which it may be; had it been Saxon, I might have reached their secret. Here, Will of the Cloister, thou wert intended for a priest, but preferred

the forest, and loved a bow better than thy beads; we must make thee our interpreter."

Will of the Cloister took the letter, and drawing nearer to the fire-light, first mumbled it over to himself, then translating its contents, he read aloud the following:—

"To our beloved Subject, Geoffrey de Marchmont:

"We summon thee to appear two days hence from next sun-rise, with thy bowmen, to aid us in hunting the deer in our royal forest of Sherwood, according to the tenure by which thou holdest the castle of Nottingham, and the lands adjacent. We would also that thou shouldest bring with thee a prisoner, named Walter-the-one-handed, whom we are given to understand has long been notorious in this neighbourhood; in which it is our intention to execute him publicly, as a warning to all evil-doers, who invade our forest-rights. Several complaints have been made to our person, respecting thy severity in putting in force the power with which we have entrusted thee; and, albeit, we have promised to make inquiry into

these things ; nevertheless, we do not wish thee to abate one jot of thy severity, as we would have the forest boundaries free from all inhabitants, saving those whom we are pleased to appoint to watch over the game. Touching the matter of thy marriage with Edith of Lincoln, and her possessions, we feel bounden to fulfil our promise in thy behalf, notwithstanding the maiden hath had access to our person this day, and promised to pay a thousand marks that she may be free. She abideth at present in the Priory of Newstead, whither she went this evening, attended only by her kinsman Hugh de Lacy. It were well if thou hadst her in thy possession — we will be blind in the matter, for the damsel is comely, and we like not to be severe with her. Regarding the lands of Hereward the Saxon, and the fief of Papplewick, we will summon him to show his claim thereto. We owe thee our thanks for hanging the two outlaws, and agree with thee that there was no need of trial, trusting that thou wilt pursue the same course until not one remaineth. We have much to communicate to thine own ear, which we shall reserve until our meeting.”

“ May all the curses of the fiends alight upon the head of the crowned tyrant ! ” exclaimed the captain, when he had heard the termination of the letter ; “ here is the justice of a Norman king ! but, by the Holy Virgin, I’ll mar his plot, an’ he come with all his mailed barons at his back ! ”

“ And, Walter-the-one-handed,” said the tall outlaw, “ an’ I draw not a bow in his behalf, I am no true Englishman. Is it not enough that he hath lost his hand by these devilish laws, but he must now be made food for rooks and ravens ? ”

“ Marry ! but I will shed a few red drops in the cause of Hereward the Saxon,” said the harper, “ ere they take from him the few acres which have descended to him by birth-right, and leave his dark-eyed daughter portionless ! ”

“ And may Sathanas fly away with me ! ” exclaimed Will of the Cloister, “ if I shoot not a shaft for the bright-eyed beauty who rode through the forest this evening. Her marry the ugly old Norman ! by my troth, it would be pairing the carrion-crow with the white dove ! ”

“ An’ I had no other cause,” said Stephen of Tuxford, “ I’d fight to the death, in revenge of

my old comrades, whose bones are now bleaching under the battlements of the blood-thirsty baron's castle."

"May I be marked like a target," said Thomas-the-Carter, "an' I leave you until this game is played out; an' I cannot hit the bull's eye, I may strike to an inch with a broadsword."

"We may not lose an arrow-flight of time," said the leader; "strip that knave of his gaudy dress, and do thou, George-o'-the-Green, wear for once the gilt trappings of a Norman slave, and speed to De Marchmont's castle with this cursed document. Tell Walter his friends are in readiness near the blasted oak. A little fire will replace this seal, we leave the rest to thyself. Keep thine eye on the weakest points of the dragon's den, an' we should have to draw him." Then pausing a moment, he exclaimed, "By Him that died on the tree! I will carry it myself, though I am torn by the tusks of this Norman boar."

"Nay, master, that may not be," said his tall companion, "I will first peril my life in this matter; an' thou dost fall into his hands, it

would be but sorry revenge, though we razed his castle above him for sepulture."

"We should be cunning men," said the captain, "an' we got more than the half of thee into this knave's garments; besides, men say this Norman hath the eye of an hawk; and trust me, so large a mass as thyself would not pass toll-free. Thou, Arthur, wilt, in the meantime, acquaint Hereward-the-Ready, with what it behoveth him to know; and thou mayest tell him, that he shall not lack an hundred strong arms, if he is hard bestead. And thou, Will of the Cloister," continued the leader, "who art so ready to enlist thyself in this fair lady's cause, wilt take a score of bowmen and apprise her of King John's kindness. Thou must not be afraid of arousing the drowsy friars of Newstead; and hear me, the less her attendant knight knows of this secret, the better for ourselves. Be careful how thou passest the rangers' lodges, and quarrel not with the porter, for he is worthy of our kindness."

"Leavest thou me no share of this enterprise," said the tall outlaw.

"Yea, marry, I do," replied the leader; "I leave thee the greatest trust—thou must await

the passing of this baron's train, with a chosen band; an' thou drivest an arrow through his mail, I will hold it good service; but, on thy life, rescue Walter-the-one-handed—thou wilt not find me idle."

"I fear me, master," continued the tall bowman, "an' thou once gettest within the coil of this black adder, small store might purchase the service I can render thee. I would fain share thy danger; an' thou perishest, there is none left to lead our band, and strike a blow for our liberties."

"Gramercy to thy fears!" said the captain, yet ill concealing the emotions which he felt at his companion's pleading; "I know thou wouldst die for me; but think not that yonder varlet's disguise will be so closely scrutinised; trust me, I might walk into the king's presence in that same garb, and escape observation." Saying which, he entered a low shed, covered in with green branches and long grass, that stood at the other end of the glade; and, after the lapse of a few minutes, returned in the dress of the captive squire.

So much had this change of costume (aided by some composition with which he had

coloured his face) altered the appearance of the brave outlaw, that even the tall bowman stopped his progress while passing the narrow outlet which led into the forest, and said, "Nay, marry, we part not company yet; our captain hath need of thy fine feathers, that he may take a short flight to the flock thou belongest."

"By St. Christopher!" answered the leader, "an' thou knowest me not in this disguise, then am I safe with the hawk-eyed Norman."

"Methinks thou art safe enough, for that matter," said his tall companion; "but few, I trow, would recognise the weather-dyed face of their leader, under that maiden-looking skin; but tell me how thou obtainedst this secret."

"By peering into the secrets of monks and friars," replied the captain; "trowest thou they have no method for rubbing off the marks of a night's wassail, and making their ruddy visages look, in truth, as pale as a maiden's while before her confessor."

By this time the evening meal was in readiness; and the outlaws having seated themselves around the fire, were joined by their captain, when the repast commenced.

Ten of the archers were appointed to wait on

their companions; and as these were changed on every similar occasion, it left no grounds for murmuring, and made servitude equal. Ale was served round in huge drinking horns; nor was there any lack of venison pasties, the smallest of which might have appeased ten moderate appetites. Neither was the prisoner forgotten amid the good fare; and, if aught might be gathered from the cheerfulness of his countenance, and the eagerness with which he fell into the glee of those around him, he seemed to harbour but little regret, either for the loss of his livery or liberty; but joined as loudly in the "Derry down" chorus of the following ditty, as the boldest outlaw in the band, not excepting the harper, who first commenced the sylvan song.

SONG OF THE OUTLAWS.

Come fill the brown bowl, boys, let care bide the morrow,
For life's but a shaft that flies feathered with sorrow,
And Love is a hart, that bides far from the glade,
So timid at first that he shuns his own shade:—
Our bodies are bows, and we laugh, drink, and sing,
Just to ease the bent wood, boys, and slacken the string;
Then fill the brown bowl, boys, and let it go round,
Lest the bow-string should snap with too sudden a bound.

Oh! the world is a greenwood, in which we all dwell ;
Some know all its wild-paths, some tread but the dell :
And they who have found its broad beaten highway,
Oft sigh for the shade in the heat of the day :
Ambition grows weary and pines for the glen,
Where he sported in childhood—'mid happiness then—
And Fame throws behind him a lingering look—
As the hunted stag glances when passing the brook.

'Tis better to fall at the head of the herd,
Than to fly back and perish, unmourned, uninterr'd ;
'Tis better to die, grasping arrow and bow,
Amid those that we love, than be slave to a foe :
To be bound with the brave amid Victory's sheaves,
Than to wither the last ear the reaper's hand leaves :
For Life is the target at which Death's shafts fly,
If they miss us, we live—if they hit us, we die.

If we die in the greenwood, the sound of the horn
Still rings out as sweetly, both even and morn.
And the stag bounds as freely above us, as when
Our loud whoop and hallo awakened the glen ;
And the old hoary oaks just wave o'er us the same
As they did, when beneath them we startled the game ;
And the stream rolls as blythe, with its tink, tinkling song ;
And the Abbey-bell rings out its merry ding-dong.

Let others go slumber beneath the cold stone,
Deep, silent, and dark ; narrow, dreary, and lone ;
Give me the green forest-turf for my last bed :
Where the hart and the hind will pass over my head ;

Where the blue-bell and vi'let above me shall wave,
And the merry birds gaily sing over my grave ;
Where a thousand old oaks will a watch round me keep,
And their broad branches roar, while they sing me to sleep.

Oh ! the Priest, when he shrives us, will smile at our deeds ;
And the Leech heave a sigh as the ebbing-heart bleeds :—
For the soul, that but kindled when tyrants did wrong,
Shall have little to fear as it journeys along.
On our grave will the peasant drop many a tear,
And maidens at twilight be found kneeling there ;
And pilgrim, and minstrel, beside it be seen,
Breathing forth a low prayer for the Outlaw in green.

The waving of drinking horns that kept time to the rude chorus ; the daring group scattered over the glade in every picturesque position ; the red light of the immense fire that flashed on many a bold brow, or mingled in softer tints with the darkness of the surrounding scenery ; the white smoke curling high above the gloomy trees ; here and there the figure of a sentinel, half revealed by some stray gleam, formed a wild and beautiful picture. Nor could the beholder look upon it without a sigh, when he thought that the next hour might see the manliest, the bravest, and the most daring, doomed to waver upon the highest tree in that forest, if they but fell into the hands of their enemies.

At a signal given by their leader, the merriment ceased; and every man sprung up from the festival, as ready to execute any daring deed as he had been to lend his voice to the ditty. The outlaw chief departed alone from the glade; and having mounted the steed of his prisoner, was soon lost in the darkness of the forest, as he hurried along to deliver the message of King John.

CHAPTER IV.

Day set on Norham's castled steep,
And Tweed's fair river, broad and deep,
And Cheviot's mountains lone :
The battled towers, the donjon keep,
The loop-hole grates where captives weep,
The flanking walls that round it sweep,
In yellow lustre shone.
The warriors on the turrets high,
Moving athwart the evening sky,
Seemed forms of giant height :
Their armour, as it caught the rays,
Flashed back again the western blaze,
In lines of dazzling light.

MARMION.

THE stronghold of Geoffrey de Marchmont stood on the same high rock, which is now occupied by the ruins of Nottingham Castle ; and was, at the period of which we write, inaccessible on every side, saving by drawbridge and

postern, unless we mention the subterraneous passage, so famous in after-times for the amours of Mortimer and the Queen Isabelle. Its lofty turrets were piled high above the sylvan scenery of Sherwood forest, and commanded an extensive view over the surrounding shires—even to the lordly towers of Belvoir, and those rich pastoral vales that spread for miles on either side the river Trent. Around the base of the castle flowed the deep river Lene, which first commenced near the out-skirts of the adjacent forest, and formed here a dangerous and natural moat, which, if even passed by the enemy, endangered but little the safety of a fortress, so strongly defended without the aid of art. Numerous excavations had been made in the rock on which the castle stood, some of which, beside forming donjons, were carried to the verge of the precipice, and cut into shot-holes, where bowmen could be placed at great advantage during an assault, should the besiegers pass the moat and carry the outward barriers.

The banner of the haughty Norman waved proudly in the silent moon-light, over the broad battlements of the castle, as the bold

outlaw rode along the banks of the Lene, now humming to himself some old song, or gazing upon the silvery ripples in which the queen of night was mirrored. Occasionally he turned to watch the progress of a stately stag, hurrying to the adjoining covert, which had been startled by the tramp of his courser, while stooping to drink; then again, the deep baying of a watchdog reached his ear, as it sounded upon the still night, from among the rude huts where the vassals of the baron slept.

Sometimes the helmet of a warder or sentinel, glittered above the lofty turrets as he paced to and fro on his watch, or paused to look at the lovely scene sleeping beneath. The outlaw gazed upon the lofty pile that arose before him (like a huge mountain darkening the sky) with mingled feelings, in which the deep hatred he bore to its possessor was half lost amid the melancholy emotions that, for a moment, seemed to settle with a leaden heaviness upon his heart. On those very battlements had swung the bravest of his followers; and, although their death had been revenged tenfold, still he felt that his triumph would not be complete, until the baron ceased to breathe.

Many a tale was told around the peasant's fireside, in the dusk of evening, of deeds which had been done in those donjons; and the colour had fled many a cheek at the mention of Marchmont's name. "Devil!" muttered the outlaw, between his teeth; "an' I once have thee within my clutches, we will settle for all." Then his thoughts wandered to Walter-the-one-handed, who was even then immured in the heart of that castle, from whence so few escaped but through the gates of death.

Walter had lost his right hand, according to a clause of the then existing forest laws, for having shot a buck within boundaries; and although he could no longer draw bow-string, still his name rung through every shire in the north, as the one-handed-swordsman of Sherwood, before whom no one could long stand as a competitor. He is mentioned by one of the old authors of that age, as being the strongest man in England; and had long been a terror to the forest-rangers, and a tower of strength to the oppressed serfs, and saving the chief of the outlaws, De Marchmont could not have had a more welcome prisoner. Neither had Walter's captivity been

easily achieved, for although assailed when alone, by a band of keepers, the hart would long shun the thicket and the greensward, which were dyed with the marks of the struggle; the rumour of which, as is already known, had reached King John's ears.

The outlaw had by this time reached that part of the moat which flowed before the gloomy archway of the postern, to which there was only access by the drawbridge; and the barbican and outworks were rarely guarded by night, as the warders retired into the postern after sunset, trusting to the strong walls, and deep water for defence. Having reined up his steed before a narrow outlet, which only admitted of one passing through at a time, he blew a loud blast on his bugle, which soon collected a few heads on the opposite battlements. The warder, who was fearful that such bold notes might cause an alarm among the indwellers of the castle, began to parley in such a tone, as left no doubt respecting the humour he was then in.

“Who in the name of the arch-fiend,” exclaimed the warder, “art thou, that darest to ring such an alarum upon our ears, at this unseasonable hour?”

“Let down thy drawbridge, friend warder,” answered the outlaw, “I bring a letter from King John to thy master, an’ thou makest not great speed I shall have an herd of green archers upon me, for they were all a-stir near Lenton.”

“And will be ready to rush across the moat with thee; I doubt not,” said the warder, “the devil draw my teeth if I loosen either bolt or bar for thee before sunrise, an’ thou bringest twenty letters.”

“By the holy rood, an’ thou lowerest not the portcullis, or droppest some plank across the moat,” said the outlaw, “I will ring out such a blast as shall bring the baron, and all his followers to the ramparts.”

“An’ thou doest that,” replied the warder, “I will send a bolt into thy brain that shall stop thy blowing for ever.” Then calling below to some of his companions, he said, “Hugh Nevile! take with thee a few cross-bowmen, and drop a beam over the moat, below the second tower, and should any one attempt to follow this varlet, swing them all off, and make targets of their heads, if they rise in the water.”

“ I may repay thy courtsey,” muttered the outlaw, as he rode along the bank to the second tower, or angle of the barbican, and was soon over the moat, leaving his horse to chance, as they refused to throw a plank wide enough across, to make its footing sure.

“ Thou art an ill-natured coward,” said the outlaw to the warder, when he reached the postern, “ an’ mightest have known by this guise to whom I belonged, for thou couldst not fail to distinguish it at so short a distance.”

“ An’ thou camest not on such an errand,” said the warder, “ I would teach thy tongue more reverence. But give Hugh Nevile thy letter, and bide here until his return, thou shouldst have drank a cup with us an’ thou hadst been more courteous.”

Scarcely had the warder spoken, or the messenger stept further than where the dark shadow of the postern extended upon the moonlight, before a loud deep voice was heard shouting from the high battlements above, and bearing no bad resemblance to distant thunder, as it exclaimed, “ How now, knaves, what means that note of defiance at this hour ?”

“ Yonder is the baron’s voice,” answered the

warder, and attempted to make known the outlaw's business; but in tones so feeble, compared to the voice which made the inquiry, as to render his reply inaudible to those above. Nor could the trumpet have much out-sounded the voice that again exclaimed, "Send up the challenger with speed."

"Had you used your tongue instead of your bugle," said the warder, "your message would have reached us across the moat, without alarming the whole garrison; marry an' I would sooner see such an upstart as thou art, swinging from the turret in the morning light, than the one-handed Saxon, who is there to die."

"Gramercy for thy good wishes," said the outlaw, "an' thou wert suspended from the said turret, I would not risk my neck to unloose thee." Saying which, he followed his guide up a steep ascent of the rock, until they reached a detached tower, which flanked one corner of the lofty foundation — here were placed sentinels. They then ascended a narrow winding stair, which led to a parapet; over this they passed, and having climbed another flight of steps, which wound through a buttress, or jutting tower, they at length reached the battlements,

behind which Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont was pacing to and fro, with rapid strides.

The proud Norman, who had sprung hurriedly from his bed at the sound of the bugle, had thrown around him a super-totus, or ample garment, not unlike a Spanish cloak, excepting only its wide sleeves; and as the night-air blew bleakly around the giddy turrets, his arms were folded, to gather the flowing drapery tightly around him. The hem of this loose garment was covered with white fur, and as he moved along with great speed, seemed to glance under the shadow of the ramparts like the white foam that follows the wake of a vessel. He wore a round cap in no wise remarkable, excepting for a band of rich sable which surrounded the lower part, and was scarcely distinguishable from the raven locks which fell upon his shoulders.

His eye-brows were dark and shaggy, and his eyes so deeply sunk as to leave only visible two deep concaves, owing to the shade of the projecting brows. Sometimes, as he turned before the moonlight, the outlaw caught a glance of the fierce fire which glowed within those caverns. One cheek was deeply seamed with a sword cut,

which, by some transverse direction, had swept under the broad nostril, and left an opening in the upper lip, through which protruded a large tooth; bearing no bad resemblance to the tusk of a wild boar.

Pride, anger, and cruelty were all prominent in his savage features; yet with these were mingled such strong characters of courage, as showed that he who so readily doomed others to death, would be one of the first to peril his own life when danger appeared.

The soldiers whom the bugle had summoned, seemed to stand in fear before the angry baron, not even daring to look upon his countenance; but each appeared bent upon examining his arblast, mangonel, or bow; shrinking aside, through a similar instinct to that which causes a dog to shun his ill-humoured master.

Hugh Nevile had stood beside the outlaw, and watched the angry looks and hurried steps of the baron, not daring either to present the letter or himself, yet knowing that both had caught his eye as he approached within two yards of where they stood, before he again retraced his footsteps upon the battlements. The outlaw had eyed De Marchmont narrowly, and

waited, with impatience, until he had thrice measured the space on the parapet, when, snatching the letter from the affrighted vassal, he approached the Norman, and, presenting it, said, "A packet from the king."

The baron paused, and drawing up his figure to its full height, threw back his head with a haughty jerk, and looked upon the outlaw with a grim scowl, as though he would have withered him by his glance, as the serpent is said to terrify its prey before devouring it.

The outlaw met his glance without quailing, and held the letter at arm's length, unmoved; his brow only growing darker as he boldly outlooked the fierce Norman.

"By God's face," said the baron, without extending his arm to receive the document, "an' thou wert not vassal to the king, I'd have thee thrown over the embrasures into the moat. Marry, matters have come to some pass, whilst a varlet, like thee, darest to approach a castle with a trumpet, blowing defiance; then intrude thyself upon its owner, with as little courtesy as one enters the hut of a serf. — Here, Nevile! draw near, knave, and teach this braggart how to approach his superiors."

The vassal bent his knee, and, without daring to uplift his eyes, presented the epistle, and said, "To the Noble Baron Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont, from His Majesty King John."

"Take pattern by what thou hast seen, knave, and approach not a noble with so little respect in future," said the baron, receiving the letter. And breaking open the seal, he read the contents by the light of a torch, held by an attendant.

The outlaw muttered to himself, that "he had never knelt to a Norman robber;" but took care that the sentence was only audible to his own ears.

"Ah! fools that we are!" murmured the baron, as he perused the letter, and commented to himself, "to hold our castles by any other tenure than the sword; for what better claim had the Norman bastard to this kingdom." — Then, proceeding a little further in silence, he suddenly exclaimed, "Bring forth the one-handed Saxon, and instantly hang the dog over the battlements." — And, pacing to and fro, in the same furious manner as we have before described, he said, "By the fiery ford of perdition! an' I suffer either king or pope to interfere with my

prisoners, may Sathanas fly away with me, life and limb. A proper matter, indeed! I shall next have to send my serfs to be chastised, I trow! or return the names of all I choose to secure in my donjons." He again perused the letter, and by such time as he had become wholly in possession of its contents, his anger had subsided, and his thoughts turned into other, and more agreeable channels.

"Edith were indeed a prize," continued he, "and might serve to sweeten this bitter draught of majesty; I will fly my hawk with the wind, and it shall go hard but in the end I grapple the quarry."

His further meditations were interrupted by the appearance of Walter-the-one-handed, who, not approving of the officiousness of one of the men in attendance, had struck him a blow which caused him to measure his length at the feet of Geoffrey de Marchmont. "Dog of a Saxon!" said the baron, "hast thou no more respect for our person, than to strike down one of my followers before my own eyes? By the blood of St. Thomas of Kent, thou shalt be hung, with mill-stones to thy feet, for this act."

“Thief of a blood-thirsty Norman!” exclaimed Walter-the-one-handed, taking advantage of the sensation he had already produced, and, springing forward as he spoke, he grasped the full folds of the baron’s cloak, and by a sudden and unexpected jerk, drew them so tightly around him, as to pinion his arms, and leave him as much chance of resistance as a man rolled in the folds of a blanket. “Thief of a Norman,” continued he, “thus do I reverence thy person!” and, with one swing of his powerful arm, he had already raised the body of De Marchmont to a level with the ramparts; another foot forward, and there slumbered a depth, down which, whatever fell possessed of life, must perish.

Just then, a soldier uplifted his battle-axe, the blow was about to fall upon the arm of the Saxon, when the outlaw seized the handle of the weapon with one hand, and with the other struck the assailant over the head with such force, as to send him staggering against the suspended baron, round whom he threw his arms, and, together with Walter, fell, within the embrasures.

All this was done in so brief a space of time,

and the Saxon having pushed aside two of the soldiers, as he sprang upon the Norman, caused such sudden confusion, that the remainder, stationed at a few yards' distance, fell over their fallen comrades, in the eagerness with which they rushed to rescue their master. Had it not been for the bearer of the battle-axe, Geoffrey de Marchmont would have gone down that quick and terrible road to death, along which so many had been hurried by his commands, whose bones even then glittered at the base of the rock, in the calm moonlight.

The outlaw stooped, as if to assist the baron in rising, and whispered his name to Walter-the-one-handed, who made no reply, but gave the extended hand of his leader a quick, fervent grasp, the only sign by which he dare communicate the thrill of glowing gratitude, and hope, that in an instant rushed through his heart

“Thou art a daring knave!” said the baron, when he arose, and saw the Saxon secured by his bowmen: he seemed to look upon him with even a mixture of admiration, and for the moment wished that he had so bold a follower: “Thou art a daring knave, but thy doom is

now in other hands: I had not thought that there was an arm within this island could have achieved such a deed. I must resign thee to those who will have no respect for thy valour! but if thou wilt take up sword and follow my banner, I will yet attempt to save thee."

"Never," replied the Saxon, firmly, "will I strike a blow for one of thy race: it would be but taking up the blade to put in force such savage edicts as those by which I have lost my hand: Norman! the blood of that is upon thy banner, and will yet be washed off, although I make not the red sluices by which it must be cleansed."

"Then be it so," answered the baron, whose passion seemed to slumber after the storm; "I had thee brought forth but now with another intent; and thou mightest at this moment have been wavering, where nought save the hooded crow flies. But, no matter: the Norman sues not twice. It is to another thou owest thy present escape; and only for a brief space."

"And thou mayest say the same, proud Norman," answered Walter, "for, had it not been for the interference of he, whom, if I err not, weareth the king's livery, I should have heard

thy ribs crack, one by one, as the rock shook thee from every point of its rugged breast, like a curse, doomed to traverse the downward road."

The one-handed Saxon, as we have already stated, was well aware who wore the livery, and spoke this with the hope that it might promote a better understanding between the baron and the outlaw, and in the end lead to the furtherance of his leader's plans.

"Nay, there thou liest in thy teeth," said the soldier, whose battle-axe had rendered his master such good service without inflicting a blow, "an' it had not been for the king's esquire, who prevented my striking thee, whether thine arm belongeth to man or devil, I would have lopped it from thy trunk."

"And sent Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont into the moat by the same blow," said the outlaw, not wishing the truth to be known; "that would have been bravely done, I trow, when he already hung over the battlements like a severed thunder-cloud; for methinks thou couldst not so easily have loosened the hand from its grasp, notwithstanding thy boast."

"Enough of this matter," said the baron,

“take away the prisoner, and hearken, knaves!” he continued, in a lower tone, “by the sunbeams have reached the moat, have in readiness a score of lances, for we shall then journey towards Mansfield; and see that each man closes well his armour; for by the bones of the martyr, if these outlaws but get wind that the Saxon is in our train, every crevice in our mail will be pricked like a target.”

“An’ there are not the ringing of a few broad-swords on your iron head-pieces,” said the outlaw, to himself, “I be no true man.”

Walter-the-one-handed was again conducted to the donjon, and as the baron was about to depart, a light footstep was heard upon the parapet, and a beautiful female, apparently not more than seventeen, approached, and seizing his arm, said, “What meaneth that trumpet, father? I feared its sound might forebode evil, and could not again rest, until satisfied of your safety.”

“Thou art too fearful, Margaret,” said the baron, parting the locks on her forehead, and forgetting, while he gazed upon his daughter, those daring schemes to which his ambition prompted him. “’Twas but this knave

of a messenger from the king, that blew as if his master were at his back. But get thee to thy chamber, thou art too lightly clad for the night-air that sweeps around these turrets." "How now?" continued the baron, addressing a handsome page, who was approaching his daughter, and seemed but little beyond her own age; "hast thou also come to inquire after my safety?" This was spoken with irony.

"He did but go to the northern tower at my wish," answered Margaret, slightly confused, "and not having found thee there, came hither to bring me the tidings."

"Humph! he is more ready to fulfil thy commands than my own," said the baron; "but come, thou seest I am safe, and thou lookest as unfit to be moving amongst cross-bows and battle-axes, at this hour, as a dove to be perched on an helmet in the fray."

"I would crave a boon of thee, ere I depart," said the maiden, lifting up her lovely eyes as she spoke, while her fair face formed as great a contrast to her father's, as the white daisy does to the dull flower of the overhanging nettle, "thou wilt grant it me," continued she, after a pause, and putting on her most winning look.

“Nay! thou knowest our conditions,” answered he, approaching as near a smile as his gloomy countenance would allow; “touch not on those forbidden matters, and thy request is granted.”

“Alas! my suit will not then be yielded to,” sighed Margaret. “I would have sought thy mercy, in favour of the one-handed Saxon.”

“Then thou must solicit King John,” replied her father; “for he hath summoned him to his presence, and will, I doubt not, deal kindly with him.” The latter sentence was spoken with a half malicious grin, in which the scar on his upper lip seemed to move, as if it gave the lie to his words.

“Here, knave!” exclaimed the baron, calling to the page who was about to follow his daughter, and did not even turn at so uncourteous a call. “Here, knave! varlet! sir page! do thou order wine to be in readiness in the arched-hall, and see that the menials bestir themselves, or thou mayest look to it.”

The page knit his lofty eye-brows as he heard this rude summons, and seemed about to reply, when Margaret cast on him an imploring look, in which tenderness and pity were mingled, or

if her eyes possessed a language, they pleaded with him to forbear, and the dark spot instantly left his brow. He, however, replied not, excepting by a stiff formal bow, as he departed.

“Curse on thy proud heart,” said the baron, whose keen glance seemed to have penetrated the thoughts of his page. “This comes of rearing a cur, who fancies that the gentle blood of a knight flows in his veins. But the Saxons are all alike, even if they have only descended from some thane, whose forgotten forefathers reigned over a few reedy acres of boggy marish, and kept some score or two of savage serfs; they were ever a stiff-necked race, and I should have torn out the tongue of ——. But no matter, I will have this varlet watched narrowly.”

The outlaw had not wasted a moment idly while in the stronghold of his enemy, but had rendered his eyes familiar with the weakest points of the defences, and examined the distance from base to battlement, together with the inner works of protection on this side the moat, with the close scrutiny of one who expected that ere long such observations might be of benefit.

His attention seemed mostly turned in the northern direction, where the rock sloped with a more gradual descent on the side of the forest, and was for the most part covered with shaggy brushwood, and here and there an aged tree, which had rooted itself in the fissures, and hung in a pleasing and picturesque position in the moonlight.

His observation had, however, been drawn from these objects while leaning over the embrasures, by the musical voice of Margaret, as she pleaded in behalf of his faithful follower. And so earnestly did he regard her, that he seemed half inclined to set her heart at rest on the matter, by uttering his own name. For rumour had whispered that the fair creature then before him, had been instrumental in the escape of two of his own band, who were doomed to death, and that the Saxon page had aided in the affair. But these things were never breathed within the walls of the castle.

The bold outlaw had gazed upon her in silent admiration, as if puzzled in conceiving how one so kind and beautiful, could have sprung from so savage a stem, or retain an affection for so cruel a sire; forgetting that from the

craggs of the gnarled rock, will sometimes spring a knot of lovely flowers. Nor had the affectionate glance which her father bestowed upon her escaped the eagle-eye of the outlaw, and he half muttered to himself, "Certes, this Norman devil cannot be so black as he is painted."

Neither should it be forgotten that no other baron within the English shores, had so daring and undaunted a race to contend with as Geoffrey de Marchmont, and that, constantly harassed as he was by these foresters, and with the fears and murmurs of his own keepers, his life might be considered as one continued series of plots, vexations, and frustrated schemes; for even when he deemed his enemies secure, and in his power, they slid harmless as eels from his grasp.

As the outlaw was following up his train of thought, and half forgetting his own schemes of vengeance, he was thus accosted by the baron, who said,

"Come, sir squire! notwithstanding the rude summons at our postern, where thou didst sound a note of war instead of peace, we forgive thee for thy interference on our behalf, which, whether intentional or not, was of service, and invite thee to empty a cup with us." Saying which,

he opened a door that communicated with the battlements, and was followed by the outlaw through a range of galleries, along which suits of armour, and various weapons were hung, that flashed back again the blaze of the torches which were borne by the attendants.

CHAPTER V.

Send a bumper about, and cease this debate,
Of the tricks of the court, and designs of the state :
Whether *Edith*, or *Langton*, or th' *King* go to pot,
Never trouble your brains : let 'em take their own lot.
Thank the Gods, we are now sitting under our vine,
And what else should we do ? but drink bumpers of wine.

THOMAS BROWN THE ELDER.

THE apartment into which the Norman baron conducted the chief of the outlaws, was decorated with a greater degree of taste and splendour than might be supposed to have existed in so barbarous an age, and which may, in a great measure, be attributed to the refined notions which were brought from the East, and other countries, through which the crusaders had passed, in the preceding reign.

The walls were covered with course crimson tapestry, and a huge iron lamp, in the form of

a warrior, hung from the middle of the ceiling. The light issued from the top of the handle of a battle-axe, which the figure held in one hand, and was strongly reflected from a burnished shield, which was grasped by the other ; while, at every motion of the door, it swung to and fro, causing the drooping chains to make a creaking sound, and driving the flame in every direction.

Drinking vessels were placed upon a table covered with a rich scarlet cloth, fringed with gold ; some of the cups were of silver, curiously enwrought with hounds and hunters, the latter blowing rude horns, with cheeks swollen out like those of Æolus. A large wood-fire crackled upon the hearth, under an immense chimney, which served in after ages as a means of escape from the enemy, when the castle was attacked ; as many of the besieged scaled these wide apertures, through the means of rope-ladders, and fled by ways only known to themselves.

After both had partaken of food, plenty of which was placed on the table, the baron filled two of the wine cups, and drinking to his companion, who returned the courtesy, he said, " I have been marvelling within myself how thou didst escape through the forest in that guise,

for not a vassal have I, who, for love or gold, dare go alone by the same path in the dress of my household, for fear of these outlaws."

"Marry, sir knight, they must be cravens!" said the outlaw, "or put but little trust in the speed of a good horse."

"By the Holy Virgin, the speed of a mettled palfrey cannot outstrip their arrows when they are in the wind," said the baron; "I would that the king chased them, more than he does the deer."

"Beshrew me, but he liketh not to expose his royal person," remarked the outlaw, "but leaveth the danger to others, and the deer to himself."

"Ha! speakest thou so lightly of thy master?" exclaimed the baron.

"It is but sooth," replied the outlaw, carelessly. "Beside he is now warring with the devil and the pope, for if the latter excommunicates us, as he threatens, who will preserve us from the former?"

"Go to, knave! thou hast a glib tongue," said the baron, but in a tone more of encouragement than censure, "and wouldst not, I trow, like his Majesty to hear with how little reverence thou namest him."

“An’ thou tellest him,” said the outlaw, “may I be cloven from head to foot, if I gain-say a word. An’ I were him, I would put this Cardinal Langton in the Lene, and send back these papal bulls, wrapt round cross-bolts, ere I’d be a pope’s palfrey.”

“Thou art free of speech, friend squire;” said the baron, attempting to smile; but it was more like the grin of a wild boar. “I drink to thee! and am of thy mind in this matter, though we be deprived of bell, book, and burial.”

“I would thou wert of my mind, on more matters that concerneth thee,” continued the outlaw, lifting the massy wine-cup to his lips, and having replaced it, fixing his eyes upon the floor, with a well-affected diffidence; as if he had something of import to communicate, yet was loth to commence.

The baron eyed the outlaw narrowly, as though he had hoped to reach the secret by his countenance; not doubting but that he was conversing with the king’s messenger, whom he thought might have gathered knowledge while at court of affairs which it would benefit him to listen to.

Although the height to which his ambition aspired, was of the loftiest, still his brain was

perplexed with petty jealousies; for he well knew that the wavering mind of King John, was fickle as a weathercock, and easily moved with every wind, and whim, that either interest or passion sent forth. Such were the motives that caused De Marchmont to place himself, for the time, upon an apparent level with the supposed esquire, and thus to continue the conversation.

“What may I gather from your serious countenance, sir squire? Would you have me look as miserable as a poor sinner, who finds himself in the other world, without his Peter-pence, and can neither gain admittance to purgatory or paradise, or hast thou any portion of sanctity that thou wishest to lend, until I become overstocked, and can pay it back at the rate of three pater-nosters per diem?”

“Nay, by the smile of a bonny maiden, I touch not spiritual matters,” replied the forester. “I leave them to fat friars, and merry monks, I tell my beads when I am tired of trolling a sylvan song, and sleep as soundly as any of the holy brotherhood, after they have sung a penitential psalm. It was of other matters that I

was about to speak. But they concern me not, and I have forgotten them."

"Gramercy, for thy memory," said the baron, "thou trowest that I might take offence at thy remarks, I wot. Fill thy cup, and I will drink to thee, as the sauciest braggart, and most fearless varlet, that ever served a king, or broke a jest at his expense."

"And I pledge thee," said the undaunted outlaw, "for as merry a Norman in thy cups, as ever cut a Saxon's throat, burnt a widow's hut, scourged a poor hind, hung an outlaw, or filled a castle donjon with victims."

"'Fore God! thou art a bold fellow, and valuest thy life but little, to utter such words in my presence," said the baron arising and clutching the hilt of his dagger, as he spoke.

"He were a goose, who cared for his life at a time like the present," said the forester, having satisfied himself that his own dagger was in readiness; for not a motion of the Norman had escaped his penetrating eye. "For after such store of good living, who can say that we have lately led a bad life? and assuredly, if we live well, the holy fathers have promised that we

shall die well, and dying well, we are sure of heaven ; therefore I hold him a goose, who careth for death after such a repast, seeing that he hath lived well."

" Ha ! ha ! ha ! thou art a merry companion," said the baron, again recovering his composure, and making a slight stagger as he regained his seat, for he had drank deeply. " I am wroth with myself that I was angered against thee ; but men, I doubt not, belie me, and consider an act of justice as tyrannous and cruel, — words which were unknown when our forefathers won this fair island from the Saxons, for all such deeds were then accounted as bravery, and set down to the score of valour."

" It was on that point I was about to speak," said the daring outlaw. " Men call thee cruel, sir knight, a persecutor of the poor peasants. One who would grasp every hide of land from the surviving Saxons, who remain in this forest, add them to thine own possessions, and send the inhabitants to seek shelter with the wild fox. But," added he, with a sarcastic smile, " they surely cannot speak the truth !"

" By the thunder of God, they are liars !" replied the baron, knitting his brows, and pacing

the apartment with rapid strides, "they who speak thus, know but little of the rebellious race who surround me. Even those who render me talliage, betray my keepers, succour the outlaws, drive their cattle to pasture within the forest, slaughter the deer, and spoil my messengers. I did but burn the hut of a Saxon, who refused to pray at even-tide beside the cross, for the soul of my wife — the tenure by which he held his possessions, — when the same evening, six of my rangers' lodges were in flames. I shall know no peace until every rascally yeoman is unhoused, and the neck of every Saxon hind again bound with the ring of servitude."

"But might you not soften these rigorous measures?" said the outlaw. "Bethink you it were better to rule over friends than foes, and there be those who have murmured of your severities to the king, and to whom he hath promised redress; and should he fail in his pledge, there are others, who have both will and power to be revenged on thyself. I speak but the truth. I speak of the power you might gain by this kindness."

"They know but little of King John, who trust in his promises," said the Norman; "and

although thou seemest to possess some knowledge of these secrets, yet thou hast communicated nothing new. As to those who would assail me, I never shrunk from the foe in fair field, and will yet throw down my gage in defence of mine honour. Thou seemest to have thrown a spell over me, sir squire, for never yet have I before listened to such accusations, without spurning the accuser from my feet; even as I did the Earl of Eltham's herald."

"By the holy rood, you trust too much to the tongues of your own vassals," said the outlaw, "to hear the truth; for they have the terror of the scourge and donjon too often before their eyes, to repeat to thee what they hear daily. Many of them have been charged to carry defiance to thyself, and tell thee that the blood of those who are called outlaws, and who have perished while in thy hands, will be required of thee."

"Bridle thy tongue, sir squire," said the baron, angrily, "or even thy royal badge may but ill protect thee: I must not answer to the menial for doing what the master approveth."

"Nay, an' you are offended, I can be silent," answered the outlaw. "An' I were the menial

you think me, I should not thus risk my head in speaking of these matters: I tell thee, Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont, that I bear as much love towards the usurper, King John, as thyself; the man who murdered Prince Arthur, to gain his crown, hath but small portion in my prayers. Nay, you may look; an' I gainsay one word when we meet him to-morrow, may God's malison alight upon me!"

"Friend squire!" said the baron, fixing his piercing glance on the outlaw, "an' I knew more of thee, I might trust thee with other matters: thy being no true lover of the king, speaketh something, but there are others who, liking him as little as thyself, are yet no friends of mine. Tell me whom thou art, that doeth his bidding, and yet darest thus to despise him?"

"Marry, that may not be," replied the outlaw. "I come to thee as the king's messenger, and will go out with thee as the same; but when thou hast reached thy journey's end, thou shalt see the love I bear thee."

"By the Holy Martyr, I believe thee honest, and would do much to win thy services," said the baron, "did I but know whether thou wert knight or squire; but I will wait until I see how

thou conductest thyself before the king. Come, fill thy cup, and pledge me Edith, the swan-necked."

The outlaw drank the pledge, and having replaced his cup, said, "If it be Edith of Lincoln you mean, she left the palace this evening, with Hugh de Lacy, whose herald you did spurn, when he delivered his master's challenge."

"We have become friends since that day," said the baron; "but by the light of heaven, she hath chosen a powerful champion; and he hath I believe some claim on her, through his marriage."

"He is in some measure allied to her," replied the outlaw, "and she needeth a strong arm in her cause, having refused to accept the husband appointed her by the king, according to the power which he holdeth over wards under age. 'Tis also whispered that his majesty hath a liking for the noble maiden, and on that account would not take the fine; but hath fixed her freedom at a higher price."

"By the soul of my father!" exclaimed the baron, striking the table with his hand, until the massy flagons danced beneath the blow, "an' he were ten times a king, and tampered with the

promised bride of a Marchmont, my dagger should reach his heart. Thou, who knowest so much of his affairs, canst not be ignorant of the oath he swore, when he offered Edith in marriage, as the reward for my services. By the sacred sepulchre! I will have him to know that my blood is more pure than that which flows in the veins of the descendants of the Norman bastard. Thou liest, sir squire," continued he, raising his voice until the arched roof rung again,—“but no,” he added, in a lower tone, “the libertine put aside his beautiful wife Avisa, in spite of the menaces of the Pope, and married Isabelle of Angoulême, even when she was betrothed to the Count de la Marche. But let him beware! I take not the prey which the lion runneth down. I will strike my own quarry, and woe to the hawk that waveth a wing over the field where I sweep! But he dare not,” added he, and filling another goblet, emptied it at a draught, as if he would bury his thoughts in wine.

“By St. Dunstan, an’ I thought that you would have taken this matter so much to heart,” said the outlaw, with an affected pity, “I would have held my peace on the subject.”

“You know not the wily viper,” answered the

baron, in an altered tone of voice, which was produced by his free libations. "I see, now, why he would have me retain her in my possession. He hath laid a snare for me; but, by the bones of St Thomas! an' he falleth not into it himself, may I never more wear spur! No! she shall be mine, though I win her at the point of my sword, and wed her amid a forest of lances! Pledge her, knave, in a full cup! To Edith the swan-necked, the sworn bride of De Marchmont; and he who holdeth her not the fairest of all, I will meet on foot, or on horseback."

The outlaw again drank the pledge, and observing the visible effect the wine had already produced on the Norman, thought that he might with safety allude to the Saxon prisoner. "By the twelve apostles, sir knight, yonder one-handed-Saxon is strong as a turret," continued he, "and might match his prowess against this Hugh de Lacy."

"I would make him my standard-bearer," said the baron; "or place him foremost among my followers, an' he would serve me; for, by my soul, I am loath that so able a swordsman should fall into other hands. Fill, sir squire, I

drink to the Saxon, and will throw down my gage for him to meet the bravest."

"You had better let some challenge stand over, as the grounds on which you grant his freedom," said the outlaw, drinking the Saxon's health with a deeper sincerity than the Norman dreamed of, while the baron again took a deep draught; "and leave it with me to persuade him; methinks it were easy to be done."

"By the relics of all the saints, thou speakest wisely," stammered the baron. "Here, Royston! Godfrey! Clement! bring torches, and light us to the kennel where the Saxon dog is secured;" then changing his mind as the attendants entered, he said, "No, not to-night; thou mayest ride beside him; I would not trust me with him now, I should cleave him to the earth; to handle a Norman like a pike-staff! Bring me my armour, Clement.—To Edith of Lincoln! Though he were ten times a king, I would meet him. Aye! and with my heaviest battle-axe. Why stand you there, knaves, and show not the king's messenger to his couch?" continued he; arising. And staggering across the hall, he allowed himself to be led away to his chamber by the attendants.

“Some cursed charm hath alighted upon me,” said the outlaw, when the baron had withdrawn; “for the form of this Norman’s daughter hath stept in between me, and revenge, or I would have provoked him to quarrel in his cups, and have sent him ere this on his long journey. The curse of a coward alight on me! the maiden’s beauty hath unmanned me; I will not yet destroy him. The daughter that pleaded for my companion, hath saved her cruel father for the present: or, by the fathomless abyss! had I not seen her, my dagger had, ere now, pierced his treacherous heart.”

“Sayest thou so, under this roof?” said the page, entering; for the door was open, and he had heard every word the outlaw uttered; “by my troth, I had given thee credit for more caution, when I heard of thy saving Walter the Saxon.”

“Thou wouldst not betray me,” said the outlaw; “but why should I doubt it, when I saw him address thee like a dog; and beheld thee ready to turn round, and smite him?”

“No, I would not!” replied the page; “but had thy words reached other ears than mine own, it might have fared ill with thee. The

lady thou namest is the tyrant's safest armour, or my own hand would, ere this, have struck a blow that should have stopped his career. Follow me to thy resting-place, for the night is nearly passed. I sleep next to thee; and, in the morning, will explain these matters more fully." Saying which, he took up a torch; and conducting the outlaw to a large oaken-panelled apartment, he pressed his hand in token of friendship; and, departing for the night, left the bold forester to slumber, or think over his daring plans.

CHAPTER VI.

His eye-brow dark, and eye of fire,
Showed spirit proud, and prompt to ire;
Yet lines of thought, upon his cheek,
Did deep design and counsel speak.

MARMION.

Heaven never took a pleasure or a pride,
In starving stomachs, or a horsewhipped hide.

PETER PINDAR.

BUT little now remains to tell either the traveler or antiquarian what Newstead Priory was, when Edith and her armed companion passed its vaulted postern, on their return from the palace of Mansfield. Time hath left the deep traces of his destroying hand upon its crumbling walls; and the passing footsteps of by-gone years, as they hurried on in their march to eternity, have worn away the quaint carvings

from column, cloister, altar, and shrine. Where the setting sunbeams then gilded the deep-dyed windows (rich with the figures of saints and warriors, and all the emblazoned pomp of barbaric heraldry), now waves the monumental ivy, with a solemn motion, as if it kept time to the sobbing wind that moans mournfully among the ruined battlements. The deep and mellow voices of the friars, who then chaunted the holy vespers, have died away; even the high and arched roof, which gave back the rolling echoes, is gone; the vaulted and pillared aisles, where the sounds were prolonged or lost, are fallen; and the long green grass waves in the silent choir.

Little did the peasant then dream, as he went whistling under the deep shadow of the lofty walls, and eyed the huge granaries and out-houses, well filled with the fruits of the earth, that in a few more years, neither garner nor threshing-floor would be seen, and only a few walls and patched-up wings left to point out what had been.

How different now, to the summer's evening which brought Edith within its walls! Before she arrived, all was astir with life; flocks and

herds were bleating in the valleys, along which floated many a wild and woodland sound, and in which were seen many a picturesque hut and rural grange. Around the Priory arose a beautiful variety of upland and forest scenery; while the valley in which it stood was plentifully watered with the clearest streams, which sprung like veins of silver from the river Lene, and threading their way through the intricacies of Sherwood forest, flowed tranquilly along by the high and surrounding walls.

The image of the Holy Virgin (to whom the edifice was dedicated) stood in a deep niche above the ponderous doorway which led to the residence of the prior. Her head was turned in the direction of the almonry, and as the declining beams fell upon a portion of her face, they revealed a beauty and expression, such as have only been excelled by the masterly sculptors of Greece. An old fountain, rich with quaint devices, and rude figures, stood at the feet of the virgin, and poured forth its clear waters from the extended jaws of a hideous dragon, into a spacious basin beneath. The air around was cool; and the waters fell with a drowsy murmuring sound, which too often lulled the senses

of the well-fed friars to slumber, while they were seated upon the stone benches, that ran along the interior of the cloisters beneath the dormitory. A vaulted and pillared aisle extended the whole length of the refectory, and was rendered pleasant by a beautiful shrubbery, which sloped nearly downward to the edge of the stream. This was the favourite resort of the friars, and numbers were then pacing to and fro; some holding converse together, others telling their beads, and a few pondering over their missals; or some huge and highly ornamented volume, which recorded the miracles of the Saints.

A savoury steam issued from the kitchens of the Priory, and rendered the air of the aisle redolent with the good things in preparation for the evening meal. Many a holy father, forgot the passage he was perusing, while he paused to inhale the rich fragrance: his thoughts having wandered from the Virgin, to venison, and mingled pasties with his paternosters. One or two hurried along with hasty steps, more like men who seek to sharpen their appetites than to hold communion with Heaven.

Beyond the shrubbery, and along the footpath

which skirted the stream with which Newstead was watered, walked the proud Prelate Cardinal Langton, accompanied by Prior Ambrose. They were in deep converse together; and as the former had but recently returned from Rome, and brought with him a terrible mandate from the Pope, he seemed to swell under his new dignity, and spake with a passionate earnestness, that but ill accorded with the humility which became one about to wield the pastoral crook in the church of Christ.

Backed by the mighty Pontiff, he regarded his quarrel with the king as a point which would ere long signalize his name: and even preferred the daring and dangerous road, by which he was then seeking to obtain the See of Canterbury, to that easy path which had been pursued by his predecessors. Bold, and ambitious, and aspiring to that fame which Becket's name had so recently obtained, and which was still blazing abroad, a spirit had kindled within him, that defied alike both death and danger, as he was well armed for the latter, and the former could make him both a saint and a martyr.

He wore a long flowing scarlet robe, or dal-

matica, richly trimmed with minever, the hem of which trailed along the borders of the shrubbery, while his tall majestic figure was reflected in the stream, and, lengthened by the sunset, seemed to spread like the form of a Titan. Although the red hat was not yet introduced, he wore a rich cap, edged with costly fur, which far outdid the more modern, and prouder emblem of office.

The Prior was clothed in the gloomy habit of his order, which formed as strong and striking a contrast to the rich materials of his companion, as did his meek and good humoured countenance, when compared with the proud and haughty features of the ambitious prelate.

Although the face of the Cardinal would be called handsome, and the fine aquiline nose, curled lip, and lofty forehead, might have served as a model for the form of a god, yet his eyes were deep sunk, fiery, and forbidding, and bore sure signs that strong passions could readily kindle them, and swell out the deeply ploughed furrows of his brow. He bore the look of a man, at once hasty, bold, resolute, and crafty; and as he had moved among kings, and rulers, he had caught that lofty aspect, which, without

commanding, has command over all who approach, as if he was but born to be obeyed.

He paced to and fro, along the broad footpath beside the stream, — armed with the thunder of the Vatican, and but awaiting the result of his interview with King John, before he issued the dreaded interdict, which he had brought from the Pontiff of Rome.—He seemed to spurn the earth on which he trod, moving more like a conqueror who comes to receive the homage of a subdued city, and tramples upon the walls which his forces have levelled, than one aspiring to preside over a church, whose every member should be “meek and lowly in heart.” Such, however, were the instruments chosen by the Omnipotent to sever those shackles which held down the human mind; and while they struggled to widen the narrow entrances of the Church, that they might enter our holy temples in greater pomp, — opened those flood-gates of religious light and liberty, which they never again were enabled to close.

“Thou knowest not our power, holy father,” said the Cardinal, continuing a conversation which they had long kept up. “I tell thee, that he dare not, lest the excommunicating bolt

should be launched against him, and thousands would then draw their swords in behalf of the Holy Church."

"Thou speakest sad truths in this matter, reverend cardinal," answered the prior, "but forgettest that his holiness hath to deal with a king, who has neither the fear of God nor the church before his eyes; who would as soon whip a priest as his own palfrey; and would, if he thought well, as readily turn our present sanctuary into stables, as he would fire the hut of a Saxon serf."

"Thou mightest have forgotten, holy brother," said the cardinal, "to what straits his father was reduced through opposing Thomas-a-Becket. But no!" continued he, extending his arm and throwing back his head as he spoke, as if the very scene was again passing before him; "that was indeed a victory. When the holy prelate paraded the country, and all ranks hastened to shout his triumph, and welcome his return with hymns and loud acclaim—when banners floated, and fires blazed, as signals of rejoicing, and music rang through every city, to welcome again to England the unbending pillar of the church,—the man who had been a greater impe-

diment in the path of the greatest of kings than thousands of enemies assembled in mail." When he had ceased speaking, a fire still lingered in his kindled eye, which told too plainly that the spirit lurking within was better fitted to lead a troop of warriors to battle, than waste itself over book and beads.

"Thou must also remember, holy cardinal," replied the prior, in a quiet tone, which, when compared with the energy of his companion, seemed like the sluggish valley stream beside the fierce mountain torrent,—“that King Henry was not without his daggers, which quelled at last this restless spirit, even before the altar. And, moreover, that the present king hath many foreigners in his pay, who, for the reward of a castle, and a few acres of broad land, would not hesitate to reach even the heart of his holiness the pope, with their weapons, though he was robed in his pontifical habit, and stood in the midst of his cardinals.”

“Brother Ambrose, thou speakest like a child on these matters,” answered the cardinal. “Dost thou think that his memory no longer retains his father’s humiliation, when he dismounted from his horse, and walked barefooted

to the shrine of the martyred saint; where he prayed a long day, and watched a longer night beside the holy relics; and even suffered his royal shoulders to be scourged by the meanest monk? Hast thou never heard old Father Hubert tell, how the tears ran down his cheeks with laughter, while he lashed the kingly penitent, and how the monarch winced when the monk gave him a few heavier blows than his companions, for the sake of Becket, who had been his play-fellow? I tell thee, reverend brother, that thou hast not even dreamed of the power lodged in our hands; a power which can shake kingdoms, and make kings prostrate their necks beneath our feet; can send forth war like a deluge, or calm the fiercest tempest with a word. And shall this power, thinkest thou, quake before one who possesses not even the love of his people! who is only an usurper? Psha! it cannot be."

"That I understand not these things, holy cardinal," said the prior, "thou hast said truly; but if, perforce, thou establishest thyself in the See of Canterbury, the anger of the king will be kindled against thee like a fire, and against all who adhere to thy cause. I tell thee that he

will repel force by force, and persecute all those who obey the interdict without let or hindrance."

"He may triumph for a short time, reverend brother," answered the cardinal; "but every moment's opposition will be dearly repaid in the end, by penance and submission; and he will at last be compelled to sue for that grace which is now offered,—will kneel like a guilty child at the foot of the pope, for pardon; so strong is the net in which he has already become entangled."

"I trust, holy cardinal," said the prior, "that thou wilt not risk thy person before his majesty, while thou art the bearer of this terrible interdict?"

"Thou needest not be alarmed for my safety," replied the cardinal; "see him I shall! and should he still refuse to reinstate me in the office to which it hath pleased his holiness to elect me, then shall the interdict be passed, even in his own presence. And then," he added with energy, "we shall see in what channel the feelings of the nation flow, when the relics of the saints are scattered upon the ground; the altars stripped of their holy ornaments; the images of

the blessed martyrs prostrated on the earth; not a bell to peal either matin or vesper, or a sound to summon to worship, but even that to cease, and the holy mass only to be celebrated among the priests. Yes," he continued, waving his arms and raising his voice, while he described the awful effects which would follow the dreadful sentence; "when the dead lie around uninterred, or are only entombed in the highways and ditches, and the consecrated ground is closed against them; when even the communion to the dying is dealt forth cautiously, and as a favour; when marriage is only performed in the churchyards, with a mock ceremony; when the people are prohibited the use of meat, and are debarred from all entertainments, even to the wearing of decent apparel, and shaving their beards; then wilt thou behold, reverend brother, the power of the church of Rome."

"Thou hast drawn a terrible picture, holy cardinal," said the prior; "and I fear me, its dreadful colours will be deepened by the severities which the king will put in force against those who obey the interdict. For he has already threatened, that if the sentence is issued

he will throw off all allegiance to Rome; and I wot but too well, that he will adhere to his promise."

"Then will the withering thunder of excommunication be launched forth," answered the undaunted prelate; "and his kingdom given to the invader, and the sins of every one pardoned who shall draw the sword against him; while to him who taketh away his life, it shall be recorded as a holy deed. I tell thee, holy brother, that more armies will be ready to rush to his destruction than ever set out to win the holy sepulchre from the infidel!"

"Then woe be to England!" exclaimed the prior, folding his hands, and looking upward, "if she is ever again given to the sword of the invader, may God avert the day!"

"Amen!" echoed the cardinal, with a flushed brow, and a look of defiance, which too plainly told that his heart and thoughts were far away from peace.

The bell had long since sounded for the evening meal, and as a domestic had been waiting some time at a respectful distance, he now ventured to announce that it was ready, and was followed by the cardinal and prior into the mansion.

It was already rumoured amongst the friars, that the cardinal had received the interdict from the pope, and was preparing the way for its execution: and great was the consternation it created amidst these lovers of good living, when they looked forward to the long and uncertain Lent.

“Holy Virgin!” exclaimed one, amid a group who were pacing the aisle, and discussing the approaching events with as much interest as those who took the most active part in the scenes. “Holy Virgin!—no ceremony over the dead,—how will their souls gain access to purgatory? Ah, me! I do fear that, day and night, we shall be called upon to offer up masses and prayers without ceasing.”

“And from whence can we gather strength for so great a labour,” said another, more famous for his hunger than his holiness; “not in fasting, I trow, when we have to wrestle with the sins of the mighty multitude. Thou speakest of the dead, brother Nicholas! marry, an’ we be not all dead with the long fast ’twill be a mercy; surely our pasties ought to be enlarged, even to tally with our increase of paternosters; fish is but sorry food, and those within our ponds are

but small ; I fear me we shall, in the end, look but ghastly confessors."

"It may be," remarked another, "that our holy father the prior, will absolve us from the interdict, seeing that we belong not to the ejected ; but are as the weapon that inflicteth, and not the body which suffers."

"And inasmuch as we are that weapon, good brother," answered father Nicholas, "and as fasting sharpeneth the appetite, so must we fast and pray to hold ourselves in readiness, — the keenness of hunger reminding us of the edge we must carry on our spiritual weapons."

"Nathless, holy brother," replied another, "on this point I differ with thee, as I consider hunger a besetting sin, which can only be kept down by good sirloins, and smoking haunches, even as we keep down our spiritual enemies by prayer."

"And for which reason," said another, "I would abolish all fasts, whereby we should leave the mind more at liberty to commune with heaven, as the thoughts would not then wander to earthly objects, seeing that hunger perisheth with the body, and can form no part of the soul. Whereas it is too ready to mingle in

our devotions, being the roaring lion which seeketh whatsoever it may devour; and knowing that it cannot be kept down, it should be appeased, at all times and seasons; for then the soul is left at ease to pursue its meditations."

"Nay, in this matter you err greatly," answered father Nicholas, "inasmuch as the body can only be mortified by fasting and penance, while the food that perisheth provoketh slothfulness and slumber; even as our brother Clement slept over his matins, after partaking too freely of the flask and venison."

"There thou errest, good brother," answered friar Clement, a burly monk, whose sleek countenance bespoke him a stranger to abstinence. "I tell thee that I did but close mine eyes, thereby turning my thoughts from outward objects; as a substantial meal driveth away for a time all remembrance of the larder."

"And doubtless didst mutter thy paternosters through thy nose, good brother," replied father Nicholas, "not wishing such holy things to come in contact with thy palate, after its being polluted with thy morning draught."

"Even so, brother," responded friar Clement, with an arch smile; "as the bee hums loudest

when most busied in search of honey among the flowers."

"'Twill be long time, I fear," said one, "ere we shall be called upon to give absolution to some deer-stalker, and show him that he is forgiven, by first setting the example in attacking the savoury joint."

"Or creep from our cell," sighed another, "to list some confessional, and strengthen ourselves for the holy work, by discussing the powdered beef and salad, and the newly broached hogshead of oldest ale."

"Woe to the souls that were benefitted by our advice," said a third, "while we sat in the warmest corner, occasionally giving the lily white mutton a turn before the fire; there will be no delicious smell to allure our stay now."

"And those beautiful haunches of venison," said a fourth, "that looked lovely as the arm of the virgin,—widow Wooddove need send no more for masses to be said for the soul of her good man in purgatory; he must abide the penal flame, while, alas! the good joint hangs unroasted."

"Peace, good brothers," said father Nicholas, "I would not that the abbot heard these mur-

murings, lest he should doom you to longer fasting than might accord with your rebellious appetites. Remember, that out of the mouth may come much that will bring back nothing, and such thoughts but ill accord with our holy calling."

"Alas!" sighed brother Clement, folding his hands on his portly paunch,—“alas! father Nicholas, there are godless men, who will eat of the fat, and drink of the strong, in spite of all interdicts; and methinks it were sin, that such weight of forbidden food should fall to the share of those who know not the evil they are doing. Better were it, I trow, that in all christian charity we should share their crimes, seeing that we do it with good intent, than suffer them to gorge beyond absolution.”

“I will talk over this matter with the holy prior,” answered Nicholas, “and relate to thee, what in his opinion seemeth good.”

“I fear not,” replied Clement, “but that the Holy Father will in all charity accord with us. Inasmuch as the church taketh to herself a share of the sins of her children, rather than see them overwhelmed with too great temptation.”

“But thou forgettest, brother, that fasting

purifieth the spirit," said father Nicholas, "and revealeth brighter glimpses of Heaven. And that if even our appetite urgeth us to partake of food with the ungodly, we ought to turn aside from the temptation, and betake us to our cells, and revel in those spiritual visions, which are only called up by fasting, prayer, and due penance."

"There thou art in error, holy brother," answered Friar Clement; "for when the belly is filled, then the mind resteth tranquilly, and revelleth in beatific visions, of lands flowing with milk and honey, and forests filled with herds of goodly harts. But when it is empty, then the mind conjureth up wastes, bogs, moors, and sterile tracts, in which lurk pits and hollows—parched and drougthy plains, whereon groweth no green thing. When the body is empty, and the stomach acheth with fasting, then doth enter in evil thoughts and affections, which come not near when it is well garrisoned with food. Even Sathanas ventured not upon temptation until he had called in hunger to his aid."

"But have I not heard thee, when joining in in the holy chaunt, hem, and endeavour to clear

thy throat, which was filled with good things, until they left not room for a note to roll in thy stomach, or a sound to rumble in thy chest," enquired Nicholas, "when thou hadst no more room for music than a woolsack?"

"That has been on fast-days," replied Friar Clement, "when the rumbling of my bowels hath put me out of tune, and I could catch no word of the holy anthem, for the squeaking and growling which they made. For some ancient writers argue, that the stomach partaketh of the nature of a dog, and keepeth up a continual barking until it is appeased. Therefore I hold it good reason, that fasting marreth all music. Father Haversham's homilies, also, partake of the same spirit, and on fast-days are as dry and tasteless as a trencher of colewort, or a two-year-old stock-fish, which hath lost even the taste of its salt."

"Brother Clement, did I not know that thy mighty appetite runneth away only for the time with thy better thoughts," answered Nicholas, "and that they return again in due season, and affect not thy duties, I should hold thee as one of the unbelievers, who laugh to scorn all our

holy ceremonies. Tell me what thou thinkest fasts were first ordained for. I would argue this matter with thee seriously."

"By the blessed St. Cuthbert, I was never more serious," replied Friar Clement, snuffing up, once more, the savoury smell which steamed from the priory kitchen. "Fasts, holy brother, were never intended, at first, to last beyond noon; and I doubt not, but that in the olden time, all masses and services were finished on fast-days, before the great meal began, and the remainder of the day was spent in feasting. Nay, I verily believe that the reverend fathers began to fast on a full stomach, and that the beef-pot was boiling before day-break. Who commenceth his house without a foundation? Nay, even in our paternoster, we pray for our daily bread before we sue for forgiveness of our trespasses: which plainly sheweth that we must be strengthened for our tasks before we begin them. Besides, how can we, who are called pillars of the church, support so heavy a load, if we are hollow and empty? I can never sleep soundly when fasting, but am subject to fits and starts, even as a feather moved by the wind. But give me a huge meal, and I am

stable as a rock, and immovable as the cornerstone of a building."

"Study, my good brother," answered Father Nicholas, "exerciseth the mind, and bringeth it to the enjoyment of rest, even as labour wearieth the body. Turn thy mind, then, to the works of the holy fathers, and thou wilt get rid of these thoughts and feelings, which ought not to be known to one of our blessed order. Study abateth hunger, and tameth the flesh—seeing that the body then taketh in spiritual food, and hath not so much a craving for that which perisheth."

"Study acteth differently upon me, holy brother," replied Friar Clement; "for many a time have I pored over my missal on fast-days, in vain endeavours to drive away the thoughts and feelings of my appetite; but all was of no avail. The very letters shaped themselves into the forms of goodly joints, and conjured up the pictures of haunches, unpicked ribs, and fleshy capons, until I could admire nothing but the portly bellies of the illuminated saints, and the protruding cheeks of the sleek and blessed Virgin; and felt half inclined to devour the painted ox, or feed upon the provender with which they

had so well furnished his manger. No, brother, nothing there have I found to abate my hunger. If I took up the Blessed Volume, it fell open, of its own accord, at the description of Nathan's feast, or the marriage of Cana ; and I sighed, while I contemplated the ditch-water in my earthen vessel, and pined for the times when such miracles were wrought. I hold all fasting to be unnatural ; for, although we are bidden to conquer our inclinations, there is no mention of waging war with our natural appetites. Food is our armour, brother, our strength, our shield of defence ; and what soldier ever battled against his own buckler, or made an enemy of his hauberk ?”

“ Thy arguments, brother, bear not upon the spirit,” answered Nicholas ; “ thy interpretations are of the word—wordy ; arising from the belly, and coming from the mouth ; into the former of which thou divest again for fresh matter, as often as thou dippest thy bread into the broth. Commune with thyself, good brother. Argue this matter between thee and hunger, and see if thou canst not appease this devouring wolf by reasoning with him.”

“ It will be all in vain, reverend father,” re-

plied Clement, with a mournful shake of the head. "Thou mightest as well advise me to get rid of my own shadow, as to hope to bring my stomach to listen to reason, until it hath partaken of a large meal. When empty, it is a very devil, despising all good counsel, raving, roaring, and rumbling to and fro, and refusing to be comforted. Argue with hunger, saidst thou? wage war with mine own appetite! surely it is dividing a house against itself, which cannot stand. Bid me go and convert the Moslem; convince a fox that killing poultry is a sin; persuade a wolf that grass suiteth him better than mutton;—bid me do any of these, and I shall sooner expect to succeed in them, than if I wasted a thousand years in endeavouring to appease an huge appetite by arguments. Hunger, brother, ever was a roaring lion, and would eat up every priest in the priory, could he find nothing else to devour."

"Prayer will bring thee to a right notion on this matter," replied Nicholas; "and if thou remainest in this state of outer darkness much longer, I will undertake to point out to thee the full importance of fasting and penance."

"I thank thee, good brother," said the burly

friar, " and would have thee pay thy visit to my cell, after I have partaken of a hearty meal ; for then my body enjoyeth a state of quiet ; and it may be, will be found in a better mood to listen. Whereas, when fasting, it hath not strength to oppose the evil powers, but is in a state of natural contrition, too weak to become spiritual ; and, albeit, the mind is then thoughtful, it is a kind of calculating contemplation, too much absorbed in watching the sun-dial course to the appointed spot, that marketh the time of our meals."

How Father Nicholas and Friar Clement settled the dispute on fasting, our story sayeth not : for just then they received the welcome summons to attend the refectory ; and the latter, pulling out an enormous wooden spoon, cut short the argument, by hurrying first to secure the largest mess of pottage and the easiest seat.

CHAPTER VII.

And shall this hold a maiden hard bestead ?
I tell thee, wench, he is a proper man ;
Short, it is true ; grim-looking, and deformed ;
But who would quarrel with the form o' th' tree,
And pause to see whether 'twas straight or smooth,
If a wild bull, on mischief bent, was near,
When leaping on a branch would 'scape all harm.

BELTON DE BURGH.

THE wing occupied by Edith and her attendants might rather be considered as an out-building than a part of the Priory, and was divided from that portion in which the friars resided by a lofty wall ; having in it more than one postern. There was an air of comfort in the apartment which the high-born maiden occupied ; and no mean degree of taste displayed in the arrangement of the different ornaments and various articles of furniture. The huge

chair in which the damsel was seated contained timber enough to furnish materials for the manufactory of a dozen such articles as bear that name in the present day. On the rich arras was represented a stag-hunt, wrought with considerable skill, and displaying much originality of perspective; the dogs being in some parts much larger than the horses; and a church far too small to form a kennel for the hound, whose hinder feet were planted upon the tower. Two tall waxen candles, which had doubtless been offered up to the Virgin, stood blazing in costly candelabras of silver, and threw a soft light upon the tapestry, which mingled with the ruddy glow of the flickering flames from the hearth, or in some places produced a diversified light.

The lady had thrown aside her riding dress, and substituted another, of a richer and lighter texture: and as the under-tunic or gown was cut low in the bosom, and the gorget thrown off, the throat was bare, and revealed those beautiful proportions which had won for her the appellation of "swan-necked." Down the slender neck fell her long silky hair in graceful curls,—like flowers drooping negligently over

a pillar of the purest alabaster: as if they felt their freedom in being released from the braid. Her brow was bound with a fillet of silver filligree, wrought into the form of lilies-of-the-valley; she wore golden bracelets on her arms, on which were engraven the motto, "*Omnia vincit amor*;" and above this a dove flying over a castle turret with a chain round its neck. Her small feet peeped out from under her long green tunic, as they rested on a curious foot-stool, covered with the devices of birds and flowers.

Edith appeared in deep thought, as she sat with one arm resting on the massy chair, and with her head reclining on the palm of her hand, while her white taper fingers mingled with the band of lilies, or were imbedded amid the darker clusters of her hair. Sometimes she raised her eyes to an attendant, who was busily employed in embroidering a gorget. Her favourite hand-maiden, Blanch, was leaning against the chair in which her mistress was seated, watching the huge fire which crackled and blazed at intervals on the broad hearth-stone, as if she sought for something among the few ruddy embers which had fallen forward,

that might furnish her with a reply, or awaken a thought that would tend to comfort the apparently disconsolate lady. Tired of the silence, like all damsels who are once admitted into the confidence of young ladies, and ever after lay claim to a share of those incidents that chance may throw uppermost, Blanch thus resumed the conversation, which her own eagerness or freedom had unwillingly interrupted.

“An’ I were you, my lady,” said Blanch, who was herself the daughter of no mean franklin, “I would cajole this love-making king, and speak him fair, and pretend to list to his suit, even as Thomas the cellarer did, when he kept the free-bands in conversation, and appeared friendly until such times as his son had alarmed the hinds in the Thorpe, and brought him assistance. Better to cheat the devil than fight him, as father Philip advised me at the last confession.”

“Tush! damsel, to thy nonsense,” replied Edith, with a faint smile; “dost thou think I could dissemble before one so evil-minded as this king; have I not told thee how he put aside his wife Avis, and even carried away his present queen, Isabella, after she was betrothed.

Nay, I tell thee, that had I not been attended by my brave kinsman, you would not have seen me to-night; for the tyrant hath many a turret where the shriek of a helpless woman would bring no assistance. Remember the fate of Mary of York; her rank was of no avail. I will hide me for the three months that terminates my minority."

"Nay, my lady!" answered Blanch, "I would bide the return of Henry Gloomglendell; of a surety the young knight will tarry no longer in France than the king's affairs require; and we may speedily reach the castle of Newark, where we shall find safety with his father."

"That may not be," said the high-minded maiden; "I seek not the protection of the earl with such slender claims. But I would that Henry would hasten his return. Alas!" she added, after a long pause,— "he knoweth not how hard I am bestead, and that too, by him, whom he is now serving."

"Bethink thee, lady," continued Blanch, "that the earl, who now abideth with us, hath a strong arm, and can hold in terror every baron in merry England, by his prowess; certes, we

need not fear for your safety, while under so powerful an escort."

"Thou art no stranger to his hasty temper, maiden," replied Edith; "and were I but to breathe into his ear, the slight which I have received from the King, he would be eager to rush into his presence, and upbraid him amid his assembled nobles, or perchance cleave him from head to foot, even if he sat with the crown upon his brow. I tell thee, Blanch, that this must not be done; for Hugh de Lacy is like the lighted brand consuming itself and all that it approaches."

"And this forest-maiden you wot of, my lady," said Blanch, "mayhap she belongeth to these outlaws."

"And what matter?" replied Edith, "she will not be the less my friend."

"Not for that I speak," continued Blanch, "but I trow, my lady, you should know somewhat of those you trust."

"Marry, but thou art jealous, Blanch;" answered Edith, with a smile, "But fear not, she shall not steal all my love. And thou knowest our Saxon adage, 'Better a guard at the gate

than on the hearth,' for the latter sees danger in the distance."

"Perchance so ! providing the guard runneth not a-field from the danger, and giveth those by the hearth no warning," replied Blanch.

"Thou sayest sooth," answered Edith. "How now, maidens !" continued she, "what meaneth that knocking? Certes, this is an unmeet hour to be visited ; shall we keep drawn, bolt and bar, and hold parley with those without?"

"I will speak with them," said Blanch, moving towards the iron-studded door, "and if we approve not of their mission, they will find work enough, I trow, to serve them until moon-rise, should they make good their entrance without your consent."

The knocking continued with greater force, and when the damsel demanded the cause of such tumult at the door of her mistress, she was only answered by a deep hollow voice demanding entrance, and a continuation of loud blows, which caused every bolt and post to shake. At length, Edith arose and demanded the cause of such uproar.

"If thou art Edith of Lincoln," said the

voice, in a deep slow tone. "I am Druth, the porter of this Priory, by the grace of the Holy Virgin."

"And what may be thy pleasure with me?" enquired Edith.

"A yeoman, with a score of archers at his back, craveth speech with thee," answered the porter; "two of his fellows I have been compelled to cudgel, and have only left my post through the threats of their leader, who vowed by the true Lord, that if I delivered not his message, every bowman in his band should prick me with an arrow. The cowards! they dare not come to close blows."

Blanch, at the command of her mistress, withdrew both bolt and bar; and when she had opened the door, uttered a loud scream, and dropping the link, fled to the side of Edith. The damsel that had been busied with the embroidery, when she caught sight of the porter, also threw aside her work, and ran for shelter behind Blanch; while Druth, with many a bow, drew nearer to the chair in which the lady was again seated. Even Edith was so much struck with his appearance, as to permit him to approach within a few feet, without speaking or daring to move.

The porter was a short thick person, ap-

parently not more than four feet high, and measuring almost as much across the shoulders, upon which sat a large round bullet-head, bearing a greater resemblance to the burthen which Atlas bears, than the body to which it belonged. His eyes were large and dark, and had a peculiar expression; the pupils of each being lodged in the farthest and most opposite corners, and thereby enabling him to see distinctly on each side at once, without moving either eye or head. A long black beard fell in wild disorder upon his breast, while his hair had the appearance of a lion's mane, all tossed, disordered and uplifted, as if by rage, or combat. It would baffle any, saving an artist, to convey a proper notion of the formation of his nose and mouth; the latter might be compared to the arch of a bridge, filled in with white piles, for such appeared the huge spanning upper lip, that revealed some of the most formidable grinders in Christendom; while the nose spread above them like an immense buttress, that would fain cover the wall it supports. An English bulldog, guarding his master's threshold, and showing his set teeth at some approaching way-farer, would be no bad emblem of the dwarf's countenance.

His huge arms reached below his knees, and the formidable fingers, that spread out from each hand, bore no bad likeness to crabs' claws; while his short powerful legs bowed out on either side, like those oaken pillars which are left as the lonely supporters of some heavy building, and bend stubbornly beneath the weight, which has neither power to break or force them into the earth. Every limb seemed to possess an herculean power; for he was also double-jointed; a sure sign of immense strength.

He had in his hand a crab-tree cudgel, which in form somehow resembled himself, and was called by the domestics of the Priory, "Druth's brother." None of them, however, were desirous of forming too close an acquaintance with so dreaded a weapon, as they had been eye witnesses to the effects it once produced on the head of a furious bull, which, while attempting to rush in at the priory gate, was struck dead by one blow from the powerful cudgel of the dwarf.

There was, however, but little that could be called savage in the countenance of Druth; while, as he stood gazing upon the beautiful form of Edith, an earnest solemnity pervaded

his face, and he seemed to regard her with the same intense interest as a connoisseur dwells upon the production of a Titian, or a Corregio, which he is viewing for the first time.

“What message may I crave, to deliver to these outlaws, fair lady?” enquired the dwarf, in a softer tone than he had hitherto used, and in a manner which seemed the more striking, as coming from so rugged a figure.

“I know not their pleasure,” answered Edith, composing her features, which had shown symptoms of alarm; “and it would ill become an unprotected maiden, to admit a band of armed men into her apartment at this hour, without a knowledge of what they require.”

“Call not yourself unprotected, lady,” replied the dwarf, “while I am near your presence; for few, methinks,” he added, uplifting the heavy club with his thumb and finger, “would like to feel the full force of my feather. But be not alarmed, fair creature; it is but the leader, that craveth admission, and he belongeth to those who would sooner aid than injure one so —” he stopped short, for just then his eyes fell upon his own figure, mirrored in a burnished shield that

hung opposite ; which also reflected the forms of Edith and her attendants ; and without finishing the sentence, he clenched his teeth, and left the apartment.

Edith, whose eyes had watched the motions of the dwarf, and justly guessed the cause which had startled him so suddenly, pitied, in the nobleness of her mind, his deformity, which seemed coupled with a heart and arm so ready to act in her defence ; and ordered Blanch to bring him again into her presence.

“ Marry ! I dare not follow the monster,” replied Blanch, with a haughty toss of her head, and all the confidence of a vain beauty, and a lady’s favourite to boot ; “ lest he should turn and rend me like a wild boar.”

“ I fear me, maiden,” said Edith, “ that under the rugged form of yonder porter lurks more of honour and kindness, than we shall be able to discover under goodlier figures ; — but hush ! they are returning.”

“ Ah !” whispered Blanch into the ear of her young mistress, as Will Scarlet, or Will of the Cloister, as he was sometimes called, entered, following the dwarf ; “ if he brought such a face as that, I need not fear him.”

Blanch did but express that which could not fail to strike the eye of Edith; for it is but seldom that either sex are blind to beauty; and if any dissimilitude might be drawn between the forms of the dwarf and outlaw, it was as great as the contrast between Adonis and the boar. The green doublet, broad belt, and buskins of deer's hide, together with the bow in his hand, and broad-sword by his side, added to which, a fine figure, and manly features, lit with that peculiar expression, which is only called up, while gazing upon beauty: with whatever feeling they might be viewed by Edith, did not fail to make a deep impression on poor Blanch, who could not help whispering, "By my troth, my lady, I would trust that handsome youth with my life."

"The matters on which I have to speak, fair lady," said Will Scarlet, "deeply concern yourself, and will lose none of their value if confined to only a few ears."

"By my fay, the yeoman speaketh soothly," said Blanch, looking at Edith; "'twere better that this little—" but her eyes fell upon the kindling caverns of the dwarf's, as if the latter personage had anticipated her remarks; and she

shrank ashamed of her own words, while Durth thus spoke.

“Maiden! it ill becometh thee, to take upon thyself that which concerneth only the wish and will of thy lady. If it is her desire that I should depart, she shall speedily be obeyed, though, mayhap, my absence may, ere long, be regretted. To thee, maiden, I especially address myself; thou wouldst have alluded to my person, and in so doing, mightest have provoked my wrath; remember that a thousand things may yet mar thy beauty, and not leave thee even strength for a comforter.”

“Nay, good Druth,” be not wroth with the damsel,” said Edith, struck with the solemn manner in which the dwarf spake; “I tell thee, sir yeoman, that thou mayest speak thy pleasure boldly, for we have none here but those whom we dare trust with our choicest secrets, if they concern ourselves alone.”

“Then be it so,” replied Will Scarlet, “thou art doubtless aware, fair lady, that King John hath plighted his oath to Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont, and for services which he has done, promised, as a reward, that thou shalt become the baron’s bride.”

“ A truth I know too well,” replied Edith.

“ I fear to tell thee more, noble maiden,” said the outlaw, “ as my orders were to converse with thee alone.”

“ Fear not me, sir outlaw,” said the dwarf; “ you allude to plundering the king’s messenger since sunset: that act hath long since reached mine ears, even before it was known to your master’s. I have also eyes in the forest.”

Will Scarlet was about to reply, “ that he need not wonder at the affair becoming known, since he turned his gaze so many ways at once;” but fortunately his eye fell upon the cudgel, and, like many a wiser man, he kept these thoughts to himself, while he thus replied to Edith, “ This is not the whole of the matter, fair lady; the tyrant king hath also advised this Norman baron to possess himself of your person, and confine you within the castle which he now holds, until he gaineth your own consent; or, perforce, compelleth you to accept his own terms. Moreover, he mentioned your travelling with only one attendant; Druth hath spoken truly, we captured his esquire, and found these things, amid others that concern you not, under the king’s own seal.”

“ May the Holy Virgin assoil you of the deed !” exclaimed Edith, “ and you, sir archer— I am deeply bounden to you for this timely warning. But, alas !” she continued, lifting up her beautiful eyes towards heaven ; “ I am but ill prepared to repel the machinations of mine enemies, and what can a lonely maiden do to oppose the power of an evil-minded monarch ? —and this baron ! rumour speaketh him strong and cruel, ready for any deed of daring. Something I would do, but, alas ! I know not what, to escape from their hands.”

“ Fear nothing, lady !” said the dwarf ; “ no evil can befall you that shall be of long continuance ; there is one nearer at hand to render assistance than you now wot of. Nor will I slumber on my post ; and it may be”—added he, dropping his massy club on the floor with a force that made the apartment ring again—“ it may be that even I, despised as I am, can do better service than thou mayest deem could in any wise fall within my power.”

“ I may but guess to whom you allude,” replied Edith, her cheek colouring until it outvied the apple-blossom in beauty ; “ and, certes, I will believe thee friendly to my interests ; and

woe to those," she added, turning her eyes on Blanch; "that despise one who hath so kindly enlisted in the cause of an unprotected maiden; but trust me, Druth, Edith will not forget thee in her happier days, should such be her lot."

"They must! they shall!" exclaimed the dwarf with a fierceness, that even for a moment startled the outlaw; "should this proud Norman, by the king's aid, force on this union, it shall go hard, if one so lovely as thyself cannot cause many a blade to leap from its scabbard, and many a lance to fly from its rest, ere thou art bound in thrall to so vile a wretch."

"I will believe thee," answered Edith, her eyes brightening with hope; "I fear not but that, in merry England, some strong arm will strike in my rescue. But fame speaks loud for the prowess of this Marchmont," she added, in a feeble tone, as if a painful thought had for a moment passed over her mind.

"Your name, fair lady," said Will Scarlet, "hath already raised up many a one in your behalf amid these fastnesses. We are a rude people," added he, "and mayhap somewhat thoughtless at times; but never, lady, was a kindness rendered to one of ours that was for-

gotten, and there are brave hearts amid our bands that would long since have ceased to beat, had not Edith of Lincoln stood between them and danger. Many an arrow will be launched in your cause, by arms that never missed their mark, and many a blade drawn that was never yet returned to its sheath, until dyed by a foeman's blood. It is a debt we owe, and a duty that we would pay, even to one less lovely."

The earnestness with which the outlaw spoke, and the glow that mantled his cheek as he warmed in the cause, seemed to act like a talisman upon poor Blanch; for she stood with eyes open and mouth a-gape, drinking in his every look and word; while even the high-born Edith cast upon him such a glance, as many a young knight would have borne the blows of the *melée* to have merited.

"I thank thee, brave archer," said Edith, casting her eyes downward, and extending her hand to Will Scarlet, which he kissed with a fervency, the sound of which sank deep into the heart of Blanch, "I thank thee, and thy companions, who have evinced so kind a feeling in my behalf. And should I require your aid,

trust me, such service shall not be forgotten ; but I will hope that no blood is needed to dye the earth for my sake. And thou, good Druth," she added, "I will not forget thy kindness, and — "

"I have yet to deserve it, lady," replied the dwarf, before Edith had finished the sentence ; then making a low bow he departed, muttering to himself as he went, "She thought me not worthy to press her white hand, and why," he added, "should I aspire to that honour — when I bear an impress so unlovely. My heart hath yearned towards some one whom I might serve, and I will yet serve her to the death," so saying, he grasped his terrible cudgel with a tighter hand, and struck at every stride a stronger blow, which caused wall and window to chatter ; until, having reached his former post by the gate of the priory, he seated himself on the stone bench, and resting both hand and head on the handle of his weapon, appeared wrapt in deep thought.

Will Scarlet also departed, and was conducted through the gallery by Blanch, and, however, fervently he pressed the hand of Edith, our history says nothing of his doing the same for

her attendant, although a whispering was heard before the outlaw had passed the door; and Blanch re-entered the apartment with a deeper crimson on her cheeks than was seated there before, and hung down her head, and appeared silent for the remainder of the night.

Great was the outlaw's astonishment, as he walked forth in the full moonlight, and found the space vacant where he had stationed his merry archers. For a moment his heart sank within him, and he was about to apply the bugle to his lips, thinking that they might have sheltered in some neighbouring thicket, or retired to the verge of the forest, when his ears were greeted by the sounds of mirth from the priory kitchen, and the following burthen left him no longer in doubt of their locality.

“ Drink! drink! drink!

Both laymen and priest, have a part in the feast,

The church and the cowl, the bowmen and bowl,

We'll merrily, merrily trowl :

With a heydown derry,

We'll ever more be merry !”

CHAPTER VIII.

Busk ye, bown ye, my merry men all,
And John shall go with me ;
For I'll go seek yon wighty yeoman,
In green-wood where he be.
Then they put on their gowns of green,
And took their bows each one ;
And they away to the green forest
A shooting forth are gone.

GUY OF GISBORNE.

THE golden rays of a summer's sun fell brightly upon the lofty turrets of Nottingham Castle, steeping the rock on which it stood in a rich golden light, and spreading a softened lustre over the distant Trent, that threw up its flashing waters under many an overhanging oak which skirted the forest of Sherwood. Tree and tower, and hamlet and upland, and wild heath slumbered beneath the tranquil beams of that

lovely summer morning, and all nature seemed robed in her holiday array, and listening to the sweet music poured forth from a thousand bills, in glade, and thicket, and secluded glen. The fawn tripped nimbly beside the hind along the open greensward in the still forest, shaking the delicate dew from many a sweet wild-flower with its light feet, or cropping, at will, the honey-dropping woodbines, which hung in waving trails above the tender grass.

There was a repose and beauty around the earth, which sank even into the steeled heart of Geoffrey de Marchmont, as he paced to and fro along the battlements, armed from head to heel. Nor could he, amid his ambitious views, avoid recalling to memory those happier hours, when, with hawk and hound, he had sallied forth in all the eagerness of youth, to range hill and valley at pleasure, a stranger to ambition, and all the thousand cares, which dog the steps of those, who climb the giddy heights of power.

A band of brave warriors awaited his coming near the postern, seated like statues on their strong dark steeds, their long lances glittering in the sunbeams, and their gonfalons hanging

motionless in the mute air. His own noble charger champed the bit impatiently, and while pawing the ground, scattered his white foam on the groom, who with difficulty held the rein.

Walter-the-one-handed was mounted on a strong roan palfrey in the midst of the baron's followers ; while his powerful arm was left unfettered that he might handle the reins ; not a doubt remaining of his security amid a score of armed men. The outlaw had also been one of the first to get to horse , for his heart yearned after the green glades of the forest, and the dun deer that were browsing so far beyond bow-shot ; he was also impatient to meet his merry men, and to brave the daring deed which his own valour had so boldly planned. The outlaw exchanged a glance with Walter, (after both their eyes had wandered over the bright hauberks and polished helms of their enemies,) which seemed to say, we have yet something to achieve for our freedom.

At length De Marchmont appeared ; and vaulting into his lofty saddle without the aid of the stirrup, a trumpet was sounded, and the heavy portcullis let down ; while the thunder of

their horses' feet, rang for a moment under the gloomy postern ; as they passed over the moat, and departed towards the forest.

The baron cast his quick, searching eye around, when they had ridden beyond the moat, to ascertain the safety of his prisoner, and the position in which his followers had formed ; and ordering two of his bravest lances to hurry first as scouts, he slackened his speed ; and rode along, for a considerable space, in silence. Wearied, however, with his own thoughts, or anxious to renew his conversation with the supposed king's esquire, he ordered the outlaw forward, and they rode at the head of the cavalcade together.

"Thou seest, Sir Squire," said the baron, "that we shall obey our Liege's summons somewhat earlier than he expected ; art thou not afeared, now the time draws near at hand, that I should repeat the conversation thou wert bold enough to carry on yesternight respecting thy royal master ?"

"Not a jot I," replied the bold outlaw. "Thou mayest tell him with my full free-will ; but, methinks, it were well, not to repeat all that thyself didst utter."

“Thou art a bold knave, and a fearless,” said the Norman, “and I shall profit by thy advice; nevertheless, I hold with thee in these matters, and am given to understand that this Langton is already near to the king’s person, having ventured even to Newstead Priory, where he now awaiteth our Liege’s answer; and should that jar with his own wishes, will speedily launch the interdict.”

“May the devil fly away with him for his kindness,” rejoined the outlaw; “and should he by chance cross my path, I will——”

“Marry, Sir Squire, what wilt thou do?” enquired the baron. “Mince not thy words, like a maiden. What may it be that thou darest inflict upon this high-flying cardinal?”

“Then, by St. Dunstan! since thou cravest to know,” replied the outlaw, “I will tell thee, that should I meet with him at some future time, I will lighten his mails, and point out a penance, which, by the mass, he shall perform ere he escapes me.”

“By my sword and baldric,” replied the Norman, “there lurketh somewhat of fire and daring within thee. I would fain that chance might throw some trifling obstacle in our path,

to try thy currency. As to thy robbing the cardinal, it is a matter which I am too dull to read."

"Wish not for the foul fiend to find us work, Sir Knight," rejoined the outlaw, "for he is ever at the elbow, if we but whistle—doing our bidding when we call to him; and if admitted to too much familiarity, he becometh our master, nor will again quit us, without leaving some of his lesser retainers to obey our beck, even as his dusky satellites now hover around the tomb of Bishop Bluet, at Lincoln."

"Pshaw! thou art surely not a believer in goblin lore," answered the knight,—“in the superstitions which originated among, and remain only with these Saxon churls, who are ever witnessing chases by black deformed huntsmen, on blacker coursers, following hinds, gloomy as the deepest pitch of midnight, with dark, hollow-eyed dogs, that seem to bay the blackness. Trust me, they may do for a portly-paunched priest to babble, while he enjoys the warmest nook by the hearth, and rewards his benefactors by overturning their wits. Holy saints! what have we here?” exclaimed he, reining in his steed; “of a verity thou art right, Sir Squire; the devil is ever nearer than we wot of, when speaking aught that concerneth him.”

They had by this time reached a wide opening, known, in the present day, as Bullwell Forest, or, rather, that low swampy land which meets at the angle of roads leading to Papplewick, Hucknall, and the above-mentioned village, and called, at that period, the "Field of Reeds," owing to the quantity of bullrushes, waterflags, and aquatic plants, which grew over several acres of marshy land. At this point stood a rude, lonely hut, built of materials which the neighbouring forest had furnished, and thatched with reeds from the swamp. At the door of this miserable hovel was seated an aged woman, who had nearly numbered fourscore years. She was busied with the distaff, and ever and anon, as she passed the line through her skinny fingers, she uplifted her dim grey eyes to the approaching cavalcade, and muttered something in the Saxon tongue, the burthen of which ran thus :—

"The Norsemen 'bided many a day,
And then the Norman touched our shore :
The Norsemen, beaten, went away,
The Normans they returned no more :
But claimed our castles, lands, and wives,
And wanting slaves, saved some few lives."

It was the sight of this aged crone which caused the baron so suddenly to check his steed ; for even he was not without his share of superstition, which, in these dark ages, was carried to a great extent, and the name of Elwerwolf was never mentioned, but in whispers, as hundreds of the simple inhabitants of the forest believed she was a witch. They had also given to her all those awful attributes which old age and solitude has not yet wholly escaped from in the present day ; for many a secluded village in England, at this hour, possesses its wise-woman.

The countenance of Elwerwolf bore a resemblance to that of the white owl, as her skin was of an unusual paleness, and her long-beaked nose seemed to overhang her withered lips. Her eyes were large, round, and grey, nor could you, while gazing upon her, divest yourself from associating her face with that of the bird of night ; for her white hair was turned backward under her hood, and by some delusion wore a feathery appearance.

“ Cursed hag !” exclaimed the baron, as his ears caught the terminating lines of the ditty ;
“ hast thou so little need to mutter thy prayers,

or so many years yet left thee, that thou canst chaunt rebellious and vindictive choruses, and whisper treason into the hearts of passengers? By the foul fiend! an' I were to burn thee for a witch, it would but benefit the forest, and prevent thee from throwing thy charms and spells amid the foolish peasants."

"An' thou huntest with the Norman," muttered Elwerwolf, glancing at the outlaw, without deigning to notice the remarks of Marchmont, "then woe be to the fold when the shepherd herdeth with the destroyer of his sheep—when the vulture and the eagle pursue their prey together. Elwerwolf hath lived too long, but her thread is nearly spun; and when the web is out, the invader will begrudge six feet of her own native earth for a last bed;" saying which, she commenced her spinning at a more furious rate, and grumbled out her curses on the Norman in an inaudible voice, the purport of which could only be gathered from the fierce scowls she cast on the baron.

"Wilt thou not answer me, thou wrinkled dealer of darkness?" thundered out the baron, in an angry tone; "or wilt thou tempt me by thy silence to hurry thy departure to Sathanas,

with whom thou hast long carried on an unholy traffic? Rouse her, Ralph, with the butt of thy lance," added he, addressing the nearest soldier. "An' thou shiverest her distaff, I will hold it well done."

Ralph moved not his lance from its rest, but casting a piteous glance on the old woman, said, "I will essay any task but this; she was foster-mother to my father."

"Dog! dost thou refuse to do my bidding?" exclaimed the baron, his face red with rage; "have I then reared a cub from this Saxon witch! By the holy rood, I will teach thee thy duty:" saying which, he uplifted a ponderous battle-axe, that was slung at his saddle bow, and aimed a blow at his follower. The horse of the latter made a plunge across the road, by which means his rider escaped the well-aimed stroke; and the enraged baron, before he was aware, had come in contact with Walter-the-one-handed, and with such force, that the chamfron of his steed struck the palfrey on which the Saxon was seated.

It was scarcely the work of a moment, for a man, so powerful as the one-handed Saxon, to wrench the axe from the grasp of the baron, and

deal such a blow, as sent the Norman staggering to the extent of the road ; beside which flowed a sluggish stream, and into the midst of it, both horse and rider tumbled. Two of the attendants instantly alighted, to assist the besmeared baron, while four others rushed upon Walter with their drawn swords, he having got them into too close quarters, to make use of their long lances. One blow, dealt with more than human force, to the right, and another to the left, unhorsed two of the Saxon's enemies, while the outlaw spurred in between the others, with so sudden a movement, that their horses wheeled round, and left the space of a few yards between them and the remaining soldiers. "To the bog!" exclaimed the outlaw, and, seizing the rein of his companion with one hand, with the other he uplifted a bugle to his lips, and blew so loud a blast, that it startled the bittern from her sedgy nest.

The echo of the horn had scarcely died away, ere it was answered by another blast, as long and loud, and in an instant, fifty bowmen, headed by the tall forester, emerged from a clump of oaks, which stood beyond the Norman and his band. As the outlaws approached with

bended bows, they recognised their leader in the distance, and rent the air with loud shouts of "Long live Robin Hood."

Covered with mud; and foaming with rage, at hearing the name of the daring Outlaw proclaimed, and finding his old enemy in the supposed esquire, came Geoffrey de Marchmont, at the head of his followers, shouting the war-cry, "*Guerre a mort!*" and brandishing his two-edged sword, regardless of the approaching band of outlaws, and only bent upon immediate revenge on Walter-the-one-handed, and Robin Hood. But they had by this time alighted from their horses, and penetrated to some distance over the bog, by paths only known to themselves.

The impatient baron dashed at once into the field of reeds, and scarcely had his war-steed made three plunges, before it stuck fast in the spongy soil. His followers met with no better fate, but were soon struggling, up to their saddle-girths, in the midst of the marsh; and shaking their useless lances at the Outlaw Chief, who stood, laughing at their dilemma, in the distance. To add to their difficulties, a shower of cloth-yard shafts came rattling around them; and although they in most cases glanced harmless

from their mail, yet not so their effect on the horses, which took to rearing and plunging, and throwing up such masses of mud and water, as almost covered their riders.

From the moment that De Marchmont ordered his attendant to overturn Elwerwolf, the old crone had assumed a new spirit, and, brandishing her distaff in her hand, while the unspun flax streamed out like the pennon of a knight, and mingled with her long white hair, which had escaped from under the hood, gave her the appearance of a fury. Her shrill voice, also, mingled with the rattling of arrows, and the clashing of blades; for several of the yeomen had now come in close contact with the Norman and his retainers, and the baron was himself engaged hand to hand with Walter the Saxon.

“Strike, Saxons, strike!” shouted the hag, in a wild voice, and keeping time to the clashing of the weapons with her distaff; “blood was ever the banquet that the Norman loved: let him now quaff his own, or mingle it with the black waters of the marish! Let not the bandog again escape to his kennel, lest the white bones of our countrymen rise up, and call us cravens,—lest their ghosts come thundering on

the sable clouds of midnight, and, shrieking around our couches, accuse us of cowardice! Strike, Saxons, strike! the enemy of our race is now in your hands; let him not escape scathless; the demons await to conduct him along the gloomy gateway of death; the doors of darkness groan for his coming; the voices of the murdered wait, breathless, to shout his entry. Alas! he escapes," continued the hoary sybil, clasping her hands; "his followers clear the swamp; they form again like closed doors of steel; their gonfalons rustle in the breeze. St. Winifred! their leader is struck down: I vow to thee a waxen candle: the battle is hushing its stormy breath."

Leaving Elwerwolf to her wild ravings, we will return to the combatants. The fall of the baron had not however escaped her keen eyes, for he lay apparently dead at the feet of Walter-the-one-handed, who had dealt him a terrible blow on the helmet with the battle-axe, and had also prostrated three others amongst the reeds. Neither had Robin Hood been inactive, although it seemed his intention more to spare the Norman's soldiers than destroy them, as he had assembled the greater portion of his own band upon a

rising bank, and commanded them, on pain of his displeasure, no longer to molest the struggling horsemen. Some of them had recovered their steeds, and were again ready for the attack, on a higher and surer ground, where their heavy weapons were better able to take effect on the light-armed outlaws.

Satisfied with the part his merry men had played in the combat, which to Robin Hood, had from the first, seemed more an affair of amusement than danger, he at length collected his archers, and sounding a note of victory on his bugle, led them along a smooth valley which sloped to the verge of the thicket, and having entered this, they were soon hidden from their enemies, amid the umbrageous branches of the forest. A bitter pang shot through the heart of the outlaw, when he thought that the combat had not been decided without the death of the baron, not that he regretted it so much on the Norman's account, as the word he had pledged for his safety with the page, before parting, and the pain it might bring to the heart of the beautiful Margaret.

CHAPTER IX.

In all my wanderings round this world of care,
 In all my griefs — and God has given my share —
 I still had hopes, my latest hours to crown,
 Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down :

* * * * *

And, as a hare, whom hounds and horns pursue,
 Pants to the place from whence at first she flew,
 I still had hopes, my long vexations past :
 Here to return — and die at home at last.

GOLDSMITH'S DESERTED VILLAGE.

AFTER the outlaws had departed, the followers of De Marchmont again prepared to pursue their journey, rendering the best assistance they could to their wounded companions, and cleansing the armour of their leader from the soils it had gathered in the swamp. As to his person, it had sustained no injury, neither did he feel any further inconvenience than that which arose

from a singing in the head, occasioned by the stunning blow, which for a few minutes had rendered him senseless. The troop, when again collected, no longer possessed that warlike appearance, which they bore at the outset of their journey, as the weeds and rushes with which they attempted to clear off all marks of their connection with the bog, left long dusky trails on their horses and armour, and in the crevices of their mail. The banner of the White Hart, which an hour before waved so proudly in the sunbeams, now seemed to share the baron's humiliation, and, besmeared with mire, fell wet and heavily on its staff.

The cavalcade was once more in motion, having formed in the best possible order, when the baron reined in his steed beside Elwerwolf, who had again resumed her distaff.

“Detestable and damnable hag!” exclaimed he, causing his war-horse to rear up, as he spoke. “It is through thy hellish spells, that the disaster hath befallen me. What say you, witch, to fire and fagot, as a foretaste of those pains, which you will suffer hereafter? Speak, hag! if thou hast any defence against such just doom?”

“ False-hearted Norman, I defy thee !” replied Elwerwolf, shaking her distaff at the baron. “ The punishment thou namest, will fall to thine own share ; and I, old and despised as I am, shall yet live to spit upon thy hated grave. The fiend hath long ago set his mark upon thee—the poor man utters thy name with a curse. Old men and women, in their prayers, call upon Heaven for vengeance, and marvel why it slumbereth so long ; even children make hideous figures on the doors of their huts, and call them after thee !”

“ She-wolf of a witch, an’ thou art not more guarded in thy speech I will tear thy abusive tongue out by the roots,” said the baron, his veins swelling with rage, and his forehead lowering like a thunder-cloud. “ Is it not enough that thou art permitted to pollute this hut with thy ungodly presence, without paying either fee, or service, and thou must lift up thy cursed voice to stir on these rebels to do me scathe, croaking thy infernal incantations like an ill-boding raven ? By Christ’s blood, an’ it were not for thine age, I would put an eternal stop to thy prating.”

“ Tyrant as thou art, thou darest not to

harm me," answered she. "Nor will I pay fee, or service, to thee, or thine, while the rightful heir of these lands yet breathes. Give up thy castle, thief of a Norman, to him who even now is a page in thy household. Thou mayest shake thy mailed fist at me. I have yet more to reveal, which thou hadst thought was only lodged within thine own black heart. Many a rich rood of broad land hast thou wrung from the fatherless and the widow, and many a mile of marsh and meadow dost thou claim, which, ere long, will be restored to the rightful owner. The blood thou hast shed cannot be so easily gathered, but even that, shall lie heavily on thy soul."

"Giles! Godfrey! fire the hut in which this heath-hag has too long formed her machinations," exclaimed the baron to two of his attendants, who immediately alighted from their steeds, and entering the hovel, took some embers from the hearth and fired the thatch, which, being dry, instantly burst into flames.

"Thou seest that blaze," continued he, "an' thou ventur'est further to awaken my vengeance; the very hands which but now kindled the fire, shall cast thee into the midst of

it. Thinkest thou, that I, who have swept the earth of so many of mine enemies, will be deterred by thy threats and menaces?"

"That thou art evil-minded and cruel enough to commit any crime, I believe," replied she, undaunted by his threat, which had, however, been uttered in that cold, deep tone of voice, so well known to all his followers, as a sure harbinger of the fulfilment of his threats. "But even in this thy own slaves dare not to obey thee; and were I, even now, in the midst of those flames, to which thy devilish malice hath committed my home, with my last breath, savage Norman, would I call thee thief, liar, oppressor, tyrant, and murderer!" While she spoke, her form seemed to rise higher, and the fire of her eye to kindle with an enthusiasm, such as shot from the mad gaze of an heathen priestess, while performing her unholy rites.

"Pitch her headlong amid the blazing rafters!" said the baron, twining her long white hair around his fingers as he spoke, and endeavouring to drag her nearer the flames. Not a soldier moved to obey his bidding. "Cowardly knaves!" continued he, raising his voice, which was half-choked by passion, "refuse ye

to obey my commands?" They still remained mute, so much were they in dread of that supernatural power, which superstition had attributed to her, that not a man raised his arm. "Speak, dogs!" continued he, "or I will strike down every one of ye. How now, Royston Gower, thou wert wont to be foremost in obeying my wishes?"

"When they did but gage my life against a common mortal," answered Royston, a brave old soldier, who had looked on death a thousand times without blenching. "But I refuse to touch this woman, or whatever she may be; for Hugh of the Glen did but curse her for affrighting his kye in the forest, and a few moons after he lost his brindled steer."

"Villain and murderer!" exclaimed a voice unexpectedly, while an arm was uplifted from between the two foremost horsemen, and a blow from a massy club alighted upon the head of the war-steed on which the Norman was seated, and the noble animal fell dead, before the burning hut. The baron's sword was uplifted, but was as instantly struck down by the cudgel, with such force, as to drive it from his grasp into the flames.

The dreadful weapon again swung in the air —another moment, and the soul of Geoffrey de Marchmont would have fled the body, had not the arm of Elwerwolf interposed, as she said, “Druth! my son, forbear! thou must not shed his blood; his time is not yet come. The star that marks his fate hath not yet reached its appointed course in the sky.” The dwarf obeyed, and lowered his knotted weapon.

“Ah! hast thou again crossed my path?” said the baron, eyeing the dwarf with a degree of terror and anger, as he stood with one foot yet remaining in the stirrup, and his knee resting on the dead horse.

“Again, and yet again,” answered the dwarf, in the same deep melancholy voice, and with as much apparent calmness as when he conversed with Edith on the preceding evening: “thou didst promise never more to molest me or mine. How hast thou kept thy word, Norman? Behold these flames! Why were thy bloody fingers twined around the hoary locks of my mother?”

The face of the baron underwent as many changes as the surface of a lake during a tem-

pest, while he listened to these accusations in silence. Twice his fingers quivered over the hilt of his dagger—then he bit his lip until the blood oozed forth, and anon knit his brows—whilst the black bushy tufts, by which they were overhung, became contracted, and the lowering gloominess overshadowed the fiery orbs that seemed to blaze beneath.

“ ’Tis well,” continued the dwarf, “ that thou art confounded by thine own shame ; ’twere better for thyself hadst thou not broken thy oath. I am again thy mortal enemy. On thine own head falls the blame. Thou knowest the power I have over thee—it but hangs by a single hair. One more deed thou canst but do, and then the curse falls.”

“ Soldiers ! sit ye there, and see your leader thus bearded !” said the baron ; “ ride down both hag and cub, and at once rid the world of a witch, and a monster !”

“ They will not ! they dare not !” answered Druth ; “ not a follower in thy train will uplift his lance against me—not one amongst them but whom I have stood between, and thee, when thy wrath was kindled—when death, or the donjon, would have been their doom, but

for the power I had over thee. Even the wretch whom thou didst bribe to put poison in my drink, knelt and wept before me like a guilty thing, and with my own hand I discharged him from the postern, and with my own gold gave him the means to wander in search of an honest master."

"Ah! didst thou, in very deed, do that?" said the baron, grinding his teeth with rage; "then am I served, on every hand, by traitors. Villains!" continued he, turning to his followers, "pursue the march;" saying which, he mounted another horse, and planting himself at the head of his party, they again set off in a brisk canter across the forest.

"Spur on, fierce spirit!" muttered the dwarf as he gazed upon them: "there is a stumbling-block in thy path, of which thou little dreamest. Thy course is beset with dangers, which thou canst not see. Like the eagle, thou hast long gloried in thy lofty eyrie, and looked down in defiance upon all beneath; but the axe is now laid at the root, and thy daughter is the dove amid its branches, which alone delays its fall. Alas! that she is thine!"

Elwerwolf had seated herself at a little dis-

tance from the burning ruins, and, as she swayed her tall body to and fro, and covered her haggard features with her hands, the tears oozed from between her skinny fingers, or lingered for a moment upon her white disordered locks before they fell. While her enemy stood before her, she seemed unconscious of the extent of her loss; but now her anger had wasted itself away, and, like the smouldering embers at her feet, left a dull dreadful blank in the place, where before was at least a portion of comfort.

Around her was the wide waste of heath and bog; and beyond these, the dark outline of the forest. The only living figures in the desolate landscape were, herself and the dwarf, the latter leaning upon his massy club and watching the last curling of the white smoke, as it rose with a fainter streak in the calm sunshine.

Elwerwolf was not one of those to shed tears for the mere loss of her worldly goods; these were the last thoughts that passed through her mind. It was her associations with the spot on which she had dwelt for threescore years, until every patch of heath, and every gloomy flag that waved along the damp marish, had become

interwoven with herself.—They were things that she had so long gazed upon; that, however greatly they might be despised by others, to her, at least, they brought pleasant remembrances, albeit, mingled with a sadness, in which there was sometimes peace.

Even the eyes of Druth wandered over the naked space, and his ears drank in the mournful sound of a melancholy stream, which had made the same sad music around his home in by-gone years; when his greatest delight was to chase the water-fowl among the reeds, or seek the silent haunts of the wild forest.

“Mother, why weapest thou?” said the dwarf, first breaking the silence which had reigned between them, since the departure of the horsemen.

“Why askest thou? have I no cause for grief, my son,” said she, in a sorrowful voice; “have these wilds been so long familiar to my sight, trowest thou, that I can depart from them without a tear. Even the donjon at length becomes endeared to the captive, and he would at last fain leave his bones in the fetters, that have almost become a part of himself.”

“Nay, an’ thou thinkest so deeply of these

things," replied Druth, "thou wilt tempt me to hasten and accomplish that, which but now thine own arm prevented me from doing. We will soon erect thee another hut, even here, where thou hast so long dwelt. Not a forester but will be eager to assist us, when he hears of thy misfortune."

"That you may do, my son," answered she, in a mournful voice; "but, alas! it can never be the one in which I have dwelt. The very chinks that time had made in its wind-battered walls, were dear to me; every crevice in which the sunbeams beat, brought soothing remembrances to my heart, that never left me all alone; the very smoke that had blackened the rafters, brought back the tongues of other days to my ears, a language of past ages, that seemed to babble beside my hearth, nor left me altogether desolate. I lived but upon the food of memory." And the old woman again buried her face in her hands, and bowed her aged head in sorrow; while a tear stole down the cheek of the dwarf as he watched her emotions; but he dashed it aside in an instant, as if ashamed of having yielded to such weakness, and grasped his cudgel with a tighter hand,

and soothed his thoughts with the hopes of future revenge.

“Druth,” continued she, “the very consciousness that such things are no more, give me pain. The wide rents which admitted the winds of heaven, served to remind me of happier scenes, and happier days; from them, have I many a time gazed upon thy form, which, however it might be despised by others, was ever dear to mine eyes. When thou didst first appear on the verge of the forest, bringing with thee some beast of the chase, the broken boards on the East shewed that thou wert drawing nigh. When thou didst wander amid the dangerous swamp, where nought human, beside thyself, dared then to tread; where only the bittern boomed and the wild-duck reared her young, even then I could trace thy form among the bending rushes. And when thou hast left me from sunrise, and never gladdened mine eyes until his setting, the last beams that gilded my roof-tree, told that thou wouldst come. Even when I resigned thee, as a vassal to the Norman, who has this day destroyed my dwelling, I knew that thou wouldst serve the rightful heir

of these lands, while thou didst seem to be doing the bidding of his plunderer."

"Mother, thou hast struck a chord on which comfort yet lingers," answered the dwarf, "and it shall go hard, but I will requite him for this deed. But something must be done in the meantime for thyself, at least, until we can erect thee another dwelling-place." While he was yet speaking a noble stag-hound approached; and, with a familiarity which told that they were not strangers to each other, began to climb up to the dwarf's face, and lick his cheeks and hands, with other signs of dog-gish affection. Another hound also appeared, and having thrust his long snout into the hand of Elwerwolf, seemed to gaze with a knowing look upon the ruins of the hut, as if he was aware of some sudden change, yet at a loss to discover in what it consisted.

Presently a stout powerful man appeared with a bow in his hand, and a sheaf of arrows by his side, while a fawn, which was still bleeding, was slung across his shoulders and secured by a belt. His dress was a green doublet, extending to about the same length, or

somewhat shorter, than a modern frock-coat, and not unlike it below the waist, while the collar was furred. Part of his undergarments were concealed, as the doublet fitted closely; his lower extremities were encased in long buskins, not unlike modern overalls. He wore a fur cap, made of the skin of some beast of the chase; he also carried a short pointed sword, and a hunting knife, the latter having no sheath. These were stuck in a rich belt, on which was gilded rude figures of the chase, and such sylvan weapons as were then in use.

“ Ah! by the holy saints, the cursed Norman hath not yet forgotten what William the Bastard taught his followers at the Conquest,” said the Saxon; for it was none other than Hereward-the-Ready that spoke. “ But come, Dame Elwerwolf,” continued he, stooping down and assisting her to arise; “ ’tis useless indulging this dolour: what better might we expect when the boar ranges abroad? Come, cheer thee, woman, I have yet a spare dwelling on my estate, that will resist the tempests better than thy old ricketty hut hath done latterly; and my daughter Elfrida will be nearer to thee. This Marchmont hath but added another notch to

the tally ; and trust me, it shall not be forgotten at our reckoning."

"I thank thee, good Hereward," replied she, "I had hoped to have left my bones on this spot, where I have seen so much of good and evil for threescore years. I have a kinsman within the walls of Nottingham, who hath many times and oft, requested me to sojourn with him; but I ever loved my humble hearth in the forest, better than the tumult of the town. I will accept thy kindness, sith it may be no better with me. I shall yet be within a bird's flight of my old haunt, and it will be some comfort to find the old heath and forest the same. Although the hunter will miss me when he pauses to quench his thirst by the stream, and finds the bearer and the vessel gone; still the water will flow on as pure and fresh as in the days of old, even when Elwerwolf is no more."

"There, now, lean thine arm upon my shoulder," continued the good-hearted Saxon; "here, Druth, thou wilt lead the way, and make it known to Elfrida that we are coming, and bear this fawn with thee, for I have not yet eaten since our morning meal. And thou, good mother,

wilt not take these matters so much to heart. Thou shalt see that we can repay the Norman with interest. Walter-the-one-handed is again at liberty; but that thou knowest. Thy son is an host; fear not but all will yet be well."

"I had not thought," replied the old woman, "that the burning of my old nest would have cost me a tear; but such is our love, for what has long been familiar to us, that, like our ancient liberties, we value them not until they are gone. It is only then, that we feel they can never more return, and remember, too well, how dear they were to us, even when we seemed to cherish them not."

"Thou sayest, sooth," answered Hereward; "and it is with difficulty and daring that we yet retain what little remaineth. This Marchmont hath even now his eye on the residue of my lands, and, backed by no less a person than King John, doubtless thinketh himself already in possession; but I will yet let fly a shaft for my inheritance, and burn down my ancient homestead, ere it shall fall into the hands of the Norman."

"He will perish in his own toils," said Elwer-

wolf; "but touching this matter of thine inheritance, it will behove thee to be cautious."

"Nay, thou needst not fear for me," answered Hereward, "for the seal of William the Bastard is still attached to the grant, and methinks they will not venture to undo that, by which they alone hold tenure themselves. Beside, have I not another claim in my birth-right?"

"Might, and not right," replied she, "are the laws the Norman enforces; but, thank Heaven, there are yet a few faithful Saxons, that will strike a blow in thy behalf, and that even his own followers are wearied of being held in thrall."

They thus pursued their journey over the forest, the athletic Saxon curtailing his manly stride to suit the feebler steps of his companion. Sometimes a rude hind, paused to glance at the shrivelled figure and wild countenance of Elwerwolf, and regarded her with a mixture of awe and wonder, or paused to make his bow of respect, to the yet wealthy landholder. They at length reached his dwelling, and Elfrida stood ready to receive them at the open door, and kindly offered her shoulder for the support of the old

woman.—Her charge had that day been driven into the woods under the guidance of a domestic. Druth had departed to occupy his old station at the gates of the priory, nor could all the eloquence of the damsel prevail upon the dwarf to stay.

CHAPTER X.

I can counterfeit the deep tragedian ;
Speak, and look back, and pry on every side,
Tremble, and start at wagging of a straw,
Pretending deep suspicion: ghastly looks
Are at my service, like enforced smiles ;
And both are ready in their offices,
At any time, to grace my stratagems.

SHAKSPEARE.

IN a large hall, the floor of which was covered with rushes, King John was pacing to and fro, in thoughtful and silent mood. Several Norman nobles, whom a variety of causes had called together, were conversing in small groups, or walking up and down at a respectful distance from their sovereign ; each, however, eyeing his countenance, when they best could venture a glance without discovery, as if they sought in

the bent brow, and abstracted look of the king, to find an answer to their many, and opposite requests. A richly painted window was partly thrown open, and admitted the fresh air from the forest, which came laden with the perfume of summer flowers, into the hall of the palace.

Squires, and stewards, and menials of every degree, were seen through the open window, some lolling carelessly on the greensward, while others were leading, or holding horses, hounds, and hawks, and awaiting the favourable moment when their masters should present them to the king. He who could produce the richest gifts brought the best claim to the avaricious monarch, and most readily obtained an hearing. For King John reigned in an age when money purchased the absolution of even murder, and justice leaned favourably to that side which produced the greatest wealth.

Some of the barons gave the king twenty palfreys, that they might obtain his request to marry a rich heiress, the disposal of whose hand and property, according to the feudal law, rested with the sovereign. Others presented tuns of wine, and immense sums of money, that he might hold his tongue and refuse to hearken to

the complaints of those whose wives or daughters had been carried away by force, or whose estates had been seized, and added to their own. Some there were, who made costly presents to obtain the king's letters for carrying off the daughter of some baron, or thane, who could not bring sufficient force into the field, to cope with the marauders.

There was scarcely any plan of villany attempted, or executed, but which for wealth, they could readily obtain both King John's sanction, and pardon. Neither was it at all times safe for that monarch to murmur at the deeds of his subjects; for there were those amongst his barons, who had so little of respect to royalty, and were so secure in the power of their own followers and strongholds, that they hesitated not to tell the king, that they but followed the example which his ancestors had set before them. Nor shall we wonder at their boldness, when we come to consider that King John was but an usurper, and had, either, with his own hands murdered Prince Arthur, the rightful heir to the throne, or been otherwise instrumental in hastening his death. The thoughts of this crime,—the recent loss of

several of his provinces in Normandy, and the approaching struggle with the pope, added to the head which the outlaws were making in the neighbourhood of Sherwood,—all sat heavily upon the spirit of the king, as he paced in moody thought along the hall.

His was not, however, a sorrow to call forth the sympathy of those around him; they knew him to be a tyrant, and but shaped their sails to suit his course, so long as it accorded with their own interests, to ride on the same dangerous sea. Nor had he policy enough to attribute his misfortunes to either fate, or accident, but had openly accused some of his most faithful followers, as being the cause of those things, which his own recklessness, distrust, and cruelty had occasioned.

Although his countenance, when undisturbed, was open, and had an appearance of frankness withal, yet there was a peculiar expression about the mouth, in compressing the lips, in the restless shifting of the eyes, and an occasional contracting of the brow, which, to those skilled in decyphering the face, plainly told that much cunning and deceit, mingled with pride, and traits of the libertine, slept under

that apparently calm surface. His dress varied but little from that of the barons by whom he was surrounded, saving that his tunic was here and there ornamented with costlier furs, and the indented border of his dalmatica interwoven with gold, while on his boots, between diamond shaped partitions, were enwrought small golden lions, — a fashion then newly introduced.

For several minutes the king had continued to pace the hall in silence, nor had any of the nobles, as yet, ventured to accost him, for they saw the dark speck upon his brow, and knew that his mind was ill at ease. This silence did not continue long, for a tall young knight, armed from head to heel, saving that his visor was up, while smoothing the plumes of a beautiful hawk, which rested on his gauntlet, allowed it, by some accident, to escape, and, afraid that it might fly through the open casement, he hastened to close it, and, in his hurry, trod heavily upon the foot of the king, who at that instant chanced to step before him.

“The curse of God rest upon thee!” exclaimed the angry monarch, stooping down, and rubbing the ornamented boot as he spoke;

“Marry, sir, you tread as heavy as St. Dunstan, when he planted his hoof upon the devil.”

“I crave your majesty’s pardon,” said the knight, “and trust that this mishap, will be rightly attributed to my eagerness in endeavouring to save the hawk, which was sent from the Earl of Gloucester to your grace, as being of rare breed; and I feared, if she escaped into the forest, I might not again reclaim her.”

“Thou hast it, thou hast it,” answered the king, but at the same time clenching his teeth, as if he still felt a portion of the pain, so unavoidably inflicted. “But, by the holy rood, if thou strikest as heavily with thine arm, as thou dost with thine heel, I care not how little I try thy prowess. What said our cousin of Gloucester?”

“He sent his greetings,” answered the knight, “and a packet, which my squire holds without, together with another hawk, which matches the one I have again captured; and the momentary loss of which I regret, since it has caused your majesty pain.”

“Tut, tut, that is forgotten,” replied King John; “and now I bethink me, thou art the

knight to whom we entrusted —— ; but we will speak of that anon, for there are those —— ; but undo the casement, and let us see the contents of our cousin of Gloucester's packet ; it is some time since we had word with him."

The knight obeyed, and calling in his attendant, received both the packet and hawk, and the birds were handed over to the falconer.

The king perused the epistle attentively, then fixed his searching glance upon the knight, and said, "I am here requested to forward thy suit with ——" but before he had finished the sentence, he was accosted by Geoffrey de Marchmont, who had just entered the hall. "By the holy Virgin, thou hast obeyed my summons readily," said the king, embracing the baron. "But how is this? there are stains upon your armour, which, if I guess aright, tell that your journey has not been accomplished without danger."

"Mere tourneying, my liege," answered the baron, with an affected indifference; "just a few cuffs with the outlaws, lest one's blood should become stagnant, for want of exercise, during our ride."

"Ay, indeed! and that in open day?" ex-

claimed the king; "By the holy martyr, but this must be looked unto: you came not, assuredly, alone?"

"Not alone, my liege," replied the baron, "but with a score of my best lances, or, by my faith, I had not now been with your grace."

"And the prisoner," continued the king, "is yet in charge of your men-at-arms?"

"Hath escaped," answered the baron, "nor need your majesty wonder, when I tell you, that I received your commands from the daring outlaw, Robin Hood, and he, too, disguised in the dress of your own page."

"And escaped, also?" said the king; "read I aright?"

"Even so," rejoined the baron, "with a much greater force than I had thought they could have mustered. We must scour the forest with blade and brand, and no weak power, ere we can destroy these hornets."

"By the foul fiend, an' thou art thus serious," said the king, "we had better betake ourselves to the capital, and leave our hounds for the amusement of these hinds, or sue for liberty to pursue the chase, for a few days in the year!"

Marry, I had thought that thy battlements had kept them in subjection."

"I am not wholly to blame," replied the baron, with warmth, "for the escape of this one-handed Saxon; for, had not your grace summoned him hither, he would, ere this, have waved upon those heights, where so many of his kin have looked their last on the sun."

"And thou hast not obeyed my wishes, sir baron," answered the king, with a sneer; "nay, marry, thou hast brought me less than I sent thee: where is my page?"

"I saw him not," said the baron, knitting his brows; "your majesty would obtain the best information, I trow, from the outlaw chief, at whose hand I received the letter."

"And he, too, escaped you?" said the king; "he whose death would have been the means of dispersing the whole band! whose policy outwitteth us all. I would that he had abided that space in my presence, had he been in the guise of Sathanas, I had discovered him."

"I may not gainsay your grace's words," said the baron; "but methinks he is too cunning to approach your presence."

“Ay! thou sayest, sooth:” answered King John; “by the rugged cross! an’ there be not a scent about a traitor, which can be found without the aid of hounds, I am no true king. But how hast thou succeeded,” continued he, in a lower tone, “with this fair Edith? I trust she is safe in thy keeping.”

“Nay, by St. Christopher!” answered the baron, in a milder tone; “I did not dare to storm the dwelling of the Black Canons, and bring off the maiden thus early: and, furthermore, Langton is now an inmate of the priory.”

“I would that he were an inmate of the grave,” answered the king, a change passing over his countenance as he spoke, and stifled one of those fits of passion which occasionally burst forth, and, like the tempest, seemed to have no bounds to its rage.

“I trust that none other ears, saving mine own, have caught those words,” said De Marchmont; “such a sentence hath already embittered the life of one king, whom may Heaven as-soilize!”

“Thou speakest truly,” replied the king; “but hear me, Sir Knight, by the soul of my father, I will shake off the whole power of

Rome ere I will be priest-ridden by this cursed cardinal." He spoke this so loud, that it reached the ears of those at the further end of the hall; and while some of the barons made the sign of the cross, others hesitated not to murmur their applause. But great was the king's astonishment, on turning round, at beholding the cardinal, clad in the sacred vestments of his office. For so much had the conversation engrossed the monarch's attention, that Langton had entered the hall unperceived by either the king or De Marchmont.

Holding the pastoral crook before him, and standing with his proud form drawn to its full height, the haughty cardinal fixed his keen piercing eyes upon King John, with so severe and searching a glance, as caused the monarch to quail before him. The bold prelate, after standing a few moments in silence, thus addressed the king:

"I wonder not, my liege, that the sheep obey not the call of the shepherd, when even those who are entrusted with the care of the fold, threaten, in the absence of their spiritual superiors, to shake off their subjection. I repeat not that, which you have even now publicly

uttered. I am but one of the humblest of the children of that church, against which you have breathed rebellion."

"Proud cardinal, dost thou dare to beard me in my own palace?" exclaimed the king, his face growing crimson with rage; "by the blessed rood, thou must have drawn unbounded limits to our patience, if thou thinkest that we shall quietly submit to thy taunts, in this place."

"I care not for thy threats, my liege," replied the cardinal, undaunted. "I am but the servant of his Holiness, and shall not be the first who has died in obeying the commands of our holy master. But I come not to quarrel with your grace, but to bear back your answer to the Pope, on whose mission I am now here;" saying which, he took out a packet from a slip in his mantle, and, pressing it to his lips, presented it to the king.

Without any sign of reverence, King John broke open the seal, and perused the epistle in silence, his lip quivering with rage the while; and when he had finished reading the epistle, he tore it to pieces, and scattered the remnants on the floor of the hall, stamping his foot, and exclaiming, "Tell the Pope, that I am no reed

to be shaken by the wind, but will repel threat by threat, and force by force. As to the see of Canterbury, I will burn it to the ground ere thou shalt preside over it. I have already made my choice, and am prepared to maintain the election."

"Then, from this moment," said the cardinal, "England is placed under an interdict; and should you still persevere in opposing my rightful election, as archbishop of Canterbury, a few more days shall see you despised and excommunicated, and every one who obeys you shall be pronounced an heretic. No man shall pay you allegiance; and blessed shall be the hand that takes away your life."

"Get thee from my sight," exclaimed King John, in a voice of thunder, "lest thy insolence causeth me to forget my kingly dignity, and I crush thee like a toad or serpent. Tell the Pope that I am ruler in my own realm, nor will I share that power with any pilfering priest. Away! or, by the soul of my father, I will have thee scourged from my gates by the grooms."

The cardinal departed with his train, without making further reply.

"Assuredly, your majesty speaketh only in

anger," said Hugh de Lacy, who had hitherto stood among the barons, and witnessed the scene in silence, "and meaneth not to send so severe an answer to his Holiness."

"When the Earl of Eltham is called upon to become my counsellor," answered King John sharply, "I will consult his opinion; but until then, methinks, it would be wisely done to leave these affairs in my own hands."

"Your majesty was not wont to prize my counsel so slightly," replied the fiery earl, "when I kept my saddle from sun-rise to sunset, and was unable to open my hand, long after the battle had closed, so tightly had it all day grasped my sword."

"I crave thy pardon, De Lacy," said the king; "but while that cursed cardinal remained in sight, I could have quarrelled with myself. But let us forget this. De Marchmont, I would have you acquainted with the worthy earl, as he is of near kin to Edith of Lincoln, your promised bride."

"By the good Lord, my liege," said De Lacy, "I would fain that my fair cousin was left to her own choice. Marry, Sir Knight," continued he, addressing De Marchmont, "I fear that you

will scarce possess her yet, without some knight shivering a lance in her behalf, albeit your suit is backed by his majesty."

"I shall not shrink from maintaining my claim, noble earl," answered De Marchmont, "should any one be so headstrong as to deny my right to the maiden, when I receive her as a ward from the crown."

"Nay, God forbode," exclaimed the king, "that we should withdraw our pledge, or suffer any one to do battle in such a cause."

"An' there be a fair lady in the case," said the young knight, who had spread such confusion through allowing the hawk to escape, "I would wager my golden spurs that she stirs up some one to break a lance in her behalf."

"By the holy saints! my liege," said De Marchmont, "an' I had to do battle with these beardless youths, who are so ready to oppose your majesty's wishes, I need but take a lady's riding-rod and her hawk-whistle, the one to overthrow them, and the other to sound a blast of victory."

"An' thou numberest me among such, thou mightest have spared thy boast until after

the victory, proud baron," answered the young knight warmly; "for I might, perchance, sit firmer in my saddle than thou deemest."

"I number none in especial," replied De Marchmont, "although there are always enow to be found in every cause, where none are wanted; and it behoveth every true knight to chastise their forwardness."

"Then, thou hadst better erase the white hart from thy shield," replied the young knight, "and carry for thy device a lady's riding-rod, and hawk-whistle;" saying which, he left the hall.

De Marchmont bit his lips, but replied not, while the Earl of Eltham, and King John, only laughed at the baron's embarrassment, and applauded the spirit of the young knight.

The barons, at the lower end of the apartment, had gathered closer together since the departure of Langton, and were conversing in low whispers, while a watchful glance cast occasionally towards the king, left no doubt as to the subject of their conversation. Some there were, who shook their heads, and knit their brows, as if in disapprobation of the arguments produced by their companions, while one or two

signed themselves with the cross, and uplifted their eyes towards heaven, as if they sought assistance from on high. Others again, grasped the hilts of their swords, or passed their fingers over their daggers, in various and angry moods, thereby indicating by what measures they would settle the approaching controversy, if left to their decision. A few there were, who appeared to listen in silence, or were following the bent of their own thoughts, as they stood looking upon the floor, or tracing circles thereon with their swords; while one or two of the younger knights, were gazing from the open windows upon the busy scene without, as if wholly uninterested in what was passing within.

Their motions did not escape the king, who, ever mistrustful, construed every whisper and sign into, either, treason, or some plot, that would militate against his own policy. As he stood partially screened from the observance of those who occupied the lower end of the apartment, he motioned De Marchmont to a seat, within the circle of a rich oriel window on the dais, and pointed towards the opposite end, as if he expected the baron to make some remark.

“Seest thou nothing?” said the suspicious

king, wondering at the baron's apparent dullness or unwillingness to comprehend him.

De Marchmont was a wary courtier, and only replied with a shake of the head, well knowing, if he hazarded any remark, the king would repeat it on the first occasion, that might serve his own purpose.

"Thou seest," continued the king, "that the cowards are already falling from me, that they have not courage to resist this cursed interdict. But, by the eternal doom! I will thwart this proud pope, ay, even if I am left alone in the contest; and it shall go hard if my vengeance alighteth not upon all those who obey his bidding."

"I fear me," replied the baron, "that the Church of Rome seeketh alone its own aggrandisement, and craveth more after power and possession, than the souls and salvation of her children."

"Thou sayest truly," answered the king; "nor would aught save the shadow of power be invested in the hand of any monarch, who yielded to the Church's demands. As to this interdict, we will put a check upon it, by indulging our subjects in games and merry-

makings, and to-morrow we will chase the hart in merry Sherwood."

"And Edith, my liege," said the baron, "what is your pleasure in this proceeding? Shall I carry her away captive, and when she is wedded, ask her consent, after the manner of our forefathers?"

"I care not if thou dost," replied the king; "but be sure and remove her to thy castle, and return thyself immediately, for I have much need of thy presence. We will send to her, by De Lacy, announcing our intention for the morrow, and it may be that she will witness the chase; thou mayest then act upon circumstances. But, mark me! I know not this; and should her kinsman complain, I must leave the healing of the matter to thine own wisdom."

"That is but just, my liege," said De Marchmont, with a grim smile, which told how little of the king's commands he intended obeying. For he well knew that if Edith was once in safe keeping within Nottingham castle, and himself absent, she would not long be without a royal visitor. "And touching this Hereward, the Saxon, he hath not yet proved a claim to his possessions; and I hear that he favoureth these outlaws."

“The day is not yet half spent,” answered the king. “We will have him in readiness after we have partaken of our noon-day meal, to prove by what tenure or vassalage he holdeth them. A quick messenger may return in a short space.”

“Shall I step forth, and send half-a-score of my own spears, to escort him in safety?” said the baron.

“Thou mayest,” replied the king, eyeing De Marchmont narrowly; “but remember that there is no mishap by the way; thou understandest me. But stay,” continued he, rising, and advancing to a large oaken table, on which writing-materials were placed, “as he possesseth somewhat of the headstrong bravery so peculiar to his race; it were well to send a summons from our hand, or he may refuse to accompany thy followers. I would also that one of my own retainers went with them, or Wardle, my squire; but he hath not yet returned from his last mission. I trust,” added he, lifting up his eyes from the parchment, and fixing them on the baron, as if he would look into his very soul,—“I trust that he hath met with no foul play in a brawl amongst your fellows?”

“By the word of a true knight,” answered De Marchmont, his face flushing with pride and anger as he spoke, “I tell your majesty that I saw not the squire, but received your commands from that notorious chief of the outlaws, Robin Hood. Nor was I aware of this, until beset by his band in the field of reeds, near to the hovel of the Saxon witch, which I burnt to the ground.”

“I fear me thou didst not throw the old bel-dame into the flames?” inquired the king.

“I did not that,” replied the baron, “but had I known that your majesty entertained any pique against the hag, she should have passed the fiery ordeal, on the spot.”

“It is not yet too late,” answered the king, “and if but a tithe of what is asserted against her can be proven, she shall be made to pass over the plough-shares.”

“Assuredly your majesty would not honour the hag with *purgatio ignis*,” said the baron, “which was only established for the free-born and noble, and through which the mother of Edward the Confessor passed uninjured. Might not the trial *per aquam frigidam*, suffice for one of such servile condition.”

“Ay, marry, might it,” replied the king, with a savage smile; “but, methinks, it were pity to pollute any goodly sheet of water with her unholy carcase; and as to defiling our river Trent with so hellish a burden, it were enough to contaminate every fin for a thousand years to come.”

“And her monster of a son, the dwarf Druth,” said the baron, “by whose hand I this morning lost my best steed; but he is under shelter of the friars at Newstead, and must pass scathless, I trow, as he will now have the high hand of the Cardinal Langton to protect him.”

“Ah! and that spotted leprosy of Rome abides there,” exclaimed King John, clenching his teeth, when he had spoken: “by the soul of my father, Henry, who gave the nest to shelter these hornets, I will extirpate the whole race, and burn their priory to the ground, as many of our ancestors did the holes in which the owlets hid at the Conquest. A pretty matter, indeed! within heron-flight of our own palace. By God’s truth! I will compass their huge granaries around with armed-men, and they shall have prayers for their food from matin to vesper,—fire and fast shall be their portion.”

“These churchmen are, indeed, thorns in our path,” said the baron; “they rebel against their liege lord, and are protected by the pope; they raise tumults which, if done by others, would prove them traitors; and where the latter meet with their meed in a noose, and a swing from the giddy battlements, the former, if punished for their crimes, are canonized; they have shrines erected for their sins, and are recorded in the calendar as martyrs.”

“Thou speakest too truly,” replied the king. “But they will not find in me a spirit relenting, to their purpose, like my father Henry, (heaven rest his soul!) I have seen through their artifices, and know yonder den at Rome to be nothing better than our mummeries and mysteries, where each one acts his allotted part, and deals out war and woe, or pardons and peace, as it may best serve themselves.”

The baron gazed for a moment on the king, then cast his eyes towards the floor, as he feared his thoughts might be discovered; for he could not avoid comparing in his own mind the policy and hypocrisy of King John, with that which the monarch had attributed to the church of Rome. But De Marchmont was too much of

a courtier to allow these thoughts to escape him, and too much of a tyrant himself, to dare murmur at the king's conduct, and with a tact, which politicians in our own day occasionally copy, he shaped his reply to suit his interests, and concealing his own opinion, only remarked, "That it was a pity such sums should be wrung from the country to keep up so great a deception."

Thurleby, one of the king's retainers, chanced at this moment to cross the hall, and the monarch having folded the parchment, delivered it into his hand; bidding him at the same time to give it to no one but Hereward the Saxon. Then telling De Marchmont that he might select an escort from his own soldiers, he walked to the further end of the hall; while the baron went to give orders to his followers, who by this time were well refreshed, since their morning encounter.

CHAPTER XI.

And he did leave his old ancestral hearth,
His halle, his hounds, and eke, his daughter dear;
Well wotted he the claim he had by birth;
“Kings are but men,” said he, “what need I fear?”
But still he ever turned his head around,
To view the distant tower with ivy crowned.

EARL ARNULPH'S PILGRIMAGE.

THE mansion of Hereward the Saxon was an extensive low building, and although the outer defences had long since fallen into decay, it still bore a few traces of its former strength. The half-filled fosse, together with the dilapidated barrier of pointed oak piles, plainly told that there was a time, when its owners had dared to dispute the entrance with the boldest foeman. Where the ponderous drawbridge had once fallen, was then a solid embankment of earth,

broad enough for a modern highway, and bearing the marks of wains and oxen, which had recently passed to and fro, with the produce of the earth. Even the dry moat had fallen back to its original state, and instead of forming a wall for the imprisoned waters, had thrown out hazel and thorn, sloe and furze, as fresh and green, and beautiful, as when traversed by hart and hind, and it formed a part of the lonely forest. It seemed as if the hand of Nature was passing over the scene, and blotting out every record of battle and bloodshed, with the beauty of her own works : as the ivy creeps over the mouldering turret, that is blackened by the fire of the besiegers, as if it would screen the malice of man from a future age, and lead us to believe that its bright leaves, had for ever waved there in peace.

The interior of the building was remarkable for nothing but its simplicity, and the primitive rudeness which appeared in the domestic arrangements. The floors were composed of clay and various sands, in which portions of pebbles and gravel appeared, some worn to a smooth and beautiful surface by the many feet, which had for ages passed over them. The

walls also were plastered with the same rough materials, put on more for strength than ornament, and as rude as the manners of the age in which they were erected.

The large hall, with its dais—the only memorial which told of its prouder times—was dismantled; and its massy benches, heavy tables, and huge oaken chairs, were converted into such purposes as were never dreamed of by those, whose hands had fashioned the foliage, flowers, and fir-cones, and every other quaint device with which they were ornamented.

In some of these venerable seats of the olden time, where the descendants of Hengist and Horsa had reposed their stalwart limbs, were now esconced litters of puppies; and their growling guardians, who never failed showing their sharp white teeth at every passer-by. Almost every description of hound had his station within the hall, from the large wolf-dog to those that hunted the boar, buck, or badger, or were trained to chase the fox, hare, and otter. Nor were there any lack of piles of bones, around the huge claw-feet of the chairs and benches, in this canine colony.

Hawks of various kinds, both long and short

winged, were stationed on their different perches, looking down with their keen bright eyes upon the litters beneath, as if waiting for the absence of the full-grown hounds, before they dared to descend and commence their banquet. Nor was it an unusual occurrence for the attendants to be aroused a dozen times a day by the screeching and clamour of such an opposite assembly, and to establish peace among these quarrelsome neighbours, by the free use of long hunting poles; numbers of which were in readiness in every corner of the hall. Antlers, fox-skins, and wings of large birds, with other remains of every beast of the chase, had been hung around the rude walls, by either the Saxon or his attendants; for, like their master, they considered these the proudest trophies, especially at that period, when the forest laws were so severely executed by the Normans. Arrows, cross-bows, spears, short swords, and bucklers, were scattered on the floor of the hall; some of them rusted and useless, others bearing marks of former frays, which, like the names of those who had wielded them, were forgotten. These were intermixed with hawks-hoods, bells, and jesses, leashes for hounds, and various tools,

which, when wanted, were only found by turning over, and again confusing the heterogeneous mass.

The apartments occupied by the Saxon thane and his household, were those which, in former times, had formed the offices of the various domestics, nor were there any worthy of remark, excepting a large parlour, or small hall, which was now used by Hereward as his principal room. The walls of this apartment were partially covered with coarse woollen drapery; these had once been stained blue, and might have been dyed by the same plants with which the ancient Britons coloured their bodies; but the hues had nearly all faded away. It was in this part of the mansion that the Saxon and his daughter, together with Elwerwolf, were seated at their noon-day meal, when the sound of a trumpet was heard from without, which caused the worthy thane to hold the morsel midway between his trencher and lips, as he listened to so unusual a summons.

“Hundebert,” said the Saxon to the menial in attendance; “go forth and bring us word who they are that wait without. If their intentions are peaceable, let us know their pleasure;

if they be otherwise, we have but few means to resist them: neglect not, however, to warn our followers who are within, to seize upon whatever is readiest in the hall, in case we should be menaced."

"Yonder blast was sounded by the Norman," said Elwerwolf, who had listened attentively to the sound; "those tra-li-ras and flourishes belong not to the old notes of England; I know them well; they breathe but little that is good towards us."

"If I guess aright," said Elfrida, "it is the war-sound of Geoffrey de Marchmont. I have heard such notes winded in the forest, when he has been returning to his castle."

"An' thou sayest truly, daughter," said Hereward, "it behoveth me to look around, for he hath an evil eye on my possessions, and it may be, that he hath already come to question my claim."

"A messenger from the king waits without," said Hundebert, re-entering; "he is attended by a party of De Marchmont's followers, for the leader bears the banner of the white-hart. He seeketh an interview with you only, and refuseth to tell his mission."

“ Let him be admitted, in God’s name,” said the Saxon; “ from the king!” continued he, musing; “ but whenever did robbery lack the sanction of Norman royalty, which first sprang from massacre and plunder? One seeth and another taketh away; and he who held his hydes of land yesterday, tilleth them to-day, for the thief that hath claimed their produce.”

“ ’Tis even so,” responded Elwerwolf; “ but thou needest not to fear; thy claims are too strong for this profligate king to unloose. Let not, however, thy Saxon honesty be too visible before their Norman cunning. Remember one of their own sayings, ‘ Put thy naked hand into the nest of the dove; but put on thy mailed gauntlet ere thou handlest the adder.’ ”

“ Thy advice shall not be lost,” answered Hereward; “ but I fear me they have some deeper scheme, than thou trowest of—”

His conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of the messenger, who with a graceful reverence presented the billet, which Hereward handed to his daughter. For Elfrida had so far improved under the instructions of an old Saxon monk, from the Priory, as to be able to decypher an epistle.

“It is a summons from King John,” said the maiden, without giving the literal reading of the document, “bidding you attend instantly at the palace, and show by what charter, tenure, or vassalage, you hold these possessions. You are also at liberty, to take whatever followers of your own you may deem necessary for your safeguard.”

“Nay, it shall not be said, that I doubted the faith of the Norman,” said Hereward, well knowing that the appearance of his followers would but furnish amusement for the gay court of King John. “I will but take Hundebert and Oswald, and leave the issue into the hands of the saints.”

“That may not be,” said Elfrida to herself, and making a sign to the old woman, she glided from the apartment, and was quickly followed by Elwerwolf.

The honest Saxon needed but little preparation for so short a journey; and with his two attendants was soon among the Norman cavalry, journeying at a brisk rate through the forest of Sherwood, in the direction of the palace.

CHAPTER XII.

I will advise you where to plant yourselves,
Acquaint you with the perfect spy o' the time,
The moment on 't ; for 't must be done to-night,
And something from the palace :

MACBETH.

IN an apartment not so large as the hall, which we before mentioned as appertaining to the palace ; but more remarkable for the costliness of its decorations, and the neatness of its arrangements, sat King John, together with De Marchmont, and several of his barons. The loudness of their conversation, and the occasional bursts of laughter, which rung out loud and long, left no doubt but that the huge wine-cups had long been in circulation.

The Earl of Eltham was amongst the number of the guests ; for although he disliked the

selection which King John had made for Edith, and had himself pressed the king's acceptance of the thousand marks, as a fine, he knew the power of the feudal laws too well to oppose them openly, and was aware that his powerful arm could not render his kinswoman so much assistance, as the keeping up of a friendly intercourse with the king might do, without showing any apparent opposition. The sheriff of Nottingham was also present, and had been admitted to the table, more to furnish them with amusement, than out of respect from the king. A favourite hawk was perched upon the arm of the monarch, and ever and anon, as he laughed at the jest of one, or other of his nobles, he smoothed the silky plumage of the bird, which returned the king's caresses, by again bristling up its feathers, and pecking at his hand.

“And hath not the page since been heard of?” enquired Gilbert de Clare.

“No, by the holy mass! neither for good or evil,” answered De Marchmont. “I tell thee, that this daring outlaw boldly blew a note of defiance at my gate; and that I liked his bearing so well, that we emptied a flagon

together, nor did I for a moment suspect him to be any other than his majesty's messenger."

"By St. Christopher! his deeds outdo those of King Arthur," replied Eustace de Vesey. "I would give a hide of my best land, for an interview with this brave freebooter."

"Thou mayest perchance not escape so cheaply," said the king, "if thy interview is in the forest; for by my faith, he hath a clever manner of emptying the mails of those who ride overburthened, which the worthy sheriff can testify."

"Marry, that can I, my liege," replied the sheriff of Nottingham; "but he comes in as many guises as Sathanas, and I believed him to be some worthy franklin, or trust me, I had not ridden with him into the forest."

"I have heard something of thy adventure, good sheriff," said De Vesey, "and shall hold it kindly done if thou wilt narrate it for our benefit, that we may be in readiness, should we chance to fall into his clutches."

"That will I, my lord," said the sheriff, willing to gratify the curiosity of his superiors, at the expense of being laughed at for his folly as many a better man hath since done. "Know,

then," continued he, "that his majesty hath set a price upon the outlaw's head, and that I have made many, and various excursions into the forest of Sherwood, to capture this notorious archer, but always with ill-success. It may be that my perseverance had rendered me obnoxious to this chieftain."

"Thou didst thy duty like an honest sheriff," said King John.

"I had been busied for some time in making enquiries for the purchasing of a hundred head of horned cattle," continued the sheriff, "to graze in the meadows which his majesty hath kindly allotted to me; for nothing pleaseth my wife better than a herd of goodly kine."

"I crave thy pardon," said De Vesey, for enquiring, "but is not thy wife handsome?"

"Ah, marry, is she," answered the simple sheriff, "his majesty hath been pleased to speak highly of her beauty, and —"

"Nay, worthy sheriff, say no more," exclaimed the king, who perceived a smile gathering on the countenances of his nobles, "thou knowest I told thee she had a pretty roguish eye, and her lips ——"

“ Which your majesty did her the honour— ”

“ To compliment also, good sheriff,” continued the king; “ but go on with thy adventure.”

“ How far had I proceeded ?” inquired the sheriff.

“ To the horned-cattle,” answered De Vese, “ when his majesty—— ”

“ Now out upon thee, Eustace,” said the king; “ allow our loyal sheriff to finish his narrative, and perchance he will introduce thee to his lady, so that thou mayest judge of her beauty thyself.”

“ This Robin Hood,” continued the sheriff, not observing the private signs of ridicule which the Norman nobles exchanged with each other, “ hearing of my wants, by means, of which I am ignorant, came in the disguise of a wealthy thane, and invited me to journey a few miles to view his herd, which, he swore, in many a round oath, were the finest between Trent and Tweed. Many a good joke we exchanged, and quaffed many a cup of generous wine before our departure. For he vowed he would toast such eyes as my lady’s, until he shamed the stars from the sky; and,

by my troth, the sun had long been up before we set out on our journey. I half forgive the knave for his merry humour," continued the sheriff; "but, beshrew his heart! when he caused me to thread these wild forest-passes, in which even a fallow-deer might lose itself, I half suspected the free-booter; and when we came to an open glade, where a herd of deer were reposing, he exclaimed, 'These, sheriff, are my cattle, pay down thy purchase-money, and drive them before thee.'"

"By the true Lord! a good joke, and a merry," said Gilbert de Clare; "but thou didst not pay the outlaw, I trow."

"Not there, I grant ye, my lord," answered the sheriff; "for finding that I liked not my bargain, he vowed, by St. Christopher, I should not depart without partaking of his cheer, which was spread under an oak-tree, and served up by tall foresters, and for which, by the Holy-rood! I had to tell out of my mail three hundred marks. Nay, the knave even begged to be remembered to my lady at home when I departed, and swore that he would sell me an hundred acres of land, choose where I might."

“By the belt of St. Botulph!” said the king, “when we join the chase on the morrow, it will be wisely done to leave our gold behind; for I find both noble and base-born more ready to laugh at this robber’s deeds, than to rid the forest of his presence. I would that some of you paid dearer for his hospitality than the sheriff; it might cause you to bestir yourselves in quest of him.”

“There is no capturing the buck we cannot discover, my liege,” said the constable of Chester: “his slot is as difficult to traverse as that of a goblin, and but few know his hold.”

“We will, ere long, sweep the forest,” said De Marchmont, “with lance and blade, and a few hundreds of followers, and leave not so much space unsearched, as that in which the hart harboureth.”

“Hereward, the Saxon, waiteth your majesty’s pleasure without,” said a page, who had just entered to replenish the flagons.

“Show him into our presence,” said the king. “Good, my lords, we would do justice before you, touching this man’s possessions, which, by the Holy Virgin! he seemeth, in no-wise backward to prove.”

“ May I crave your majesty’s leave to depart,” said the sheriff; “ for the sun is fast hastening westward, and I would not again fall into this outlaw’s hands.”

“ Nay, if you are weary of our company, good sheriff,” said the king, “ depart, in God’s name; and remember, that a postern is erected in the wall near to Lenton, high enough for two armed horsemen, bearing lances, to pass under.”

“ It shall be done, my liege,” answered the sheriff; “ and touching the gathering of wood, for the lepers of St. Leonard’s, your majesty hath not yet signified your pleasure.”

“ We grant them estovers,” said the king; “ and every day they shall be allowed one cart-load of dead wood to be burnt for their own use only; the same to be taken in view of the foresters, and not otherwise, for which we will send our own hand and seal.”

“ And the monks of Sneinton, my liege,” continued the sheriff, “ have they your majesty’s permission to sell pardons to all those who will contribute to the building of a new monastery in the hundred of Linbye?”

“ We countenance not these things,” replied

the king sternly; "if our people are no wiser than to purchase pardons by such folly, we take not the blame; but the sanction of our name shall no longer be coupled with these robberies of Rome."

The sheriff made his obeisance, and departed, as Hereward the Saxon, entered the apartment.

Although Hereward, was brave in heart as a lion, and had lost much of that antipathy which his ancestors had nourished against the Normans, yet when he saw the spoilers of his race seated before him, and witnessed the contemptuous sneers with which he was received, especially from De Marchmont, no marvel that the blood mounted his cheek, while he averted his eyes from the many scowls, which were directed against him.

"Saxon!" said King John, looking fixedly upon him, after having allowed him to stand several moments in silence, "we would know by what tenure thou holdest the lands, situate in Sherwood? together with the mansion in which thou residest, and the many privileges thou dost claim within the forest?"

"By the right of descent from honourable

ancestors," answered Hereward, "and a renewed charter, which the Norman William signed with his signet, to my ancestors, and their heirs for ever, in consideration that they resigned many a rood of land, even that which your father Henry granted to the Black Canons of Newstead for their priory. Here is the charter;" saying which, he unfolded a roll of parchment, and placed it before the king.

The manly figure of Hereward, as he stood erect, and pointed, at arm's length, to the charter—the whispers and glances which the barons interchanged with each other—the guilt of De Marchmont, who hung his head in disappointment, and could not meet the open gaze of the honest Saxon—together with the embarrassed air of the king, formed a fine picture of honest manliness triumphing over tyranny.

At length King John glanced upon the parchment, and he said, "What barbarous writing is here? of a verity such deeds as this must remain incomprehensible to us all. Assuredly, knave," continued the king, putting on one of his sternest looks, "thou hast not brought us a cabalistic scroll, and meanest to destroy us by some Saxon spell?"

“ I deal not with Wiglaer or Wicca,” answered the Saxon, “ nor fear the evil powers ; the charter is written in Saxon, the language in which King Alfred recorded his laws, and in which Edward the Confessor granted just rights to the people. The language of kings and conquerors,” continued he, raising his voice, “ and that in which minstrels recorded the deeds of valour, achieved by Hengist and Horsa, will never be extinct, although there are those who despise it.”

“ Methinks the Saxons first learnt it from their own swine,” said the constable of Chester, “ for it is full of nasal notes, and grunting terminations.”

“ At least,” added De Vesey, “ whatever was musical in it they forgot in their hurry, when they fled at the battle of Hastings.”

“ I hold not with you in that matter,” said Robert Fitz-Walter: “ methinks the Saxon language hath improved much of late ; through constant suing to the Normans, its storminess hath subsided to a whine.”

“ Shame on you, my lords,” said Hugh de Lacy, rising with a brow dark as a thundercloud, “ there are those among you wedded to

the daughters of noble Saxons; and were it only for their sakes, it were well that ye named them with respect. For, by the hand of God! an' had justice been done, there would have been fewer left to scoff, than there are at this board. Nay, by my good sword! it is cowardice thus to taunt a man alone, and unarmed, especially one who comes summoned by our king."

"Who speaketh so vauntingly?" said the Constable of Chester; "marry, but the earl cannot yet have sobered from the revel of his late victories, whilst he thus challengeth us all to the lists."

"John of Chester," said De Lacy, in a deep voice, thick and solemn with rage; "had there been one individual that I would sooner have challenged than another, at this board, it would have been thyself: for I this day heard thee trying to persuade Robert Fitz Walter to fall off from the king, and take part with Cardinal Langton and the pope; and for this thou art both coward and traitor, which, by the help of God, I will prove." Saying which, he threw his gauntlet with such force at the constable, as swept his wine cup from the

table, and scattered its contents on his glittering armour.

“ I will not shrink from thy challenge, proud earl,” answered John of Chester, his lip quivering with rage. “ But to thee, Robert Fitz Walter, I appeal, in the presence of his majesty, to say if he hath not uttered a falsehood, as black as hell is deep.”

“ Fitz Walter hung down his head in silence, conscious that all eyes were fixed upon him, while a variety of emotions passed over his countenance, like clouds, that give new colours to a lake, each chasing each, with continued change. The patience of King John was, however, soon exhausted ; and he exclaimed, in a voice of thunder, “ Speak, sir knight, or, by God’s teeth, I will have thy spurs torn from thee, and thy name proclaimed throughout England, as a traitor.”

“ He, — he, — did not,” stammered Fitz Walter, in a voice which belied his words.

“ By the soul of my father!” exclaimed King John, “ I believe thee not. Had you spoken the truth, you would not thus have hesitated in your answer.”

“ False-hearted liar !” said the earl, frowning

on Fitz Walter; "thou shalt answer me this calumny, or I will have thy heart's blood: ha! even if he of Chester sat beside thee."

"Cease thy boasting, proud earl," said the constable, "and in me seek to prove the veracity of Sir Robert Fitz Walter, when, and where thou willest; either on horseback, or on foot; with thy followers, or single-handed."

"We will give attention to this matter ourselves," said King John, "and appoint both the place wherein to fix the lists, and also the time of combat: for, by the holy saints! we do much suspect thee, John of Chester, of treason against our person; and thou, Geoffrey de Marchmont, wilt ——!" the king turned round, and found the chair, which De Marchmont had occupied, empty: the baron had retired, during the confusion, without observation.

"Saxon," continued the king, addressing Hereward, who had stood a silent witness of the tumult, and been forgotten, amid the loud threats of the challengers; "we will look into this matter on a future day. In the meantime, we consider thy claim to these possessions just: but, by the face of God, if thou art found countenancing these outlaws, or in anywise sheltering

those who offend against the rights of our forests, thy charter shall avail thee nothing. Go thy ways, and forget what thou hast been witness to."

The king spoke the last sentence in a lower tone of voice, and when the Saxon was about to reply, motioned him to be silent, and depart; a sign which Hereward obeyed.

The sun had long sunk amid masses of dark and fiery clouds, and night was gathering gloomily over the forest, ere Hereward and his attendants had resumed their journey homeward. Loud and terrible claps of thunder, attended with quick and successive flashes of lightning, told that the tempest, which had long thrown its threatening shadow over the sky, had at last burst forth. The huge forest-trees were all astir with their grating branches, and large, heavy rain drops clattered amongst the foliage, which, mingled with the loud rumbling thunder, now near, or afar off, sounded like the grand, but fearful, rolling of the ocean. The avenues of the forest also gradually grew darker; and where the trees stood thickly together, they formed a black barrier, impenetrable to the sight.

“ ’Tis a terrible night,” said Hundebert, “ and methinks it were better to go by the Priory, as the Lene is much swollen by the late rains, and was but just fordable ere the shower began.”

“ The river will have had but little time to deepen its waters,” answered Hereward, “ ere we reach it. Hold up, Dundred,” added he, addressing his horse. “ Marry, how the beast shrinketh from the lightning ! but ’tis indeed fearful,” continued he, straining his eyes forward ; “ saw ye that flash, threading its way between the trees, like a huge fiery serpent, stretching across the forest ?”

“ St. Dunstan shield us !” exclaimed Oswald ; “ by my faith, master, it were well if we rode at a brisker pace, through this narrow pass, and gained the broader forest-way, for, believe me, if the lightning striketh any of these broad oaks near at hand, we shall have but little chance of escaping without harm.”

He had scarcely spoken, before a red lurid flash, that seemed to fill the forest with light, attended by a deep and awful peal of thunder, burst forth, and striking a large oak, which overhung the path about an hundred yards be-

fore them, rent it into a thousand shivers, and scattered the riven branches far and wide around. While the Saxon and his attendants reined in their steeds, and gazed in fearful wonder at the sudden destruction, and the huge white splinters, which were visible amid the darkness; a rustling was heard in the thicket, and four horsemen rushed forth with levelled lances, just as another flash of lightning revealed the danger, then left all again in darkness.

Two of the foremost riders came with their lances pointed at full speed against Hereward; but the cautious Saxon, by a sudden movement of his steed, escaped the danger, and both their spears struck against the hard stem of a gnarled tree, and burst into shivers in their grasp.

“Ha! thieves! villains! what means this?” shouted the enraged Saxon, dealing a blow at every word, which, although struck almost at random, and in darkness, were given with such force, as brought one of the horsemen from his saddle; and he fell with a deep groan among the crackling branches.

“Cursed Saxon!” exclaimed another, grappling with Hereward, “deliver the scroll which you this day produced before the king?”

“ Ah! art thou a Normam robber?” shouted the Saxon, grasping the steel band which secured his enemy’s helmet, and planting his hard knuckles tightly under his throat.

Each was held back at arms length by his adversary; their swords were crossed, and borne so heavily together, that neither of them dared to strike under such equal advantages. After a short struggle the steel band gave way, and Hereward was forced from his saddle. In another moment the foot of his enemy was planted upon his breast, and the soldier again demanded the document.

“ I have it not,” said Hereward. The Saxon had delivered it to Oswald on their leaving the palace.

“ Damned Saxon!” exclaimed the soldier, in an angry voice, “ hast thou thus baffled us? but I will deal thee that, which shall leave thee peaceable, while we search!” Saying which, he drew back his arm in order to give full force to the blow, when a sudden stroke fell upon his own naked head, and clove him to the breast. In another moment the lightning again reddened the wild forest, and revealed the form of Walter-the-one-handed.

Several outlaws had also gathered on the spot, and a heavy blow from a quarter-staff soon levelled the soldier who had opposed himself to Hundebert, and who had well nigh conquered the Saxon's attendant; for his short sword availed but little against the longer, and heavier weapon of his assailant. The horseman who had struck down Oswald had offered no further violence, and was easily captured by the yeoman; while the one which Hereward had first struck down had been disabled in the right arm.

A light was speedily procured by the outlaws, and on examining the soldiers, they discovered the badge of the white-hart, the device of Geoffrey de Marchmont, on several parts of their dress, and housings.

The whole scene had a wild and almost terrible effect; for the thunder still continued to bellow, and the light of their torches was occasionally eclipsed by the bright and vivid flashes of lightning. Added to which, were the bold brown faces of the outlaws dimly revealed; the huge trees rising on either hand like piled clouds,—the dead, and wounded soldier stretched on the wet grass, together with the horses,

which were grazing on the greensward, as if they had no part in the scene presented, — all combined to form a fearful, yet magnificent picture. Nor was the grouping of the figures less effective. On one side stood the one-handed Saxon resting upon his sword, and gazing in silence on the bleeding and lifeless form at his feet. On another, the figure of a bold outlaw holding a suspended sword over the prostrate and sullen horseman, whom he had brought to the earth; while Oswald and Hereward, the one leaning against a tree, and the other resting by the side of his steed, told by the loud working of their chests, that they had not been idle during the affray. Hundebert had escaped, without a blow.

“Speak, knave!” exclaimed a deep mellow voice, addressing one of the soldiers, and in a tone which left no doubt but that it was the leader of the outlaws. “Speak, knave! and tell me at whose bidding you did this deed?”

“At the bidding of him whose bread we eat, and whose banner we follow,” replied the man briefly and sullenly.

“And what motive,” inquired the outlaw, “could compel you thus to attack a man, like

ruffians, and cowards in the dark, or say what was the will of the Norman thief, whom ye serve, with Hereward the Saxon?"

"To take from him some document, the contents of which concerned us not," answered the soldier.

"And the life of the Saxon," inquired the outlaw, "if he resisted?"

"Even so," replied the soldier, "whether he resisted or not."

"I blame ye not so much as the cruel tyrant," said Robin Hood, "and am right sorry that ye wield your swords for so cowardly, and bloody-minded an oppressor, as De Marchmont. You see," continued the outlaw, pointing to the dead body, "the fate of your companion: as he is, so would one word from my lips reduce you all, did I not reckon with the master, instead of the slave."

"He died in fair combat," said the soldier, undaunted, "in the service of his lord; and bespew the tongue that would speak evil of those who perish bravely."

"Call ye that bravely done!" exclaimed the outlaw, in a solemn voice, "besetting a man without defensive armour upon him: and his

attendants so unequally weaponed, and that too in the darkness of night, and in a lonely forest-path ; shame on your tongue ! But whenever was aught chivalric or noble to be won in the service of De Marchmont ? Had ye met the Saxon in fair field, I had said nothing ; an assassin, a wolf, a wild-boar, could have done the same deed, that ye have this night attempted."

"By the thunder of God, which is now rumbling so awfully through the heaven," exclaimed Walter-the-one-handed, his voice ringing above that of the deafening peal, "an' I come in fair contact with the nithering Norman again, we shall not part until either of our souls have found a larger space than the body ! I vow it by this night's deed ; nor should a supplicating saint turn me from my purpose. He this day escaped my hand ; but I thought not then that the devil was so black !"

"Soldier," said Robin Hood ; "I still call you such, although this cowardly attack hath thrown a tarnish on the name. But I partly acquit thee of the deed, inasmuch as this cowardly plot was not of your forming. It

would boot but little to take away your lives, seeing that your places could be readily filled by others, who would sooner eat the bread of Sathanas, than win it by nobler means. Return to your master, and tell him that the outlaws of Sherwood, have again marred his villany, and will not fail to take ample vengeance on himself, ere long."

"Surely, thou meanest not to let them escape without some mark home with them," said Walter-the-one-handed, "to show what company they have parted with."

"There has been blood enough spilt in this affray," replied Robin Hood. "We will, however, detain the one which is wounded. Should the false Norman deny that he was the chief mover in this night's work, we shall not then lack a witness. Begone," added he, addressing the two remaining soldiers; "your road is easy to find, and must be traversed a-foot; for we may chance to need your steeds in our own service."

The men departed without replying, and the outlaw chief ordered six of his followers to accompany the Saxon to Papplewick. The

wounded soldier was escorted between two strong yeomen, who followed the steps of their brave leader, and Walter-the-one-handed, along a wild winding glen, which led deeper into the forest.

CHAPTER XIII.

Hearing this sounde, he gave a sudden starte,
Like one who feels an arrowe in his harte :
And marvelled much, whether for ill or good
The voice had spoke. Well did he wot, that wood
Had many a woeful sight, which but to see,
Bristled the hair, and knockèd, knee to knee :—
He stood with mouth agape, nor wist which way to dree.
WHITE WITCH OF WANTLEY.

IT will be remembered that during the stormy altercation which took place between Elwerwolf and Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont on the heath, the latter alluded to the page, whom we have already introduced into our history ; as forming one of the baron's household. De Marchmont well knew the slight claim by which he held the castle of Nottingham, and had always regarded the page as a stumbling-block in his path, which might at some unexpected moment over-

throw his slender foot-hold. Nor was he a man who would long allow an obstacle to obstruct his path, when it lay within his own power to have the same removed. Still there was something so noble in the bearing of the page; and at times, a remembrance of the unjust method by which the rights of the orphan had been wrested from him, flashed upon the baron's mind, until he had half become reconciled to the presence of the youth, and thought that a few of his proud looks might well be borne, considering, how much he was withholding from him.

Excepting Druth the dwarf, the baron had believed that the birth and claims of the page were unknown, to all saving himself. But when Elwerwolf openly, and in the midst of his own followers, trumpeted forth his claims, he at once resolved upon a speedy and certain method, to rid himself for ever from all fears. With this intent he had ordered one of his most faithful followers to return to the castle, soon after their arrival at the palace, and at once to secure Edwin in one of its deepest donjons, until such time as he himself returned. Further he had hinted, that should the youth make much resistance,

the better way would be, to dispatch him at once, and that secretly. He furthermore alluded to some story being hatched up, to satisfy the curiosity of his daughter Margaret, should she interest herself regarding his absence. Royston Gower was the man to whom De Marchmont had trusted this mission; he was a hardy old soldier, one who had been to the Holy Land, and seen blood spilt as plentifully as water; he had also been a witness to some few tragedies, which the baron had considered it necessary to perform in private, and for his own safety; but none of these had appeared so cold-blooded and unnecessary as the one which he was then about to execute.

“In the donjon!” muttered the old soldier, as he rode leisurely along, after having passed some distance from the palace, as if in no hurry to execute his commands; “and yet he seemed not so earnest, as when he bade me and Wandelton cut out the tongue of the Jew. But he was no christian, and clamorous for money to boot. To the deepest donjon!” muttered the old soldier. “Ha! that was the spot where the Saxon thane was dispatched; and a man might as well expect to make himself heard at the distance of a thousand fathoms in the earth, as

from thence. I like not this affair! And our young mistress loves the youth, as much as she loves her own life, ay! marry, and I think, more. And what if the old witch spoke truth, and this Edwin is the son of Gurthric-of-Clifton,—for by my troth, he hath the looks of the old warrior,—shall I murder the child of one who fought bravely, and died nobly in trying to win back the holy sepulchre? May the foul fiend fly away with me if I do this deed! And how if I put him not in safe keeping? Why, Royston, thou mayest lose thy head. And what if I place him in the donjon? Better take away his life, Royston Gower; and thou hast blood enough to answer for, I trow. And what if I do none of these things? Why thou wilt sleep all the sounder, Royston!”

“And mayest hope for forgiveness hereafter, if thou truly repentest of thy past crimes,” exclaimed a deep hollow voice from the hazle copse, by which the soldier rode; and, in another moment, Elwerwolf, the hag of the heath, stood before him.

Although Royston was a brave man, and had never turned his back on danger, but had always been one of the foremost to seek it out,

still his mind was a slave to those superstitions which were so widely spread at this period ; and he as firmly believed in the appearance of the gigantic black huntsmen, who, mounted on dark coursers, chased each other around the tomb of the Norman, Bishop Bluet, at Lincoln—as if his own eyes had witnessed them. Nor can our readers have forgotten that he refused to obey the bidding of De Marchmont, when he was ordered to strike down Elwerwolf on the heath ; it need not, therefore, be wondered at, that her sudden and unexpected appearance, in so solitary a spot, and while the old soldier's mind was labouring under such ideas as we have recorded, should produce more fear upon him, than if twenty lances had been levelled at once at his helmet. But his was a terror which no earthly power could have produced ; for he believed in all those mysterious attributes with which the ignorant peasantry had so ingeniously and terrifically clothed the “ Hag-of-the-heath ;” and had Satan himself arisen before him, his fears could not have been greater.

The spot to which chance had directed the footsteps of Elwerwolf, or which she had, perhaps, herself selected, as best suited for her pur-

pose, (for, as we have before stated, she rather kept up the air of mystery with which she was regarded) was unusually romantic. Royston, either to avoid the noon-day heat, or, as being more in accordance with his own thoughts, had taken one of those wild bridle-paths, numbers of which ran through the forest, and were in some places almost dark with the over-hanging branches. The hazel-copse, from which Elwerwolf had emerged, skirted the sides and bottom of a deep valley, or glen, that was hemmed in by high banks on either hand, and so precipitously steep as to be inaccessible to human footsteps, and what with their approaching each other so closely, and the gloominess of the intermingled branches overhead, the spot was so dark as to have the appearance of a deep twilight. A rapid rivulet also coursed through the steep and dusky glen, dashing downward with a gibbering melancholy sound, and showing here and there small masses of foam, which, to the soldier's excited imagination, had the appearance of white spirits, whose bosoms were kept in constant motion by the unceasing sounds which they sent forth. Nor did the rustling of a few hollies and black-thorns, which shot out

from the clefts and fissures of the bank, together with the light hue of a silver birch seen above the foliage of the hazels, contribute aught to lessen his fears; but, blended with the tall bony and impressive form of Elwerwolf, the dim and excitable light by which he was surrounded, and, above all, those sounds, increased and varied by fancy, left him no doubt but that he was either in the hands, or the haunts, of the Prince of Darkness.

“Thou tremblest,” continued the hag, after a short silence, for no doubt she had heard the old warrior’s soliloquy; “thy own thoughts are painful to thee; but whenever did they sit easy upon one who was hastening to spill the blood of the innocent, whose heart was black with the crimes he meditated.”

“Nay, there thou liest,” replied the old soldier, his mind somewhat eased by finding that the hag, whatever her other powers might be, had not read his thoughts aright,—“there thou liest, old witch; for, by the bones of the holy Saviour, I had not steeled my heart to the deed you seem to wot of.” Royston, during the silence Elwerwolf had maintained, for it seemed as if she sought to transfix him with her eye,

had regained a portion of his lost courage, or rather, perhaps, made up his mind for the worst.

“Then hath the world indeed changed,” answered Elwerwolf; “for when was the hand of Royston Gower ever slack to shed blood?”

“More times than thou trowest of,” said the soldier; “methought that thou mightest have seen that change in him before this; for, by the mass, it is no long time past since he was ordered to shed thine own;—thy memory is a bad one.”

“Tell me not of that,” replied the hag, “it was fear which prevented thee from obeying the tyrant’s orders; thou wert afeard that the blood of an old woman would call down vengeance upon thine head. Marry, thou wert not in that mood, when the Saxon’s groans pierced the deep donjon; and when another, and a shriller voice rang through the northern turret.”

“Aye! knowest thou of that deed?” exclaimed the soldier in alarm; “then art thou the she-devil which men report thee. But thou forgettest that I interceded for the victim, and but narrowly escaped with my own life.”

“All this I know,” said Elwerwolf; “nor do

I blame thee so much for the deeds in which thou hast participated, as springing from thyself alone, as from thy willingness to become the instrument in other, and more cruel hands. But remember that he who concealeth a sin, although it be not his own, in a measure encourageth the crime. Would that thou hadst but left De Marchmont to his own machinations! the hand of justice would, ere this, have held him in her gripe."

"Since thou seemest more disposed to deliver an homily, than raise he of the horned hoof," said Royston, "I care not to tell thee that I have delivered many a victim from De Marchmont's hands, and warned others to escape."

"Yet men have rumoured thee cruel," replied Elwerwolf, "and have linked thy name with all the dark deeds which the Norman hath ever accomplished."

"Mayhap they knew not better," answered Royston. "They have also recorded thee as a witch. And while I expected to be mounted by thy power on the Devil's back, and sent I wot not whither, here am I, listening to thy discourse, which hath gravity enough to become a very friar."

“ I fear me,” replied the old woman, “ that thou hast been more ready to listen to evil than good. And yet, from what I have heard thee utter but now, I am willing to believe thee less wicked than I had before thought.”

“ I do regret me of much that is beyond recall,” said Royston, with a melancholy shake of the head; “ and tell thee, that even now I was about to disobey a command, which may perchance cost me my head.”

“ An’ thou wouldst inflict death upon others,” responded Elwerwolf, “ then art thou a coward in very deed, if thou doest it to save thyself.”

“ Nay, for that matter I care not for myself,” replied the old soldier; “ but methinks thy speech smacketh not much of one who belongeth to the evil powers, as we were wont to name the misbelievers, for thou seemest not to urge me on in the execution of my mission.”

“ An’ thou thinkest it right,” said Elwerwolf, “ why dost thou linger? Assuredly the tyrant thou servest, bid thee hasten to execute murder.”

“ Nay, there thou hurriest on too fast for my charger,” replied Royston, “ I tell thee, old dame, for devil I believe thou art not, although

I have many times and oft heard the baron call thee such. But of a verity it is my belief, that had you not this very day made free with certain matters which in no wise concern you, I had not now had spur in stirrup, nor De Marchmont have thought aught of this springling."

"A nobler hawk hides under that hood than thou trowest of," answered the hag, "and may yet strike such a quarry as De Marchmont little deemeth of. But pursue thy journey with speed," continued she, "and bid Edwin of Clifton to fly the castle this evening, for I know thou hast a yearning in favour of this youth."

"Thou speakest soothly, old muncher of the marish," replied the soldier. "I first taught him to draw bow, and splinter lance, he had known no more how to wield a sword than the dog that turns the spit, had I not had him with me in the keep, when the old baron was away. But he wished him not to be taught these things, and it would have been sin to have trained a chicken, with such spirit in him as Master Edwin, only to have strutted about all day long in his fine robes. But I tell thee, old spit-fire, that, saving myself, who taught him how to handle his weapons, and must therefore

always be his master, there are not many of his age, or even a few years beyond, who would gain aught in that way from his hand."

"And thou wilt see him safely away from this dragon's den?" continued Elwerwolf, without much regarding the rough soldier's praise of his pupil.

"Ay, marry, will I," replied Royston, "and mayhap do something more to boot, if he be the son of Gurthric of Clifton; for I can tell thee, that I first lifted lance in his father's service, long before I knew this proud Norman."

"Then shalt thou have my prayers!" exclaimed Elwerwolf, "and as thou dealest with this orphan, so shall it administer to thy weal hereafter. He is indeed the son of him thou didst serve, and in protecting him thou renderest a service to thy former lord; for well thou knowest by what means he is withheld from his estate; but more of this anon. Thou wilt deliver unto him this purse of gold," continued she, taking a well-filled bag from under her mean habiliments; "I would not that he bore with him the value of a hawk's plume from the Norman. Thou wilt also find a suit of armour in the eastern turret; it hath long

been in readiness; fear not to equip him in this."

"By the holy rood! I will do thy bidding," exclaimed the old soldier, his eyes brightening with the fire of former years as he spoke; "and what if I share his perils? it may stand me in some stead at my last shrift. And, by the mass, old Wolf-of-the-heath," continued he, extending his mailed hand; "if I hear aught uttered against thyself after this, I will splinter a spear on the corslet of him who speaketh it, if it be but to rub off a few of my own slanders."

"Nay, do not so," said Elwerwolf; "splinter as many as occasion may call for, in the protection of Edwin, and for each one I will number thee ten in my behalf; but lead him not rashly into danger, for thou knowest how soon the blood of a Clifton is warmed."

"So may God deal with me, I will do as thou desirest," answered Royston Gower; and setting spurs to his steed, he departed at a good round speed; muttering to himself as he rode along: "By the blessed saints! an' I am almost sworn knight-errant; and this old crone hath won upon me like a lady-love; I will bear a burning hut for my favour. But what matter?"

my heart sits lighter within me than it hath done for many a day; and I am but serving my own lord, though I give this Norman the slip. He then broke forth into a stave, which had no lack of variations, as the motion of the steed furnished him with innumerable shakings, and thus ran the burthen:—

“ So thou shalt sleep 'neath the greenwood tree,
I'll be thy squire and watch by thee,
Until the merry lark hails the day,
Then we'll don our helms and haste away;
For we twain are both strong and able,
To match the knights of King Arthur's table.”

'Twas long since such splendid visions had floated before the eyes of the old crusader, as during that short ride his imagination had conjured up; they even excelled those which he had drawn, when, twenty years before, he embarked in the train of Gurthric of Clifton, to win the golden domes of the holy city, from the Saladin. But he was now beside the moat, and the clanking chains of the drawbridge were soon heard in motion; for no one, who passed under the gloomy portal which led to the castle, escaped with fewer questions than Royston Gower.

CHAPTER XIV.

Alas! the love of women! it is known
To be a lovely and a fearful thing;
For all of theirs upon that die is thrown:
And if 'tis lost, life has no more to bring
To them but mockeries of the past alone.

BYRON.

EDWIN and Margaret were seated in the same apartment, which De Marchmont and the outlaw had occupied the previous evening; and as Royston had no wish to communicate his message to a second person, he entered without hesitation. The old soldier doffed his helmet before opening his mission, an unknown piece of courtsey on his part, and a honour which he had rarely paid to the baron. The page was struck with such unwonted politeness, and Margaret de Marchmont looked on in wonder.

“I have a message for your ear, my lord, I mean Master Edwin,” said Royston, wishing to pay more deference to the page than he had hitherto done, yet at a loss how to address him in a tone different to that, which long custom had rendered so familiar.

“For me!” said the page in astonishment, “and what may it be, my good old hack-shield, that you are afraid to speak it before my Lady Margaret?”

“Why that is the reason I have for saying it to yourself,” answered Royston, “seeing that it toucheth not matters, meet for a lady’s hearing.”

“But it is meet for my hearing,” said Margaret, rising with all the dignity of one accustomed to having every wish gratified; “an’ it be not meet for my hearing it is not meet for Master Edwin’s, neither will I let you tell it him alone.”

“An’ it be so,” said the old soldier, puzzled within himself how to act, for the caprices of ladies were less familiar to Royston than the shivering of lances, “an’ it be so, I must keep it to myself, although my doing so, may cost Master Edwin more than he troweth of, and mayhap you, my lady, will be sorry hereafter ;

and yet," muttered the old man to himself, "I would that she knew; for she might aid us in some matters which at present puzzle me."

"Nay, an' it be anything which toucheth the welfare of Edwin," said Margaret with a striking earnestness which seemed much at variance with her general manner, "you will not keep it from me, good Royston."

"I would rather that Master Edwin broke the matter to your own ear, my lady," answered Royston, fumbling with the dagger in his belt with one hand as he spoke, and swinging his helmet in the other, much like a boy who is puzzled how to act before his superiors; "and yet," added he, "it were a pity not to tell you somewhat of my mission. He must leave the castle to-night, and perchance, it will be some time ere he returneth again."

"Leave the castle!" exclaimed both the page and Margaret together; "and for what," continued the latter, "with whom, and whither must he begone?"

"He must leave it with me," answered Royston, "and for reason good; it is dangerous for him to bide here longer, and where he goes to, must be left to his own choice, for by the

holy sepulchre ! I know not where to lead him ; but if he loveth himself he will be gone."

"Is such the baron's order?" inquired the page, looking intently at Royston.

"No, by my troth!" answered the old crusader, "an' I must tell you his commands in this matter, they vary somewhat from mine own, inasmuch as he hath no wish for you to leave it again ; and lest harm should befall you, would in all kindness keep you within the deepest donjon : such were the baron's orders ; for old Elwerwolf of the heath has to day stirred the devil in him."

"Holy Virgin !" exclaimed Margaret, folding her hands, "you do but jest. Oh, say not that my father sent thee forth on such an errand, and I will give thee this chain of gold, a relic of my sainted mother's."

"By the holy cross ! for which I have shed my blood," answered Royston Gower, making the sacred sign as he spoke, "I but utter his commands in this matter, and withhold others of darker purport, with which I was also commissioned."

"'Tis strange !" muttered the page. "What have I done to deserve this ?"

“The fault is thy father’s,” replied Royston, with provoking calmness; “hadst thou not been the son of Gurthric-of-Clifton, De Marchmont would not have cared the value of a bolt-head what had become of thee. Why I fulfil not his commands thou partly knowest, having heard me tell many a time, I trow, in whose service I first lifted lance. I served thy father, and was sworn vassal to his heir. I have found the latter in thee, and my vassalage is again renewed. I did but change my service, for lack of a right lord.”

Margaret had hitherto sat in mute agony, for she was in every sense of the word a child of impulse. Eighteen summers had rolled over her head, and she knew next to nothing of the world. Her companions had been two female attendants, and the page, whose services were mostly confined to her father; and where he would most willingly have rendered them, they were forbidden by the baron. Proud she was, but she was not vain; her pride extended only to a love of finery, that she might please Edwin. She was simple-hearted as a dove, and had rarely put a check upon her own thoughts, saving in speaking in praise of the page to her

father, for which she had been several times rebuked ; and as her feelings towards him had long ripened into wild uncultivated love, devoid of those trifling decorums which etiquette required, and which she had never known, it may be readily supposed that she put no check upon them on the present occasion.

The Norman maidens possessed not all that hauteur, and cold philosophy with which some writers have clothed their heroines. Nor could the romantic notions of chivalry reach to every bower and hall in such extent as they did to others. Margaret had no mother to fortify her mind with admonitions, and lectures of decorum ; for she had died long before the maiden had reached a knowledge sufficient to appreciate her affection, or even lament her loss. Neither had the baron taken any pains with her education, so that she grew like a wild but lovely flower, which throws out its stems in every direction, without a notion that either blight or injury lurk around it ; dreaming that the world is filled with the same sweet perfume, which it unconsciously scatters from its own bosom.

Her love for Edwin had sprung up in the same proportion, as her father's aversion strength-

ened against the handsome, and high-minded page. It first peeped forth in the bud of pity, and then shot up in a bolder and stronger stem, while watching with admiration the fortitude with which the youth bore insult upon insult, which, although they called the colour to his cheek, and the cloud to his brow, always vanished before her slightest smile. Words at length came, and with them the full utterance of the heart; for while the music of her own voice schooled him tenderly into subjection, she became herself a slave, and shared the same fetters which Edwin had so long and willingly worn.

As we have before hinted, he had long possessed some knowledge of his birth: clouded and indistinct as it was, it had been the means of stirring up loftier, and more decided notions in his own mind. And if it had done no other good, had, at least, the effect of arousing him to become expert in the use of arms, and to pay more attention to the rough, but manly lessons, which he received in private from Royston Gower. And when he heard the old soldier declare, that he was the son of so distinguished a warrior as Gurthric of Clifton, he

doubted not for a moment its truth, as several circumstances had before tended to awaken the same belief.

It was not the announcement of his father's name, which had the effect of arousing Margaret, but the knowledge that the chosen of her heart was in danger ; for the love which she had once borne to her father, had subsided into awe, and at last to indifference, while it warmed and flowed with double force in the channel by which her affections ran, and was at last, all centered in Edwin. Our readers must remember, that we are sketching the character of a child of nature, one whom sympathy warmed, but neglect chilled, who knew but little of art, and less of deceit, unless to practise it for the safety of others, (a deception which angels need not blush to wear, when it becomes a shield and shelter from cruelty,) whose emotions were sudden and sincere—the very glow and goodness of the heart.

Springing up, with the eagerness of a lioness, when she had heard the solemn asseveration of Royston, she caught Edwin's arm, and looking wildly into his face, exclaimed, " Let us fly from my father's anger, ere he taketh away my

life for loving you. Leave him in this cold castle, which he hath so long possessed, and so much coveted ; let us hasten to some spot, where we can live happily, if humbly. I have wealth which was my mother's, and which hath always been in my own possession. Hasten, my Edwin ! Oh ! let us begone ! And my father —but I will tear him from my memory."

It is almost impossible to describe the looks and actions of old Royston, during this announcement. He had never imagined, for a moment, the possibility of Margaret wishing to accompany them ; but when he heard her distinctly and urgently push the necessity of departure, and include herself, without hesitation, among the party, he was struck with astonishment. His deep dark eyes gradually expanded, and his mouth was fairly a-gape ; while, with head thrown back, and his helmet held out at arm's length, he might be said, for a few moments, to have resembled one of those unfortunate wights, who were looked into stone by the Gorgons. His frame at length gradually relaxed, and, making two or three paces in the room, he whistled, in low notes, a portion of the same air which he had chaunted on his journey.

“ Let it be even as thou wilt,” said Edwin, looking upon such a face, as, when it imploreth, wiser men than the page have not had the courage to answer nay.

“ Art thou mad ?” exclaimed Royston, breaking short in the midst of his stave, and turning sharply around as he spoke. “ Bethink thee, Sir Edwin, that it will only be by hard riding, and encountering many dangers, that we can hope to escape De Marchmont; and although I am willing to peril life and limb in thy service, yet it will scarce be wisdom to venture forth amid the difficulties that may surround us, with one so ill prepared to brave them as my young lady. Nay, more, it would be unknighly to tempt her to the peril.”

“ He speaketh truly, my dearest Margaret,” said Edwin, taking her delicate hand, and pressing it upon his own bosom; “ and yet I dare not ask thee to bide here without me until better days.”

“ An’ thou didst ?” answered Margaret; “ I would not believe that thou spoke it sincerely. What dangers canst thou bear which I may not share? what perils encounter, from which thy Margaret will shrink? No, blithely will I ac-

company thee, for the trial of my love hath come. Thou shalt see that a Norman maiden dare venture her all, after she hath launched her heart foremost. I am young, Edwin, and like thee the better able to endure. I will go with thee, or go to my grave; for I have no mother to love, and my father he"——. She threw her face upon his shoulder, and sobbed aloud, while her long locks fell upon his bosom, and were here and there impearled with tears.

"Nay, come, my lady, we will not leave thee," said the old soldier, speaking as if he was soothing a child. "An' Edwin there can but guard himself, why, I will e'en throw my old body between thee and danger. What if a spear-head should show the fair day-light through me! it may let in another ray from heaven at the same time, that shall lighten an old warrior's somewhat heavy load before he sets out on his long home. Come, come, I will die for either of you, an' it will make you happy. I have turned foolish," added he, to himself, "ever since I met the old she-wolf;" and for the first time, for many a day, he dashed a tear from his cheek, that stole forth, as if wondering at itself, and at a loss which course to steer, down his many-furrowed cheek.

“ Let me look on thy face,” said Edwin, raising the head of Margaret. “ It was wont to cheer me when all beside seemed dark. There now, those tears have manned me, and I dare brave aught that may keep those cheeks dry. Thou shalt not be left behind,” added he, parting her silken locks as he spoke, and kissing her beautiful forehead.

She smiled through her tears, like a seraph welcoming some beloved spirit to the mansions of bliss, yet remembering the aching bosoms which mourn its absence below ; for her heart was heavy when she called to mind the cruelty of her father, and she went weeping to her own chamber.

CHAPTER XV.

Their way

Lies through the perplexed paths of this drear wood,
The nodding horror of whose shady brows,
Threats the forlorn and wandering passenger :

MILTON'S *Comus*.

YOUTH is seldom accompanied by deep reflection : it is a time in which we erect our own land-marks, and they are few, and wide apart : we look into the future in the same way as we gaze upon a long distance, only anxious to discover what lies beyond, without deigning to cast our eyes upon the dangers between. Sorrow is forgotten, in the bare anticipation of enjoyment, and present grief but forms the frame in which pleasure is pictured : it is the dreamy part of life ; we see nothing real ; our mourning robes are mingled with white plumes, and wed-

ding favours, and our gloomiest processions skirted with gay assemblies, that move to and fro in mirth and laughter, and cross the darker lines in our vision. Even so was it with Edwin and Margaret: blinded with love, and measuring others only by themselves; novices in the busy world, of which they really knew nothing, they would have been wrecked ere they had well set out on their wild voyage, had not the rough, but abler hand, of Royston Gower, occasionally seized the helm. Neither did the old man, upon due reflection, deem it necessary that they should leave the castle on the evening on which he arrived, so that their arrangements might be the better matured on the following day.

“And in what direction, thinkest thou, we should journey?” said Edwin, as they sat up late, arranging their plans, after Margaret had retired to her apartment; “for, by my faith, after the weight of gold this old saint hath bestowed upon us, methinks it were in no wise difficult to reach even the holy land.”

“We shall fare much better by staying in our own,” answered Royston; “I have once journeyed thither, and all I received, were,

blows from the Saracens, and a few mouthfuls of the dust of their deserts. Thy worthy father lost his life in fighting for a sepulchre, which we never won, and De Marchmont only brought back a portion of the Infidel's cruelty. Set thyself at rest in the land where thou art, for here thou hast friends, who, for the love they bore thy sire, will not fail thee, when the hour of trial comes."

"But what if I fall into the hands of the baron again?" said Edwin: "thinkest thou that I shall escape him a second time? bethink thee also of thyself, for, by all the saints! thy head will scarce sit securely on thy shoulders after this."

"Let me look to thine first," answered the old soldier, with careless indifference; "for, by the true Lord, I value but little mine own, if the losing it will benefit thee aught. There is one near of kin to thee, who resideth even now at the castle of Newark; he was with thy father in Palestine, and would, I doubt not, do much to restore thee to thy rightful possessions; his power with the king, as I have heard, is also of some weight. It were better to seek him out, ere we venture further."

“ Ay, meanest thou Savany, Earl of Gloom-glendell ?” inquired Edwin, “ who joined De Marchmont, some time ago, in chasing the outlaws.”

“ The same, Sir Edwin,” replied Royston ; “ and he hath a son, who is, even now, on some important mission at the court of France, unless he has returned : and more, I can tell thee, this same son is beloved by Edith of Lincoln, whom Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont is so anxious to marry, I dare be sworn, more for her broad lands, than a love of herself. And could we secure the favour of these outlaws, by my creed ! our cause would fare none the worse. I fear me that the Lady Margaret will lead to a discovery, and upon that her father will base his claims once more upon yourself : could we but prevail upon her to stay for a few days, then much might be done.”

“ No, by my hope hereafter,” said Edwin, firmly ; “ it is Margaret’s choice, and even thou mightest form a shrewd guess of what would befall her, if left behind until the return of her father. His greatest mercy would be, to bury her in some nunnery ; or, perchance, wed her to the first comer, were it only to revenge himself

upon me. I tell thee, Royston, that she long ago extended her affections towards me, even when I deemed myself only a page, nor knew aught beyond respecting my birth, and is even now ready to link her fate with my own, when only hope buoys us onward! Such a one is worthy to share an emperor's throne! but there are few like Margaret Marchmont. I care not what others may say; we will escape or perish together; Heaven will raise us friends.—Thou speakest of these outlaws," continued he, "knowest thou aught of the page who brought a message from King John, yester-even?"

"Ay, marry do I," answered the old soldier, with a smile; "it was none other than Robin Hood, their chief," and Royston recounted their adventure in the field of reeds, much to the amusement of Edwin.

"'Tis strange," said the youth, musing; "I overheard him accuse himself of cowardice, because he had not slain the baron, or provoked him to a quarrel over their wine-cups; and thou wilt scarce believe me when I tell thee, that it was through Margaret pleading for the one-handed Saxon that saved De Marchmont's

life. Many a time had I lifted my own dagger to his throat ere this, had not the form of Margaret seemed to glide before me ; and, methinks, the same thoughts have checked many a ready hand. And yet men say the baron hath shed human blood like water. Canst thou tell me how he hath escaped thus long?"

" I know somewhat of his crimes," replied Royston, with a deep sigh. " Cruel he was ever ; but he hath met with men who have repelled force by force, and set at defiance all his power. Trust me, it is more the feeling of pride than revenge that has moved him to these things. Three times hath he narrowly escaped these outlaws ; and had it not been for the voice of their leader calling off his archers to-day, not a man of us would have escaped from their hands. Even they left him for dead upon the field ; for never was blow dealt fairer in casque, than that which the one-handed Saxon struck the baron this day, yet he escaped."

" And yet thou sayest he sent thee but now to take away my life," said Edwin.

" Only on the conditions if thou didst make resistance to be confined in the donjon," answered Royston ; " for I tell thee, Sir Edwin,

that touching matters which might bring his own honour into the question, he would not stand at the sacrificing of a score or two of lives. And it is rumoured, that he got possession of this castle, which was granted by William the Norman to one of your ancestors, by proving that all the heirs were dead. But of this the old witch of the heath seemeth to know more than any other: and King John will make no stir in these things, unless urged on by those, from whom he craveth some assistance."

"The night weareth on apace," said Edwin, "and it were well to refresh ourselves with sleep, the better to prepare us for the approaching fatigue."

To this Royston readily acquiesced, and they speedily retired to rest.

It was considerably past noon on the next day (and the same on which the Royal hunt was to take place in the forest,) before our party were fully equipped for departure. Edwin was mounted on a superb charger, (which Royston had provided,) and clothed in a rich suit of chain armour, with the accompaniments of sword, battle-axe, dagger and lance. Margaret was also seated on a beautiful palfrey, on which

she had often followed the stag through merry Sherwood; she was dressed in the habit of a page, and having bound up her long hair, to eke out the delusion, had the appearance of a beautiful youth of sixteen. She bore a short sword by her side, together with a sheaf well stored with arrows, and a bow slung behind. In using the latter weapon, she possessed tolerable skill: for at that period archery was cultivated for amusement in the castles of the Normans, and many a fair hand had winged a deadly shaft at the stately stag. Royston had in no wise altered his costume, but was sheathed in mail. They drew up under the portal, and the old soldier swore a Norman oath at the warder, as he delayed to lower the drawbridge.

“Why dost thou stand staring in that guise, like an unhooded hawk?” said Royston to the warder; “by the devil’s hoof, an’ thou lowerest not the bridge, I will probe thy ribs with the butt-end of my lance, and mayhap, give thee a prick with the point to boot, to make thee bestir thyself.”

“Gramercy for thy threats, friend Royston,” answered the warder, “assuredly thou mayest

pardon the free use of one's eyes on an occasion like the present; for by St. Peter, who is the oldest warder on record, it is not often, that those pass out from our gates, who never entered in. And methinks I have just cause for being in no hurry to do thy bidding; and, saving thyself, my labour might in this case be spared, for assuredly this knight and page could only have entered by the lock-hole, and may depart without bolt being drawn."

"What meanest thou, sirrah?" said Royston, sharply, "thou wert not wont to tamper with time after this fashion, when I was on our master's business, and how knowest thou that I am not even now, on affairs of urgency?"

"Sirrah me no sirrahs," answered the warder, angrily, "and as to thy business being one of urgency, know that there are others who have also been entrusted with the baron's matters, since thou last entered the castle: and that since yesternight I have received our master's orders, to allow no one to cross the moat."

"Then those orders extended not to ourselves," replied Royston, "and Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont must have forgotten that he appointed us to be in readiness at the palace by

sunset. Thou mayest bear this in mind," continued the old soldier, "and although it may have escaped his memory, thou art witness that it hath not mine, and must answer to himself for our delay."

"My commands are not mine own," replied the warder, "and my safety dependeth more upon obeying them as they were given to me, than in hearkening to others of which I know nothing, and had not the baron some strong reason for issuing them, he would not have sent with all the speed man and horse could make, after the sun was down; and in such a night as darkened, and thundered over the earth yesternight."

"What might thy commands be?" inquired Royston, "that thou adherest to them so rigidly, for, by my faith! I remember not the issuing of such an order, unless when in expectation of an attack, and of which we had heard something beforehand."

"To allow no one to cross the drawbridge on pain of death," replied the warder, "and thou well knowest that such orders are to be kept, or woe betide him in trust!"

"Thou art right, good warder," said Roy-

ston, in a mild and affected tone, "and hadst thou told me thus much before, thou knowest I would not have perilled thy head by importuning thee so long; but, who is that hallooing across the moat? assuredly thy orders did not bar all access to the castle, although none are allowed to depart from it."

"Certes, they did not," answered the warder, looking across the moat, "and I well wot, that thou wouldst not wish an old comrade to fall into harm's way, for doing that which is wrong. But yonder is Leornof the groom, returned with the baron's war-horse. I will but lower the bridge to admit him, then we will empty a cup together, and wash down all unkindness. But who are those with thee?" added he, in a voice which was intended for Royston's ear alone.

"I will tell thee anon," answered Royston, "over our cups, and I think, I may be able to inform thee of the cause which has called for this sudden order; but speed thee, for I long to pledge thee in a bumper."

"That thou shalt do in sooth," replied the warder, and instantly called upon his companions to lower the portcullis. The steed on which the groom was mounted, proved restive,

and before he had time to reach the drawbridge, Royston, followed by Margaret and Edwin, shot across with the speed of thought, and galloped along by the edge of the moat, in the direction of the forest.

“ Archers, send your shafts after yonder traitors !” said the warder, calling to the bowmen who manned the ramparts which overlooked the drawbridge. But they were unprepared ; for having heard mention of the emptying of flagons, some of them had descended the winding stair, and others had laid aside their bows, to be in readiness to partake of the expected beverage. One or two arrows were, however, shot, but not until the party were far beyond their reach.

The castle was suddenly in an uproar ; nor was it long before they discovered that Margaret and the page, had escaped along with Royston. A consultation followed, in which it was concluded, that since the lady had also departed they had nothing to fear ; for even the warder declared that, in spite of the baron’s orders, if his daughter had commanded the drawbridge to have been lowered, he dared not to refuse. But, in spite of these assertions,

he had certain misgivings, and a few doubts within himself, whether or not he should shew a clean pair of heels. Then he thought of Royston, and had no fear of his own fate being worse than the old soldier's, never dreaming any other than that he had gone to the palace. Some voices were for sending out half a score of lances in the pursuit, but then, they knew not by what right they could pursue a free-born maiden. At length it was suggested, that Margaret might not be amongst the party, and that the knight in armour appeared at least three inches higher than the page; this had, however, the effect of dismissing a council, in which all had a voice, and several set out in search of the lady and the page, calling aloud their names, in every gallery and apartment in the castle, until they at length aroused the keeper, or head warden, who had been sleeping soundly since his noon-day meal. But he, like the rest, said much and did nothing, except sending out a messenger to De Marchmont, who went sulkily on his mission, declaring, as he crossed the unlucky drawbridge, that he would as lief carry a commission to the devil, as face the fiery baron with such tidings.

Meantime, our adventurers were speeding forward at a brisk rate, and had penetrated far into the depths of the forest, before they slackened a rein; for although Edwin retained a hold of Margaret's bridle, still it was evident, from the ease with which she sat in her saddle, that she required no assistance.

"By the rood of our Redeemer!" said Royston, "we have but just departed in good time; and the appearance of the groom did more for our escape, than we could have achieved with half-a-score good swordsmen; I marvel that the cross-bowmen sent not their bolts after us; methinks they have grown courteous of late."

"I feared not for ourselves," replied Edwin, "for with our armour we might well bide the shock of their bolts; but it had fared ill with the Lady Margaret, had their shafts struck upon her."

"The Holy Virgin will be my defence," said Margaret, kissing the cross, which she took from her bosom; "and hath already wrought a miracle in our favour; and yet," added she, "I wished that my horse had possessed more speed, when I heard the warder call upon the archers to shoot."

“ It grieveth me,” said Royston, “ to leave the old warder in this scrape ; for, trust me, his head sitteth not so securely upon his shoulders, as it did an hour a-gone.”

“ Assuredly no harm will befall them on our account,” answered Edwin, “ and yet I know not how we could prevent it.”

“ An’ they were to hack each other’s swords ; bleed one another a little now, instead of on St. Michael’s day ; knock down a part of the bar-bican, and leave a few hoof-marks on the other side the moat,” said Royston,—“ I doubt not but they might escape scathless. But how they will make their tale good, since we passed fairly and clearly over the drawbridge, baffleth my understanding.”

“ Thou wouldst not have had us sounded a blast of defiance,” said Edwin, “ like the bold outlaw, when he aroused the castle at midnight, and blew as if he had an hundred followers at his back ?”

“ Nay, marry ! would I not,” answered Royston, smiling ; “ but that was a bold deed ; I knew well the forester’s brown brow, when he first came on the battlements ; for we have many a time crossed each other’s path in these green

glades. But thou art safe, said I (cutting the string of my cross-bow, lest I should be called upon to shoot,) not a bolt shalt thou have from Royston Gower."

"By my troth!" said Edwin, "I marvel much at his daring, and more at his forbearance. He hath great power, yet he useth it not wantonly; hath many enemies, yet availeth himself not, of all his means to cut them off; he winneth a victory by a good jest; and, like the knights of old, escapeth all danger by a blast of his merry horn."

"By the beard of the blessed St. Bernard," said Royston, "we have paid but little attention to the road we pursued; for, by my faith, we are in a part of the forest which I never remember to have traversed before."

After a short consultation, they turned their horses in another direction, which only led them further into the centre of the woods; nor was it until after sunset, that they found themselves in the same grassy glade, along which Edith and the Earl of Eltham had passed on the previous evening. Instead, however, of taking the same direction which the knight and lady had pursued, under the guidance of the daughter of

Hereward the Saxon, they took an opposite course, which led deeper into the thickets.

Twilight approaching, and in a forest, however little it might affect an old veteran, like Royston Gower, had in it something more fearful than otherwise to Margaret. To do the page justice, although he cared but little for himself, and could, for once, have supped on the wild fruit of the tree, under which he would gladly have slept without a murmur, had he been alone: yet he knew that these were privations, which the beautiful and delicate frame of his fair companion was but ill calculated to endure. Royston Gower also showed a preference for a supper and bed, and by such time as it was nearly dark, they set off in quest of a shelter for the night.

The moon was, however, rising, and threw her chequered and silvery light over the forest, which, while it enabled them to discover the difficult paths, also served to point out any danger that might approach, should the clattering of their steeds, attract any unwelcome visitor.

Margaret rode beside her lover where the path admitted two abreast, and where it

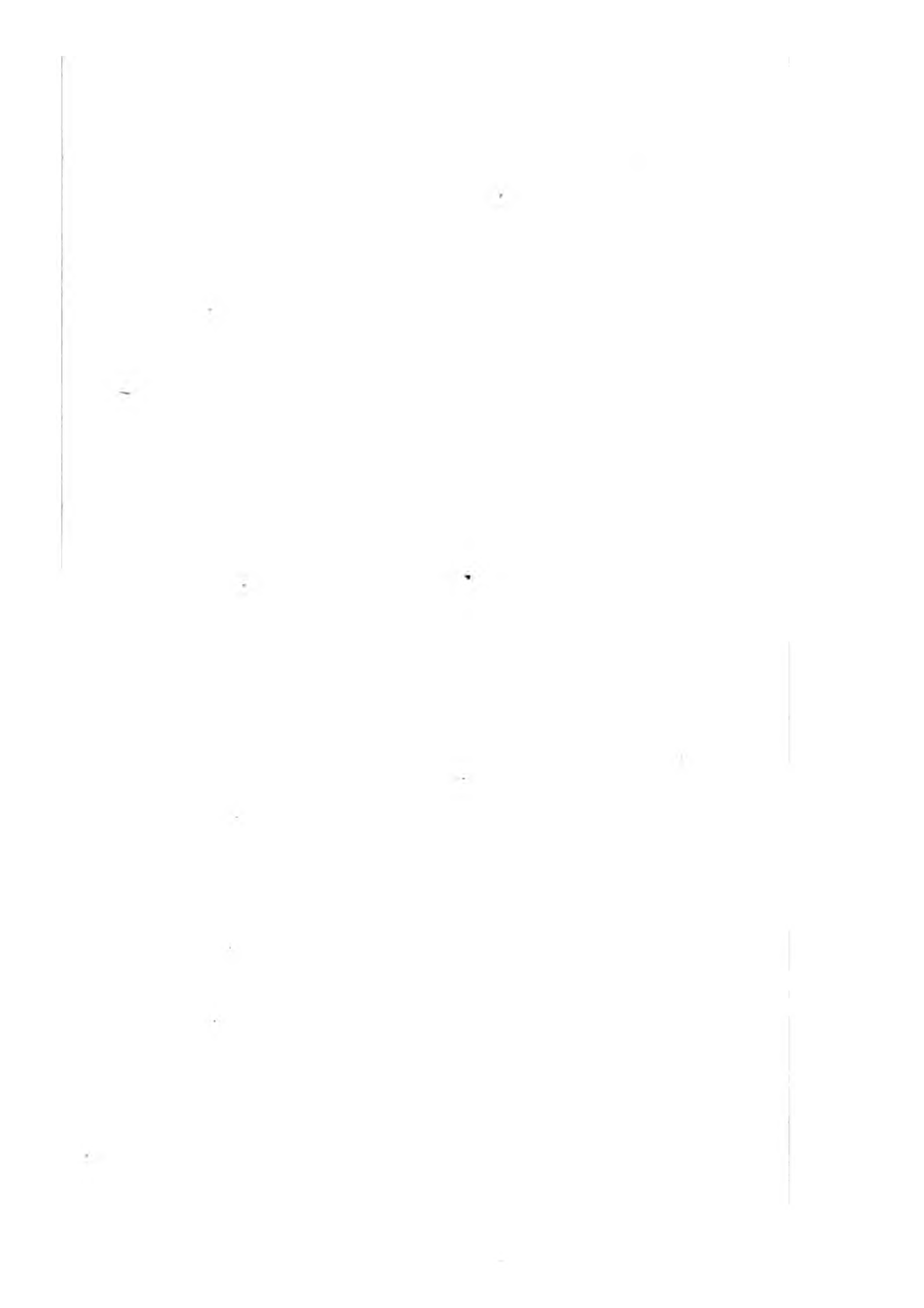
became too narrow she occupied the centre. Thus they pursued their journey through the wild and gloomy avenues of the forest, uncertain where the path which they traversed might terminate.

END OF VOL. I.

ROYSTON GOWER.

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VOL. II.



ROYSTON GOWER;

OR,

THE DAYS OF KING JOHN.

An Historical Romance.

BY THOMAS MILLER,

AUTHOR OF "A DAY IN THE WOODS," "BEAUTIES OF
THE COUNTRY," ETC.

~~~~~  
"Under the greenwood tree,  
Who loves to lie with me?"  
~~~~~

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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ROYSTON GOWER.

CHAPTER I.

Now he is clad, and ready all to ride,
With hunting horn and strong hounds by his side ;
For in his hunting he hath such delight,
That it is all his joy and appetite :
And forth they all have ridden merrily
Unto the mighty wood that stands hard by.
And o'er the land they ride along full right,
Where the swift hart is wont to take his flight,
Over a brook and so forth—on his way
The king will have a course at him to-day.

CHAUCER.

A MORNING of sunshine and beauty followed a night of storm and darkness—the earth seemed refreshed by the showers, and the sky looked

calm and clear, as the face of a lovely woman, lit by the first smile, that breaks in upon days of sorrow. Scarcely had the sun climbed above the forest, before numbers of the idle and curious were assembled near the palace of Mansfield, to witness the departure of King John and his nobles, for the chase. Menials were also in waiting; some holding in the leash, tall, deep-chested stag-hounds, limbed like antelopes, yet strong enough to tear down a wild boar. Ever and anon, they bayed deep and loud, like the hollow bass of an organ, or strained at the leash, and snuffed up the morning air, while they watched with attentive eyes the opening of the massy gates: the well-known signal to speed to the forest. Others held noble steeds, that were also impatient for the chase, and arched their proud necks, or pawed the earth, and scattered their white foam among the heath-flowers, while their long flowing manes, streamed out upon the breeze, like dark banners. The loud neighing of the horses, mingled with the voices of men, and the deep baying of the hounds, rung on the still air, and was borne along until the distant forest returned the doubling echoes.

There was something spirit-stirring and pleasing in the scene, that made the blood race gladly through the veins, and lifted the soul above all feelings of sorrow. The rich and mingled dresses of the attendants, the various and beautiful positions of the steeds, the picturesque forms in which the hounds were stationed, the smoke curling from the ample chimneys of the palace, the town of Mansfield, with its straggling street and rude Saxon church, glittering in the sunshine, the turrets of Newstead Priory just seen through a vista in the forest, and the wild and wide-spreading scenery of Sherwood; formed a beautiful and varied picture, which filled the beholder with delight.

Among the group assembled before the palace, were those who neither regarded the beauty of the scenery, nor the splendour of the preparations. These were men who hesitated not to show their aversion to the forest laws, and to speak harshly of the King and De Marchmont, even in the midst of their followers.

“Come hither, Rowen,” said a broad bony man, calling to a fine greyhound, that had been trying his speed with a stag-hound, which

chanced to be loose ; “ come hither, fool, unless thou wouldst lose thy fore-claws. What hast thou to do among those high-bred dogs ? Marry ! some keeper will be lawing * thee, and calling it justice ; and it will be unlawful for such as me to gainsay the deed,” continued he, patting the noble hound : “ and though I may fight for thee, I cannot place thy claws on again : stay here, fool, and no harm shall befall thee.”

“ Be thou not so cock-sure,” replied another, “ yonder fellow, with the large brindled stag-hound, hath an evil eye upon thee ; and, by my faith ! unless you hold lands to entitle your keeping that greyhound, and he makes inquiries, he will take away the dog and yourself to boot, and, mayhap, imprison you for twelve moons, and the Normans will call this justice. For what the court of Swanimote concludes

* *Lawing-dogs*.—Three claws of the fore-feet shall be cut off by the skin, by setting one of his fore-feet upon a piece of wood, eight inches thick, and a foot square, and then setting a chisel of two inches broad upon the three claws of his fore-foot, to strike them off at one blow ; and this is the manner of lawing-dogs, so that they may not hunt or hurt the deer, or other beasts of the chase.—MANWOOD'S *Forest Laws*.

upon, the court of Eyre confirms. Were I thou, I would see my dog safe housed from the eyes of these Normans."

"By the Holy Virgin! an' any of them dare to mar, or meddle with my dog," exclaimed the man, "I will bray their limbs to a jelly," saying which, he shook over his head an immense cudgel, the weight of which, dealt by such an arm, would scarce need to be repeated, to destroy any living thing.

"Strange times, neighbours," said an old peasant, who was taking his morning meal, while he looked around, (which consisted of a piece of swine's flesh, and a large stem of cabbage, as cold and greasy as the bacon, with which it had the day before been boiled)—"strange times, neighbours," repeated he again, holding a portion of the flesh upon the point of his sharp whittle; "Christian Smith taken to the Moot last night, for not following the hue and cry in the forest. Some trespass for vert or venison, I warrant, and Christian as deaf as a post,—never heard the summons! Strange times, neighbours!"

"I marvel not at such matters," said the man with the club. "Lamberstone, the tanner,

suffered them to pull down his hut, and struck not a blow ; and this they did, I trow, for fear of his dressing stolen deer-skins. I would they were half as honest as the tanner !”

“Nay, by St. Dunstan !” said another, whom, in spite of his disguise, was none other than Thomas-the-Carter, “and ye speak of grievances, what think ye of a man being held in thrall for a year, only for fetching his horse from the forest-pasture in the night, and that too to visit a dying father ? But he was found in the forest after sun-set, and the Norman laws hold him guilty, as much as if he had been taken in stable-stand.”

“I fear me it is over true,” said the old peasant, wiping the whittle as he spoke on his doublet, and thrusting it into his belt. “Marry, they have made crabs and nuts mast, and demand pannage for gathering acorns. My grandson, a boy of eight summers, was but playing with a tiny bow, and shooting with a headless shaft, when the Regarder took it away, and said, that such things were forbidden by the forest-laws, and that no bow must be kept but by persons qualified.”

“Qualified, said ye ?” exclaimed another ;

“ by my troth, even they escape not scot-free. The thane of Linbye was fined, in spite of his right to hunt, for chasing the deer before sun-rise, when it was past the fourth hour, and the sun far advanced ; but the morning was hazy, and the sun had not broken forth ; and this was held good judgment by the Normans, because the sun was not seen, though it had been light five hours by the day, and yet the thane was qualified.”

“ By my hope in the saints,” said the club-bearer, “ we are all cowards but the outlaws, and have bowed our necks to this bondage, until it becomes a pain to hold them erect ; and yet, methinks, a few blows might thin the numbers of these Agisters, Verdurers, Regarders, and Foresters, who live by tolls, trespass, and oppressions. But — ”

“ Hark ye, friend,” said the keeper already alluded to, who had held the brindled stag-hound in the leash, and wore the badge of De Marchmont, “ ‘ great boast small roast,’ they say, my man of the club. But by what right do you claim to keep this greyhound. Methinks you neither look like a freholder, nor one possessed of chattels or lands, worth two

hundred marks by the year; and, certes, you neither look like baron or knight, my man of the gaberdine, though you talk as proudly of blows as if you were Robin Hood himself."

"And can as readily deal them upon any Norman slave as ever an outlaw in the forest," answered the club-bearer; "and touching my right of keeping this greyhound," continued he, "know that it is my pleasure, and that I neither seek permission of De Marchmont, nor crave the leave of his footgelds. Art thou answered?"

"Ha! answered, saidst thou?" echoed the keeper; "by St. Christopher, am I, as it regardeth the matter of dragging thee before the head-keeper, and thy dog too. Nay, thou needest not frown; thou must with me to the court, and there tell them thy pleasure;" saying which, he seized the prisoner by the doublet, with the intention of compelling him to obey, without consulting his will.

"Loose thy hold, fellow," exclaimed the man, in a loud voice. "Loose thy hold, varlet, or, by the eternal doom! I will compel thee. Nay, then," added he, uplifting his clenched fist, as if he scorned to make use of his ponderous

club, "take that for thy hardihood," saying which, he struck the arm of the keeper with such force as caused it to fall stunned by his side.

Just then a horn sounded, and King John, mounted on a superb charger, and followed by his nobles, issued from the court-yard of the palace.

Beside the king rode Geoffrey de Marchmont, with a countenance unusually melancholy, regarding not the stirring scene without, but seemed absorbed in deep thought, from which he was only aroused by the voice of his sovereign, exclaiming, "How now knaves! what quarrel is this that ye maintain so near our presence?"

"Answer his majesty, sir keeper," said De Marchmont, observing that one of his vassals was in the affray.

"I was but doing my duty, my lord," replied the keeper, "in demanding by what right this fellow kept a greyhound, who replied, by no other right than his own pleasure; and, when I attempted to take him before the chief keeper, he struck me over the arm, with such force, that I fear me he hath broken it."

"By the thunder of God!" exclaimed

King John, his face kindling with anger, "every bone in his skin shall be broken for this deed. Seize the knave, De Marchmont, he shall know our pleasure in this matter. Marry, things have come to some pass at length. Ah! does he resist thee?"

The man had hitherto stood motionless, and seemed in nowise daunted by the presence of the king; but when De Marchmont approached, and was about to capture him, he uplifted his massy club and swinging it round his head with as much ease as though it had been a feather, he said, "Keep thy distance, false Norman, or, by the foul fiend, I will drive thee far from me." Saying which, he turned quietly around, and began to move away with a slow careless step in the direction of the forest, followed by the noble hound.

"By God's teeth! an' ye suffer him to escape," said the king, "I hold ye all cowards. Nay, it shall not be said, De Marchmont, that I bid you do that of which I was myself afraid," saying which, he unsheathed his sword, and planting his spurs deep into his steed, was in an instant beside the club-bearer. The man turned suddenly round, and saw the uplifted sword, and as

it was in the act of descending, he sprang back two paces, swung his massy weapon around his head, and without attempting to injure the king, struck the weapon from his grasp, with such force, that it flew several yards in the air, and glittered in the sunshine like a bar of silver.

A loud shout of applause was raised by the assembled crowd, but above all was heard the voice of King John, exclaiming, while his face was crimson with rage. "Pursue the traitor! hew him down; a thousand marks for his head; loose the stag hounds; tear him asunder!" As it most frequently occurs in all similar cases, such a variety of commands, issued so rapidly upon each other, only increased the confusion; and the nobles and inferiors, instead of obeying, looked bewildered upon one another, each expecting, that the next to him would obey, and yet, not one stirring to execute the King's orders.

"Speed, knaves! rush forth and capture the traitor!" shouted the stormy king. De Marchmont, and the constable of Chester, sprang forward to obey this second, and more peremptory bidding; for the monarch fixed his angry glance upon them as he spoke. In the meantime the

man, who was well aware of the consequence which must follow, if he was caught, for disarming the King, turned a little to the left, where several grooms, still held the steeds in readiness for their masters, (many of whom had followed their sovereign on foot from the court-yard, and halted behind to witness the scene which had so unexpectedly prevented their departure,) and striking down a menial with his clenched fist, he sprang into the saddle, and set off at full speed in the direction of the forest, followed by the hound.

The palfrey which he had mounted was one destined for the king, and was intended to be led through the chase, until the steed on which the monarch was then seated should have grown weary. Nor could the club-bearer have chosen a swifter, or more beautiful animal, had he sought throughout Christendom; for, with the speed of thought, it swept over the expansive heath, and, in a few moments, both horse and rider had entered the skirts of the forest, and far distanced all pursuers.

Uttering a thousand curses on the heads of his followers, and the daring stranger, who, with his hound, had escaped all pursuit, King

John reined in his steed at the verge of the heath, and awaited the approach of his retinue, who were followed by a crowd on foot, whooping, and hallooing, and rejoicing at the good fortune of the man who had escaped, and entirely disregarding the angry looks of the nobles.

Along a bridle-path, here and there overhung with dwarf oaks and stunted hawthorns, which led direct to where the king had halted, approached the Earl of Eltham and Edith; the brave knight having succeeded in persuading his fair kinswoman to venture abroad, and witness the chase, to which Edith had given rather a tacit consent, although, she well knew that she could not entrust herself under safer keeping than De Lacy's. Geoffrey de Marchmont and the constable of Chester had given up their chase after the club-bearer, and also halted beside the king, where they were stationed, when the earl and his fair charge approached.

The king rode up with an air of politeness, which became him well; and, doffing his gaudy hunting-bonnet, saluted the lady. Nor could those around avoid remarking the sudden change of his countenance, which, from raging

passion, was so momentarily turned to all the calmness of unaffected courtesy. But this was one of the remarkable traits in King John's character; his temper was unsteady and fickle as the wind, veering alike from friend to foe, and seldom certain upon any occasion, unless to nourish revenge.

The constable of Chester scowled darkly at the earl; but the latter returned his frown with a calm glance, from which few could have inferred, that they stood on terms of mortal defiance. De Marchmont gazed upon Edith with an intensity, which caused his deep-sunk and fierce eyes, to appear like lighted torches, seen in a dark cavern; so much did the overhanging brows contrast with the bright orbs beneath. But the lady observed not this, as she appeared intent on listening to the compliments showered upon her by King John; than whom, none was better skilled in the flattering language of chivalry, so much in vogue, when addressing the fair sex in that age.

“By my royal crown!” said the king, looking fixedly at Edith, until the lady was obliged to lower her lovely eyes and avert her head,—
“By my royal crown—a paltry bauble to name

beside thy peerless beauty—but I would wager it, that not a hound moves in the slot this day, if they but once catch sight of thy bright eyes, they will take thee for Diana the goddess of love.”

“Nay, my liege!” replied Edith, smiling at the monarch’s error; “methinks that you have forgotten your love-lore, while you thus confound the goddess of dogs, with she of the sparrows.”

“Ay, marry, I wonder not,” answered the king, “that I confound the goddesses together, when I see all their charms embodied in one, and am in the presence of that divinity.”

“Your majesty is in the merry mood to-day,” said Edith; “it were pity that I chose such an ill-toward season to appear in your presence, as the last.”

“Nay, now thou hast hit me fairly on the helmet,” answered the king, staggering for a moment under such an unexpected attack; “an’ thou hadst asked me for aught beside, I had not said thee nay, and will again lay my will open to thy wishes, providing, thou touchest not on the matter of thy marriage.”

“Nay, my liege,” said Edith, “I failed in

obtaining my last boon ; and, I fear me, have not courage enough to crave another, though so kindly held out to me."

" On the word of a king," said the monarch, " and by the honour of chivalry, I will make thee amends for my last refusal. Name what thou willest, and it shall be granted, so that it be not beyond our power to give."

" I cannot crave a boon of your Majesty, in this generous mood," replied Edith, putting on one of those winning smiles, which have cost kings their kingdoms, and conquerors all the glory of their conquests.

" By the bones of all the saints !" exclaimed the king, " we will leave thee no room to doubt our intention. When thou returnest this cross, thy request shall be granted, be it noon or night, in the camp or in the city." Saying which, he took from his neck a richly wrought gold chain, to which was appended a splendid crucifix of brilliants, and threw it around the neck of Edith.

" I will remember your pledge, my liege," said Edith, bowing her beautiful head so low, that her floating ringlets fell over the arched neck of her palfrey.

The king cast a tender look upon her before he retired ; but what his thoughts were, no one ventured to guess, although one of the nobles whispered, that they were not with his Queen Isabelle.

“ Cunning king !” said Edith, when she saw that he had mingled with his Barons, “ thy deception is known, and I may work something from this gift,” continued she, examining the costly crucifix ; “ that shall at least free me from this hideous old Norman. An’ thou wilt waste thy words in such fulsome praises, it shall go hard if I do not something to punish thy presumption.”

Edith again examined the princely gift ; and, in spite of what she had said, felt flattered that she had received it from the hand of a king, and one who had before paid great adoration to her beauty. But these were only the thoughts of a moment : and the recollection that he had divorced Avisia, and borne away Isabelle, when she was betrothed to the Count de la Marche ; and the hints which he had thrown out to herself, regarding the conditions by which she might obtain her release from De Marchmont, soon got the mastery over the kindlier feelings,

which, for a moment, she had entertained towards him, and left in their place contempt, and a proud determination to repay his deception by severe retaliation, such as only the wits of women can devise,—to torture those who are once snared with their beauty.

But Edith thought not then of the events which would transpire before another sunrise. The bird that awaits the moment to make some tiny insect its prey, sees not the hawk poised over its head; neither does the falcon, when struggling with the quarry, behold the stealthy serpent which is ready to coil around them both. The future is dark, and the present too often over-clouded; we guard against events which can never occur, and leave those which might be avoided to chance. Our wisdom is just sufficient to show us our folly; and all our foresight only tends to point out that we grope our way in darkness. We put our trust in the winds, and launch our safety upon the uncertain sea. Such was mankind when they fled to swamps and forests for security, and even there had to guard against the wolf; they were the same when they dwelt in canvass cities, and the sentinel slept on his post, and the curtain

made no noise when it was withdrawn by the midnight invader. And we, in spite of all our boasted improvements, but erect monuments, to be pointed at, and laughed to scorn by the future, and when all our precautions are overturned, we exclaim, "*Hominis est errare!*" as if we had been the first to discover the truth of the maxim.

But Edith thought not of these things, as her silken tresses blew out in the morning air, and her high-mettled palfrey neighed in answer to the gallant steeds that snorted around; while Hugh de Lacy rode by her side, one of the bravest knights that ever splintered a lance in the lists. The noble stag-hounds tugged impatiently at the leash, and when they had gained the wild skirts of the forest, and were set free, hill and wood, and vale and river, returned their deep baying in a thousand echoes.

CHAPTER II.

An hundred dogs bayed deep and strong,
Clattered an hundred steeds along,
Their peal the merry horns rung out,
An hundred voices joined the shout,
With hark, and whoop, and wild halloo. —
Far from the tumult fled the roe,
Close in her covert cower'd the doe,
The falcon, from her cairn on high,
Cast on the rout a wondering eye,
Till, far beyond her piercing ken,
The hurricane had swept the glen.

Lady of the Lake.

ALTHOUGH the ancient forest of Sherwood is as old as the hills, yet never had its hoary oaks shadowed a gayer assembly, than that day sped through it, with whoop and hallo : nor its dells and dingles, rung with wilder, or more cheering sounds. Here might be seen the forms of strong and stately stag-hounds emerging from beneath the green foliage of the hazels, or half-

buried amid the rustling fern ; while others elevated their high heads above some wild furze bush, that was covered with its golden-coloured flowers. Further on was seen the figure of a horseman, his rich drapery contrasting beautifully with the deep foliage, gliding on like a phantom, so muffled were the footsteps of his steed, amid the deposition of decayed vegetation — the gatherings of forgotten centuries. Another part of the forest was silent, and there a solitary huntsman had halted, to listen to the far-off sounds of the horn and hounds, quite at a loss which way to steer his course.

The sun seemed concealed by the closely-woven branches overhead, and a rich aroma emanated from the trees, that filled the forest with fragrance : while the humming of ten thousand insects high above the top-most branches, sounded like the distant murmuring of aërial music.

Afar off, might occasionally be heard the shouts of the vassals, as they narrowed their circle in the wide woods ; for their feudal services were required as much in the chase, as in war, and they were compelled to drive the herds of deer back into the forests, lest

they should escape, and become scattered over the country by the alarm made in hunting. Many hundreds of these were assembled, and raised their voices as loudly, as if the banner, which the same laws compelled them to follow, had been raised.

Sometimes a stag might be seen amid the deep solitude, leading along the herd, or pausing with his feet planted upon some rude hillock while he snuffed up the gale, or listened with erected head, and beat the ground with his hoofs. At length the sound smote his attentive ear, and he bounded off with the speed of thought, followed by the herd, whose tall antlers were seen glancing between the massy boles, like moving and leafless branches.

Anon a troop of horsemen would come thundering down some green glade, then vanish in the gloomy thicket, on the edge of which a broad flood of sunshine streamed, illuminating here and there the stem of a gigantic oak, then glancing obliquely along, until lost amid the darkness of the scenery.

At last the panting hart appeared, a noble fellow which had seen six summers, and shot by tree and bush, like the glancing lightning :

as if conscious of his new dignity, (for having reached that age, and being followed by a king, he became a hart-royal;) he shook his antlered head aloft, and kept his stately course along a wizard stream, that wound in many a maze under the overhanging branches, and made a low melancholy music, which accorded well with the wild solitude. Having reached the widest part, he plunged his reeking breast into the stream, gained the opposite bank, shook his beamy head, paused a moment to listen, then dashed again into the dense thicket, causing the yielding branches of the underwood to rattle again, as he shot between them.

Further up the stream, and at a picturesque turning, diversified with every variety of forest-tree, appeared the foremost hounds, baying deep and loud, and announcing to their followers that they were in the slot of the hart. Behind them came the horsemen at full speed, shaking the forest with the clattering of their steeds, while the loud peal of their hunting horns, mingled with the whoop and halloo of loud voices, the crashing of branches, and the jingling of bells, with which some of their bridles were ornamented, filled the air with their wild music,

and awoke the sleeping echoes of a thousand valleys.

Foremost of the train rode King John, "fiery red with speed," and hallooing at the top of his voice, that those behind might follow in the track, while voice after voice, caught up, and threw back the sound, until it was heard faintly and afar off, and at last died upon the ear of some lost straggler in the forest. Behind the king, rode Geoffrey De Marchmont, followed by many other knights and nobles, whose names come not within the compass of our story. The constable of Chester was not visible amongst the train, and the forms of the Earl of Eltham, and the beautiful Edith, were seen far in the rear of the chase.

The hounds had by this time reached that point of the stream, at which the hart had before passed, and were for a few seconds at fault, until one of them, which had hitherto kept the lead, dashed into the water, and having regained the opposite shore, again sent forth his full voice like muffled thunder from his deep chest; the whole pack opened on the cry, and were soon lost in the umbrageous thicket.

Without a moment's hesitation King John

plunged the spurs into his reeking steed, and swept aside the current, regardless of the splendour of his housings or the depth of the stream, although his palfrey was nearly saddle-deep. As clearly and swiftly did De Marchmont guide his foaming charger across, and was boldly followed by the rest of the train, until horseman after horseman was lost amid the gloom of the opposite branches; Hugh De Lacy and Edith were the last who reached the ford, as the noble earl had never relinquished the lady's bridle since the hart was first aroused, for her palfrey had evinced a restless impatience to speed foremost in the chase.

Scarcely had the earl resigned his kinswoman's reins, that he might the more easily discover some shallow part of the brook, over which she might pass with greater safety; when the sound of several horns was heard in the opposite direction to that which the hunters had taken. In an instant the noble animal on which Edith was seated erected his ears, his nostrils became dilated, he arched his beautiful neck, and shook out his long flowing main; then rearing almost erect, he made a plunge forward, and dashed down a narrow alley with the speed

of light, in the direction which the horns had sounded. Just at that moment the earl was in the midst of the stream, at a part so very shallow, that it scarcely could have reached the foot-cloth which decorated the lady's steed. In his eagerness to overtake her, and hurry to force his own palfrey from the current, the animal stumbled, and caused a further delay of a few moments, before he had entered the leafy avenue, down which Edith's steed had rushed.

De Lacy had not ridden far, before he heard a shriek, that seemed to arise from the left of the path he was pursuing; and not doubting but that it was the voice of the beautiful maiden, he dashed amidst the entangling under-wood. He paused a moment, and looked around in vain; he called her name until the woods resounded again with Edith, another shriek arose in the opposite direction, and the brave earl stood bewildered in the forest.

Meantime the chase was still pursued with vigour, and had been kept up with unabated speed, by both hart, hound, and horse, ever since the departure of the earl in search of Edith. The shadows of the trees, however, at length began to slope eastward, for the sun had

left his high station in the centre of the sky, and was fast journeying to the west. Just then, with mouth black and dry, tongue hanging out, and sides panting with such force that they seemed to "stretch his leathern coat almost to bursting," his light elastic vigour changed to a heavy weary gallop, his eye glaring almost savagely, came the jaded hart, down that beautiful green glade, along which the daughter of Hereward drove her cattle at the opening of our story. Behind him, and even then, at a considerable distance, followed a few of the strongest and most resolute hounds, the remainder having long since flagged in the chase, while, of the noble and well mounted horsemen, so many of whom had set out in the early part of the day, scarce a score remained, and of these, King John, and Sir Geoffrey De Marchmont, still took the lead.

Slowly and wearily approached that splendid train, which, but a few hours before, had appeared so gay and buoyant; but then, scarce a voice was raised: and if a note was sounded on the horn, it seemed as if the hunter parted reluctantly with the breath that filled his instrument; even the feeble baying of the remain-

ing hounds, was husky and harsh, and they lolled out their huge tongues, as if they had been breathing in the atmosphere of a blazing furnace. Twice had the noble horse on which the king was mounted, stumbled through very fatigue, since it had entered the smooth and open glade; and even the one on which De Marchmont was seated, staggered to and fro like a drunkard.

The distance seemed impassable between the hart and stag-hounds, as if neither of them had power to lessen the space, although each went along at the full extent of its strength, with laboured speed. They seemed like those fabled hunters of the north, who chase the hinds over enchanted lands with furious hounds, but are never permitted to draw nearer, than the distance, from whence they first started. Even the horsemen seemed to gain no ground upon the chase, and, from the higher end of the glade, it might be said to resemble a moving picture.

At length the royal hart cleared the glade, and struck off in the direction of a more open country, although still intermixed with vast tracts of sylvan scenery, but containing also patches of pasture-land, and wild extents of

heath and bog, which reached to the reedy borders of the river Trent. The eye of King John, swept the weary range outstretched before him; and, perhaps, feeling some slight commiseration for the noble hounds, and the stately hart which had so long and gallantly headed the chase, and doubtless having sundry cravings in his own royal stomach, he applied a splendid bugle to his lips, and sounded a re-chase.

The foremost hound crouched as suddenly to the earth as if he had been struck by an arrow, when he heard the signal which called from the chase; and the remainder obeyed their leader as speedily as if their limbs had been under the control of wires. Neither did the horses need much checking, and one or two fell on the greensward where they had halted, having been compelled to keep up a speed beyond their strength, like those, who in moments of mental derangement, perform feats, under which they sink overpowered, when the fit is past.

“By the holy sepulchre! De Marchmont,” said King John, stooping from his saddle, and applying the skirts of his rich mantle to wipe the perspiration from his brow, while his inflamed countenance bore no bad resemblance

to a red and fiery sunset,—“ By the holy sepulchre ! St. Christopher himself, never ran such a chase as this ; and I will have this royal hart proclaimed, for the pleasure he hath this day given us. Marry, I have got a Saxon’s appetite, and could feed on swine-flesh and colewort, so long hath this Hart-of-ten kept me fasting.”

“ I marvel not, my liege,” replied the baron ; “ for my part, I have half a mind to turn swine, and feed on those crabs that hang so temptingly before us. By my troth, your majesty never can honour a more gallant hart than we have this day pursued, with horn and hound, and keen appetite ; and, if such is your pleasure, it shall be proclaimed on the morrow.”

“ Such is my pleasure,” said the king ; “ and let it be done speedily, at every market-cross and village within twenty miles of the forest, and on pain of death, if any one shall be found to molest or hinder its return to Sherwood. But where, in the name of Beelzebub, is the Constable of Chester ? He was wont to be foremost in the chase, and I see him not amid our followers ?”

“ I missed the worthy knight, my liege,”

answered De Marchmont, "when we crossed the stream in the early part of the day; up to then, he was one of our train."

"'Tis strange!" mused the king; "and De Lacy, I warrant, is attending his sweet kinswoman. Surely the fiery knights have not met in the forest, and cut each other's throats in deciding the quarrel which, I know not how, sprang up yesternight between them."

"No fear of that, my liege," answered the baron. "John of Chester has no appetite to cope with such an arm as De Lacy's, in a hunting-dress; he will trust himself more surely when sheathed in mail."

"Thou speakest soothly in this matter," said the king. "Powerful although the constable is, and, excepting the earl and thyself, the best lance in our realm; yet, methinks—— But what, in the name of the foul fiend, have we here?" said he, raising his eyes in astonishment. "By the black gulf! 'tis De Lacy himself, and without the swan-necked lady."

It was none other than the noble earl bare-headed; his naked sword in his hand, his rich mantle, torn and soiled by the thorns and briers of the thicket, his countenance red with heat,

his brow contracted, and eyes glaring wildly ; while the neck and chest of his steed was covered with white foam. He turned to no one in particular ; but riding up to within a hundred yards of the cavalcade, exclaimed, in a voice of thunder, which startled even the king and De Marchmont, " To the rescue ! to the rescue ! Edith is borne away in the forest—Edith is lost !"

Without pausing to give a further explanation of the circumstance, he again dashed into the thicket, shouting—" To the rescue ! to the rescue !" and brandishing his sword.

Only one knight obeyed the instant summons, without asking a question, or thinking of his jaded steed. His cheek, however, was seen to blanch at the news ; but he was in the forest almost before the bending underwood had closed upon the smoking haunches of De Lacy's steed, and following in the same track that the earl pursued.

There were others who also obeyed the summons, though not with such eagerness as the young knight ; and from the weary appearance of their horses, there was but little hope of the search extending far.

“Thou hast gone somewhat beyond me in this affair,” said the king, fixing his piercing eyes upon De Marchmont. “Marry, thou shouldst have told me that thy followers were in waiting to carry her off during the chase. But she must be liberated, or this wild earl will make all our throats acquainted with his dagger.”

“My Liege!” said De Marchmont, gazing in astonishment at the king, and yet at a loss how to proceed.

“Tush! tush! think not that I am angered,” continued the king. “By my faith! I did not credit that thy fellows were brave enough to capture Edith, while in such keeping as her kinsman’s; but he will know these foresters by their badges. Nevertheless, I will stand between thee and his rage, and say that it was some joke of mine own to try his prowess. I am half sorry that I advised thee to attempt this deed.”

“By my honour as a knight, your majesty—”

“First pointed out the snare,” continued the king, without noticing the menacing look of the baron; “but what if I had forgotten the

power of her kinsman at the time, may I not be pardoned, providing I bear the burst of his wrath, and clear thee of the affair?"

"I know nothing of this matter, nor into whose hands the lady Edith may have fallen; neither spake I word to one of my followers to bear her away," said De Marchmont, with an earnestness which almost startled the king.

"Ah! sayest thou so?" exclaimed the monarch in astonishment; "then, by the blood of all the saints! she must have been captured by these outlaws, but they shall restore her. Ah! marry! shall they, or I will burn down the forest over their heads."

"I fear me," replied the baron, "that she hath fallen into other hands than theirs, as I have heard, that many times and oft, she hath stood between them, and the wrath of her father, and, methinks, would sooner meet with good than evil from their hands. For, to give the devil his due, although, they are arrant thieves, yet I have heard that they never forget a kindness, nor forgive an injury."

"Then, in God's name, raise a hue and cry," exclaimed the king; "awake the forest; let every lazy keeper be aroused. By the rood, I

would rather lose the half of my kingdom, than the maiden should come to harm. Hie, knaves !” continued he, with an energy, which was not the least part of his character, as he was wont to act only upon the impulse of the moment. “ Hie, knaves ! and search every nook of the forest,” said he, addressing several keepers and other menials, who had gathered around the hounds and horsemen ; “ and the first who brings me tidings of the lady Edith, shall have his pouch lined with gold pieces,—away !”

“ I will but take me another steed,” said De Marchmont, with a coolness that but ill became the destined bridegroom of so lovely a lady, “ and some slight refreshment ; then scour the forest with a score of my best lances.”

The king made no reply, but turned his steed in the direction of the palace, and resumed the journey in silence, wondering into whose hands the beautiful Edith could have fallen, and half suspecting in his own mind that De Marchmont was, in some measure, privy to the affair. Nor should we be rendering justice to the character of King John (bad as it was generally), to deny that his anxiety was sincere, although the feeling from whence it sprang,

if too closely scrutinized, would reflect but little in his favour. Neither was he devoid of personal courage, although, like the other traits of his character, it burst too fiercely to be lasting, and when subdued, sank into servility, and almost cowardice, as his humility to the Pope, in the latter part of his reign fully proved. Had not the thoughts of the savoury haunches, and other rich dishes, which were awaiting his return at the palace, crossed his mind, and kept up a taunting torture with his appetite, no doubt he would have joined in the search for Edith. But habituated only to the gratification of his own pleasures, he could not muster self-denial enough, to deprive himself of the gratification of the table and wine-cup, although the doing so might have purchased the good graces of Edith, which he would willingly have gained at any other sacrifice, than that of his own indulgences.

De Marchmont's thoughts flowed into another channel; he was not insensible to Edith's beauty, and well knew into whose hands she had fallen; but her immense possessions were of more value in his eyes, than the face and figure, which was worth an emperor's wealth.

Ambition and power were the glories to which he aspired ; he wanted wealth, for that would enable him to keep up a large force of men-at-arms, and place him high amongst the rival barons ; and he cared but little, whether it came through the hands of beauty or deformity, although the former might render it more welcome.

They had by this time reached the palace, and as a savoury steam, greeted them while passing the kitchen, they lost no time in appeasing their appetites, which was then as keen, as that of a famished peasant's.

CHAPTER III.

He has lifted her on a milk-white steed,
Himself on a dapple-gray,
With a buglet-horn hung down by his side ;
And slowly they rode away.

O they rode on, and on they rode,
And all by the light of the moon,
Until they came to yon wan water,
And there they lighted down.
They lighted down to take a drink
Of the spring that ran so clear.

Old Ballad.

THE narrow forest-path in which we left Edwin and Margaret, under the guidance of Royston Gower, in a former chapter, only led to deeper and more perplexing thickets, along which they journeyed with difficulty, without either discovering the signs of a more beaten road, or any human habitation.

Margaret also grew more timid as the scenery around her darkened, owing to the dense canopy of branches overhead, which scarcely a moon-beam could penetrate ; and as she endeavoured, every now and then, to bring her palfrey abreast of Edwin's, she even retarded the slow progress which the little cavalcade was then making. Royston was already champing the end of the leathern strap which secured his helmet, and internally cursing in his heart all lovers ; for he was conscious, that, had the lady remained behind, they would long ago have found some hut, in which they might have procured both a bed and supper. Edwin, also, in the midst of all his love, could not forget sundry cravings of the stomach, and turned his thoughts alternately to his lady and the larder. While Margaret felt her lips glued together with thirst, and bent her beautiful head every now and then, to listen for the plashing of a brook ; for which sound, she more than once mistook the sleepy rustling of the gloomy foliage.

They journeyed along, however, without venturing to exchange their thoughts to each other ; like a party who, having been dispatched to bear sorrowful tidings, look upon one another

in silence, each expecting that the next will open the communication. Even Edwin, as he occasionally grasped the hand of his fair companion, when the road permitted them to ride abreast, sometimes suffered his thoughts to wander away after the food that perisheth, and entirely forgot for the moment, that the whitest fingers in Christendom, were enfolded within his gauntlet.

Margaret's mind was also absent at intervals, and wandered back to her father's castle, and the silver cup, whereon the belted hunter blew his bugle-horn, with swollen silver cheeks; and glittering hounds, pursued the polished stag, that was bounding midway between the handle; and from which she had so often sipped the cooling draught, flavoured with spices and honey.

As Royston's appetite increased, his imagination also expanded, and he conjured up the shapes of haunches and sirloins in the boles and branches of the trees; and where, a straggling moonbeam chanced to fall upon the broad surface of an agaric, his ready fancy changed it to the brown coverlet of some remembered pasty, where either sleek pheasants, or slices of venison, slept lovingly side by side.

Two or three attempts did he make to

chaunt forth an old stave, but it was like trying to masticate the wind,—an empty hollow sound without any words ; so he again took to chewing the leathern thong, and then wondered what could have induced him to participate, in such a wild adventure.

“Marry, Sir Edwin,” said he at last, weary alike of the way and the silence ; “methinks forests were only made for men to find huge appetites therein, and be mocked at, when we have grown hungry ; for, by my troth, the very trees seem to point at me ; and I would snap off their leaves to be revenged on them, were they not so bitter. I should not mind a little fighting now, just to make me forget that I have not eaten since noon.”

“Think not of that, 'good Royston,” replied Edwin, munching a sour crab which had chanced to dash against his open visor in the darkness ; “let us at least show ourselves brave soldiers, while even Margaret puts up with the hardships of our journey without a murmur.”

“I would that we could reach a brook,” said the lady, in a voice, faint with both hunger and thirst ; “a draught of the cool water of the forest would do more to revive my spirits than

food, which it is a folly to think of in this wild place."

"Thou forgettest, Sir Edwin," answered the old soldier, without noticing what Margaret had said, "that ladies having slenderer waists, and being somewhat narrower, moreover, on the stomach, give not so much room for hunger to move in, as it findeth within ourselves. And thou knowest also, that Father Clement was wont to say (when he quoted in the Vulgate)—*he* goeth about seeking what he may devour; whereas, as he used to assert in the kitchen, that if women had been possessed of the same appetites as men, it would have been written,—*she* goeth about seeking what she may devour."

"Father Clement," said Edwin, with a smile, "ever knows where to find those passages in his missal that make mention of devouring, better than he does the prayers on fasting and penance; and can, moreover, readily misquote holy writ, to make it subservient to his own gluttony. As to the other part of thine argument, I hold it good, that if man's stomach be larger, it can the better bear provisioning for a longer journey, even as the bulkiest galleys venture farthest out to sea."

“And yet it would have done your heart good, Sir Edwin,” continued Royston, “to have heard how clerkly he summed up the food that Goliath consumed at every meal, seeing that he was six cubits and a span in height, and allowing two messes of pottage for each cubit. By the mass, I would that I had now, what it took to support one of his legs, which was, I believe, somewhat taller than the highest oak in this forest.”

“Methinks the hungry father knew better the depth of his own stomach,” said Edwin, “than the height of the giant, who was but a dwarf to those King Arthur slew.”

“That very name increaseth my appetite,” continued Royston, “and makes me think of the many good things which have so often smoked upon their round table. By all the saints, I could now eat a portion of the dragon which St. George of England slew.”

“Out upon thee!” said Edwin; “thou an old soldier of the cross, and to talk thus of hunger! How wert thou wont to appease thine appetite, when crossing the deserts beyond the seas?”

“By eating of the good store of provisions

which we carried with us," answered Royston. "We were then soldiers of the church, and copied the example of the holy fathers, by keeping a good larder; for we well knew that Satan had long ago chosen the wilderness for his temptation, and, believing the devil to be a Jew, armed ourselves with good bucklers of bacon."

"Hark!" said Edwin, reining in his steed; "if my ears deceive me not, I heard some one conversing in the thicket."

"It might but be the rumbling that my bowels made," said Royston, "for they have long been chiding me for my neglect; or perhaps they are quarrelling for an acorn, which I but now threw down my throat to appease them. For, by my troth, they growl like a pack of famished hounds."

Voices were, however, heard at a little distance from the path along which they rode; and as they were more likely to meet with foes than friends in such a situation, they reined in their steeds for a few moments, to listen to the conversation, which seemed to draw nigher.

"I tell thee," said one, "that I like not this

playing the spy upon our companions ; what, if Hugh does occasionally converse with the out-laws, whom he meets on his rounds ? is he to suffer imprisonment for so doing, and we to be made the mean instruments with which to entrap him ? Are we not adding knots to the thong which may be brought down to chasten even ourselves ? By the holy rood ! I have half-a-mind to throw my badge in the face of our chief forest-keeper, and take my chance among the merry out-laws."

"Thou talkest like a fool," replied another ; "have we not both food and raiment, and the whole forest to range in ; beside Scot-ales, where we may drink as often as we please ? Beside, I see but little difference between serving De Marchmont and being a follower of Robin Hood's,—both are alike under obedience."

"But are we not strengthening the power of a tyrant ?" said the first speaker ; "are we not, even now, set to watch Hugh of the Peak ? have we not, to-day, been in the pursuit of Beowulph ? whom, if we had captured, would have lost his hand. Should we not, if it were known that we had allowed him to escape, un-

dergone some severe punishment? I tell thee that I like not a servitude in which I am bound to shed, even the blood of my play-fellow."

"By St. Dunstan! neither do I, for that matter," answered the other; "but seest thou not, that we may render more service to our oppressed companions, by keeping in De Marchmont's service, than in throwing it up? bethink thee, of what we have already done."

"Thou speakest good truth," was the reply; "but I have sundry misgivings on these points, I like not to eat the bread of the man whom I am betraying; neither will I do it longer; I will away to our chief keeper, and tell him that I have done serving the Norman. Take thou my badge and bow, and deliver them; I will henceforth seek other employment; say that I despise the service of a tyrant."

"And get myself into the donjon," said his companion; "for not sending an arrow through thee, after having heard thy message; for such would be my doom; and thou wishest me not such harm, I trow?"

"No, thou knowest me better," said the other; "I have no wish that thou, or any other,

shouldst suffer on my account; but I tell thee I would be gone."

"Even so would mine own inclination lead me," was the answer; "but I fear, as yet, to yield to it; I have not forgot the maiming of the Smith, nor the fleeing of Wat of the Marsh; nor can I,"—here their voices became inaudible, as they pierced further into the forest, and our travellers again resumed their journey.

It will be readily supposed that the conversation, which they had thus chanced to overhear, served in nowise to enhance the character of De Marchmont in the estimation of either Edwin or Royston; while, to Margaret's bosom it brought a painful feeling: when she remembered how unpopular her father must be, while he caused, even those who were bound to execute his commands to plot against him. For, to do justice to the maiden's feelings, she was not altogether unconscious of the impropriety of her own conduct on this occasion, and had a secret dread of what might be its results, should she again fall into the baron's hands, whom, as we have before stated, she much more feared than loved. Still she would rather that his

praises had been sounded in the ears of her lover than his faults; and had never neglected to throw a veil, over such of her father's evil actions, as had only met her own eye.

They had, by this time, ridden through the dense thicket, and gained a smooth verdant path which spread far along in the unclouded moonlight, beside the river Lene. Here they alighted; and Edwin, unbuckling the horn which hung by his side, filled it with water, and presented it to Margaret; while Royston, kneeling down on the green-sward, took also a long deep draught, saying, when he arose, "Better this than nothing; though, by my faith! an' a fish had floated by, I should not have waited for his being cooked, but e'en made a meal of him."

As they were in the act of remounting, they perceived a rustling among the tall osiers which grew on the bank, and a short human figure arose, whose head scarcely overtopped the willows. Royston was the first to recognise the stunted form, and exclaim, "By the point of my lance, here is our old friend Druth! How goeth it with thee, my little warrior? Marry! thou didst strike a bold blow, yesterday, when the baron stood bickering with the old dame.

But, beshrew me ! I can scarce talk to thee for very hunger."

"Shame on thee!" said the dwarf, in his usual solemn tone; "thou who callest thyself a soldier, to complain of hunger! I have not broken my fast since sunrise; and yet," added he, flourishing his massy club in the air, as if it had been a riding-rod; "could I meet with him I seek, thou shouldst see me handle my weapon, as lightly as if I had eaten since curfew."

"By ale and bread!" continued Royston, "methinks the jolly friars of Newstead are wont to keep their larder well-stocked; assuredly thou hast not kept thy usual watch by the gates. And I am at a loss to read aright thy present purpose in the forest."

"Revenge!" muttered the dwarf, "leaveth no room for further appetite. But whom hast thou with thee?" added he, straining his sharp eyes on Edwin and Margaret, as he spoke; "an' I dream not, those are the features of a Clifton, and a Marchmont. Right glad am I, my lord," said he, approaching and bowing before Edwin, "to see you at last in knightly guise; it ill became one, who had the best

blood of Saxon kings in his veins, to be a cup-bearer to his conquerors. And you, lady," added he, in a sorrowful tone; "cannot conceal yourself from me, even in that disguise. I would that you had remained in your own bower; this is but folly and madness."

"And yet," said Edwin, "you were ready enough, I trow, to quit the mansion to which you would again consign the lady;—ay, by my faith! as ready as you now are, to meddle with matters which concern you not, and on which you might at least have held your silence, in this presence."

"The cub may abide safely in the tiger's lair," answered Druth, "and escape the bloody jaws which are agape for all beside; and if I have been so ready to speak in this presence, I have not always kept silence, even when the safety of my life depended upon so doing; but enough of this. Whither is it your pleasure to journey to at this hour? I know the forest, and may be of service."

Edwin briefly stated, that they only required food and shelter for the night; and of which they had long been in search.

"Then follow me," said the dwarf, "and I

will lead you where both may be procured; and, perchance, that of which you will stand in more need, ere long. For, by the blessed rood! you will not escape from the net, in which you have hitherto been ensnared, without a long chase and a narrow search.—And you,” said he, addressing Royston Gower, “are strangely changed, while you thus lead away the prey—that you was wont to drive so readily into destruction.”

“’Tis but the trick of an old hound,” answered Royston, carelessly; “to fright away the deer that he would not have hunted down. I am now,” added he, with a laugh, “sworn knight-errant to thy mother, and may, some day or other, wed the old witch.”

The dwarf frowned, but answered not.

They again pursued their journey through a dark and dangerous part of the forest, which was in some parts almost impassable, for the dense and entangling underwood, and again, diversified by small hillocks and patches of uneven ground, extending for a considerable distance beside a deep streamlet, the banks of which were occasionally broken, and precipitous. While carefully pursuing their way beside the

water-course, they were suddenly beset by six men in black vizards, one of whom, by a sudden act of agility, had sprung upon Royston's horse unawares, and secured the arms of the old soldier so firmly behind, as left him no chance to make use of his weapons. Edwin, who was much more dexterous, had already uplifted his sword, and was in the act of cleaving down the nearest assailant, when Druth exclaimed, "They are friends! for the love of Christ, forbear, Sir Edwin, forbear,—know ye not me?" said the dwarf, fronting the outlaws.

"Why, certes, good Druth," replied one of them, "thou hast the advantage over some of us, who are as much alike as two acorns, inasmuch as they who have seen thee once, can never mistake thee for another. But when you would serve your friends again, it would be better for you to keep in the rear, seeing that we seldom venture before spear-points, when they may be avoided, and you cannot well be seen above a horse."

"How now, knaves, why parley ye here?" said a voice from within the thicket; and in another instant Robin Hood stepped into the midst of the party,— "What, friend Page!" continued

he, extending his hand, his keen eye detecting the features of Edwin in the moonlight, although only a portion of the face was seen through the ventail; "hast thou slipt off the hood like a true hawk, and ventured into the wide air alone? Ah, ah!" added he, with a merry look, glancing at Margaret, "what, flown away with a mate too! Marry, thou hast brought some work for our mad priest, I trow; but thou shalt read my riddle another time."

"That were wisdom, my brave yeoman," replied Edwin, "unless thou meanest to leave no one a chance to guess."

"Not I, by my faith," answered the outlaw chief; "but thou canst not expect those who guessed thy riddle beforehand, to have forgotten it again so suddenly."

"An' I had, friend yeoman," replied Edwin, "it would seem, that there are those, whose eyes are at least equal to their memories. But we will talk of this anon, and for the present would sooner be partaking of thy forest cheer, than wasting words, which only seem to leave our stomachs the emptier."

"It was even to his green hearth, where I was about to conduct you, Sir Edwin," said the

dwarf, but now I have seen you in the safe keeping of your host, I will again be gone."

"Whither so fast, Druth?" enquired Robin Hood; "thou wert not wont to wend away thus speedily, without partaking of our woodland cheer: what game is in the wind that thou fliest thus quickly?"

"I go but to fulfil my pledge," answered the dwarf, "which is as sacred as if sworn upon holy relics. I have vowed to serve Edith of Lincoln, and she is this night carried off by some of——" he paused, as if unwilling to repeat the name of De Marchmont before Margaret.

"Tush, man, tush!" said the outlaw, "we know what thou wouldst say; but hearken,—a band of our own merry men are in the pursuit now; and if thou wilt but have patience to rest thy limbs for a little time, thou wilt be both better able, and perchance, nearer the mark in reaching the lady after, than thus prowling about alone, like a discarded deer. For, certes, I was about to peep in upon old Nicholas, the Leech, to visit a wounded man he hath even now in charge, who, mayhap, can tell us something of the matter. Trust me, thou mightest as well hunt for a lost arrow in the

darkness, as think of discovering the path by which Edith has been taken at this time."

"I will content me," said the dwarf, with a sigh, "though I have sworn to spare neither life nor limb in her service."

Robin Hood made no reply, but bade his followers lead on to the same spot, where we have before conducted our readers in a former part of this story. The same caution was observed as when he conducted Thomas-the-Carter, to the rendezvous. Scouts were stationed at various points, and within call of each other, while, around an immense fire, in the centre of the forest-glade, reclined a merry group of outlaws, who, when our party entered, were singing, at the highest pitch of their voices, the following rude ditty.

SONG OF THE OUTLAWS.

As free as the wind is the life that we lead,
That sweeps without let over mountain and mead ;
We own not a tyrant, no foeman we fear,
Our home is the greenwood well stocked with red-deer.

The king lives by tollage—we toll whom we please ;
He collects in the cities—we under the trees ;
But he showeth no favour, nor misseth a door,
While we stop but the rich, and molest not the poor.

No baron, nor abbot, nor monk 'neath a hood,
Shall pass heavy laden through merry Sherwood,
For we lessen their burdens, by taking a toll,
And lighten the body, to better the soul.

We lack not a stoup of good berry-brown beer,
We lack not a pasty, well lined with fat deer,
We lack not an arm when the tyrant does wrong,
To succour the weak, and strike down the strong.

There are eyes in the hamlets, and hearts by the Lene,
That brighten and beat, for the outlaw in green,
When in the blue twilight he steals forth alone,
And lists for a footstep more dear than his own.

Then drink to the arrow, the bolt, and the bow,
That can strike down a coward, or level a foe,
For we own not a tyrant, no foeman we fear,
Our home is the greenwood, well stocked with red deer.

Margaret gazed in astonishment upon the wild scene before her : and although she had been accustomed to see armed men from childhood, still, the bronzed countenances, and the fine athletic forms, unincumbered by armour, that moved to and fro in the moon-light glade, struck her more forcibly than the sheathed figures which she had so often seen. The outlaws filled their goblets and quaffed them to the health of Sir Edwin De Clifton, and the speedy downfall of the tyrant De Marchmont ; and

while the first pledge called up the colour into Edwin's cheek, the latter caused a tear to gather in the eyes of Margaret, as if she felt for the first time, that she participated in her father's unpopularity, and had neither the will nor the power to repel the charge. Even Royston looked confounded, and would fain have removed the maiden from the noise of their merriment, had he not wished to preserve her secret. Druth sat in silence, devouring the food that was offered him with an avidity which left no doubt of his long fasting. While Robin Hood attended upon the two lovers, and attempted to rally their spirits, by his constant sallies of rough wit.

CHAPTER IV.

I do remember an apothecary—
And hereabouts he dwells,—whom late I noted
In tattered weeds, with overwhelming brows,
Culling of simples ; meagre were his looks :
Sharp misery had worn him to the bones :
And in his needy shop a tortoise hung,
An alligator stuffed, and other skins
Of ill-shaped fishes.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE brave Earl of Eltham, accompanied by the stranger knight, who had so suddenly followed him into the thicket, were still riding to and fro with furious speed, in the hope of discovering Edith. Sometimes they raised their voices and called aloud her name, until every dell and dingle rang again with the sound ; then they listened attentively for a reply, but the bellowing of the stags, the barking of the fox, and the

raven's croak, were the only answers that broke the forest's silence. At length their steeds became weary, and it was with great difficulty that they kept them upon their feet amid the jagged roots of the trees, and the dense copse-wood, through which they passed in darkness, saving, where here and there, the moon-light streamed in through occasional vistas.

They at length reached the end of a long winding path, which they had traversed some time on foot, as the overhanging boughs drooped so low, as to prevent their sitting upright in the saddle; moreover, the condition of their horses required them to be led, after such long and continued fatigue. Now, however, they had gained a smooth and expansive opening carpeted with delicious green, in the centre of which stood a lodge, or rude hut, of considerable dimensions. A stream of the purest water flashed forth brightly in the calm moon-light, and flowed with a low pleasing sound through the centre of the glade: also skirting in its course a small plot of garden ground, which was well filled with such herbs and flowers, as were then most celebrated for their virtues in medicine, or admired for their beauty.

To this water-course each knight led his steed, and having allowed them to drink their fill, threw up the reins, well knowing that they would not quit so luxuriant a pasture.

Having thus satisfied themselves regarding the comfort, and safety of their chargers, they next turned their attention to their own wants, and as the hut was the only visible habitation at hand, they approached it in the hopes of obtaining some refreshment.

Great was the astonishment of the knights, when they arrived at the front of the rude wooden mansion, (on which the full moon-light streamed without interruption), at discovering a skull and cross-bones, placed over the doorway.

Their wonder also increased the more upon further examination, when they saw stags' horns, the skins of snakes, dried toads, newts, mice, and many other varietie of birds, beasts, and reptiles, interspersed with earthen vessels, and bunches of dried herbs nailed to, or suspended from the sides of the hut. Nor had their curiosity abated one jot, when they heard a shrill voice exclaim from within, " Galenius ! add also two grains of the infallible salts of

Saturn, with three drops of the vitriol of Venus ; they must be taken before the moon is low, or the divine drugs will lose much of their medicinal efficacy. I would that the antimony had been calcined by the rays of the blessed sun, the father and spring of light ; but what saith Esculapius, when we cannot reach the magical and celestial fire ? ‘ if the patient needeth it, it must be administered without.’ Yet I would that I had the blessed light ; but it shall be done on the morrow.”

As the knights were more in the mood for discussing a supper, than the efficacy of the “ salts of Saturn,” the earl struck the door with the hilt of his sword.

“ Thou mayest pass on, good archer,” replied the same voice, as if in answer to the summons ; “ the patient already sleepeth soundly, and his fever is much abated,—he will take the infallible draught anon, and I would have thee call again about the hour of sunrise.”

“ We are no archers, good friend,” said the earl, “ but two strangers, who, wearied with the day’s chase, and other matters which have left us thus late in the forest, crave some refreshment and a little rest, as our steeds are

weary and unable to bear us further, until they have partaken of food, and reposed themselves."

"Ye have chosen an unfortunate time, worthy strangers," replied the voice, "for I have with me a wounded man, whose case calleth forth all my skill, and, moreover, requireth stillness, that his slumber may be unbroken, while the divine medicines work out their power. Ye had better journey further, for the mansion of Hereward the Saxon is but little more than three leagues distant."

"It is impossible," answered the earl, "the way is unknown to us, neither are our horses able to bear us a step further at present. Open thy door, we will not disturb the repose of the patient, unless thy churlishness compels us to make good our entrance by force."

"Nay, an' ye think that I begrudge my hospitality," said the voice, "enter, in God's name!" saying which, the door was instantly opened by the physician himself; for such the long woollen robe of crimson, and high fur-cap which he wore, bespoke the inmate of the hut. He motioned the strangers to seat themselves on two massy stools of the rudest manufacture;

then bidding his attendant Galenius to add more fuel to the fire, turned his attention to a small iron vessel, which was placed upon a pile of heated charcoal.

The knights gazed in astonishment at the variety of utensils, both earthen and iron, which were hung on the sides, or scattered about the floor of the apartment, ready to be used in the operations of pharmacy. Among these were crucibles, brass basins, retorts, matrosses, and recipients ; together with several varieties of rude earthen furnaces, and every thing, so far as perfection could be obtained, for distilling, evaporating, calcining, dissolving, and otherwise preparing whatever was necessary or known, in the then barbarous art of physic.

There was something uncommonly wild and care-worn in the long spare features of the physician, as he bent over the iron vessel, into which, ever and anon, he scattered small portions of different ingredients, or threw a hurried glance at his guests from under his thick bushy eye-brows, which, together with his high wrinkled forehead, caught the full light of a red smoky torch that blazed beside him. He looked more like one of those old alchemists, busied in trans-

muting baser metals into gold, than a follower of the art of pharmacy ; or, as he occasionally cast his eye upon a large volume which was laid open on the table, he bore no bad resemblance to an ancient magician preparing his spells and conjurations, wherewith to work, weal or woe on the human race.

On a pallet, beside him, reclined his patient, enveloped in the skins of wild goats, from which his bare bony arm, and head covered with dark bushy hair, peeped forth, as if they formed a part of the shaggy skins ; and the whole resembled the form of some savage satyr sleeping.

Farther on was seen the thin hungry figure of Galenius, the attendant, like famine, about to warm his bloodless limbs, blowing the embers with his breath, and bending over the green branches which he had thrown on the hearth. Galenius was kept much for the same purpose which our artists use their wooden models ; and although the physician had no notion of copying his attendant, still he retained him to practise upon, and tried under how great a quantity of boluses, powders, and draughts, this shadow of famine could survive.

“ I would fain know, worthy physician,” said the knight who had accompanied the earl, “ what thou canst furnish us for our evening meal ; for this forest air hath brought on an appetite which must be appeased without delay.”

“ To eat when much an-hungered, worthy knights,” said the physician, “ is like placing a man in the *melée* without his armour ; inasmuch as the stomach being naked, cannot encounter with its food so well as when reasonably filled. I will forthwith administer unto each of you a syrup, prepared from hyssop, thyme, ground-ivy, and spleenwort ; with angelica-roots, fennel, and rue, and other things only known to a few in our art. And after you have taken this, together with two small boluses, which I will also administer, and you have rested while the sand passes the glass, then you may venture to take one-fourth of a pound of animal food, with a small portion of oaten bread.”

“ Rue—fennel—spleen-wort—and boluses, worthy leech !” muttered the knight ; “ I tell thee we have no need of medicine at present ; if thou hast got a goodly sirloin, haunch, or pasty, or even a few rashers of boar’s-flesh,

thou shalt soon see that our only ailment is hunger."

"Thou talkest like one of the ignorant children of the world," replied the leech; "not knowing that the virtues in the things I offer, contain the intrinsical life which cometh not to corruption, but have been freed and extricated from every impurity, and precedeth all food. They have been gathered under their favourable planets,—some free from dew, others in the scorching noon-day, and when the moon was in her last quarter,—and are prepared for fitting digestion by requisite coction and maturation; and brought to the highest degree of exaltation, and sufficient even to drive hunger from the body, and all earthly impurities, which it insensibly consumes by the help of fixation, and volatilization.

"Stand forth as a testimony, Galenius! thou who wert fat with impurities, even to the fatness of full-acorned swine, when I first took compassion on thee; but art now freed from the grosser portions of our nature. See, worthy knights," continued the physician, pointing with an air of triumph to his living famine; "when he first came into my household he could scarce

pass the doorway, and now he glideth to and fro, as easily as a beam of light."

"I in nowise impeach the efficacy of thy valued syrup, learned leech," said the knight, emptying the miraculous draught which was presented him, among the hissing embers; "but as I would rather fill out my armour, than sit like a shadow encased in mail,—and, moreover, as I would not waste many words with thee, lest our arguments might disturb thy patient, I will for the present rest satisfied with trying the virtues contained in this fitch." Saying which, he took down one of the largest from the beam over his head, and cutting out sundry immense rashers with his hunting-knife, threw them on the ruddy embers, and quietly awaited the operation of cooking.

"Ah! ever rejecting the counsels of the sage," exclaimed the physician with a sigh; "and dressing even the food with impure fire. Knowest thou not, Sir Knight, that as the wick of a lamp attracteth the oil, so those portions of flesh thou art preparing, attract all the grosser particles of the fuel. But you know nothing of that circulation which nature makes by means of the universal spirit; nor of the influences of

heaven and the stars, which produce the ethereal and spiritual fire, that embodieth itself in the air, and lodgeth in vegetables and woods of the earth, and is from these gathered and retained by a process only known to a few beside myself. Galenius, bring forth the flask containing the distilled elements of fire, and let their food be at least prepared in pure flame."

"Now, by all the saints! if thou pourest one drop of thy distillation on the embers," exclaimed the knight, clutching the shrunken arm of the trembling skeleton as he held the flask, "I will pour the remainder down thy hungry throat. Disturb not thyself, worthy leech, but bring forth what bread thou hast."

The shadow glided to a dark crypt, and brought forth two pewter plates, together with a large oaten loaf, into which the knights soon made a deep inroad, without pausing to inquire whether it had been baked with the elements of distilled fire, or on common ashes.

There was something exceeding characteristic in the features of the physician, and his attendant, as each of them watched the diminution of the savoury rashers and the huge loaf, be-

neath the repeated attacks of the hungry knights. The leech looked on with uplifted hands and eyes, in horror and astonishment, calculating, doubtless, how much that was impure they swallowed at every mouthful; and the quantity of boluses and draughts it would take, to chase away so much that was gross from their natures.

The observations of Galenius were of a different nature. His head and eyes kept time with every mouthful which the knights devoured; while his thin transparent nostrils were upturned, as he snuffed up the rich fumes which spread over the apartment. At last, he could resist the temptation no longer, but, snatching up a portion of the broiled flesh, and a large lump of bread, he darted into the dark crypt; and his jaws were soon heard busied in the mastication, as loudly as those of a horse, when it feeds after a long journey.

“Galenius!” exclaimed the leech, “bring forth the leathern bottle containing the mixture of cinnamon; and yet,” mused he to himself, “although it has been preserved with the richest and oldest wine, sweetened with honey and eggs, and purified with endive, mint, and nard,

sow-thistles, docks, and barley ; has stood in the sun seven times until heated ; and been cooled as many, in the moon-light ; yet would they prefer the impure and stronger drinks.”

The shadow came forth bearing the large leathern-bottle, and two drinking cups ; but having been summoned before he had finished his purloined banquet, he had thrust the remainder into his wide mouth, which was now so full, that it left him no room to move his jaws ; and, in the first attempt that he made to speak, he was nearly choked.

“ What hast thou done ? ” exclaimed the physician, springing up and seizing the skeleton by the back of the neck. “ By the true Lord ! thou hast partaken of this food, dressed in impure fire, and thyself freed from the grosser particles. Put out the unholy morsels,” said he, reaching down a phial, “ and swallow instantly a large portion of this vital spirit, or thou wilt be nothing more than a living death. Open wide thy mouth, and let the air first run its perpetual motion around thy stomach, for the flesh thou hast devoured is never at rest, but runneth continually from the pure elixirs with which thou hast so long been nourished. Three days

must thou devour ducks'-meat, which having its root implanted on the water, containeth a portion of the principle of life. What! doth thy stomach reject the vital spirit, which before it held as safely as the phial? nay, then thou must swallow verdigrease and the vitriol of Venus, with the sublimation of antimony and the salt of sulphur."

"No, no, master!" exclaimed the poor victim, getting rid of the vital spirit with as much reluctance as he had swallowed it; "I cannot take the bitter draught again. Give me but one cup of the strong ale which the yeoman left for your own drinking, and I will taste no more swine's flesh for the present; although, in sooth! it would have accorded well with me, had it not been for the nauseous spirits."

"Now, by my faith!" said the knight, rising; "thou shalt have a cup, an' thou wilt bring it forth; and, hark thee, friend shadow, if thou canst find a stoup of the old wine, with which thy master prepares his syrup of cinnamon, produce it speedily; an' thou lingerest long, I may be tempted to beat out what little substance you yet retain. Be quick, or you shall swallow the bitter draught you so much dread."

The phantom cast a fearful glance at his master, as he entered into the crypt and produced a wooden flagon of ale, and as speedily returned with another large leathern bottle, filled with the choicest wine. Each knight quaffed a horn of humming old ale, and having poured out another for Galenius, filled their larger cups from the wine-flask.

“Bethink thee,” said the physician to his attendant, who had already emptied the drinking-horn,—“bethink thee of the penance thy body must undergo, Galenius, before it again reaches that spirituality to which I had before brought it.”

“Ay, marry, master,” replied the menial, “methinks that had it been pure, it would not have become so suddenly restless and ravenous, at the smell of these savoury morsels; which, in sooth, it hath never yet done, when you have been distilling the pearls of Paradise, or the manna of Heaven.”

“I could be sworn on the holy rood,” said the leech, “that thou didst not take the golden spirit of life at sunset, or thy appetite would not have grown so outrageous.”

“I did but smell of it, worthy master,” said

the attendant, "and that alone caused me to shake my head, fah! Methinks, after the smack of these rashers, I would fain become fat and unspiritual as I was before."

"Poor impure mortal," replied the physician, with a look more of pity than anger; "and is this all that my labour and care with thee have produced? After having put roasted capon before thee, and, for a reward, when thou hast not eaten of it, taught thee how to mix the ostrich's stomach from rare herbs. Have shown thee mighty secrets, when thou hast left untouched the coarse viands, from the making of the tincture of gold, the red lion, to the poisonous foam of dragons, the blood of the salamander, the immaculate wolf's jelly, invaluable serpent's brain, the spirit of the spread eagle, even on to the juice of Janus; and would, hadst thou been firm, have unfolded to thee the grand arcana of the elixir of life."

"I confess my frailty, worthy master," replied the skeleton, "and have long waged war both with my stomach and memory; and, in spite of all your valued advice, I can better remember how to stuff a wild-goose, or make pasties of a fat buck, than recollect the name

of one ingredient, in these immortal mixtures. And after the rich flavour which hath clung to my palate this night, I have sworn never to pollute these pure medicines again, by bringing them in contact with my impure body. I will fetch your wood, and carry out your physic to the furthest ends of Sherwood ; but, by the smack of the pasty which Eleanor-of-the-Valley gave me yesternight, I henceforth renounce all draughts and doses, boluses and purgatives."

" Alas ! and all my hopes are dispersed," said the leech, with a sigh ; " like the refuse of nature from the pure hermetical salt. I had thought to have left my secrets in your keeping, which hope only detained me in the wilds of these forests. Alas ! I shall never more consult with the Leeches of Alexandria, nor ponder over the mummies of Egypt, from which I had hoped to distil the secret, and make the living last longer than the dead. But see, my patient moveth, he hath at least need of the physician." And he again bent his shaggy brows over the wounded man.

CHAPTER V.

But whither she went, north or south,
Or east or west went she,
Was never spoke by living mouth,
Till Hal rose up, and he,
Vowed that she passed him in the gloom,
But whither went he never knew ;
So dark the night began to loom,
So fast the horsemen flew.

St. Christopher's Chase.

THE silence that reigned in the apartment for a few moments, while the physician counted the pulsations of his patient, was suddenly broken by Hugh de Lacy, who, springing up, impatiently, seized a rich mantle which had hitherto lain unobserved on the wounded man's pallet, and exclaimed, "In the name of a thousand fiends ! how didst thou obtain this mantle and

hood? Speak! or by my hope hereafter, I will tear open thy throat, and see if all thy elixirs and mysterious medicines will be of any avail to make thee whole again. Speak!" vociferated the earl, in a voice of thunder, holding up the mantle, "how came this in thy possession?"

"Even along with the wounded man," replied the physician, as he sat unmoved beside the couch of his patient. "It was found upon him, and was the cause, if I understood the yeomen aright who brought him hither, of his receiving the deep sword-gash, which may prove one of the gates of death, of which there are many at which the spirit escapes. Even in the elements there is much malignant mercury flying up and down, which whenever it exceedeth the purer particles, bringeth an infinite number of epidemical, pestilential, and contagious diseases, which, uniting with the individual venom already lodged in the body, by eating the impure ——"

"The mantle, the mantle!" said the knight impatiently, "how came it into his possession? Tell me, or, by the holy saints! I shall be tempted to lodge my dagger in your own body. Speak! how did he obtain it? This very man-

tle, knave, was worn by Edith of Lincoln in the chase to-day! But why do I waste words with thee," continued the earl, approaching the couch of the wounded man, "when thy patient can answer me?"

"Touch him not," said the physician, standing boldly between the couch and the earl; "wert thou to disturb his repose, thou wouldst obtain only wild and vague answers, for the draught which I have administered, now holds contention between life and death. When the moon is down he shall speak to thee, for his fever hath already abated, and I have just forced a compound between his teeth, which will do much for the preservation of his life. I see a change over his features even while I speak to thee. Galenius may tell thee more of this matter, for I doubt not but that his curiosity would lead him to inquire, as eagerly as his appetite is now urging him to devour the remnant of your meal."

"Tell us, knave," said the stranger knight, putting a silver coin into the hand of the attendant, and speaking in a quieter tone than the earl had before done, "it concerneth us much to know the truth of this matter, and

thou shalt not lack a cup, and a cut from the fat buck, if thou speakest truly."

"In sooth I know but little of the affray, Sir Knight," answered the hunger-stricken menial, with a large mouthful, which he was then masticating; "I did but hear of some horseman carrying off a lady in the forest, who were narrowly pursued by the outlaws, and that the party finding themselves hard bestead, by some means threw the lady's mantle over one of their own fellows, having equipped her, as the yeomen suppose, in the horseman's cloak. After this the party divided, and the archers attracted by the mantle, followed up the pursuit, and having discovered their mistake, gave the patient a taste of the sword, for the trouble he had put them to."

"And to whom belonged the party?" inquired the knight; "didst thou hear by whom they were headed, or bore they any sign by which they might again be distinguished?"

"The outlaws named none," answered Galenius; "and now I bethink me, the patient (who is swallowing the medicines, of which I envy him not,) received his wound through refusing to tell aught of his comrades; but

among them I heard mention of a tall man in a vizard, who seemed to act as leader."

"Enough!" said the earl, "this accounts for the voices by which I was deluded; and the cravens by whom we were pursued, dared not to make the attack openly and boldly, although there was but the arm of one knight to protect an unoffending maiden. But we will seek out the haunts of these outlaws: if they have recovered her, she is safe. Thieves although they be, and plebeians, I would sooner that she fell into their hands, than those of the merciless barons. It cannot be De Marchmont," said he, musing, "he never quitted the king's side during the chase. Bore the wounded man the white hart on his dress or arms?"

"He was without his outer surcoat, Sir Knight," answered Galenius, to whom the question was put, "and bore no mark by which he might be distinguished."

At this moment a loud knocking arrested their attention, and the attendant, without awaiting the physician's orders, undid the door, and Robin Hood entered the apartment.

"How fares the patient, worthy leech?" inquired the outlaw, without addressing either of

the knights, or seeming to pay the least regard to their presence; "when thinkest thou we shall be able to have further speech with him?"

"By such time as the moon goeth down," replied the physician; "and she must ere this be fast veering to the west."

"The east already shows a few ruddy streaks," said the outlaw, "the hart draws nearer the covert, and the birds are bestirring themselves; I will await the time thou namest;" saying which he approached the table, and filling a cup with wine, said, "*Waes hael!*" then emptied it at a draught.

"Methinks I have seen thy face ere now, Sir Yeoman," said the earl, "and that not many evenings ago, when thou didst let fly a shaft in the green glade, and brought down a noble stag?"

"I have a remembrance of another face beside thine at that time, gallant knight," replied the outlaw; "and if you had kept as close a safeguard upon it to-day, as you then did, I had not been here at this time."

"Nevertheless I am well pleased to have met with thee," answered the earl, "not know-

ing that the outlaw chieftain stood before him, "for I hear that some of thy companions gave chase to the robbers, who have this night borne away my kinswoman Edith. Knowest thou aught of the party into whose hands the maiden hath fallen?"

"Nothing, noble knight," answered Robin Hood; "the thieves bore no mark or sign by which they might be distinguished, although there is one amongst the yeomen who vows, by St. Dunstan, that in spite of the vizard which their leader wore, he dare be sworn upon the crucifix that he saw him amongst the king's followers in the early part of the chase. I have yet hopes of receiving some information from the patient when he awakes."

"I would fill thy pouch with broad pieces, brave yeoman," said the stranger knight, "if thou couldst but point out the villain that hath been the means of bearing off the Lady Edith, so that he might come within reach of my sword's length."

"I would double thy gift," said the outlaw, "an' I but had him within three hundred paces of an arrow, for the sake of the damsel who hath so often protected the oppressed."

“ And couldst thou make sure of thy mark at such a distance ?” said the knight, smiling.

“ I would risk my head on the shot, Sir Knight,” replied the outlaw. “ An’ thou doubt-est my skill, thou shalt see me furnish Galenius with a breakfast, which I doubt not he will prefer to the leech’s mixtures. Seest thou yonder pheasant preening himself in the dim day-break ?”

Both the knights strained their eyes towards three or four square holes in the door, which were made to let in both air and light; for the window only consisted of crossed laths, and was covered by a woollen cloth, or curtain, to keep out the night-air. This was still down, so that the only light which entered the apartment (excepting the torch) was through the door; and this was but the feeble dawning of day, but little stronger than twilight. Through one of the holes, which fell in a line with the sky, and the topmost bough of a far-off tree, they discovered the form of the bird, which was scarcely distinguishable from the deep foliage, excepting by the motion of its head, and that appeared more like the moving of a stem in the morning breeze.”

“By my knighthood!” said the stranger, “I should deem it good archery but to shoot thine arrow through the opening. ’Tis mere folly to think of sending a shaft half that distance.”

The outlaw replied not; but unslinging the bow from his shoulders, and selecting one of the best and straightest arrows from his sheaf, drew farther back to make sure his aim, and then bent the bow to its fullest stretch. The knights kept their eyes on one or other of the openings, and in a second saw the pheasant fall, pierced through with the arrow.

“By St. Christopher!” exclaimed the knight, “an’ thou wert to swear to fetch down a star, I should scarcely doubt thy boast, after such a shot as this; no, not even if thou didst aim at it through a dark cloud. Assuredly, thine are the enchanted arrows of Benoldever.”

“There are other archers in Sherwood,” said the outlaw, “who would have hit the same mark.”

“I marvel not at their bringing down the dun-deer,” rejoined the earl, “after witnessing such skill as thou hast but now shown.”

“Their shafts can reach higher game than that, Sir Knight,” said the outlaw drily.

Either the sharp loud twang of the bow, or the power of the opiate which was exhausted, had aroused the wounded man, who now sat upright on his couch, and was rubbing his eyes, as if he could scarcely believe himself awake ; so different was the scene before him, to those which he had been accustomed.

“ Take this draught,” said the physician, “ it will help to recall thy wandering senses ; for the mind, like the earth, is at times obscured by vapours, which only the sun can chase away. Even so will this blessed drink remove the clouds that now oppress thee.”

The patient, whose lips seemed parched and feverish, emptied the cup without replying, then called for a draught of water, which was immediately given to him, with the addition of a small white powder. The outlaw and the knights stood beside his rude bed.

“ Friend,” said the outlaw, seating himself on the stool from which the leech had just risen, and taking the hand of the wounded man between his own ; “ look upon my face, and see if thou canst call it to thy remembrance ?”

“ I do,” said the man, throwing back the long dark hair which partly shaded his pallid

features. "You once rescued me from the fangs of the Norman, De Marchmont, and, I doubt not, saved my life."

"A simple kindness," said the outlaw, "do I request in return, which I will hold as good service, and remain your debtor. Where was the lady borne, whose dress you last night assumed, to aid her escape, and elude our pursuit? I ask you not to betray the planner of this foul plot, having heard that you was sworn on the holy emblem of our faith to secrecy; put us on the right path to regain her from those, in whose hands she is now in thrall."

The wounded soldier hung down his head, and remained for several moments in deep silence; while the different thoughts which passed through his mind might be partially seen in the changes of his countenance, as if gratitude was combating with honour.

"Was she a free-born maiden," enquired the soldier, "or but the concubine of the noble whom she accompanied in the chase, as we were given to understand?"

The brow of the earl grew gloomy, as he was about to make some passionate reply; but Robin Hood prevented his remarks by saying,

“ She was none other than Edith of Lincoln, whose many kind actions in favour of the oppressed hath rung through these wild forests.”

“ Then am I a villain!” exclaimed the wounded man, clasping his hands to his forehead; “ and——” he paused, as if suddenly recollecting himself—“ the man whom I serve, a liar and a deceiver. Nevertheless, I will not perjure myself by repeating his name, and I fear that the little information I can give will be of small avail. But of this I dare speak: the expedition was undertaken for Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont; although they were neither his followers, nor in anywise connected with that baron, who bore away the Lady Edith.”

“ Now, by the honour of my knighthood!” exclaimed the earl, “ I will fathom this matter; ah! although I rip the secret from out the throat of this false knight with my sword, I will challenge him before the face of King John,” added he, shaking the rickety edifice as he paced to and fro. “ And what reward was the ravisher to have, that committed this cowardly outrage for the baron?”

“ De Marchmont’s daughter for a bride,” re-

plied the wounded soldier; "although he who did the deed is at least as old as her father."

"He must be on the alert for his reward," said Robin Hood, "or, by my faith, the bird will be flown, I dare be sworn. But canst thou not direct us in some path whereby we may hope to reach Edith; and, if not rescue her, at least gain some tidings of her situation?"

"I know nothing further of the matter," said the man, sinking down again as if exhausted; "she was, I believe, to be sheltered in some one of the numerous granges which belong to De Marchmont in the forest. I know not which; but left the horsemen bearing her away in the direction of the North. I have suffered for the foolish part I enacted, and in return, obtained such information as I have given. I shared the confidence of a false leader. I am weary, and would fain sleep."

The physician again took his seat beside the patient; and the two knights, together with the outlaw, seated themselves around the hearth, for the morning air came chilly through the wooden lattice, which was now deprived of its coarse curtaining to let in the increasing daylight.

“ I crave thy pardon, noble knight,” said the earl, turning to his companion, “ for not having before expressed my thanks for the gallant and knightly assistance you have rendered me in the search after my kinswoman. But, by the rood ! one of her smiles would well repay a day spent in hard blows, and she shall yet be restored to thank you herself, for having kept you in saddle, the greater part of the night, in this wild forest.”

“ I have done no more, gallant earl,” answered the knight with modesty, “ than any one wearing spurs would have done on a like occasion. And am but sorry that our research hath met with so unfavourable an issue.”

“ May I crave the name of the worthy knight,” said the earl, “ to whom I am thus greatly indebted ?”

“ It is scarce worth knowing,” answered the knight ; “ but his majesty hath been pleased to name me the Knight of the Hawk, owing to a blunder I committed in his presence two days ago.”

“ By the mass !” replied the earl, “ I now remember thee well ; and bravely didst thou confront De Marchmont, when he boasted of what

he could achieve with a lady's riding-rod, and hawk-whistle."

"The baron is a brave soldier," replied the knight, "nor needed he to have made such a boast, after the deeds he has achieved in Palestine."

"His majesty," said the outlaw, breaking in upon the conversation without ceremony, "hath more to do in this affair than you wot of, and gave his sanction to capturing Edith."

"Remember, sir yeoman, that thou speakest of king John," said the earl, angrily: "and that, too, in the presence of his followers."

"And remember, proud earl," replied the outlaw, "that I speak of what I have knowledge; and can swear that I saw the king's letter addressed to De Marchmont, wherein he advised the Norman to seize upon Edith, and bear her to Nottingham-castle. Nay, further, that I bore the packet myself, disguised in the dress of the king's page, and rescued Walter-the-one-handed at the field of reeds."

"I do believe thee, brave outlaw," said the earl, "and had I thought a moment, might have known that only Robin Hood himself could have brought down a pheasant through a

hole, where scarce a butterfly could have escaped without shaking the silver from its wings." Saying which, he arose and drank a bumper to the outlaws of Sherwood, adding, "I fear me, that I should find but little favour at the hands of the king, if he once knew that I had suffered you to escape whole."

The outlaw then proceeded to state the precaution he had taken, to warn Edith of the plan laid down to capture her; neither did he omit to mention the attack upon Hereward the Saxon, by De Marchmont's follower. One part he kept secret, which was the scene that had delayed his calling earlier upon the physician.

The earl was not much astonished at this treachery on the part of De Marchmont; but was puzzled at the seeming contradictions which hung around the conduct of the king, and vowed within himself that he would yet outwit the subtle sovereign.

As we have before stated, King John scarcely knew his own mind for an hour together; and it was no uncommon thing with him, to pledge his solemn word to forward the suit of some baron in the morning, which he was sworn to oppose at the plea of another rival before

night. Sir Geoffery de Marchmont seemed alone to understand the fickle character of the king; and it was no doubt that knowledge, which had caused him to offer terms to another party to capture Edith, while he himself waited to see its effects upon the monarch, in order that he might steer his course in the direction, in which the wind sat most favourably: not knowing that there were others in readiness, to rend asunder the flimsy web which he was weaving.

After a long deliberation they arose to depart, having arranged, in the best manner they were able, to convey any information to each other, which they might chance to gather respecting Edith.

“The morning air is chilly,” said the old physician, “and the particles of darkness yet mingle with the bursting light: take a draught of the elixir of Aurora, which hath never been warmed in the sunbeams, and yet retaineth all the qualities of the elements, the virtues being compounded within each other by the help of air.”

Both the knights and the outlaw shook their heads at the proffered draught; and Galenius,

made a face, not unlike that of a monkey's, which has devoured some nauseous food unwittingly.

“Nay, then,” continued the leech, “go forth unprepared, and meet the impure vapours, now floating upon the earth, and inhale their poisonous qualities, until even the vital spirit will have to struggle long with the grosser portions of your natures. Then ye will have need of the Divine medicine.”

They thanked the old man for his courtesy and departed. Galenius having already brought their steeds to the door of the hut.

The outlaw turned in an opposite direction to that which the knights had taken, and soon gained a beautiful foot-path in the thickest part of the forest, where the early bee was humming around the honeyed woodbine; and the merle pouring forth a flood of music from his speckled breast. The timid fawn trotted beside the hind, or lifted up its dark bright eyes in wonder at the intruder, before it rushed into the thicket. Sometimes he hummed a merry stave to himself, or plucked a blossom from the hawthorn; then paused a moment to admire the rising sun, as it seemed to bathe the topmost branches of

the oaks, in orient light. At length the splendour was gradually shut out, as he entered a shadowy glen, overhung with every variety of underwood, and was soon lost among the deep umbrage.

CHAPTER VI.

A poor sequestered stag,
That from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt,
Did come to languish; and, indeed, my lord,
The wretched animal heaved forth such groans,
That their discharge did stretch his leathern coat
Almost to bursting; and the big round tears
Coursed one another down his innocent nose
In piteous chase.

* * * * *

Thou see'st we are not all alone unhappy;
This wide and universal theatre
Presents more woful pageants than the scene
Wherein we play.

As You Like It.

ON the morning following that of the chase, a group was collected in one of the streets of Mansfield, discussing the events of the day, when their attention was suddenly arrested by

the blast of a horn, which was sounded in the direction of the palace. Shortly after, a score of foresters, attended by a few of the king's soldiers, and several of the armed followers of Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont, made their appearance; and having reached that part of the street in which the crowd stood, they formed a circle, which the foresters guarded with halberts, and the horn was again sounded. The principal personage, who wore the dress of the king's household, and was within the circle, mounted on a beautiful palfrey, held in his hand a scroll of parchment, from which he read the following proclamation:—

“Whereas John, king of this realm, did yesterday hunt a royal hart within the forest of Sherwood; which said hart-royal, his majesty in all kindness for the sport it afforded both him and his nobles, allowed to escape free: And furthermore, whereas, after so long a chase, this royal hart proclaimed, hath the king's permission to return again into the forest of Sherwood, be it known to all men, of whatsoever condition, that should any one endeavour to prevent the return of the aforesaid hart-royal-proclaimed, he shall suffer the pain of doom: And

furthermore, should any one kill or maim the said royal hart proclaimed after its return, he shall also suffer the pain of death. Whereas, the king loving the lives of his subjects, would not wantonly bring them within the pale of punishment, he hath, in his usual clemency, ordained, that this proclamation be read at every town-cross, village, and hamlet within the shire; and whosoever shall be found in anywise molesting or driving the aforesaid hart-royal, after this proclamation has been made, shall suffer death."

The horn again sounded, and the party were about to move off, when the crowd, which by this time amounted to several hundreds, and had completely fenced in both the soldiers and foresters, commenced hooting and hissing, nor did they in anywise seem inclined to open their dense ranks to allow them to depart.

Those nearer the inner circle were prevented from escaping by those outside, who, with looks of defiance and clenched fists, seemed anxious to reach the soldiers, whose horses by this time began to plunge, and exhibit signs of alarm and restiveness, for the hissing and hooting increased.

“How are we to know this hart-royal,” said one, “from any other full-grown stag?”

“By the king’s having looked at him,” replied another ironically. “Pity that, in his clemency, he had not put the same mark on him by which he distinguished Prince Arthur.”

“Or that Wat Tyrrel had waited in the wood yesterday,” added a third, “and feathered his shaft at another Norman.”

“Or at any one of his slaves,” said a fourth, “who are so ready to issue his proclamations. Down with them! down with them!”

Just at this instant a large stone struck the man who had read the proclamation, but by whom hurled could not be seen. This was the signal of attack, and the halberts which the foresters held were wrenched from them, and instantly broken to pieces. All was now confusion and shouting. Here might be seen five or six clinging round the legs of a horse, while as many more were pulling the soldier from his saddle; there, others were seen flying from the uplifted sword of a more fortunate horseman, who had succeeded in extricating himself from the mob. Some were armed with quarter-staffs and bludgeons, and there were a few provided

with bows and arrows, who, every now and then, made a shaft rattle on the hauberks of the soldiers. The forest-rangers, as they escaped one by one from the clutches of the crowd, fled in the direction of the palace; their example was also followed by the horsemen, until only four remained, who, having placed their steeds flank to flank, stood firm as bulls that head the herd. On these the whole fury of the mob was turned, like so many curs besetting a noble stag, yet not one daring to approach near him.

Each soidier watched his assailants as narrowly as the hawk hovering over its quarry: sometimes they advanced with their lances levelled, and drove back the foremost of the crowd; then again retreated, and turning round, each presented a bold front to the enemy. At length, one of the mob, more daring than the rest of his companions, approached near enough, with the sword which he had picked up in the affray, and struck off the head of a lance. A loud shout instantly followed this achievement, which was answered by another near at hand; for the horsemen having rallied themselves, were joined by others from the palace, who hastened to their rescue.

The crowd instantly began to disperse, the greater part of them flying in the direction of the forest ; where they would speedily have fallen a prey to their mounted pursuers, had not an unlooked-for event fallen out in their favour. Walter-the-one-handed, attended by a numerous band of the outlaws, who had been all night in the pursuit of Edith, were just entering a green lane, which led into the nearest forest-path, when they heard of the tumult. And as most of the inhabitants of the town and the adjacent villages, were favourable to the followers of Robin Hood, the brave Saxon was easily persuaded to take a part in the affray ; which he did the more readily, when he understood the cause from whence it sprung.

With the battle-axe suspended by his side which he had taken from De Marchmont, and a large straight two-edged sword in his hand, he approached at the head of an hundred archers, some of them with their bows ready bent, and others armed with swords and bucklers ; and drawing up his men in a line between the pursued and the pursuers, he had soon the whole of the crowd at his back, who, elated by

this unexpected aid, became more uproarious than before.

The opposing party, which by this time amounted to about twenty horsemen, besides a few on foot, also drew up in an opposite line, as if they awaited a further attack: when the one-handed Saxon proclaimed silence, and thus addressed the followers of the king:—

“ Ride back to the paltry tyrant whom ye serve, arouse him from his bed of sloth, and tell him that there are those who set at nought his proclamation, who value their lives less than their liberties, and will hunt on the land, which is theirs by birthright, in spite of any Norman robber that has set foot upon their possessions. If there is any one amongst your number, who will dare to alight and defend the evil system which I have denounced, I will in all honour singly and fairly give him battle on the spot. Nay, he shall have the vantage of his horse to boot.”

A loud shout followed this challenge, which must have reached even to the palace; but its principal inmates were then slumbering, after the last night's revel, which was kept up late to honour so noble a chase. Three or four

armed horsemen rode out from the ranks together, to accept his challenge; but as if each was willing to give preference to the other, they all returned, and were again greeted with sounds of derision.

This could not be borne, and one braver than the rest dismounted, and stood midway between the opposing parties.

“Thou hadst better have retained thy saddle,” said Walter, approaching with the heavy sword resting upon his shoulder, “thou mightest then at least have escaped, if the reception was not to thy mind.”

“Not I, in faith,” answered the soldier, “seeing that I have already the advantage over thee, in having two hands, and thou canst not hold up a shield. I will do my devoir fairly, since you have defied and insulted not only ourselves, but he whom we serve.”

“I would that the Norman thou servest again stood before me,” answered the Saxon, “he should not escape my single arm—prepare thyself!”

Walter drew back as he spoke, as coolly as if he was but waiting beside a friend. Both their swords were instantly uplifted, and clashed toge-

ther with a force that made them bend again ; while the Saxon, dexterously slipping his own blade down that of his adversary's, brought it with such force upon the hilt, as caused his opponent to drop the point level with the ground ; when, rushing in with a sudden motion of the foot he prostrated the soldier on the greensward. Not a blow had been struck from the first moment that their blades came in contact, yet such was the overpowering strength that slumbered in the muscular arm of Walter, that the other was not able to stir his weapon from the mountain-like pressure which rested on the cross-hilt.

The Saxon stepped back and allowed his enemy to arise, who no sooner regained his feet than he gave a frightful glance at Walter, and ran off with the greatest rapidity, exclaiming, " He is the devil, and none other, and fighteth with magic. The holy saints preserve me ! for crossing weapons with Sathanas. I saw his eyes flash fire ! " and throwing himself into the saddle, away he sped to the palace.

He was speedily followed by the rest of the party, not altogether from any fear of the crowd, or the outlaws, but that their orders were

peremptory, regarding the reading of the proclamation at sundry places before the hour of noon.

Meantime the royal hart, which King John was so highly honouring, had been driven into the purlieus of the forest by the rangers. Purlieus were in some measure still a portion of the forest, although they had long before been disforested, some of them, as far back as the time of Henry I. The privilege which this law had left, permitted the owners of such lands as were called purlieus to hunt the stray deer which they might find thereon, although they were not permitted to pursue them beyond the boundary. Thus, although the owner had the liberty of following such stray deer over another man's land, yet must he sound the re-chase—which was to blow a blast on the horn, and call off his dogs, as soon as the stag had regained the forest. This was called hunting by toleration, and not from a real right.

A dog might enter the forest, providing he had fastened on the deer before it reached the boundary. The owner of a purlieu must hunt only himself, and not even with his servants, unless he was ill, and had permission from a

forest justice. He must not hunt a deer out of season, although it is found trespassing on his own land. He must not hunt in the night-time, nor before sunrise, or after the sun has set, neither on the sabbath. He must not build a house on his own land adjoining the forest without a grant for that purpose; for thus saith the charter, "The sight of many houses do terrify the deer." But, above all, to kill a hart-royal proclaimed was to be punished with death.

It will be readily imagined to what endless and vexatious quarrels such laws as these led, especially in those cases where the keepers were avaricious, or entertained a private pique against any purlieu-holder. Fines for trespass were constantly enforced, and many a deer was driven into such lands, that the rangers who were lying in wait, might obtain money from those who, in chasing them, deviated one jot from the Norman forest-code. Even Manwood, who is a great advocate for the preservation of vert and venison (trees and deer), admits, that the laws were so very severe, that it was impossible for any man who lived near these boundaries to escape the danger. Nor was it until years

had passed over, after the signing of the *Charta de Foresta* by King John, that these evils were remedied.

Hereward the Saxon had arisen early on the morning on which the proclamation took place, and being a-field, was of course ignorant of the edict. He was followed by his favourite stag-hounds, and was occasionally amusing himself, by sending a shaft among the numbers of rooks that were regaling themselves in the corn-lands. Sometimes one of these dusky denizens of the elm-trees might be seen formally pacing along the deep furrows, waging war with the worms and grubs, or occasionally tearing up the half-grown wheat, when suddenly an arrow would pin his bent head to the earth, and leave him transfixed, as an example to his marauding brethren. But they only arose, and threw out their long stick-like legs, to alight again at a further distance from the unerring shafts of the Saxon, giving a kind of mournful "caw" for their fallen comrade.

Suddenly a noble hart cleared the fence by which the Saxon was walking, and before the stately animal had reached the middle of the corn-field, the teeth of the largest stag-hound

were fastened in his throat. Hereward ran to the spot, and had just dispatched the hart with his hunting knife, when six rangers came full speed, through a gap in the hedge, and surrounded him.

“Villain!” exclaimed the foremost, “thou hast killed the hart-royal proclaimed, while we were in the act of driving him into the forest.”

“An’ thou darest to call me villain again,” said the fiery Saxon, unsheathing the short sword which he carried in his belt, “I will silence thee for ever. What knew I of its being a hart proclaimed? or who shall gainsay what I kill in my own purlieu?”

“That thou wilt have to answer before our master,” answered the ranger; “as to thy not knowing, it is no business of ours. You are not ignorant of the punishment which followeth such a breach of the law. You must with us, before Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont, who, as chief justice of the Court of Eyre, and lord ranger of Sherwood, will be best able to decide on this point.”

As yet, no one had ventured to place his hand upon the Saxon; and he stood grasping the short sword, and looking down upon the dead

hart in thoughtful guise, while the noble stag-hounds, each stationed beside their master, watched narrowly his countenance, as if they but waited the signal to tear down the foresters. At last he said,

“ I will abide the issue of what I have in ignorance done, although the Norman tyrant is to be my judge. You yourselves can testify that the sun has not long since climbed the heavens, and that I could not have heard the edict, having been a-field ever since the sun rose. Not one step do I journey with you; the court opens in two more days; there will I appear and answer to the charge.”

“ Nay, Saxon, you elude us not in that manner,” said another ranger, seizing Hereward by the shoulder as he spoke; “ this is no case of bail; nor are we such bad sportsmen as to part with the bird in hand for that in the bush.”

“ Dog and slave of a Norman robber!”—exclaimed Hereward-the-Ready, shaking off the ranger as he spoke, and hurling him forward with such force, that his head ploughed up the earth where he fell,—“ Dog of a tyrant! an’ I will be roughly handled by the best of you, I will first sell my life as becomes a true Saxon.”

But while he was brandishing his weapon in the face of those who stood before him, his arms were seized by the two rangers who had kept their station on each side of him; not, however, without his having inflicted a deep wound on one of their shoulders. The two stag-hounds, each, at the same instant, sprang forward and attacked the rangers; but not with equal success. The largest and strongest reared up, and missing his hold on the keeper's throat, succeeded in planting his sharp teeth in the cheek and jaw, and bearing the forester at once to the earth.

The man wrestled with his antagonist, with all the courage of Hercules; and grasped the hound, in his turn, by the throat, with such force, as caused the eyes of the noble animal to project frightfully from their sockets, both man and dog rolled over several times, each alternately being uppermost. At length the forester succeeded in what is called, in modern canine warfare, "hanging him off;" and then planting his knuckles deeper in the animal's throat—in spite of the imprecations of the Saxon—held him down, until the brave hound ceased to breathe, and lay dead beside

the noble hart, which he had but a few moments before, borne to the earth.

Meantime, the lesser stag-hound had also succeeded in tearing down a ranger; and having, at the first spring, grasped him firmly by the throat, still retained the same hold, while the man lay struggling and almost breathless, on the ground. Neither could his companions render him any assistance, as two of them were, by this time, severely wounded; and the others barely managed, with the greatest difficulty, to hold the enraged Saxon, who seemed more bent upon rescuing his hounds than in making his own escape. With eyes that seemed to flash fire, and feet planted upon the fallen forrester's breast, the savage hound swayed his shaggy head to and fro, while his jaws were besmeared with blood, as he still tugged at the wretched victim's throat. Nor would he obey the voice of his master, although Hereward had several times exclaimed, "Off Wolf! down dog! loose thee!" and many such expressions as had never before failed in bringing the animal to obedience. A deep internal ferocious growling accompanied the savage action of the hound, as he kept his fiery eyes fixed upon his dead com-

panion; nor could he be made to forego his firm hold, until several seconds after the unfortunate ranger had ceased to breathe his last.

“Saxon, thou wilt answer for this bloody and murderous work!” said one of the rangers, eyeing the dead body of his comrade; “inasmuch as thou hast resisted us in fulfilling the king’s orders, wounded and killed our companion, and slaughtered the royal hart; which last act alone is death by the law.”

“Thou speakest to one, slave,” replied Hereward, “who only prizes life according to its value, and would sooner meet death in its most terrific form, than live, and be base enough to procure his bread by enforcing such laws as I am now accused of breaking. Unhand me, dogs! or, by the soul of my father, I will hereafter let loose those among ye, who shall spare neither life nor limb!”

“You might, perhaps, have escaped us,” said another forester, “had you shown yourself in civil bearing at first, and accompanied us to some Scot-ale, and covered the drinking-pegs a few times. But we sell not the blood of our comrades at so cheap a rate. You must, with us, to the palace.” And he took off his large

leathern belt, and, by the aid of the other keepers, secured the arms of Hereward.

“ Dishonest descendants of a race of robbers!” exclaimed the Saxon; “ I would that I had the single arm of my One-handed countryman by my side, were it but to show you how a Saxon can strike. And I might take ye to the Scot-ale, forsooth!” continued he, “ and see ye guzzle like swine, until you could not number the pegs in your tankard, and then I might have freedom to send a shaft after any deer in Sherwood, faithful keepers that ye are! But when,” added he, “ did ever the Norman keep faith himself, or any that belonged to him show aught, save falsehood, cowardice, and tyranny? And my brave dogs!”—He needed his hand at that moment to dash away a gathering tear, but they were both secured; and the remaining hound, after it had been driven from the dead body, had hurried homeward, to all appearance mad.

The keepers, well aware that if they chanced to meet with any of the Saxon’s followers, a struggle would ensue for his liberty, led him by an unfrequented path to the palace. Two of them bore their lifeless companion on their

shoulders; and the arms of the sturdy Thane were firmly secured, while he walked along in silence.

But, leaving Hereward with the keepers, we must return to his mansion, where Elwerwolf and Elfrida still remained.

CHAPTER VII.

How many monstrous forms in sleep we see,
That neither were, nor are, nor e'er can be.
Sometimes forgotten things, long cast behind,
Rush forward in the brain, and come to mind :
The nurse's legends are for truths received,
And the man dreams but what the boy believed.

DRYDEN.

The Tartar lighted at the gate,
But scarce upheld his fainting weight ;
His swarthy visage spake distress,
But this might be from weariness ;
He drew the token from his vest——

BYRON.

ELWERWOLF, or the Hag of the Heath, as she was designated by the peasantry, had, ever since the morning on which her cottage was fired by De Marchmont, found a shelter in the dwelling of the Saxon ; where, without any control, she

was left to indulge in her wild rambles, and wilder reveries at will, as no one cared to question her, as to where she went, or from whence she came. And it was doubtless owing to chance that she had overheard Royston Gower, while indulging in one of her lonely rambles in the forest.

Beside a substantial oaken table, which was also set out with a substantial breakfast, sat Elwerwolf and Elfrida, waiting the return of Hereward before they commenced the morning meal. Although the fare bore but little resemblance to that which we are accustomed to see in the present day, still it seemed more suitable to the men and the age; when blows were better understood than bohea, and the cleaving of helmets was a more familiar word than either coffee or hyson. White wheaten bread and brown barley cakes were piled high in rude wicker baskets, which were made more for use than ornament, and would about as well become the boudoir of a modern lady, as those massy wicker hampers which are used, in our own time, for conveying potatoes. Venison and eel pasties were also there, on staring pewter platters; and brown vessels made of baked earth

were filled with yellow honey ; nor was there any lack of milk, wearing the rich hue of the primroses and cowslips, on which the sleek kine had fed. Eggs were also in readiness, and striped rashers of bacon, that but awaited the sound of the Saxon's footstep before they sent their welcome savour around the apartment ; and a large rude jug, resembling a brown pickle-jar, bore on its top the whispering foam, as if it said, " Mistake me not ; I am the humming brown ale of old England."

Elwerwolf sat on a low stool, the legs of which some hand had attempted to carve into the forgotten form of acorns, but had given two cups to each. Her long spare body was bending over the ruddy embers on the hearth, while her arms were folded across her bosom, and she swayed herself to and fro, with her eyes closed, like one who wished to send her thoughts far away from the scenes by which she was surrounded ; or like some wild enthusiast in our own time, who, while praying, seems as if wriggling his body into that heaven, which he is endeavouring to take by storm. But Elwerwolf bawled not like the modern mad ; her thin lips moved, but no one heard them utter a sound,—she seemed as if

struggling with her own spirit, or wrestling with thoughts that could not shape themselves into words. At length they found utterance, but were at first so wild and incoherent, that even Elfrida paid no attention.

“ And with Edwin, too ! ” said she, speaking like one who unconsciously talketh in a dream. “ But why should he depart with her ? What portion hath he in the Norman ? what hath the young of the wild-cat to do in the nest of the dove ; or the fawn in the kennel of the hound ? Alas ! such as they are, so might their fathers have been. No ! the wolf cannot be brought to pasture like the sheep, nor the hound taught to graze beside the hart ; the gray goose knows not that its feathers furnish forth the shafts that slaughter its fellows. But the future is dark. I have loosened the prisoner, and he yet hugs his chain ; have given him the sword, which he hath rivetted to the scabbard. I have but seen through a veil in the darkness of night. Night ! that makes the bondsman forget he is a slave, only sharpens my remembrance ; and the morning light bringeth to me no rest.”

“ Speak not in such a melancholy tone, good

Elwerwolf," said the maiden, as she superintended the toasting of sundry slices of the barley-cakes, which, when done, she immersed into goodly bowls of milk,—“speak not so mournfully; let us hope that there is sunshine beyond these threatening clouds.”

“Who looks for sunshine in the gloominess of night?” continued the old sybil. “The horned owl hooted not for nothing in the shaggy darkness; the old dog, much wiser than us mortals, howled throughout the weary night; the kite made woful lamentation; and the wild-geese went with a noise of moaning through the silent sky. Even when the moon arose, her light was ghastly, and the stars looked luridly and afraid upon the earth; and many fell down with affright.”

“Talk not so ominously, good mother,” said Elfrida imploringly. “Believe me, I have slept but uneasily since the man was destroyed, who attacked my father in the forest; and last night I had such dreams as haunted me just before my mother died. Why lingers my father, when the sun is already upon the threshold? But, peradventure, he followeth the chase, for there

is but little venison in the larder. Come, we will wait no longer; let us begin our morning meal."

"The sunbeams have indeed reached the threshold," continued Elwerwolf, "and shine as if in mockery upon the palfrey's shoe, which your mother placed there to keep out the evil-eye. May God defend us! for I feel that the hour of trial is at hand. Thou art young, maiden," added she, turning her cold gray eyes upon Elfrida; "yet thou hast tasted of the bitter cup, and shown no lack of fortitude. Again wilt thou be called to the trial. I feel my old heart sink within me, even to aching. It hath never deceived me yet; there is evil gathering either against thine or mine. I see it coming along as surely, as when the low dark threatening clouds move slowly and heavily under their slumbering load of tempest and thunder; the storm will assuredly burst, but where, I wot not."

"God's will be done!" exclaimed the maiden, drawing a rude crucifix from her bosom, and breathing a short prayer. "High and low," continued she, "are alike subject to the evil powers that are now abroad. Even Edith of

Lincoln hath not escaped, but is borne away no one knoweth whither; nor hath she as yet found a chance to send me the token, that might guide a few honest hearts, and strong arms to aid in her rescue."

"Edith belongeth to those," said the old woman, "who will do her no scathe. Her prison-house will be like a palace, and her fetters made of ornamented gold. It is for such as ourselves, maiden, that the iron gyves are rivetted, and the cold donjons made strong."

"The imprisoned hawk knoweth not whether her fastenings are leathern thongs, or tassels of silk," answered Elfrida; "she pineth for the wide range of the free heaven; and if the perch to which she is secured, is of gold, 'tis alike hateful, for she is still a prisoner. Thou knowest but little, I fear, of the noble heart of this Edith.—But hark! I hear the hurried tread of a stranger," added she, throwing back the long dark hair which overhang her cheeks, to listen. She had scarcely spoken, before Royston Gower, unattended, and unannounced, rushed into the apartment.

The perspiration stood thickly upon the old

crusader's brow, as he threw himself into the seat, which stood in readiness for the Saxon; and without speaking, drew forth a glove from his belt, and placed it upon the table.

The loud working of his broad chest, and the look of weariness, so unusual to his iron countenance, told that Royston's errand had been one of speed; nor could he recover himself sufficiently, until a few moments had elapsed, to answer the damsel's interrogations.

The Saxon maiden had heard of the capture of Edith on the previous evening, and was in no wise astonished at receiving the token, but had been kept awake the greater part of the night in anticipation of some messenger. Although it was but a simple signal to tell of distress, it was at least safe; for in those unsettled times the bearer of written documents was almost sure to be plundered, even by those who were unable to decipher a line, while a ring, a glove, or even a feather, might be safely borne, as creating less suspicion, and being equally understood. The art of writing was then in its infancy, and doubtless many a lofty castle had never contained within its walls, the materials necessary to pen an epistle.

“Where is the Lady Edith?” said Elfrida, as soon as she had glanced at the glove.

“Hast thou already forsaken the heir of Clifton?” said Elwerwolf, looking angrily at Royston Gower.

“Didst thou receive it from the lady’s own hand?” continued Elfrida in the same breath.

“Where is thy solemn pledge, craven,” muttered Elwerwolf,—“thy oath given in the forest, that thou wouldst never quit his side until he was reinstated in his rights?”

“By whom was the lady borne away?” said Elfrida.

“And thou must needs bear with thee the spawn of the serpent,” proceeded the old woman; “thou couldst not carry the noble youth in safety from the adder’s nest, but must plant one of its young in his bosom, to sting him on a future day.”

“Answer me,” continued Elfrida; “lest our aid come too late: what would the Lady Edith, that I should undertake in her behalf?”

“And he is, perchance, by this time, again in the Norman’s hands,” said the old sybil; “peradventure, in his darkest donjon; and thou, like a false-hearted coward, hast fled to save thine own life.”

Like a stag at bay, did Royston Gower turn upon his two clamorous companions, now bending his head in the direction of the maiden, then showing his front to Elwerwolf; but before he had time to answer the questions of one, he was again assailed by the other; until, at length, losing a portion of his own patience, he drew the massy seat nearer to the table, and commenced an attack upon one of the large bowls of milk, which was also amply supplied with thick slices of coarse barley bread.

“Wilt thou not answer me?” said Elfrida, rising and seizing the bowl; “thou mayest eat thy fill, but first tell me where the lady is lodged, that I may speed on my mission.”

“And in what direction hath the cruel Norman dragged the brave youth?” said Elwerwolf, rising and putting on her hood; “I will at least dog his steps, though I die for following the slot.”

“Wam, jam, wam!” were all the words that issued from the full mouth of Royston Gower, until he had taken a deep draught of the foaming ale cup, to clear his throat.

“An’ I had two tongues,” said Royston, having waited until the clamour had somewhat

abated ; “ mayhap, I would reply to you both, though, by my faith, methinks, you would outdo a whole bevy of friars, though they were galloping over their paternosters, after having been warned into the refectory. Edith of Lincoln, I have not seen, but received the token from another. As to you, old beldame,” added he, addressing Elwerwolf, “ fear not for Edwin ; he is in safe keeping with the outlaws.”

Royston then proceeded to narrate how the glove came into his possession, while wandering in the early dawn of morning, at some distance from the haunts of the outlaws. Setting aside the many interrogations of Elfrida, and the interruptions of Elwerwolf ; it appeared that the messenger despatched from the place, where Edith was then a prisoner, had sunk down in the forest through weariness. Unable to proceed further, he had imparted the secret of his mission to the old crusader, who, without delay, undertook its execution. The messenger was to await the return of Royston, at an appointed place, with what force he might be able to collect, and conduct them to where Edith was confined.

While they were speaking, Druth stood at

the entrance of the apartment, and leaning his back against one of the short Saxon pillars of the doorway, (which in bulk and stuntingness bore no bad resemblance to himself), he listened with an anxiety and earnestness to their conversation, which showed how deep was the interest that he took in the fate of Edith.

“Where left ye the man?” inquired Druth, his eyes lighting up with a wild fierceness as he spoke; “who has dared to carry off the loveliest of her sex? Would that I had the spoiler within reach of my cudgel!” added he, brandishing the massy weapon as he spoke, with a velocity that made even Royston shrink, lest he should encounter its weight.

“What interest hast thou in the maiden?” said Elwerwolf, in a solemn voice, which caused the dwarf to start from the pillar; “or what dost thou here, when the son of thy former lord needeth a guide, and is sporting, like an unsuspecting stag, by the lair of the wolf? What portion hast thou in the maiden, that should cause thee to meddle in her behalf, when thy services are owing to one, for whom thou hast a right to shed thy last drop of

blood? Begone! as I before bade thee. See the daughter of De Marchmont safely into her tyrant father's hands; then follow Sir Edwin, and set about the great work which I have pointed out to thee."

"Twice have I told thee," answered the dwarf, "that I have sworn to aid in the rescue of Edith, even as much as if she had been yourself. You would not, I trow, that my word should be like that of the Norman, broken as easily as the tempest breaketh down the reeds, or veering like the wind that blows where it lists. Have I not also vowed to serve Sir Edwin? but to separate him from Margaret surpasseth my power. You know not the strength of love."

"Nor would I," answered Elwerwolf, fixing her searching glance upon the dwarf, "wish to be taught it from thy lips. I tell thee that we were doomed to serve; and woe betide thee, if thy folly leads thee to look beyond the allotted height to which our flight is circumscribed. I read that in thy countenance, which I would fain see blotted from thy memory. Despised thou hast ever been, by all, excepting myself.

Let not thy foolishness hold thee up to the derision of others, and expose thee to mine own scorn!"

"I may not understand thee, mother," answered the dwarf, with a look, in which confusion was depicted. "Assuredly I cannot have done wrong in taking part with a defenceless woman, and that too when she was hard bestead. Shall it be said that in England there were strong arms which hung listless, and refused to strike when a lady needed their assistance, and she too the friend of the oppressed Saxons! Beautiful she is," added the dwarf, with a sigh; "but were she as unsightly as myself I would strike a blow in her behalf—her lovely looks are as holy to Druth, as the benignant smile which hangs upon the face of the Blessed Virgin."

"May they be no more!" replied Elwerwolf; "but I pardon thee, for even the cold glance of the haughty Cardinal Langton brightened, as he passed her in the court-yard of the priory."

"Let us begone," said Elfrida, "for I would not that the lady should appeal to the daughter of a Saxon for succour, and find her request slighted. Thou, Druth, wilt accompany

me to the haunts of the outlaws? No English maiden ever yet craved help from their hands, and was refused;" saying which, she left the apartment, followed by Royston Gower and the dwarf.

CHAPTER VIII.

But oh that hapless maiden!—
Where may she wander now, whither betake her,
From the chill dew, amongst rude burs and thistles?
Perhaps some cold bank is her bolster now,
Or 'gainst the rugged bark of some broad elm
Leans her unpillowed head, fraught with sad fears.
What, if in wild amazement, and affright,
Or while we speak, within the direful grasp
Of savage hunger?

MILTON.

OUR story again carries us back a few pages, to where the palfrey on which Edith was mounted, took flight beside the forest brook, and bore the lady with a fearful and almost breathless speed, into the depths of the thicket. It will be readily supposed, that the screams which reached De Lacy's ears, in the early

part of his pursuit, came not from his fair kinswoman, but were raised by those, whose object it was to allure him far from the path which her steed had taken. It appeared to Edith that her palfrey had started of its own accord, as there was no sudden sound or motion to raise an alarm; but she saw not an horseman dismount in the distance, and approaching as stealthily as a serpent, plunge the point of a sharp instrument into the side of the noble animal, then again throw himself down among the mingled fern and bracken.

Fast and furious was the beautiful maiden borne along, under the gloomy canopy of overhanging branches; and the speed of her horse was greatly accelerated by the shouts of those who were attempting to overtake her, and who had hovered all day in the rear of the chase to accomplish her capture. With fiery eye, dilated nostrils, and limbs stretched as if upon a rack, his tail and mane streaming out like unfolded banners on the blast, away sped the spirited yet half-affrighted courser, with a rapidity which seemed to increase as he went; while the silken ringlets, and floating drapery

of Edith, formed a beautiful contrast beside the long lines of green foliage by which she so swiftly shot.

One horseman only, out of at least a score who followed at full speed, was enabled to gain ground on her fleet-footed courser. From the appearance of the rider there was no doubt of his being the leader of the party, as his splendid hunting-dress bespoke him a noble; he wore a vizard, which completely covered his face. Scarcely had the horseman succeeded in overtaking the lady, and by a sudden and cautious manœuvre grasped the reins of her palfrey, which put so abrupt a check upon its speed, as would have thrown the fair Edith from her saddle, had he not caught her with one arm—when all at once he was aroused by a loud shout from the thicket, from which a band of archers issued.

Those who followed were not, however, to be deterred by a flight of arrows, but were speedily by the side of their leader, whose skill in guiding the lady's steed with one hand, and keeping at bay three or four of the foremost outlaws with the point of his sword, might have called forth praise, had it

not been displayed in so bad a cause, as the capture of a defenceless maiden.

The cavalcade had, by this time, so far outstripped the archers, as to gain a turning of the forest-path, which for a few moments shut out of view their pursuers, when the leader tore off Edith's mantle and veil, and threw them around one of his followers, whose surcoat was as speedily looped over the white shoulders of the lady. This, as our readers are already aware, threw the archers on a wrong path; for the horsemen immediately divided, and the leader, who still held the maiden's rein, struck into the deeper shades of the forest, followed by a few of his retainers; while the remainder of his band still continued on the road, and were pursued by the outlaws, who halted not until they had overtaken the supposed Edith.

Meantime the maiden, with her swan-like neck imprisoned within the coarse folds of the horseman's mantle, rode beside her captor, who still pursued his course among the entangling trees, with all the speed that could be made; until at length the underwood became so thick, that the party were compelled to rein in their horses, and look around for some path that was

more passable. Almost breathless with the rapid motion of her steed, which had called a colour to her cheek that might put to shame the rosy tint of the bramble blossom, sat the beautiful Edith, looking in astonishment upon the daring group that were around her, who, in nowise abashed, returned boldly her glance, with expressions that showed how much they felt the power of her surpassing loveliness. Even the eyes of their leader gleamed from under the dark vizard, as they rested upon her, like live coals, which throw out their light upon the gloom of midnight.

“Whither would ye bear me?” said the maiden, addressing the leader of the party; “for what purpose have you brought me hither? Ye seem not,” continued she, turning to the horsemen, — “ye seem not to be De Marchmont’s followers, and cannot refuse to lead me in safety to the priory of Newstead; which when ye have done, I will in all honour give you a goodly guerdon.”

“Thou speakest truly, fair lady,” said the leader; “not one here obeys the war-call of Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont, seeing that they are the retainers of John of Chester, himself the

humblest of your slaves ; and one," added he, removing the vizard from his features, " who will ever be ready to peril himself in a lady's service, for her smiles."

" I have heard of your valour, my lord of Chester," said Edith, " and trust that you will do nothing to sully that fame. Am I to thank you for having, in all kindness, checked my steed ; or to consider myself as a prisoner? Methinks it were well to know the position in which I am placed, before proceeding farther."

" You must consider yourself in some measure under my care, fair Edith," answered the baron, in an embarrassed tone ; " but, had I been aware of the costliness of the pearl I have now in charge, trust me I would not so rashly have pledged myself to another, who has not yet, I believe, found favour in your eyes."

" I understand you not, my lord," replied Edith haughtily ; " and only wonder that a knight wearing spurs should demean himself so low, as to take an unfair advantage over an unprotected maiden. But there are those," added she, " who will not fail to demand satisfaction at your hands, for the cowardly action you have this day done."

“ I would dare much more for your sake, lovely Edith,” answered the baron, “ and leave those who dared to gainsay what I had done, to prove me a coward,—a device which I have not yet entered upon my escutcheon.”

Just then a loud shout, as if from several voices, was heard in the distance, which was none other than the outlaws in pursuit of the remainder of the Constable of Chester’s followers ; and Edith, considering it the duty of a captive to lose no chance that might aid in her escape, raised her voice to the highest pitch, as she called for help.

“ Hush, lady,” said the baron ; “ by all the saints ! no harm is intended thee. An’ thou wilt but be silent, it shall be even as thou likest.”

But Edith, like a true woman, having found the point that gave her an advantage, instead of ceasing, only raised her voice the higher ; and continued to call for help, until every dell and dingle rang again with the sound of her voice, which, even in that situation, still retained all its sweetness.

A few of the outlaws were arrested by the sound, and seemed fast approaching the spot

where the cavalcade had been compelled to halt; even the rustling of the distant branches had already caught the alert ear of the baron, when he ordered his attendants to dash into the very centre of the thick underwood.

In an instant they forced their powerful steeds through the bending beds of hazels, hawthorns, wild-sloes, and every variety of shrubbery, which speedily rose again to an erect position, and concealed the high heads of the tallest horsemen. Two of the attendants, taking their signal from the hand and eye of the baron, drew a bandage over Edith's mouth, which effectually prevented her from calling; and the whole group waited with a silence, that rendered even the fluttering of the leaves, and the dreamy murmuring of the bee, audible.

The voices of the outlaws were heard within the distance of a few yards from where the cavalcade was concealed.

“By St. Cuthbert!” said one, “they took not this path; what boots our following the cowards, who had not the courage to abide by the maiden whom they had captured? I will be sworn that the call was some stratagem to draw us from our pursuit.”

“Then was it a stratagem raised by Sathanas,” said another; “for, by the splendour of our Lady’s brow! never heard I sweeter voice call, nor is there another within the range of Sherwood could raise so much music from her tongue as the Lady Edith; and I will be sworn, by bead and book, that I heard her somewhere hereabout.”

The outlaws, as if by one consent, again raised their voices, and Edith made an attempt to answer them; but so tightly were the folds of the bandage secured, that the low muffled sound which she raised scarcely reached the ears of the rude soldiers who held her arms. One of the steeds chanced to neigh; but, fortunately for John of Chester, it was just at the moment that the archers raised the shout, the clamour of which drowned every other sound; and when the echo of their voices had died away, the far-off murmur of a brook, and the low wave-like stirring of the branches, were all the tones that gave a voice to the silence of the forest.

“By the mass!” exclaimed one of the outlaws, “the forest is growing dark as the throat of a wolf, or we might yet discover them by

the footing of their steeds; I would vow a fat buck to the Friars of Newstead, if we could but rescue the damsel."

"Which would be better accepted by the holy fathers," said another, "than the largest waxen taper you could offer up before the shrine of the Virgin; for, by my troth, these black canons prefer buck-flesh to their breviaries, and some of them love the winding of a merry horn better than the sound of their own vesper-bell."

"By the tongs of St. Dunstan," said another, "methinks our captain will begin to doubt our valour; for, instead of returning with De Marchmont prisoner, we shall bear but sorry tidings, when we make it known that Edith of Lincoln has been carried off."

"And yet I would that we had borne away the Norman robber," said the first speaker, "'twas the work of a coward to beset Hereward in the forest. By my faith! an' he crosses the path of Walter-the-one-handed again, I would not give the value of a leveret for his life."

By this time they had withdrawn to a considerable distance from where Edith was concealed, and no sooner was John of Chester

satisfied that they had departed, than he ordered his followers to emerge from their hiding-place, and with his own hand unloosed the bandage from the maiden's mouth.

"I will proclaim thee a cruel-hearted churl," said Edith, her spirit rising beyond control, when she found her tongue at liberty; for even at that age the tongue was a weapon which a lady could handle well; and however much we may mourn the decline of chivalry, we cannot but own, that this hath always been well wielded, and has come down improved, through its long line of fair descendants. "I will proclaim thee a cruel-hearted churl in King John's court; for who but a base tyrant would bridle the speech of a free-born maiden by brutal force: I tell thee that this day's work shall darken all thou hast before done; and were I a knight, I would tear thy spurs from thy heels, and hold up thy banner to derision. I marvel not that the clowns have bestirred themselves in my behalf, seeing that aught like gentle blood but seldom flows under a coat of mail."

"Assuredly, fair maiden," answered the Baron, subduing his gathering rage before he spoke, "I have but done a deed after the manner of

our noble ancestors, and but little would any lady value the love of her lord, were it not for the remembrance of some daring deed which he had adventured for her sake. By the majesty of Heaven, I would not give a silver penny for the hind that submitted to be captured quietly in the brake."

"And call you this a daring deed?" said Edith, raising her head with a look of contempt, "to capture a lonely maiden in a forest, and even fly away without daring to await a blow from the single arm of her protector. Or mayhap it was a daring deed to hide like a craven in a thicket, with half a score mounted followers, when only a few archers were abroad! Certes, it was the height of valour and right knightly done, to bind in the breath of a free-born maiden. Or it might——"

"Now, by the thunder of God!" exclaimed the fierce Norman, unable any longer to control his passion, and dropping the rein of her palfrey with a force which caused the features of Edith to change their look of despair to one of fear, "if it were not that I would fain spare the blood of these outlaws, I would with my own sword have scattered them like the forest

leaves in autumn. But if thou thinkest that I fear the arm of the Earl of Eltham, I will ere long convince thee how lightly I value his prowess. Already hath he defied me to deadly combat, nor shall I shrink from his challenge, but will tell him, ay, when in the lists, that thou art in my power, and bid him, with all his armed followers at his back, to tear thee from my keeping. Think not, proud maiden, because I have forborne to speak harshly, that it was through fear of either knight or noble."

"I shall not lack a few champions," said Edith, still undaunted, "who will gladly enough splinter a lance in my behalf; as to thyself, I scorn to hold further converse with thee, and advise thee to confess thy sins to thy grey hairs."

The baron was deeply stung with this latter sarcasm, for having been held a favourite by the court dames in his younger days, he had in his conversation with Edith, forgotten that more than a score of years had rolled over his head, since white favours were waved at his entry in the lists. However, he replied not, but knitting his teeth together, began to think of other matters.

Although John of Chester had, at first, in all honour towards De Marchmont, undertaken the capture of Edith, with an intent to fulfil his promise, as the latter had pledged himself to unite his daughter with the constable; still the old baron, when he had witnessed her beauty, and thought over the vast extent of her broad lands, began to repent of his rash promise, and had hitherto entertained hopes that he might yet obtain her hand; but these hopes had in some measure vanished when he heard her allude so bitterly to his grey hairs. He was not, however, a man to be daunted by a shadow; and when he again calculated, with all that he could summon up against himself, he found that the possession of Edith was one great advantage in his favour.

The wily baron had at first decided upon bearing the lady to his own castle, but having changed his mind respecting his promise to De Marchmont, and knowing that the latter would spare neither man nor horse to regain her, he at length came to the resolution of placing her for a short space of time in a grange which belonged to one of his own followers, and which stood without the boundary of the forest. Since their conceal-

ment from the outlaws, the baron had conducted his party through circuitous and difficult paths, always using the greatest caution, which seemed to increase the more as the twilight darkened.

The cavalcade at length came to the entrance of a deep glen or ravine, the descent to which was so precipitous, that each horseman was compelled to dismount and lead his palfrey down the steep. Edith only remained in her saddle, while the baron with his own hand conducted her steed in safety to the bottom. This path was not chosen as being the only one that led to the place, where the constable intended to lodge his prisoner, but as a way, of all others, the most likely to be free from either outlaw or traveller. Tradition had long called it the Haunted Glen, and the superstitious peasants had peopled it with their own imaginings, until they believed in the existence of such things as their fancies had created, over the cheerful fire on long winter nights, when the tale of ghost and goblin was recounted.

The imagination could picture no spot wilder or better adapted to indulge in the thoughts of superstitious reverie, than the one which our travellers now pursued. Even in its present

state, when nearly every trace of the ancient Forest of Sherwood is swept away, this wild spot still remains, although centuries have passed over it, and forgotten tempests echoed through its gloomy depths, and made darker its shaggy sides. Still it is to be seen, with its precipitous banks overhung with hoary hawthorns, and filled with the music of the same tinkling stream which flowed of yore, and at this hour yet rolls on to the romantic entrance of the rural village of Lamley. But the twilight that deepened upon the same scene, on the night which Edith traversed its depths, threw its blue dimness over a wilder and more terrible prospect than is now seen, where tree overhung tree, and branch rose high above branch, more like those threatening piles of rock and mountain that lift their craggy and spiry heads among the Alps, and fill the musing mind of the passing traveller with a melancholy joy.

Here might be seen a solitary horseman pricking his way carefully on some narrow ledge of the glen, and stooping so low to evade the overhanging brushwood, that his helmet seemed placed on the head of his horse. There the armour of another glittered, as he occasion-

ally passed some opening between the dwarf and stubborn trees, until at length their deep umbrage shut him out from the sight, and only the point of his spear or the swallow-tail of his gonfanon were visible above the dark line of branches. Lower down, and beside the stream rode Edith, her palfrey led by one of the constable's followers on foot, for the road was too narrow to admit of two riding abreast. In some places a straggling starbeam found its way through the network of boughs, and fell upon the clear deep glen-current in which it stood mirrored like a gem set in a ground of darkness.

Here and there the stream broke away in a mass of white foam, with a louder noise, as if it had grown angry while contending with the massy and fallen fragments, which had for a few moments interrupted its progress. Behind Edith, rode John of Chester in silence, which was unbroken, saving by the two followers who brought up the rear, one of them riding on the ledges or rugged embankment, while the other wended along beside the stream at the bottom of the glen. In accordance with the constable's orders they both rode at a considerable distance from

the retinue, that they might be in readiness to give warning in case of pursuit.

“ Didst hear aught behind us, Neville ?” said the rider who occupied the higher ground, half averting his head as he spoke, yet seeming afraid of looking fairly back.

“ Nothing,” replied the other, edging his steed nearer to the bank on which his companion rode. “ Nothing,” replied an echo which sounded through the glen, and had before played with the interrogation of Neville.

“ Heard you that ?” inquired Neville ;—the words were again echoed, and in the deep silence that afterwards reigned, seemed to fall more audibly than before.

“ The spirits are abroad,” said the other, in a low tone, which was again reverberated in the same cadence in which it had been spoken.

Neville then began to mutter a paternoster, but the echo was just as perfect in the bad Latin as himself, and answered word for word.

“ Avaunt, Sathanas, I defy thee !” said the soldier ; “ I defy thee !” was again echoed and seemed to come both bolder and clearer in defiance.

“ By my faith !” said Neville, “ an’ it were not for being branded with the name of a coward, I would ride forward and join our companions.”

“ Nay,” replied the other, “ an’ you fly from the fiend, the powers of darkness have you at once, for they are somewhat like to dogs ; but meet them boldly, and they dare not assail you ; while, if you endeavour to escape, they will speedily have you within their gripe.”

Just then a shout was heard from the front of the cavalcade, through which a wild boar had rushed, and came thundering down the glen along the steep ledge, with such force, as to either bear down Neville’s steed, or cause it to spring off with affright.

“ Holy Mary, shield me !” exclaimed the alarmed soldier, extricating himself from the horse, and shaking himself like a dog, for he had unluckily fallen into the brook.

“ By all the blessed saints !” said his companion, “ this cometh through thy being afeard ; hadst thou felt no fear, the fiend would not have attacked thee. I escaped through muttering my prayers.”

“ I had half gone through a credo,” answered

Neville, "when the foul fiend assailed me. Didst thou not mark, that he had only power over my steed? whereas, had I not bent my thoughts to my devotions, he would have flown away with me."

"I fear me," said the other, "that thou hast left some great sin unconfessed, or not paid thy full dues to the priest; or, mayhap, we are wrong in thus bearing off a free-born maiden. Believe me, there is something amiss, or the fiend had not thus confronted thee."

"I made a thrust at him with my sword," answered Neville; "but I doubt much if the smith, when he forged its blade, sang the holy psalter, which keepeth away the evil powers, and is proof against every spell. I tell thee that my blade pierced his hairy body thorough; but he rushed on as if it had been no more than a ray of light, instead of an ell of good steel."

"Hearest thou how he is yet mocking us?" said his companion, again listening to the echoes; "I hold that it would be wisely done were we to set off on a good round speed; for, by the splendour of heaven, I cannot hear even the clattering of our comrades' horses, so much space have we lost in remounting thee again."

“ Nothing, besides the horned hoofs of Sathanas, (from whom may the blessed saints deliver us!)” said Neville, “ could speed over this den of darkness, that to me smelleth of penal fire. May the fiends fly away with me, if ever I venture through this infernal passage again, without wearing some charm which has been blessed by the holy fathers.”

“ I would much rather hear thee curse over thy cups,” said the other, “ than in this place; not that I fear the evil one, sinner although I am; but—”

Just then an owl, which had flapped his way into the gloomy ravine, lifted up his unmelodious voice, and the speaker, without naming the reasons which caused him to set at defiance the evil one, pricked on his steed to a pace, which, considering the inequalities of the path, was truly marvellous. Neville, not a whit more brave, followed close upon his companion's heels; while the echoes, which were awakened by the clatter of their steeds, caused them to imagine that a whole legion of fiends were in the pursuit. Nor had their rapidity abated a jot, when they reached their companions in a part of the glen which was much

wider than the path along which they had hitherto journeyed.

Into the midst of the cavalcade they both dashed, driving asunder the horsemen like a vessel cleaving the waves; even the gigantic form of the constable of Chester rocked in his saddle, and Edith but narrowly escaped from being overturned.

“Are ye mad?” exclaimed the baron, putting out his muscular arm and checking Neville’s steed as it passed; “what, in the name of all that is evil, caused ye to ride into the midst of us at such speed without first giving warning, when there is no danger?”

“The grim glen-fiend hath pursued us,” said Neville, “and had been mocking us before we ventured to fly. I encountered him on a rough embankment, and should have put to flight his incarnate devilship, had he not, by some of his cursed spells, bewitched my horse, which before was always as firm-footed as a rock.”

“Tell me not of fiends,” said the baron, “Thurlby and Cranbourn, ride into the rear, and see that neither fiend nor fear drive ye from your station. Let these cowards,” added he, turning to Neville and his companion, “ride

in the centre, lest some bar-ghost affright them."

"Coward," muttered Neville, between his teeth, "belongs not to me, and that he troweth right well."

The remainder of the journey was traversed in silence; and when they had once passed the gloomy ravine, their course lay through a portion of the forest, less wooded than that they had hitherto traversed, which enabled them to make better progress. A gentle ascent, covered with the richest greensward, and on which the moonbeams fell without interruption, led to an old grange, where, for the present, the baron had decided upon placing Edith. Here the cavalcade halted, and at a signal from the constable, a rude drawbridge or hatch was lowered, about strong enough to bear two horsemen at a time; even the moat, over which it was thrown, might have been leaped by a spirited steed. Edith was led across by her captor, and a man and woman, both in the simplest rural guise, stood at the doorway to receive her. But the lady made no reply to their offered courtesy as she entered, or was rather forced into the mansion.

CHAPTER IX.

Gloster. Vouchsafe, divine perfection of a woman,
Of these supposed evils, to give me leave,
By circumstance, but to acquit myself.

Anne. Vouchsafe, diffused infection of a man,
For these known evils, but to give me leave,
By circumstance, to curse thy cursed self.

Gloster. Fairer than tongue can name thee, let me have
Some patient leisure to excuse myself.

Anne. Fouler than heart can think thee, thou canst make
No excuse current.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE apartment into which Edith was conducted, was long, low, and but indifferently lighted, and the whole building seemed to bear about it more the signs of strength than comfort; and was like every other solitary house of the period, in some measure fortified. A wood fire was lighted on the broad hearth, by a female attendant, who,

every now and then, cast a side-long glance at the lady, as if she would fain speak, but dare not; or her expression might be construed to that of one who has something to communicate, yet is at a loss for a commencement. Edith was seated on a large oaken chair, with her elbow resting on a massy table of the same material, and her eyes fixed on a waxen candle, the flame of which was streaming sideways, for the night-wind blew coldly in through an open casement. As she drew her garments (which had been restored to her since she alighted,) tighter around her, she missed for the first time the rich gift which King John had but that morning thrown around her neck. At any other time she would not so much have regretted its loss; but just then she had been calculating upon it as the only means which would lead to a speedy escape, providing she could have forwarded it in safety to the king.

The female in attendance, guessing the cause which made the lady draw her garments more closely around her, arose from her kneeling position, where she had been attempting to blow the furze-bushes and logs of wood to a flame, and secured the casement, which was

much too small to admit of any one's escaping; she then retired, and brought in some refreshments, of which Edith but sparingly partook.

"The noble Constable of Chester craveth speech with you, my lady," said the maiden, "provided he may be admitted into your apartment."

"A prisoner has but small command over her jailor," said Edith; "and he well knoweth that it would be of small avail, were I to refuse him, since he hath not left me the means of having mine own choice. But tell me," added she, in a different tone, and tendering the female a gold piece, "in whose residence I am now prisoner?"

"Adam of the Long Glen holdeth this mansion and the adjacent lands," answered the attendant, "in second right from the Baron of Chester; and I dare be sworn, lady, that had Adam been allowed a voice in this matter, he would fain have persuaded the constable and his followers to have journeyed farther for their fare. Never saw I such monstrous appetites as these soldiers have brought: all the sodden beef have they eaten, and the undried bacons, and

are now busied with the salted eels in the hogs-head ; while for ale and mead, by my troth, you might as well empty it down the river Lene, and not a whit more effect would it have in raising the water."

" But they cannot bide long with you," said Edith ; " assuredly the constable means not to detain them here beyond the morrow."

" Marry, but that's the worst," replied the female ; " as Dame Long Glen said in the larder, which sounded like an empty room, it was so cleared of every thing. They're not only likely to stay, but others are to be sent for, I trow ; and some are to keep watch while the others rest ; and I fear me we shall have but little sleep all the blessed night, for the tramp, tramp, of their sentinels, just like somebody that's done murder and can't rest in their bed."

" And for what are all these preparations ?" enquired Edith.

" That's what Dame Long Glen cannot compass," said the attendant ; " and she vows that she will have no unfair doings in her house, but will know the bottom of all this ; and if she should find you are not rightly treated, she vowed, by the blessed St. Cuthbert, she would stick to your

cause like a caterpillar to a gooseberry-bush, —yea, if even the proud constable deprived them of the tenure by which they hold this place, which, as the old dame says, is ten times too big for them to live in. And oh, my lady, the cleaning it takes; the rubbing and the scrubbing. Marry, the sins of a Norman baron might be washed out in half the time.”

“ And what does the baron now ?” inquired Edith.

“ The Holy Mary bless you, my lady !” exclaimed the female. “ Do ! Why, marry, he talks of mangonels, and cross-bows, and partisans, as if we were living in a castle. Nay, he even spoke of widening the moat ; but then, as Adam said, ‘ of what use would the drawbridge be ?’ which is barely long enough now. And as to deepening it,—why, half the swine would be drowned ; for they are always falling in. I would sooner have to learn two more prayers for a penance, than that these fighting, planning braggarts should have come here, eating us up.”

“ I would fain speak with your mistress,” said Edith.

“ She is a good old body,” said the loqua-

cious attendant. " Maybe a little too hot now and then, as if no one knew how to brew and bake saving herself, or how to prepare salt-fish for the winter; but very open,—marry, she'll speak to you with no more pride than myself, although mayhap she is not so well-spoken."

" I doubt it not," replied Edith, wishing heartily that the maiden would depart.

Nor had she to wish long, for a heavy footstep was heard in the gallery; and just as the female opened the door to retire, John of Chester entered, unannounced and unbidden, and caused Edith to regret that she had not again the loquacious attendant for her companion.

The baron had been somewhat particular in setting off his fine person to the greatest advantage, nor had the labour of his toilet been bestowed in vain. A more commanding or majestic figure could not be found amid all the courtiers who surrounded King John; and as his super-tunic was now fitted on in the best manner, and his rich velvet cap placed in the most effective position, to shew his still long, though somewhat grey hair; with every other part of his costume as carefully arranged, he had at once the appearance of a man who in

his younger days would not have to sue long, to find an entrance to a lady's heart.

Edith arose not to receive him, nor appeared to pay any attention when he entered, but turned her face in another direction, as if she had found something that fully arrested her glance in the opposite wall. "I trust the Lady Edith," said the baron, "will, instead of considering herself a captive, hold the deed which I have this day done in fair repute, as it has been the means of saving her from the hands of Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont."

"If by that, my lord," said Edith, "you mean that I have escaped the wild boar and fallen in with the wolf, why, certes, I feel but little to be thankful for in the matter. And it baffleth my wits to discover how you could foresee that I should have fallen into De Marchmont's hands."

"Simplicity and beauty, fair lady," said the baron, "walk hand in hand; nor should I look to find aught beyond these in yourself."

"Old age and cunning," answered Edith, "are seldom found asunder; nor does flattery become such company."

"I flatter you not, lady," rejoined the earl, rather piqued to find the cool reception he had

met with. "But you are young, and need one to guide you aright, and protect you against the wiles of those who are more cunning than yourself."

"And what may be the price of that protection, disinterested sir," said Edith, with a sneer, "or where shall I find one, who out of a pure chivalric spirit, will guard me against such robbers as have this night beset me, and borne me away perforce."

"Call not love by so harsh a name," answered the baron, "nor blame me for what your own beauty has caused. I am your protector; and had I not borne you away, you would ere this have been in De Marchmont's power."

"Love!" said the lady, with a look of supreme contempt; "and must I, because my face chances to please, like a toy, become the property of every marauder, who has the hardihood to stretch out his arm towards me. If thy object was to rescue me only from De Marchmont, why didst thou not give me a safe escort to the priory or the palace, where thou wouldst at least have obtained thanks for thy labour, and couldst fairly and honourably have solicited my hand?"

“And of whom should I solicit, saving thyself,” said the constable; “if I hear aright, thou hast refused to marry De Marchmont: I will make thee my wife.”

“Thou hast a son,” answered Edith, calmly, “were I inclined to bestow my hand on any other than where my heart has long been fixed: methinks his years and mine own would be more meet to match together than thine, which must almost treble those I have numbered.”

“What hath the heart, or years, or love to do with marriage,” answered the baron; “will thy rank diminish aught in becoming the bride of the Constable of Chester, or thinkest thou that a young head would be able to manage thy affairs in these troublesome times, like mine own?”

“And yet it was but now that thou didst attempt to flatter me, that my looks had been the cause of this outrage,” said Edith, “and even wanted to cover it with the plausible name of love, instead of ruffianism. How thou dost reconcile these points in thy sage wisdom puzzleth my poor wits.”

“Thine are but the wits of a woman,” said the baron, with an embarrassed look, “and

never attempt to look for the true meaning beyond the surface, when truth is only to be found in a well, too deep for woman to dive for."

"Too deep for my wisdom mayhap, sir," replied Edith, "but cunning like yours floats on the surface, and I am in no wise at a loss to guess the true meaning of thy thoughts in this matter, which thou art so loath to express, well knowing that they become thee not, nor any one who possesses a right notion of honour."

"Thou judgest harshly, lady," answered the baron, in an angry tone, "and but ill repayest the courtesy which I have hitherto extended towards thee."

"Courtesy didst thou say?" exclaimed Edith. "Certes, thou hast a plausible knack of clothing churlish deeds in courtly language, sir knight. But nathless I consider this night's work a disgrace to one wearing belt and spurs. I do suspect much, that had I but had a score of followers at my back, thou daredst not to have attempted this deed; and further," added she, rising with a flush upon her face and a frown on her brow, that might well have become Venus enraged,— "and further, I hold thee no better than a robber, for bearing me off in the way

thou didst, and a coward, since thou didst not dare to attack me, with all thy band of ruffians, whilst I was under the safe protection of one good and tried knight. But I swear, by the shrine of the blessed Virgin, I will proclaim thy villany before every sworn knight that I may chance to meet with."

"Thou wilt meet with but few here," exclaimed the baron, his face colouring with rage, "and threatenest one, proud damsel, whose fair fame is too deeply established to be sullied by a breath. Never shalt thou escape me, or have chance to proclaim what thou wouldst find would only be considered as a deed of gallantry. How trowest thou our ancestors took themselves wives among the proud Saxons? Marry, by bow and bill, even as I have now obtained thee. Thou shalt either become my bride, or I will retain thee as my prisoner. Whom dost thou think, would ever dream of commencing a search for thee in a place like this? Be advised, or thou mayest perchance remain here until old age has furrowed the comeliness of thy countenance, for by the burning lake thou shalt not escape me!"

"I fear thee not," replied Edith, "coward that thou art, thus to threaten an unprotected

maiden. Heaven will throw open some door by which I shall escape from thee."

"There is but one door at which thou canst escape me," said the savage baron, in a solemn and earnest tone, and fixing his dark eyes upon Edith while he spoke, until the high-spirited maiden quailed again beneath his glance; "there is but one way, unless thou art willing to become my bride; then thy liberty shall be as extensive as mine own. But if thou refusest, by the soul of my forefathers, thou shalt become the bride of none other."

"I have refused," answered Edith, in a voice subdued by fear; "my life thou mayest take, and I believe thee cruel enough for such a deed; but my will is mine own, and that, thank Heaven! is beyond thy power."

"Thou hast not yet been put to the trial," said the baron, "until then, I will leave thee to think over the matter;" so saying, he departed; after having double-locked the door.

Although Edith had sustained her part in the interview with great courage, it had been more through the hopes of an immediate escape, which she doubted not the baron would readily allow her to make, when he was acquainted

with her firm resolution, requiring perhaps such conditions that she should consider her capture more in the light of an escort, than the making of her prisoner. Left alone, however, she then began to see more clearly into the character by whom she was opposed, and trembled when she thought that she was in the power of a man who had not hesitated to threaten her life if she persevered in opposing him. The words which he had also dropped, respecting the impossibility of discovering her retreat, threw a chilliness over all her hopes, and she began to despair of again regaining her liberty.

She then arose, and taking the lamp in her hand carefully examined the apartment. Although the windows were rudely glazed, and left her at first a hope of escaping through the lattice, yet, upon examination, she discovered that the frame-work was massy stone, intersected with iron, and that the portion of the casement which opened, was only just large enough to admit of the head.

In a corner of the apartment stood a bed, the tapestry of which was enwrought with gaudy colours, representing Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Adam was presenting our first

mother with a large yellow apple, gathered from a tree that scarcely reached his knee. Beneath the tree was an angel milking, and although the winged milkman sat on a stool, yet his head overtopped both cow and tree, and nearly covered a horse, which seemed standing on the highest branches. To the left of Eve appeared a church; and a dark-robed gentleman holding something in his hand which looked like a pincushion, but, doubtless, was intended for a book : he seemed pointing to the holy edifice, as if reminding them that they were not yet married. On the ground lay the rib, out of which Eve (who stood the head higher than Adam), had been formed ; both of them were very respectably clothed in the ancient Saxon costume, even the angel wore breeches, which being blue, contrasted well with his flaming red wings.

Edith, however, had but little time to observe this early specimen of the arts ; her thoughts were bent upon making her escape ; and when she found that all her hopes were overthrown, she sat down and wept bitterly. The thoughts that her lover was far away, and she had so suddenly and unexpectedly fallen into the

power of one whom she had never suspected of entertaining a thought respecting her, and one who, moreover, would escape all suspicion on the part of those who might bestir themselves in her behalf, added greatly to her grief. She even wished that she had fallen into the hands of De Marchmont, well knowing that there were those who would then, have discovered the place of her imprisonment. What the Constable of Chester meant by putting her to the trial, she was at a loss to guess, and sat conjuring up all kinds of imaginary tortures which her brain could invent, until at last her lamp expired, and she was left alone, in silence and in darkness.

Slowly and gradually did the faint moonlight (which had long been shaded from her windows by the tall trees that grew along by the side of the moat,) find at last its feeble way into a corner of her apartment, and here and there she was at length able to discover, through the net-work of the foliage, glimpses of a star or two, and small portions of the deep blue and tranquil sky. Edith's mind felt calmer as she contemplated the burning lustres of heaven, and her sobs slowly and gradually

became silent, and tear after tear grew feebler, and fell far short of the long courses which the former ones had traced down her lovely cheeks, until the last pearly drop lingered in her beautiful eyelids, like the dew that lurks in the silver rim of the daisy, when the flower is unfolded.

Hopes and fears chased each other through her bosom, until at length came the gloomy thoughts of death, and her courage began to fail. "Who would know of it?" muttered she to herself. "Oh that I had been born a lowly village-maiden, free from wealth, and free from care, where I might have bestowed my heart and hand together, and had no one to have gainsayed me. Of what value are my broad lands to me? Would that I could buckle on armour," added she, arising and pacing the apartment, "and shake out my banner, and sound my trumpet. But, alas!" said she, again seating herself, "my heart even now sinks at the thought. And the trial! assuredly he dare put me to none, unless he meditates my death; and what here," added she, looking around, "could tell my secret?"

Just then she heard a measured footstep

pacing slowly to and fro before her window, and the figure of a man, as he passed, shut out, for a few moments, the vistas that had revealed the stars and small portions of the sky. As the moonlight became stronger, or her eyes by long gazing better able to distinguish objects, she was at last able to discover the figure of the sentinel distinctly, and observed that he grasped a long spear in his hand, which he occasionally made serve the purpose of a walking-staff. He had also a sword and dagger in his belt, and a bow with good store of arrows by his side. Sometimes he hummed a merry tune as he paced along, or broke out into a whistle, which was occasionally answered by the night-hawk, as it wheeled high overhead, or by the more discordant notes of the owl.

At length Edith arose, and having undone the casement, called in a low tone to the soldier as he passed, who instantly obeyed the summons, as if he was well aware over whom he was placed as guard.

“If thou wilt do me a slight service,” said Edith, “it shall tell much in thy favour. If thou canst not, deal fairly with me, and deceive

me not, for I have need of assistance, and may, perchance, find some one who will peril himself in my behalf."

"He called me coward!" muttered the soldier to himself, who was none other than the superstitious Neville,—“I, who have served him thus long! I will do thy bidding, lady,” added he, “inasmuch as I consider he had no right to imprison, or seize upon a free-born damsel.”

“But canst thou leave thy post,” inquired Edith; “or knowest thou any other with whom I may communicate in safety?”

“I may not leave my station until sunrise,” answered Neville; “but the east is already broken with the first streaks of day. Name your wishes, lady, and they shall be fulfilled.”

“Knowest thou where Hereward the Saxon dwelleth?” said Edith.

“Right well, lady,” answered Neville; “and although my journeying that distance might awaken suspicion, yet will I be sworn to find some one, who shall in all honour do your errand.”

“So may Heaven deal with thee!” exclaimed the maiden; “thou wilt then seek out some one who will in all safety and secrecy deliver this

glove to his daughter Elfrida," said she, putting her beautifully turned arm through the window, and placing it in the broad brown hand of the soldier; "and wilt, furthermore, so arrange matters, that the messenger shall bring the Saxon maiden, or what force she can muster in my aid, to this place."

Neville swore a deep oath that he would fulfil her wishes; and, as our readers are aware, dispatched the messenger.

Edith, after having first placed such articles of furniture against the door, as she could most readily remove, that their fall might give her notice, in case of any one entering the room, and having offered up her prayers to Heaven, retired to rest. The first faint peep of day had already subdued the brilliancy of the moonlight, and a few early birds were warbling on the surrounding sprays, when she betook herself to her couch. For some time she listened to the weary foot-fall of the sentinel, as he traversed the length of the building and mingled his merry notes with those of the feathered songsters, until, at length, only a confused murmuring fell upon her ears, and she slept.

The mind of Edith was ill at ease, even in

sleep; and again her fancy bore her through the wild avenues of the forest. The winding of horns, and the baying of dogs, mingled with the loud shouts of the hunters, again rung upon her ears, and she felt once more as if borne along in breathless speed amid the train. Then appeared a rocky barrier which she could not pass; a wild boar seemed as if descending from one of the shaggy ledges, churning the foam between his deathly-looking tusks; she attempted to cry out, but in vain, her voice had lost its utterance. Again, she was borne away in fancy by her palfrey, and strange faces appeared peeping between the trees, moving as she moved; yet their motion seemed to slide along; for the same branches, through which they were peeping, accompanied her in her flight, with a dizzy rapidity. Anon the scene changed, and a young knight in armour stood beside her, with his helmet in his hand, and the rein of his steed thrown carelessly over his arm; he regarded not the impatient pawing of his palfrey, nor the haughty jerks of its head, for his eyes seemed bent upon her alone.

He murmured soft words to her ear before he departed, and her fancy strained to overtake

him, until nothing but a galley was seen far away on the stormy deep; and to her the billows were impassable. Then came the countenance of John of Chester, with a deep frown upon his brow; he stamped fiercely upon the floor of the apartment as he entered, with a drawn dagger in his hand; his voice also seemed to sound loud and deep like thunder. Edith shrieked aloud! and awoke, for the furniture with which she had secured the door of her apartment, just at that moment fell heavily upon the floor.

A gauntleted hand and mailed arm was seen between the opening of the door, endeavouring to remove away the heavy chair, which prevented the figure from entering. Edith sprang from the couch, on which she had thrown herself without unrobing, and had nearly regained the door, which she was about to render more secure, when a man entered clad in complete armour, with his visor down, which left nothing but the gleaming of his eyes between the bars visible. In one hand he held a long parchment, and was followed by a menial, who bore writing materials. At a sign from the figure in armour, the ink-horn was placed upon the

table, and the servant withdrew, when the armed man double-locked the door after him, then stood in silence gazing upon the terrified maiden. The sun had by this time climbed far up the heavens, and the sentry had long before quitted his station. But we must leave Edith for a short time, with her mailed intruder, and bring up other characters, whom we have long neglected in our story.

CHAPTER X.

In summer time, when leaves grow green,
And flowers are fresh and gay,
Robin Hood and his merry men
Were all disposed to play.

Then some would leap, and some would run,
And some their shafts let flee;
And each did try, with his good bow,
The archer best to be.

Old Ballad.

BRIGHT and beautiful was the morning that broke in upon Sherwood forest, and tipped with golden light the tall tree-tops, which, like giant sentinels, overlooked the green glade where the outlaws were assembled. Robin Hood had but just returned from visiting the wounded man at the old physician's, and Edwin had long before arisen, to look upon the manly exercises of the

yeomen, whose loud shouts had aroused Margaret Marchmont from her couch, and she sat on a seat of green turf witnessing the stirring scene before her.

A score of archers, with Will Scarlet at their head, were shooting at different and difficult marks; he who hit the last, or came nearest the central point, having the privilege to erect whatever he might choose for a target, at which all were expected to shoot.

Many careless shafts had been shot before their captain arrived; but no sooner did they behold the king of archers overlooking their game, than each man began to draw his bowstring more carefully, and to take a more guarded aim at the mark. It was only by such severe practising, as was on that morning witnessed by Edwin and Margaret, that had rendered the merry archers of Sherwood so famous throughout England for their skill. The broad target at which they had hitherto been shooting, was, on the appearance of Robin Hood, removed; for Will Scarlet had three successive times hit the clout, and, as conqueror, was bound to erect a fresh mark.

A tall thistle, with its flowery head, was

growing near at hand. This Will carelessly cut down; and, after having collected a quantity of loose earth around the stem, to keep it erect in the spot where the former target had stood, he stepped back and said, "I hold him a good bowman, who shall scatter the flowery tuft from yonder thistle, without piercing either head, leaf, or stem."

"By my pinfold and pledge!" said the jolly Pindar of Wakefield, striking the ground with the end of his long-bow as he spoke, as if it had been his pindar's shaft; "I hold him a cunning wight, and right worthy of being foremost in our band, who shall strike off a thistle's down with his shaft, without hitting aught beside. Marry, I should as soon think of impounding stray kine in wet weather, without leaving their foot-marks on the way to the fold, as to hit yonder mark."

"By pot and pan!" said the Tinker of Tick-hill, who could hit a mark with the best of them; "an' thou speakest of aught, it smacks as much of the pound as a new pan does of rosin and solder. I tell thee, I hold it good hammering to hit the rivet at this distance, without bruising the tin; and, by a tinker's budget!

'twould be equal to blowing the dust off the charcoal, without bringing the fire to a glow."

"Saw ye e'er the marrow of that, worthy yeomen?" said the Pindar of Wakefield. "He findeth fault with my speaking of the craft of pindarship along with archery, when he himself bringeth his tinker's budget to bear upon every matter, like a pindar's staff falling on a lagging heifer. Assuredly this is pot calling the pan grimy, after both their bottoms have been blackened over the same furnace, or pounded in the same mire."

"Come, tinker," said Will Scarlet, letting fly a careless shaft as he spoke, which swept by at least four inches above the head of the thistle, — "come, tinker, and mend thy chance whilst thou mayest; for I promise thee, that my next arrow shall be much nearer the mark."

The stout tinker took his stand at the appointed station, and delivered his shaft so fairly, that it glided over the centre of the thistle, and was within two inches of sweeping off the tufted flower.

Much the Miller next shot, and carried off the end of a leaf, which stood so near to the ap-

pointed mark, that it seemed a marvel how his arrow could pass by without dividing the flower.

Several others also shot, each meeting with different success; but not one of them had exactly accomplished the task, although Arthur-a-Bland had scattered two or three fibres, which chanced to have fallen on one side.

Little John was the next that stepped forward, and delivered his shaft with a greater degree of caution, which proved so effective, as to sweep off the tufted-head of the thistle as cleanly as if it had been shorn; for what the broad head of the arrow loosened, the feathering of the shaft swept away.

“Well and yeomanly done,” exclaimed Robin Hood, who had narrowly watched every shaft which had been discharged. “By the mass! Will Scarlet, I do hope thou wilt as fairly and clearly acquit thyself on thy next mark.”

“That shall be seen,” said Little John, taking down a long-bow from a tree, on which several were hung. “Few, I trow, can hit this mark; I have but done it thrice in my time, and will again adventure, if even I miss.”

So saying, he half bent the bow, and step-

ping to where the target was always placed, he planted one end of it in the earth; which he rendered tolerably secure, by tramping around the loose soil, leaving the tightened bowstring to face the spot on which they stood to shoot, as the mark at which their arrows were to be directed.

“ I hold him a good archer,” said Little John, “ who shall split yonder bowstring with his shaft; and will give him the silver arrow which I won of the Leicestershire foresters, just for the love of seeing such a shot.”

“ I fear me,” replied Will Scarlet, glancing down his own bowstring with half-shut eye, to see that it fell truly in the centre,—“ I fear me that yonder bow will still retain its round string; though, by my faith! I would give up my first shot at a fat buck, or some holiday prize, to see such a mark fairly struck. Marry, I would not venture my neck on our captain clipping the string, albeit he is the surest to hit the white that ever took sight before shaft.”

“ By the love of our Lady! Will,” said Robin Hood, with a smile, “ an’ thy life depended upon my splitting yonder string, I should look narrowly before I let my arrow flee; and

yet, I trow, I should save thee, as I have done heretofore."

"That oaken branch," said the Pindar of Wakefield, "hath shot its sprays far out this sweet summer time, and even now throweth a shade over the half-seen bowstring; and yet," added he, looking up at the goodly oak, "'tis a splendid arm, and I would not that it were lopped off."

"Thy eyes are clear, Pindar," said Robin Hood, stepping forth and taking a narrow survey of the mark; "was the bough removed, the light would fall full on the string. It hath long shadowed our aim, and there is none other part of the glade so smooth, and right fitting for the practice of our archery as this, or the noble stem should not be removed. Bid Nat-of-the-wood bring forth his heaviest axe; for, by my fay! it will need some stubborn blows to bring it to the earth."

"Ye have no need to call him forth," said Walter-the-one-handed, who had stood carelessly leaning on his ponderous sword, and watching each archer deliver his shaft; "I will e'en make ye more space for the daylight to spread."

So saying, he uplifted the massy weapon with his iron arm, and, at the third stroke, the ponderous branch began to crash, and would have fallen on the erected bow, had not Walter thrown down his broad blade, and giving the huge bough a twist; he held it in his powerful gripe, when he had wrenched it from the tree. For a moment he poised the immense limb of the oak above his head, then threw it from him with great force, into the more open part of the glade. One of the small sprays struck the Tinker, and prostrated him to the earth: fortunately for the mender of pans, it was not the butt-end of the bough, or he never again would have tightened bowstring.

A loud shout of applause was raised by the outlaws, when they had witnessed this feat of strength; and even Margaret could not refrain from raising her voice, in approbation of the prowess of the one-handed Saxon. Edwin, too, felt his heart beat lighter, when he thought that he had been instrumental in aiding the escape of one, who was so well able to deal a blow into the deepest ranks of the enemy.

All things being once more in readiness, the outlaws again prepared themselves for the diffi-

cult task. Several, however, altogether declined to draw bowstring against such a mark, which one of them swore was as difficult to be seen, as the fulfilment of Tib-of-the-Trent's prophecies.

Little John was bound to venture a shaft at the hazardous mark which he had himself erected; and he took the precaution, before shooting, of selecting the straightest and clearest arrow from his sheaf, and of also waiting for the first bursting of one of the gentle breezes, which, every now and then sprung up, as if only to awaken the green leaves that seemed to slumber so peaceably beside each other.

Fairly and boldly, and with caution, did Little John take aim, and discharge his shaft; and so truly was it shot, that, although it struck not the string, it alighted bang in the centre of the bow. A little more to the left, and the arrow would have divided the string. The clapping of hands and loud huzzas of the outlaws, showed their satisfaction at the archer's skill; even Robin Hood lifted up his own voice to swell the applause.

Will Scarlet next stepped up to the allotted mark from whence they all shot; and every

breath seemed as hushed, and every voice as silent, as if their companions had been contending with the rival archers of other counties, instead of merely trying their skill among themselves. With all the coolness which was so essential to the furtherance of good archery, and with eye and arm firm to his purpose, Will delivered his shaft with the same success as his opponent; for it alighted on the other side of the bowstring, and also pierced the wood of the bow, leaving only the space of the string between the two arrows. He also received the plaudits of his companions, but not one of them would adventure another shot at so precarious a mark.

“By the love I bear towards strong ale and fat bucks!” quoth the Pindar of Wakefield, “I should as soon think of keeping a wild falcon in the pound, or overtaking a swift stag after having drank my tenth cup, as splitting yonder bow-string.”

“And I,” said the Tinker of Tickhill, with a shrug of the shoulder, “would as soon undertake to solder a hole up blindfolded, or clench a rivet in the dark; for, by St. Dunstan! who was both tinker and smith, I trow there is never

a wight in Christendom who can drive a shaft through yonder string."

"By St. Peter! who first taught us to take toll," said Much the Miller, "I should think it as easy to sift the bean flour from the wheaten, when they have been ground together, or to blow round the mill-sails with my own breath, as to shoot a shaft so near yonder mark, as those which are already discharged."

"And I," said Allan-a-Dale, "should just as soon hit yonder string, as get music out of the reeds and bulrushes, like Godfrey Pan; who, I dare be sworn, was a tinker, though he took afterwards to tending sheep in Arcady, some Thorpe or other in the Fens of Lincolnshire, I trow, where reeds are plentiful."

"Marry, and by my creed!" quoth Arthur-a-Bland, "I would as lief try to make leather from the rind of wild-crabs, (and I hold their skins somewhat of the thinnest to wear,) or shoot at the sky-lark, when it is singing far beyond ken in the clouds, and expect to bring it down, as to hit the silken bow-string."

"Nay, then, by my hope hereafter!" said Robin Hood, stepping up, "since ye all refuse to bend wood after yonder two shafts, which

seem so loath to be divided, why, I will e'en make one for the nonce, an' some of ye will split a headless shaft with me after."

So saying, and without further delay, he took an arrow at random from his sheaf, and drove it clean through the centre of the bowstring, piercing even the wood beyond, and so closely wedged in between the heads of the other shafts, that they all three touched.

Long and loud were the acclamations that arose from the assembled outlaws, after this exploit, and Margaret failed not to show her admiration, but sent forth her sweet voice to swell the torrent of applause, while Edwin waved his helmet, and the tinker clapped his bony hands together, until they sounded like the clatter awakened by his own hammering.

The outlaw chief, having achieved this triumph, took the long sword, with which Walter-the-one-Handed had hewn down the ponderous oaken branch, and sticking it point downward, invited his merry men to split an headless shaft upon its edge. Not one of them, however, would adventure against so hazardous a mark; and Robin Hood was himself compelled to follow his previous and successful shot, which he

again did with the same caution and equally good fortune, splitting the headless arrow upon the edge of the sword, at the distance of six-score yards. Just then the daughter of Hereward the Saxon, accompanied by Druth and Royston Gower, entered the glade.

A deep gloom sat upon the brow of the dwarf, and there was a wildness in his eye, which added to the peculiar expression of his countenance, and the matted and shaggy hair that seemed as if thrown upon his head with a hay-fork in a slovenly manner, gave to his features the look of some savage monster, meditating mischief. He also grasped the massy cudgel, his constant companion, with a fierce firmness, as if he would fain bury his lumpy and mis-shapen fingers in the knurry wood. As he drew near to the outlaw chief, he swung the ponderous weapon round his head with a frightful velocity, which caused those who stood near him to spring to a safer distance, and leave a complete and vacant circle around him. At length the dwarf approached within arm's length to where Walter-the-one-Handed stood, resting his broad bony hand upon the hilt of the heavy sword, on which Robin Hood had

split the headless arrow. With the look of a maniac, Druth moved on without once observing the athletic Saxon, and still swinging the massy club around his head, while he continued to mutter to himself such words as were inaudible to those around him, until the ponderous cudgel was within a hand's-breadth of Walter's head.

Startled by the keen and sudden current of the air, which the rapid motion of the weapon had driven to his cheek, the one-handed Saxon sprang aside in an instant, and uplifting the heavy sword on which he had leant, he struck the club from the grasp of Druth, with such force that it flew through the air, and fell within a few feet of the spot where Margaret was seated.

The savage eyes of the dwarf seemed to flash forth fire, and he drew up his deformed figure like a tiger that is about to spring upon its prey, and stretched forth his hands, and clenched his teeth together, as if to give a fiercer and surer force to the deadly attack. Walter-the-one-Handed fixed his piercing eyes upon the dwarf, and threw down his weapon: scorning to take any unfair advantage; but only throwing out

his single sinewy arm, while his feet seemed rooted to the earth like a rock, as he stood immovable and ready to meet the expected shock of his opponent.

For a moment or two the lips of the dwarf quivered again with rage, and a dull ashy hue faded over his hideous features as he gazed upon his powerful antagonist; then passing his hand over his brow like one whose thoughts have been unconsciously wandering: in an instant he collected himself, and the gloominess of anger departed from his face.

“Art thou mad, Druth?” said Walter, in a deep tone of voice, “or what in the name of Saint Cuthbert could cause thee to bring thy weapon so near my skull? Assuredly thou must have known that it was not quite so hard as thy knotted cudgel, although it hath had blows enow, I wot, to have split asunder one of thinner material.”

“I cry thee mercy, good Walter,” answered the Dwarf; “but certes, my thoughts were wandering, I wist not whither, and I am right glad that I maimed not one whose strength we shall so much need in our new emprise. But in sooth I was thinking of the beautiful Edith, whose

retreat is discovered, and was, I trow, dealing imaginary blows for her rescue."

"Thou wilt do well to harvest thy strength until it is called for," said the One-handed Saxon: "but let us up and be doing. Where is the maiden held in thrall?"

Druth pointed to Royston Gower, and stated that he would lead them to where the man had appointed to be in waiting, as he was unable to point out the place of her imprisonment.

"Lead us onward to the rescue of the noble maiden!" exclaimed Will Scarlet, grasping his long bow firmer as he spake, as if he was already confronting those who held her in captivity. "It shall go hard if I dye not the feathers of my shaft in the heart's blood of some of her enemies."

"By him that died on the tree!" exclaimed Little John; "an' I drive not a bolt into some of their bodies, may I never bear bow again."

"We will spare neither life nor limb in the lady's cause!" said Robin Hood; "I would that we knew the strength of those we shall be opposed to. Knowest thou aught of the party into whose hands the maiden hath fallen?" inquired he of Royston.

“Not a jot do I know!” answered the old soldier; “the man bid me speed in God’s name, and I obeyed him.”

The news that some clue had been obtained which would lead to the liberation of Edith soon passed from mouth to mouth, and Royston Gower was one of the first to enrol himself amongst those who were to attempt her rescue. Edwin sat beside Margaret, to whom he communicated the tidings.

“I would fain strike a blow in the lady’s behalf!” said the high-minded youth, his eye kindling as he spoke; “for it behoveth all who aspire to the noble honours of chivalry, to peril themselves in the defence of the oppressed, and in especial, when a noble damsel is wrongfully detained, or in anywise hard bestead.”

“Do as it best pleaseth thee!” answered Margaret, placing her small white and beautiful fingers in the manly grasp of her lover, and throwing out a tender glance from her gentle dove-like eyes, very unbecoming of one wearing the dress of a page, but quite in keeping with a young woman deeply in love. “But remember, Edwin,” added she, “that thou seekest out no danger in which I must not be a partaker,

nor adventrest thyself, where I may not be beside thee."

"By the love I bear thee!" replied Edwin, grasping the hand of his fair companion, with an ardency which showed how dearly it was prized; "I dare not lead thee into danger, nor expose thy fair frame where blows are to be received and given; thou wilt abide my return here. Royston will soon again be beside thee, and here thou wilt at least be safe."

"And wouldst thou leave me in this wild scene alone," said Margaret, "imagining that a thousand evils had befallen you in your absence, or think you that I could bide at mine ease here, while you were exposing yourself to dangers, and might need some one by your side to caution you against adventuring too rashly?"

"Nay, then, let it be even as thou wilt," said Edwin, who could but ill muster courage enough to tear himself from an object which he so dearly loved. But just then, Robin Hood, and the daughter of Hereward the Saxon, drew near, for they had been conversing together ever since the latter had entered the glade.

"I have bethought me," said the outlaw, addressing Edwin, "of a shelter where your fair

companion may abide in all safety and comfort, even at the dwelling of Hereward the Saxon, the last spot where suspicion will alight, should her father even search for her."

Margaret looked up to Edwin for a reply, and there was something in her countenance which indicated that such a retreat would not be unwelcome.

"Humble, though our dwelling may be, lady!" said Elfrida, taking advantage of the short silence which reigned; "your welcome shall be sincere, and no pains spared to bring comfort to one, who, like yourself hath so often stood between us and danger; I know no one to whom my father would more gladly unbar his doors than to you and Sir Edwin."

Elfrida knew not, that while she was then speaking, her father was a prisoner, and about to appear before his greatest enemy, De Marchmont.

"I thank thee, kind maiden!" said Margaret, blushing deeply as she spoke, for her thoughts had wandered to the disguise she then wore. "I know of none other with whom I would sooner abide than thy worthy sire and thyself, and will gladly avail myself of thine offer until affairs

wear another aspect, providing I have Edwin's consent."

This was, of course, readily given, and Edwin agreed to accompany Margaret and Elfrida to the dwelling of the Saxon. It was, however, arranged that they should wait the return of Royston Gower, who was compelled to lead the outlaws to where the messenger waited. Robin Hood immediately set out to attempt the rescue of Edith, followed by Walter and the dwarf, and a numerous train, who gradually vanished among the deep foliage of the forest, each eager for the affray.

CHAPTER XI.

Angelo.—He must die to-morrow.

Isabella.—To-morrow? O, that's sudden! Spare him, spare him :

He's not prepared for death! Even for our kitchens
We kill the fowl of season: shall we serve heaven
With less respect than we do minister
To our gross selves?

Measure for Measure.

WHILE these measures were in progress for the deliverance of Edith, Hereward the Saxon was borne perforce to the palace, to answer before King John, and Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont for killing the royal hart. The monarch on that morning, was in one of his evil moods, for just before Hereward entered he had been informed of the tumult which had taken place at Mansfield, and of the contempt with

which his proclamation had been received. Neither were these all the circumstances which had transpired to ruffle his hasty temper. Cardinal Langton had issued forth the interdict, and divine service had every where ceased, excepting amongst those who were in favour with the king, and had some interest in setting at defiance the mandates of the pope. Several of the bishops had fled to the continent, after having laid such parts of the kingdom as they presided over, under sentence of the interdict.

King John was busied in issuing his orders for seizing upon all the lands, and revenues, abbeys, and benefices, of those who had obeyed the sentence: and a monk was making out the writs necessary for the fulfilment of these orders. Messengers were continually passing in and out of the apartment in which the monarch and De Marchmont were seated; together with several barons and knights, and officers of various orders.

“The lazy drones!” exclaimed the king, rising from his seat; “and he of Ely, too, whom I raised from the kennel to my own table, he must publish this bug-bear tale of the pope’s to frighten old fools into fits, and make grey-

beards pale over their prayers ! But, by God's teeth ! he of Rome shall find with whom he has to deal. I will be sworn that he hath taken me for one of the foolish, who run to kiss the cross on Good Fridays, or pray themselves hoarse over the mouldering relic of some ass who was sainted for his stupidity. Troweth he that the dead will slumber the less soundly in their graves, because a parcel of drunken and gormandising priests have not mumbled their unintelligible gibberish over them ? or that the whole sanctity of the church is worth the clipping of a silver penny ? Away, Fitz-Halbert," exclaimed he, raising his voice ; " take a plump of spears, and pierce through whoever dares to oppose your path ;—ransack the dens which these drones of the church too long have fouled. Leave neither pyx nor candlestick, bell nor book, nor gold enough to gild a finger of their trumpety images. Dictate to a king ! forsooth. They deem me a child in the pope's leading-strings, one that can just whisper his paternoster, and speak silkily of heaven ; but, by the depths to which they have damned the people, they shall yet find that I also can launch forth my thunder, and scorch with leven fire.

Wot ye of the fat incomings of the prior of Lenton?" inquired he, looking around for an answer.

"Two tuns of wine annually, for the celebration of mass, my Liege," answered the monk, who was on the look-out for preferment, "five hundred marks by the year for freeing the military vassals of the priory—the tenths of all produce, the ——"

"Enough," said the king, waving his hand peremptorily; "and ought, assuredly, to have been guerdon sufficient to have bound him to our interests. But no matter; their hives shall be explored, and themselves expelled from the plenty they have so ill deserved. By the soul of my father! they shall know with whom they have to deal. And that proud cardinal hath, I trow, retreated with these hornets to their foreign nest, where they may more securely hatch treason. But let them look to it. Servants of the church although they be, I will seize upon their kindred for hostages; and, by the thunder of heaven! have them trodden to death by my war-horses, if they break faith so widely with me."

"The cardinal, my liege," said the insinu-

ating monk, "yet abideth at the priory hard by, and hath, as I am given to understand, visited several of the thorpes and hamlets adjacent, and of his own authority forbidden all May-games and pastoral sports, of whatsoever kind, under penalty of threatened excommunication."

"I would to God, that the hand of some one would reach to his very ——." He paused, and his countenance became pale as death, for just then his eye fell upon a richly illuminated volume,—the plunder of some neighbouring abbey.

The book, which was written in Saxon, and entitled, "Examples of True Penance," had fallen open, and revealed a gaudy illustration, where his father, Henry the Second, was pictured as kneeling before the shrine of Thomas-à-Becket, while two grim monks were lashing his naked shoulders. The design did not lack crimson gashes, nor was there any want of tears, which, when compared with the size of the royal penitent's head, together with their colour, resembled golden-pippins. Whether the holy father who had laboured over this production was a wag, and had conjured the

kingly tears into golden pieces, thereby indicating the penitential drops which were then most dear to mother church, our story sayeth not.

Rude, however, as the sketch was, it had the effect of startling the conscience of King John, and the monarch had several times paced the length of the apartment before he again spoke, or deigned to notice any one present. Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont, whose keen eye first caught the object, which had so suddenly disturbed the mind of the king, closed the richly-bound volume, and with a tact, which would do honour to the most tender keeper of a royal conscience, thus directed the conversation into a new channel:—

“It were but fitting, my Liege,” said the baron, “that some inquiry should be set on foot, and some example made among the vermin-like rabble, who have had the audacity to molest your servants while issuing the royal proclamation. For, by my knighthood! an’ these tumults are not quelled, it will be unsafe to venture abroad.”

“Let the ringleaders swing on the highest oaks in Sherwood,” answered the king, “with-

out either hearing or trial, as a terror to the remnant of this scum of mankind."

Just then a messenger entered, and making a low genuflection, said, "Several of the forest-rangers wait without, and crave leave to bring before your majesty the prisoner now in their keeping, who hath within this hour, before their own eyes, slain the hart-royal proclaimed."

"Let him be hung without delay," said the savage king; "we will hear their tale anon; meantime, let the audacious wretch be led to instant execution. Marry, my vengeance hath at last alighted upon a right mark; lead him to death without delay."

"Were it not better, my liege," said De Marchmont, "that he were allowed fair trial before the court of Eyre, where his sentence will be given publicly, and our names suffer not a jot from doing such an act of justice? Such an example might do somewhat towards humbling the arrogance of the peasantry."

"We will first see who hath had the daring to do such a deed," said the king. "Bring in the knave, that we may behold him. By the Holy Virgin! he must needs show a bold front who hath done this act, and setteth but little

store, I trow, by either life or limb. Ah! In God's name, can this be the very Saxon who, but two days ago, made such a bold stand in our own presence?" exclaimed he, lifting up his eyes in astonishment as Hereward appeared.

"The same, my liege," answered De Marchmont, casting a brutal and malicious smile of triumph on the prisoner as he spoke. "I rightly deemed how well he would deserve the kindness which your majesty extended towards him. Witness the present deed.

"False-hearted Norman!" exclaimed Hereward, extricating his arm, by a sudden jerk from the grasp of one of the keepers who held him, and shaking his clenched fist in defiance at the baron; "my deed is one which I am not ashamed to confess, knowing that it was not willingly done; but thine was cowardly and devilish, and but became a robber and a villain like thyself. Nay, thou mayest knit thy brows; I fear thee not. I tell thee boldly before this assembly, that thou didst order thy followers to waylay me when last I returned from this place, with the grant by which I hold my possessions. Nay, more; I tell thee that one of them was left dead on the spot, and another yet lives, and

will swear to what I have spoken,—that you, Geoffrey de Marchmont, bade them take away my life in the forest, and possess themselves of the document which hath been a bar to your avarice; and that, too, after I had been discharged honourably from the king's presence."

It is almost impossible to describe the angry and yet guilty look of the baron, as the undaunted Saxon uttered his accusation. The lips of the Norman quivered again with rage, and his deep-set eyes seemed to flash with fire, so fiercely and angrily did they roll under the lowering and shaggy brows; which might not unaptly be compared to the blackening of the thunder-cloud above the red destroying lightning. Twice did he attempt to speak; but the bursting of his passion was like a floating mass of ice, borne furiously along by the river current, until it comes crash against the unyielding pillars of some bridge, and presses its force upon the arches, which it is too bulky to pass. At first, his ready fingers flew to the dagger which was stuck in his belt, leaving no doubt of his intentions, which could only have been checked by the recollection, that where he stood was an unfavourable place. Then his hands became

clenched, as if he held something deadly in his grasp, and was squeezing it with all the strength of bitter hatred. Even King John, and all who were present, gazed in astonishment at the storm of passion with which he seemed contending; and there were those amongst them who doubted not his guilt.

“Art thou bewitched?” said the king, “or are we to hold thee guilty of the crime laid to thy charge? Assuredly we cannot give credence to what this Saxon hath now said; speak, and let us know the extent of this matter. For, by all the blood of battle! he escapeth not the deed he hath done, in the very teeth of our proclamation, though we are bound to sift his accusation against thee.”

“I—I—know nothing of the matter he hath spoken of,” stammered forth De Marchmont, in a tone of voice, which before discriminating judges would have gone far to have confirmed his guilt: “what vantage could I reap by shedding the blood of a thousand such low-born churls as himself? Nay, your majesty is witness, that but even now I interceded in behalf of his life, although the crime which he hath this day done calls for instant death.”

“Thou hast spoken truly,” said the king, not thinking it worth while to remember that De Marchmont was as ignorant of who the prisoner might be, until he appeared, as the king himself. “What sayest thou, Saxon? Hast thou aught to urge in thy defence against killing the hart proclaimed.”

“Nothing,” answered Hereward, “saving that I knew not of the proclamation; and had I heard it, should have been at a loss to distinguish the hart from another of the same age and size in the herd.”

“Ah! speakest thou thus boldly in our presence?” exclaimed the king, with a bitter scowl.

“I speak but the truth,” answered the undaunted Saxon; “it is nought unusual for harts of that growth to wander and feed alone; beside, I killed him on my own homestead, agreeable to the privilege stated in my grant, and not within the boundary of the forest.”

“For which thou shalt assuredly die on the morrow,” said the king, in a solemn tone: “thou hast killed the hart in despite of our proclamation, for the which the law holds thy life forfeited; nor will I transgress one jot or tittle of the forest charter, which was drawn up by my an-

cestors for the preservation of their rights in hunting."

"I am true Thane-born and free," answered Hereward; "and as such, demand the right of trial. I deny not the charge urged against me. But that I have broken one point of the law by which I hold my possession, I do deny, and am prepared to prove the same in the court of Eyre; or, if that is denied me, to make good with my own sword what I have said."

"Dost think, then, to contest a point in which thou already acknowledgest thyself guilty?" said the king. "Hadst thou denied the charge, we might have given thee the privilege of trial by ordeal, and seen if thou wouldst have escaped scathless from fire and water. I tell thee that both the law, and thine own confession have already doomed thee to death. For which I bid thee prepare thyself speedily; for, by God's birth, there is nothing under the face of heaven can save thee."

"It were better, my liege," said De Marchmont, well knowing that the trial would but be a mere form, as he himself was Lord Chief Justice of the court of Eyre,—“It were better that your majesty permitted him the privilege of

trial, seeing that the justice of the sentence which you have already pronounced, would then be fairly confirmed in the eyes of the people. And that the court will be holden on the second day after the present."

"Then let it be so, in God's name," said the king; "and in the meantime prepare thyself for the accusation, which the Saxon hath already laid to thy charge. I would fain see this follower of thine, De Marchmont: who is so ready to swear that it was by thy orders he and his fellows waylaid the Saxon. I would not that those present went away with the impression of your being guilty in this matter, after having in all honour denied the same."

What motive could induce King John to act thus, might be difficult to fathom, were it not well known that he sought every opportunity of humbling those who approached him, of all degrees; and that of no one's power was he more jealous than De Marchmont's. Moreover, that inherent love of retaliation upon those who had opposed his most trifling wishes, and the hopes of catching the wily baron in his own snare, did more towards his acceding to the affected solicitation of De Marchmont than

any reason which the latter had urged. Nor would the crafty Norman have again adverted to the trial, had he not thought that the affair of attacking Hereward had been forgotten by the king, and would in some measure serve to cloak his own feelings towards the Saxon. As it was, however, he had no alternative, but, at least, to appear to accede to the monarch's proposition, and merely said, as Hereward was led away to the donjon until his trial, "I shall not marvel, my liege, at aught that may be advanced against me; for by the word of a true knight, I doubt not but this Saxon, by the aid of the outlaws, has won over my attendants. Nevertheless, it will be seen that the knave hath laid some deep plot against mine honour, which your majesty will at once see through."

"And Edith," said the king, without deigning to reply to what the baron had said, "is there no tidings of the maiden, or hath she also been beset in the forest? But you, my lord," added he, with a sneer, and turning to the Norman, "know nothing I trow of the matter."

"I have already answered that question, my Liege," said the fiery baron, in a tone of defiance,

“and in such a manner that none, saving yourself, would have dared again to repeat it.”

“Nay, nay! be not wroth,” said King John, hastily; “it cannot be too great a privilege, for sooth! for a king to enquire after his subjects, and that, too, when one of them is ward to the crown, and hath been conjured away we know not how. But where, in the name of our lady, is the constable of Chester?—and the Earl of Eltham? Have they taken fright at this interdict, which is as full of terrors as a nurse’s tale, and deserted us at our utmost need?”

No one had heard any tidings of them; and as the question was put, as much to evade replying to De Marchmont’s angry remark, as for any information, not one thought it of much consequence to reply. And the king again resumed his occupation, in giving orders for the confiscating of the estates of the bishops, and those who had in any measure adhered to the sentence of the interdict.

CHAPTER XII.

'Tis chastity, —————
She that has that, is clad in complete steel;
And, like a quivered Nymph, with arrows keen,
May trace huge forests, and unharboured heaths,
Infamous hills, and sandy perilous wilds ;
Where, through the sacred rays of Chastity,
No savage fierce, banditt, or mountaineer,
Will dare to soil her virgin purity.
Yea there, where very desolation dwells,
By grots, and caverns shagged with horrid shades,
She may pass on with unblenched majesty.

MILTON.

THE Earl of Eltham, accompanied by the young knight who had so generously aided in the search of Edith, had traversed the northern extremity of the forest since their departure from the dwelling of the physician, and were still in quest of the lady at the time when

we again bring them before our readers. Both the knights had been in their saddles since sunrise; nor had they as yet broken their fast, although the sun had climbed high into the clear blue arch of heaven, for it was near noon. Thousands of winged insects blew their humming horns in the air, as they spread their tiny pinions in the warm forest-paths, or flew in clouds around the burnished helmets of the horsemen.

The road which the riders pursued skirted a kind of woody meadow-land, beyond which rose the forest in the distance, gloomy and grand, and towering like a huge mountain-range beside the sky. Here and there the tops of the tallest and remotest trees fell back as if upon the clouds, and wore a deep black tint, that would have seemed terrible, had it not been softened by a blue mistiness, which also overhung the mingling purple that sprang from the darker masses. This again had diffused its hues into a sloping bank of branches of a deepish green, that spread far along until it caught a broad, mellow, and sudden flood of sunshine, that gave to the tops of the lower trees the appearance of a field of waving golden

foliage. At length their path brought them to a grange, before which spread a narrow moat or ditch, and great was their astonishment, at beholding two men-at-arms, pacing to and fro, on the opposite embankment.

“Halloo, sir sentinel!” shouted the earl, as he and his companion reined in their steeds opposite the uplifted bridge; “lower that wooden hobby-horse of yours, which stands poking its straight shaven limbs out, as if impatient to fall across, and give us a welcome to your larder? Be speedy and lower the bridge, which, if it bears us safely over, we will speak well of; though, by my fay, it hath but a slender and ricketty look!”

“And is, moreover, unaccustomed to bear those across, who seem to demand what they ought humbly to crave,” replied one of the soldiers, taking up the chain of the bridge another link as he spoke, as if he had no wish for its nearer approximation to our travellers.

“Thou dost not mean, knave, that we should crave that refreshment from thy hand, which thy master would feel himself honoured in offering to us?” said the earl, causing his steed to rear on the verge of the moat, as if he intended

to bound across, and chastise what he deemed the insolence of the sentry.

“Hearken, friend boaster,” answered the soldier, “we have more than enow in this small place already, and it may be that your intruding hither, at this time, might be of more consequence to yourselves, than the value of refreshment would be found either to you or your steeds. Take my advice and journey further.”

“Now, by the true Lord!” said the earl, “thou hast decided for me in this matter. And, albeit, I might spare thy scanty stores, yet will I make myself acquainted with the danger of which you hint, before we separate. Once more I bid thee lower the bridge, or, by the thunder of God! I will clear the ditch and cleave asunder thy skull.”

“Go thy way, mighty skull-cleaver!” replied the soldier tauntingly. “I tell thee, my fine King Arthur, that thine insolence will save us thy share of the feast, and that all you will obtain will be a sight of the spit, and, mayhap, a taste to boot, unless you are speedily gone; I will lower no bridge to a braggart.” So saying, the soldier fixed one end of his spear in the bank, and held the point in a line with that of

the horse's chest, should the rider fulfil his threat and leap the moat.

Scarcely had the soldier put himself in a defensive posture, and his companion brought down his spear with the same intent, before the young knight dashed the spurs into his steed, and accomplished what the earl himself was preparing to achieve; for he cleared the narrow moat at a bound, and struck off the spear-head with a single blow of his sword; and, in another moment, the blade was at the throat of the other sentry, who fell on the bank, and offered no resistance.

Before the earl had time to follow his companion, an old woman had issued from a low doorway, which led into an angle of the building: she bore in her arms a vessel hooped with wood, the contents of which she was about to pour into a large stone trough, beside which several portly swine wallowed and stretched themselves, in all the indolence of piggish ease.

"God-a-mercy, and Mary Mother be our shield!" exclaimed the old dame, dropping her pail on the head of one of the swine as she spoke; and retracing her steps to the doorway,

which she held ajar, while she thus continued her comments—

“ God-a-mercy ! be ye Christian men, that point your swords at one another ? or are ye savage Saracens, come to shed human blood ? Might ye not as well try your swords on the throats of the swine ? they will just yield as much blood ; and if ye are misbelieving Jews, sure ye will be ridding yourselves of an abomination, and they will do as well to cure and eat after, while, in very truth, we can do naught with dead men.”

“ We are neither Jews, nor Saracens, worthy dame !” said the knight, lowering the narrow draw-bridge as he spoke, that the earl might pass ; “ we did but crave some refreshment from these over-fed knaves, having kept our saddles since sun-rise, and as thou mayest guess, lost nothing of our appetites ; but they, a murrain on them ! refused to lower the bridge.”

“ Ah, marry !” quoth the old housewife, “ then it is time for the dame to be budging, if the like of them begin to set up for masters, and to say who shall go, and who come. By St. Withold ! I am now cursed with more than a score of them, and if they bide a week longer

my rafters will be as clear of bacon, as a priest's heart is of self-denial over a flask and pasty. And to deny such knights as you seem to boot, by my troth! I would give cup and crust to the greatest impostor that ever bore crook, cockle-shell, and sandal, although some scores of them have never been out of sight of a green tree, or out of smell of an English hearth; and yet, be-shrew them! when they get hold of a cup of humming ale, they talk sweetly about the Saracens. But pardon me, gentles; I am gossiping here when I had more need be setting forth my homely fare to quell your fasting. For, as father Philip saith, hunger is a fiend that taketh as much subduing as our evil thoughts, and needeth great support, lest the mind should dwell too long in anticipation of the food which perisheth; I pray you alight and refresh yourselves."

"Methinks, honest dame!" said the soldier, who had arisen, and seemed in no wise inclined to oppose his strength any further against the knights; "methinks, you would be acting wisely to acquaint our leader, that two strangers are without, before you venture to conduct them over the threshold; for, believe me, you will

get but small thanks for your trouble, should they become acquainted with what he would fain keep secret."

"And I also think, my brave broken spear!" answered the old woman, with an air of triumph, "that the leader you wot of, would be sparing of his compliments to your prowess, when he found that a brave knight had regained our strong hold without the aid of bridge, and in the very teeth of two spearmen. And, furthermore, my bold defender, I can tell thee, that I never yet had to ask permission, as to who should come and be seated at my board. My goodman, is no Theow, that I need to crave admittance for a guest. If thy leader liketh not my ways, he can journey further, and take the whole pack of you; for, by Holy Mary! ye are not worth a cup of beer-wort, excepting to guzzle and swill, like a herd of famished swine returning from the forest without mast."

"No matter, dame!" said the earl, "should this leader you speak of, begrudge us a share of that hospitality of which he is himself so largely partaking, we can but set him down for a churl, and cudgel him into courtesy."

"He hath other matters on hand at this mo-

ment, worthy knight!" said the old woman, with a knowing shake of the head, which was, however, lost upon our travellers. And she led the way into the mansion, having first called to a rough red-headed roguish-looking youth, (who was endeavouring to force a fat pig into the moat,) to attend to their horses.

We must, however, leave the horsemen for a few moments, and turn our attention to a scene within the dwelling, which had commenced about the time that the earl and his companion reached the moat; for this was none other than the mansion in which Edith of Lincoln was prisoner.

We left the beautiful maiden in her guarded apartments, into which a man in armour had intruded; and who, after having double-locked the door behind him, stood gazing on her in silence, with a glance so fixed and penetrating, that it caused Edith to quail, although only seen through the bars of the ventail. Edith had but just arisen; and as she had not retired to rest until sunrise, and her slumber had been broken by the noise made in forcing open the door of her room, and as her thoughts had been wandering in sleep, together with the sud-

den appearance of the intruder, no wonder that her fine features showed symptoms of alarm.

For a few moments the armed figure stood in silence, holding a sheet of parchment in his hand, as if at a loss for words, or ashamed of opening the mission which had brought him thither. Edith was the first to speak.

“Who art thou?” began the maiden, in a voice which but ill accorded with the boldness of her interrogation, as it faltered with the very fear which she attempted to conceal,—“Who art thou, that thus unceremoniously breakest into this chamber, which, although at present my prison, ought to be held in more esteem than the cell of a felon? What is thy business with me, that hath called forth this unknighly and ruffianly act?”

“To liberate thee, lady,” replied the man in an affected voice, which sounded frightful in the hollow helmet, “if the conditions which I offer meet thy fair approbation. They are terms proposed and approved of by the Constable of Chester.”

“And what may the conditions be,” enquired Edith, “on which I may hope for that liberty

of which I have been deprived, in the face of all law and honour?"

"They are here recorded," said the knight, delivering the parchment to Edith.

The maiden ran her eye attentively over the document; then returned it, exclaiming,

"I will never accept of my freedom on these terms. The man who has robbed me of the gift, which was but yesterday presented to me by the king, and wishes me to return it on such conditions as are here recorded, is a villain."

"Bethink you, lady," said the warrior sternly, "that you are but requested to return the jewelled cross to King John, with a request by the messenger that he will withdraw the pledge of your hand from De Marchmont, and bequeath it to one, who already loves you; and assuredly an alliance with John of Chester would not diminish your rank."

"John of Chester hath already had mine answer on this matter," said Edith. "I am no changling; my resolution is as fixed as a rock. I will maintain it, if I perish in so doing."

"But remember, proud maiden," said the man, "that he doth but solicit that which he

can compel thee to give. Thou art in his power, nor canst thou give thine hand to another. Be wise; a priest waiteth without,—he can unite you for the present; and the marriage-feast shall be kept up, and the ceremony renewed, in the cathedral of Lincoln.”

“Sooner shall the death-hymn be sung over me,” replied Edith, “than I will ever wed with a robber and a villain, and one who hath only got me into his possession by mean cunning and cowardice. I hold the Constable of Chester for ever degraded by this act, and will proclaim his cruelty and meanness throughout England.”

“That thou wilt never do,” replied the man. “He hath taken up a resolution, which will not be readily laid down; his purpose is as firm as the foundations of the earth. His wife thou shalt be; and if thou escapest him, it can only be by the dark door of death.”

“And doth he then think,” said Edith, her face wearing a mingled expression of fear and contempt, “that if, by brutal force, he compelled me to go through the mere forms of marriage, I should feel myself bound to be silent in the matter when I had escaped him; any more than the traveller, who under fear of his life while in

the hands of the robber, repeats the oath which is forced upon him, but feeleth not himself bound to fulfil the same? Or, doth he think that such an action would be countenanced by the law; that King John would slumber quietly on his throne, and not interfere; or that De Marchmont would not bestir himself in the matter? Or that my own vassals are so weak, as to look on at such tyranny and not strike a blow to be revenged? If he thinketh thus, then indeed do I pity his folly, as much as I detest him and despise his mean cowardice."

"Art thou resolved, maiden?" said the warrior, in a deep firm tone, which gave but little hope of his swerving from the propositions. "I await thine answer until the sunbeam, which is now passing o'er the parchment, leaveth it in shade; when that is darkened, prepare thyself for the ceremony. The priest is without, and the Constable of Chester will meet thee in the ruined chapel by the ravine."

"I am resolved," replied Edith. "My strength you may overcome, but my mind and will ye cannot overpower. My trust is in God and the Holy Mother."

Edith fixed her eyes on the increasing sha-

dow, but spoke not a word ; and the armed man also gazed upon it in silence, as he stood with his arms folded on his mail-covered breast. No sound for a few moments broke in upon the marble stillness of the apartment ; to Edith every thing around seemed listening, as if the very room had become possessed of feeling, and waited in suspense the progress of the sunbeam that was passing over the parchment. The maiden drew her breath quicker, as the document on which she was to have signed her fate grew darker. Once she dared to raise her lovely eyes to the helmet of her opponent, but no sign of relenting was to be found there. Her glance was returned ; and then the cold collected eyes, which gleamed through the barry visor, fell again upon the parchment.

At length a noise was heard in the adjoining room, which was divided from that in which Edith so calmly awaited her fate ; by a strong partition of oaken planks, so closely fitted together as to defy the keenest glance, saving at the top, and beyond any but a giant's height to overlook, where one of the strong boards had been removed. In this apartment Dame Long Glen was busied in setting out her best fare for

the earl and his companion, both of whom had entered at that period of time when Edith and her mailed companion were anxiously watching the declining sunbeam.

Scarcely had the two knights seated themselves at the massy oaken table, which was covered with good substantial cheer, before they were startled by a loud shriek from behind the partition, and heard a voice exclaiming,

“ Help! help! Villain, unhand me. Is there no one to take the part of a helpless maiden? Help!” and a shuffling of feet was heard, as if the opposing parties were struggling with each other.

Both the knights sprang from their seats in an instant,—the Earl of Eltham with the naked dagger in his hand which he was in the act of plunging into a large eel-pasty; his companion stood with his sword unsheathed, his head thrown back, and his eyes staring wildly, as if he had been startled by an apparition, or a voice from the grave. As he listened for a moment he exclaimed,

“ By my hope in God! that was the voice of Edith of Lincoln calling for aid.”

“ Thou art mad to say so,” said the earl;

“hearken once again. When hast thou ever heard her voice, or how comest thou to know her?”

They listened, and heard a rough voice say, “Thy struggles are useless here, maiden. They who hear thee will be more ready to aid in bearing thee away, than take thy part. Thou hadst best submit to thy fate quietly, for it grieveth me to have recourse to this force; but John of Chester awaits thee at the altar.”

“Where I will never meet him,” said Edith, and a sound was then heard as if one had fallen heavily on the floor, while the voice of the warrior exclaimed, “Rash girl, forbear! loose the dagger. Nay, then, thus will I——”

“It is, it is Edith, my own betrothed! To the rescue, noble earl;” but the earl heard not the voice of his companion. Twice had he run at the oaken partition, and struck it with his foot with the force of a mountain-bull, until even the rafters above shook again with the blow. His companion also lent his assistance; but all their efforts were in vain, and like true knights they thought not of either danger or the door, as they continued to persevere at the mark. The stranger knight, however, who seemed the

most impatient to rescue the maiden; by a powerful thrust with his shoulder overturned the heavy oaken table, and scattered the good things with which it was covered over the floor of the apartment. In an instant the brave earl flew to his assistance, and by their united efforts they swung the massy block to and fro; as they held it by the strong and quaintly-carved legs. With almost the force of a huge battering-ram came the weighty table-end against the oaken partition, which now began to creak and bend again like branches in the tempest.

The old dame had remained in the apartment, and heard the screams of the maiden as she called for aid, and witnessed the preparations of the knights for her rescue, in which she at last began to take as much interest as themselves. Nothing could be more ludicrous than her gestures of mingled grief and astonishment, when she witnessed the overthrow of the table, and all her choicest viands.

“Content ye, sir knights,” said the old woman, when first they arose at the call for help, “content ye, and I will go round and see that the maiden cometh to no harm. Marry! how thou kickest,” continued she, as the earl run

with full force at the wooden barrier. "By my troth! our old Hawthorn is nothing like thee for a kicker. Surely, if thou hadst fasted so long as thou hast said, thou couldst not kick with half that force. St. Cuthbert! if thou hadst but devoured a tithe of that pasty, my partition would have fallen before this. Holy Mother! art thou mad?" exclaimed she, when the young knight overthrew the huge table. "Gracious Heaven! it took six of our stoutest hinds to remove it, when we cleansed the floor after our last Christmas carousals; and here you come and wisp it over as if it were but a ducking-stool, and all the store of good things which I have set before you were no better than swine-mast. Mercy! would ye bring down the roof-tree on my head, and spoil all these provisions?" added she, stooping down to rescue a huge pasty which bore the foot-mark of the earl. "And here is a jar of honey as yellow as gold, and as sweet as ever bee gathered from woodbine or golden broom, strewing the floor as plentifully as hogs' blood at a killing-time, and I cannot save half a horn of it. And this pasty, filled with the whitest silver-bellied eels that ever made a blob in the Lene; and the crust,

as short as a Norman's temper, is kicked about and divided into as many bits as William the Bastard ever clove England into. And this fine boar's head, that looks as if it would turn round and bite me for the ill-usage it has sustained. And this flagon of good brown ale, strong enough to make a priest sing at Lent, is mixed with the bowl of richest milk that ever cat wet her whisker in. And this comes through being kind and hospitable, when another body would have bid you journey on.

“ St. Dunstan ! how they batter the old table against the partition,” said she, resting her hand on a huge wheaten loaf as she spoke, which, together with a dish of dried sea-fowl, had been hurled to the further end of the apartment. “ Ah !” added she, with a sigh, “ they have no love for any thing old-fashioned. They never think of the harvest-suppers, and Christmas-revels, and Easter-feasts, which have been eaten off that fine black old table, until it is coloured again with the fat of the land, and the torrents of berry-brown ale which have flooded it, when the chimes have been ringing merrily, and the bonfires blazing brightly.”

But the knights neither heard nor regarded

the old woman, as they still continued to batter at the strong barrier which divided them from Edith. At length the heavy supporters, or wooden pillars, to which the planks were secured by strong oaken pegs, gave way; one was broken asunder in the midst, and the strong tenacious fibres of the wood still hung together, like the ragged membranes of the toughest willow. Another blow, and the whole of the oaken division fell with a noise like thunder. A cloud of dust then arose, which prevented the discovery of any object for a few seconds. Neither of the knights, however, awaited the subsiding of the suffocating clouds, but sword in hand dashed over the fallen ruins to the rescue. During their exertions to gain an entrance into the apartment, the voice of the warrior was heard at times above the tumult, exclaiming, "What meaneth that uproar, knaves? Away! I need not your help." Then again, "Ho! ho! guard hither, Hugh, Roger, Everly, De Ripley, Thornhill. Speed, varlets! and silence this clamour."

But his words were lost amid the din and dust that followed, and when the knights had entered the room they beheld the warrior in the

act of quitting the apartment, and bearing the struggling maiden in his arms. Beyond the door-way which he was passing, and which opened into a low-arched passage, were several men in armour, with their weapons in their hands, as if they had hastily assembled : for wonder and confusion were depicted in their faces.

CHAPTER XIII.

Then echoed wildly, from within,
Of shout and scream, the mingled din,
And weapon clash, and maddening cry
Of those who kill, and those who die!

* * * * *

And forms were on the lattice cast,
That struck or struggled as they pass'd.

Rokeby.

It was scarcely the work of a moment for the young knight to rescue Edith from the ruffian who was bearing her off; for so infuriated was he, when he beheld the beautiful maiden struggling to release herself from the hold of her foe, that he rushed forward like an enraged lion, and uplifting a massy beam, which he had removed from his path, he struck the man-in-armour such a blow over his helmet, as brought

him down with one knee on the floor. While her enemy was falling, the knight caught Edith by one arm and uplifted her with as much ease as he would have done a child. The terrified damsel lifted up her tearful eyes and glanced hastily at her deliverer, and found herself pressed to the bosom of her own chosen lover, Sir Henry of Gloomglendell. She threw her arms involuntarily around his neck, while her beautiful head sunk upon his shoulder, and her long unbound hair, drooped in rich masses over his glittering armour, like clusters of silk over a mirror of silver.

Dearly would that hasty and fervent embrace have been bought, had not the brave Earl of Eltham thrown himself between the lovers and the open door-way, which was filled with the points of bristling spears, and uplifted swords. At the head of the assailants was the man-in-armour, his helmet now removed, as the bandage by which it was secured had been broken by the blow he had received : and the features of the constable of Chester were revealed under the disguise.

“ Ah ! have I met thee again ? ” exclaimed the earl, his brow darkening with rage. “ And

is it thou, cowardly oppressor, who, with a band of armed robbers at thy back, darest only to attack, and bear away an unoffending maiden, shrinking, even with all thy force, from the single arm of her protector. By the souls of my forefathers! I do but sully my knightly fame to cross swords with such a niddard, who is only worth a leathern thong, a tall tree, and the hand of a forest hangman."

"Which shall be thine own doom, proud braggart, ere the day darkens," replied the Constable, his lip quivering again with rage, and his voice hoarse with passion. "Hand to hand would I have met thee in the lists like a true knight, but thou hast thrust thine own head into the wolf's mouth, and I am not fool enough to forego the advantage I have over thee. Thy prowess I admit; but wert thou Sathanas himself, thy chance would be but a sorry one against the power which now opposes thee. Hell has sent thee hither that I might revel in full hatred of my revenge. Soldiers, strike deep! a pound of gold will I give to him who makes the widest rent for his soul to escape!" Saying which, he hastily resumed his helmet.

It was a fearful and perilous situation which the lovely Edith occupied, as she stood behind her lover and brave kinsman, an unwilling witness of that terrible contest. A javelin, which was hurled with furious speed, parted the silken ringlets of the maiden, and was within two inches of piercing her white, slender, and beautiful neck, which King John had compared to a pillar of ivory, and which, from a girl, had obtained her the epithet of Edith the "swan-necked."

The doorway, which the two knights so bravely defended (against a score of armed men) was built in an arch, and corresponded in form with the vaulted passage, which was occupied by the constable and his followers. There was no window at the further end of this archway, nor any other light, saving that which escaped through an open doorway in the midst of the passage, which led into the very apartment which the knights had at first occupied. The entrance, by which John of Chester's followers had arrived to his assistance, was through a winding gallery, the opening to which was comparatively dark.

The imagination could not conjure up a more

stirring or dangerous scene than that which presented itself in the vaulted and gloomy passage. The faces of the contending warriors wore a dull bronzy hue, while their weapons, as they were brandished to and fro, occasionally caught a ray of straggling light, which flashed back again upon their armour. Here and there was seen a contracted brow anxiously watching stroke upon stroke, while their bodies swayed hither and thither as if they themselves were dealing the blows in which they were so deeply interested, and which the narrowness of the passage prevented them from sharing in.

Foremost was the constable, wielding, with both hands, a weighty battle-axe, which cut many a deep stroke into the broad oaken plank, which the brave earl had snatched up hastily for a shield.

Beside the earl stood Henry Gloomglendell; and well did he maintain that fame which he had so deservedly won by his prowess, for his action resembled more the sweeping evolutions of the eagle, circling in its own airy element, than that of a man wielding a weighty weapon, and defending himself against a band of assailants. Sometimes he stepped up to the very

teeth of his enemies, and drove them back by dint of a few terrible blows. Then again he was by the side of the beautiful but dejected maiden, breathing a few words of hope and comfort, during the brief interval that his opponents gave back.

Well was it for John of Chester that his limbs were encased in armour, and that of the best, and that the earl had but his cross-handled sword, in place of that battle-axe, against which no mail had hitherto been proof. Like an infuriated bull, struggling to regain the lowing heifer beyond his ranged assailants, did the constable try to beat down the knights, and force his way to Edith ; but he had to deal with men who had never turned back on a foe, and whose hands were knit to their swords, until either death or victory decided the contest. Nor were the soldiers who supported the constable afraid of facing the knights, but as one or other of them were struck down and removed, their companions stepped readily into their places, in spite of the fate that awaited them.

Hitherto the blows had been dealt at random, each party stepping forward or retreating as chance seemed to direct ; but at length the

earl and constable came hand to hand, for Gloomglendell beat back every soldier that stepped forward to support their leader. In the centre of the doorway they stood front to front. The plume that decorated the helmet of Chester swept the low brow of the archway, as it waved to and fro in the contest, and his uplifted battle-axe glittered again in the light, as it rose and descended in quick succession, with such force as would have brought to the earth any other than the powerful warrior who withstood its blows.

The massy oaken plank which the earl interposed between himself and the searching strokes dealt by his enemy, was of such weight, that it seemed a marvel how one single arm could shift it, with as much apparent ease as if it had but been a light shield. The sword which he wielded passed harmless over the constable's mail, nor, in spite of all the blows he had struck, had it as yet loosened a rivet, or cut through a fastening of his armour; as for himself his breast alone was defended by a light habergeon, or breastplate.

As yet John of Chester had done nothing more than hack away portions of the temporary

shield, for so expert was the earl that he pushed it forward to receive every blow which was aimed at himself. At length De Lacy struck with all his force at the constable's helmet, such a blow as brought the mailed baron to the floor, while the earl's sword broke asunder within a few inches of the hilt.

A rush was instantly made by the constable's followers to pick up their fallen leader, and fortunate was it for Chester that they came to his aid, just as the earl was uplifting the oaken plank with both hands, and about to deal a blow, which would have crushed him in the armour, in which he was encased like a snail in its shell. The end of the plank, however, came in contact with one of Chester's followers, who seeing the danger, had thrown himself before his leader, and paid the penalty of death for his bravery.

Like a pack of retreating curs before a baited bull, which has broken from the stake, did the constable's followers fly before the rude but terrible weapon which the earl brandished, and during the moment of their retreat allowed him time to pick up the heavy battle-axe which had fallen from their leader's grasp when he was struck

down. But they fled only for a moment, like the ocean waves retreating from the shore, but to return again with greater force. Some there were, too, taking the hint from their leader, (who had recovered the momentary shock, which had but stunned him for an instant,) entered the door in the passage, and went round to the apartment from which the knights had forced their way to the rescue of Edith.

They were now beset both front and rear; and while the earl defended the entrance of the passage, Gloomglendell disputed the barrier formed by the piled ruins of the oaken partition and the massy table. But this could not last long; for the assailants, having seen the advantage which the earl possessed over them by his oaken weapon, betook themselves to the same mode of attack, and were speedily armed with beams and rafters, and other portions of the same materials, from some of which projected huge rusty nails and wooden pins.

Great was the skill which Gloomgendell displayed, in defending himself against his numerous assailants, as he parried one blow with the ponderous beam which he wielded, or sprung back to avoid another, and, while retreating,

taking aim at the same time for the next stroke he intended to deal.

Three or four of his opponents had succeeded, by this time, in making their way over the broken wood-work, and he had now enough to do in keeping them from within reach of Edith. One of them was bold enough to make a rush at the alarmed maiden, as she stood swaying herself to and fro in an attitude of sorrow, or lifting up her hands and eyes imploringly to heaven; but the watchful eye of Gloomglendell caught the motion, and he struck down the extended arms of the soldier, just as he was about to seize her, with such force, that they drooped stunned and useless by his side. The other three still maintained their ground, nor could the brave lover do more than defend himself against their attacks; for others were on the floor of the apartment, and about to bear off the maiden.

“To the rescue! to the rescue of Edith, noble earl!” shouted her lover; for De Lacy still maintained the pass of the doorway, as there were still several soldiers defending the passage, where he swung the terrible battle-axe before his enemies, nor yielded a foot of the floor, which

was already slippery with the blood he had spilt.

To step a few paces forward, and drive his assailants to the extremity of the passage, then suddenly close the door in the face of his foes, was scarcely the work of a moment; and, in another instant, he struck down two tall warriors, who were bearing away Edith. The rest fled, and left the knights for a short space sole possessors of the room; together with Edith, who lay as if lifeless upon the floor.

But this lasted not long; for the door was again forced open, and the Constable of Chester, with ten of his followers, rushed in, and ranged themselves along the end of the apartment. The knights exchanged a brief glance with each other, like men who see that their fate is hopeless.

Just then a horn was heard from without, blown with such force, that its doubling clamour rang through every room of the building; a loud shout, as if from many voices, next followed; and, in another instant, Robin Hood and his brave yeomen entered the apartment.

Not a blow was struck by either the constable or his followers, so astounded were they

by the sudden entrance of such formidable numbers ; for the outlaws drew up in triple columns before Chester's soldiers, and Walter-the-one-handed stood front to front with the constable, grasping the battle-axe which he had taken from De Marchmont at the field of Reeds.

A thousand contending feelings seemed to struggle together for expression in the constable's countenance, which quailed again beneath the fixed glance of the outlaw chief. As yet no one had spoken a word : the loud shout which the merry foresters had raised, on entering the apartments, had died away, and Edith stood leaning on the shoulder of her lover, and shedding tears of joy. The Earl of Eltham rested himself against a broken joist ; while the heaving of his broad chest, and the perspiration which was gathered on his brow, showed that his giant-strength had been put to its severest test.

At the entrance of the passage, and beside the shattered remains of the oaken partition, lay the bodies of those who had fallen in the struggle. Over one of these bent Druth, leaning upon his club ; and, from his position, one

would have deemed that he was deeply contemplating death, had not a nearer and narrower search, shown, that his deep-set eyes were looking out from under their fierce and shaggy brows at Edith and her lover.

“John of Chester,” said Robin Hood, at length breaking the silence, “were it not that thou dost belong to a noble order of knight-hood, base and unworthy as thou art, and that thou wilt have to answer before them for this foul and cowardly deed,—were it not for this,” added he, raising his voice until the roof rung again, “by my hope in the Mother of God! I would hang thee on the highest oak in Sherwood before the world was an hour older.”

“And thinkest thou, brave captain,” said Walter-the-one-handed, “that he will be dealt with according to his misdeeds, among those who are equally base as himself? How, trowest thou, could the bloody-minded De Marchmont lift up his voice against him, when he, in verity, appointed him to do this deed? or what, thinkest thou, would the heartless Norman King John do, more than laugh at it as a goodly jest? What wotteth he,” said the high-minded Saxon, pointing to the dead bodies on the floor,

“ of the blood spilt in the unjust quarrel of an oppressor, than that of a deer slaughtered in the chase? Nay, by the true Lord! he would sooner bestir himself to look into the death of a staggard. An’ thou be’est advised by me, thou wilt just let me smooth his hair with this battle-axe, then throw him into the moat with his blinded and foolish followers.”

“ That shall not be,” exclaimed the Earl of Eltham, stepping forth into the midst of the outlaws with his uplifted battle-axe, and dispersing their ranks on each side as he advanced, like a war-steed rushing through a corn-field to the charge. “ Hand to hand will I maintain my right to revenge, and yet wage war with him to the death in the tented lists. Ay, and maintain my quarrel with every knight of the order to which he belongs, should they gainsay me in this matter. Already have I thrown my gauntlet at his feet, and he hath this day whetted my appetite afresh. I thank ye, brave yeomen, for your timely interference, more on behalf of the noble maiden, whom ye have been the means of releasing, than for myself; for, had I fallen, it would have been like a true knight, in a just cause, and against unequal numbers.”

“ These are not grounds to quarrel with thee upon, noble earl,” said Robin Hood; “ but were our minds bent upon his death, not King John himself should rescue him from our hands. As it is, do with him what pleaseth thee best; there is no arm to which we would sooner trust this cause than thine own, although our one-handed friend hath seldom need to strike a second time.”

“ Were it not for thy former quarrel, noble earl,” said the young knight, approaching, “ he should yet feel how a Gloomglendell can strike in the cause of his betrothed. I would hold it the proudest day in my life, brave De Lacy, if thou wouldst trust this quarrel to my keeping.”

“ It may not be, valiant youth,” replied the earl; “ thou hast well won thy claim to the hand of Edith this day, hadst thou not won her heart long ago. By my knighthood! I honour thy courage the more, that thou didst win my favour before I knew that my companion in the forest, was the noble Henry of Gloomglendell.”

“ My sword hath never yet lagged in its sheath, when aught knightly hath stood before

its edge," said the Constable of Chester, unable to bridle his anger longer: "as for the keenness of the blade, ye might have ere this have been acquainted with it, had not these deer-stealers and forest-robbers have brought their most knightly aid."

"By the holy mass!" exclaimed Walter-the-one-handed, lifting up his battle-axe above the Constable of Chester, until the baron cowered beneath him like a partridge under the descending hawk, "an' thou darest to name thy cowardice beside the actions of those who were never found nidderrings, I will cleave thy false head in twain. Marry! thou hast need to boast, while only two knights were found fighting and unconquered, against thyself and above a score of thy fellows. Had we found thee in thine armour among the slain, we might then have thought that thine hand was as forward as thy tongue."

The Constable, either through pride or sullenness, remained silent after this rebuke, and stood with folded arms in the midst of his soldiers, still retaining his haughty look. Nor did his followers shew any symptoms of alarm, but gathered around their leader with menacing

frowns, as if ready to share either death or imprisonment by his side.

At that moment another voice was heard from without, exclaiming, "Why tarrieth the bride and bridegroom! I have drank their healths devoutly with the cellarer, even in spite of the interdict; having had their worldly prosperity much at heart over my cups, that I have endangered mine own spiritual welfare."

"How now, drunken friar and gormandizing priest," said Robin Hood, as father Clement staggered into the room, with a leathern bottle in his hand; "what doest thou in this assembly? Get thee gone to thy priory, and see that thou makest sure of the private postern; for, by the mass! an' thy superior findeth thee in this unholy state, he will mortify thy body with severe penance."

"Friend Outlaw," answered the friar, with a drunken shake of the head, "thou hast no charity. If I have quaffed a single cup for the welfare of others, it was that I might lighten their own souls of a greater load of iniquity, well knowing that they are forbidden to put the wine flask to their lips during the solemn interdict. I did but permit Luke, the cellarer, to empty two cups;

and lest he should plunge into too deep damnation, forced the contents of the flagon down mine own throat with a holy intent, saying, thus do I bear your iniquity. Nay, I even gave him absolution for what he had drunken, and left him in a state of lowly contrition on the floor. When wilt thou risk thy soul in such charity?"

"I fear me," answered the outlaw chief, "that thy charity covereth as great a load of sin as thou canst well walk under, and would advise thee to depart, and sleep thyself into penitence."

"Thou speakest truly," replied the friar; "and well may I exclaim, in the Vulgate, I have borne their burthens, and staggered under the load of their transgressions. But I have not yet executed my holy office, having been sent for, to bind two together in the blessed bonds of wedlock."

"Wert thou in a fitting state to perform so holy a ceremony," said Hugh de Lacy: "thou shouldst not depart without accomplishing it. Though thy doing so might perchance call forth the anger of King John, and thou mightest have to link another hand within the lady's, than that which would have forced itself into her grasp." The constable hung down his head and replied not.

“Marriage, worthy knight,” said the friar, “though forbidden to the servants of the church, by the blessed St. Dunstan! who I fear will be but little loved by our fair sisters in another world, is nevertheless a state of blessed beatitude. And I, miserable sinner! have been subject to the thoughts of love, even in the midst of my devotions. Nor can I even now look upon the benignant face of St. Agnes in my missal, without conjuring up the features of Bertha of Bawtry, even as she was when I walked by her side, to fetch up the lowing kine. Nay, the very form of the ox in the manger, pictured above my paternoster, brings to mind a red and white milcher, which was Bertha’s pride. But, alas! even her favourite kye was slaughtered and sold to our priory: nor would I have partaken of the beast, had it not been just after Lent.”

As friar Clement generally grew sentimental when in his cups, the outlaws listened with mock gravity, and one of them quietly suggested that, was St. Dunstan then on earth, he doubted not but his power would be much craved by the laymen.

While the friar thus engrossed the attention

of the outlaws, Robin Hood and the earl were consulting together. And Edith, who had again thrown the rich jewel around her neck, approached the brave archers, and with a blush on her cheek, expressed her thanks for their timely interference. At length Hugh de Lacy approached the constable of Chester, who was guarded by four of the yeomen, and said: "On the word of a knight, I would have thee answer me as to what part Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont took in this affair? Thy confession may be of some avail in lessening the blame, which at present rests with thyself."

"John of Chester, impeacheth not his companion in arms, at the bidding of any one," replied the constable, "when doing so would but benefit his own safety."

"I have heard from my kinswoman's own lips," continued the earl, "that thou hast endeavoured, by brutal force, to compel her to resign herself unto thy power. We now stand at mortal defiance; and although thou hast disgraced thy knighthood, yet am I willing to give thee the chance of fair combat, either here as thou standest, or in the open meadow, mounted and armed at all points." The constable paused as

if undecided whether or not to accept the challenge, while hue after hue, crimsoned and faded over his features, like the dying tints of a summer sunset.

At length he said, "I may not now accept your challenge. In the lists, and under the eye of King John, I will do my devoir."

"Strip the coward of his armour," said the earl, looking with hatred, and withering contempt at the constable; "let his shield be reversed, and send him forth as one unworthy to mingle again with true knights. By the nails of the cross, I do regret me, preventing the outlaws from putting their threat into execution."

The archers readily did the earl's bidding, in spite of the menaces of the constable's followers. Nor did John of Chester offer any resistance to his rude grooms, but only exclaimed, as he left the apartment, "I shall yet meet thee, proud earl, where I may repay thy courtesy!"

Hugh de Lacy answered not, but again resumed his station beside Edith.

"I thank thee, good Druth," said the maiden, approaching and extending her fair

hand to the dwarf, who had seated himself upon one of the fallen rafters, and seemed buried in his own thoughts; "I thank thee for having so well redeemed thy pledge, and trust that thou wilt guide the daughter of Hereward to my presence, that I may also acknowledge her kindnes for having aided me this day."

The dwarf muttered something which was inaudible, and without pressing the white fingers to his lips, paid his salute to the empty air between himself and the lady, as if he was unworthy to touch her. Edith smiled at the dwarf's modesty, as he made a low obeisance and departed.

Robin Hood also led forth his gallant band, having exchanged mutual good-wishes with the knights, who also speedily departed with Edith to the Priory of Newstead. The day was again fast declining, and the blue mantle of twilight gradually enveloped the silent forest, before the little cavalcade had reached the end of their journey.

CHAPTER XIV.

Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs ;
Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.
Let's choose executors, and talk of wills ;
And yet not so,—for what can we bequeathe,
Save our deposed bodies to the ground :
Our lands, our lives, and all are Bolingbroke's.

King Richard II.

HEREWARD the Saxon still remained prisoner, and was compelled to await his trial until the meeting of the court of Eyre ; nor did his daughter Elfrida gain any tidings of her father's fate until her return from the forest with Edwin and Margaret. On their arrival at the Saxon's mansion, they discovered Elwerwolf pacing the apartment with rapid steps ; her long grey hair

was unbound, and she swung her arms to and fro like a maniac. When Edwin entered the apartment she paused, and fixing her cold grey eyes alternately on him and Margaret, began to mutter to herself such words as were inaudible to any beside.

“How now, good mother,” said the Saxon maiden, looking kindly at the old hag, “have you no kind salutation to offer to the heir of Clifton, or has the suit of armour so altered his appearance that you know him not in his new guise?”

“Mine eyes are not yet so dim, maiden,” replied Elwerwolf, fixing her searching glance on Margaret de Marchmont, who still wore the dress of a page, “but that they can yet peer through any disguise. Thou mayest blush, maiden,” added she, for Margaret’s cheeks had assumed the colour of the bramble-rose; “but if thou regardest the safety of Edwin de Clifton, thou wilt return to thy father’s castle before the day goes down, for there is evil abroad, and thy absence may peradventure turn it from this youth. As for myself I fear it not, for my hour is near at hand. The warning voice hath approached even to mine ear.”

✱

“ They go not, were they willing,” said Elfrida, “ without first seeing my father. Where tarrieth he ? He is not wont to remain a-field, when it is time for the mid-day meal !”

“ He hath not yet broken his morning-bread within these walls,” replied Elwerwolf, in her most solemn tone, “ nor hath his shadow darkened the threshold since sunrise. Brandel sat barking at the gate, and awaited his return, until the faithful hound was weary with watching. Thy father is in the hands of his enemies. The Norman king, and the savage baron De Marchmont, have now power over him, for he hath slain the proclaimed hart, and his doom will, I fear, be death.”

“ Holy Virgin, forbid it !” exclaimed Elfrida, grasping the massy table for support. “ It cannot be that they are so cruel. I will hasten and throw myself before the king. Saxon although I am, he will not look on my tears without pity. I will not arise until he hath forgiven my father.”

“ Let us go together,” said Margaret, seizing Elfrida’s hand. “ I also will plead with my father. I will kneel and conjure him, by the image of my angel-mother, to set Hereward

free. Hasten, and let us begone. I am a free-born maiden, and the king will not refuse me audience."

"In God's name! let us speed, then," said Edwin, putting on his helmet. "Although I cannot plead, my sword may be of some service; and, by the holy saints! I know none in whose cause I would sooner strike a blow than the honest Saxon's."

"Stay!" exclaimed Elwerwolf, placing her skinny hand upon the hood which the Saxon maiden was about to don. "As well might you throw yourselves before a wolf ravenous for prey, and hope to be spared; or stand in the path of a lioness which has lost her young, and think to be left scatheless. The Norman already hungereth for thy father's possessions. The king hath long been looking for some victim to sacrifice to his vengeance, for the loss of the dun herds which are yearly slain in the forest. Thy father lacketh not friends—many a strong arm, and ready hand, resteth within these greenwood fastnesses, which Hereward's name will nerve. Thou wilt sue for mercy in vain; but should he be condemned, it may be that there is power enough

in these forests to save him. Hearken!" said she, listening, "I hear the tramp of horses, and the ringing of armour. Edwin, save thyself. De Marchmont's followers have long been in search of thee, and it may be that some one has watched you hither."

"Not a step will I stir," answered Edwin, unsheathing his sword, "to leave these maidens alone and undefended."

And ere he could say more, Royston Gower, who had been looking after the horses, entered the apartment, exclaiming,

"Fly, Sir Edwin, De Marchmont's soldiers are already within the gates."

But the young warrior stood unmoved as a rock, while half-a-score men in arms, grasping spears and swords, stepped without interruption into the apartment.

"By the belt of St. Christopher!" exclaimed the foremost, "but here is more game than we thought hidden in this covert. Who, in the name of Sathanas, would have dreamed of finding such fawns in the cavern of the wolf. Nay! nay! Mistress Margaret, ye need not to colour so," added he, touching her lightly on the shoulder; "I have not carried you in my

arms so many times on the battlements to see the sun set, but what I can remember your face."

"Come, come! friend Royston," said another, "you need not to turn your face from us as if one could not swear to those broad shoulders and bony arms in the dark. You have kept us close enough to our saddles of late; nor have we much hope of quitting either bridle or stirrup, until our master has seen you shorter by the head."

The leader approached Royston, and whispered something in his ear.

"Never!" answered the old crusader, extending his hand, and speaking in a low tone of voice; "thou shalt see that a soldier will stick as closely to the new duty, which his own conscience hath marked out, as if he was under the obedience of the bravest chieftain."

"An' thou preferrest thy honour to thy life," replied Anlof. "I have said my say, and, mayhap, something more than becomes my duty."

"I would have done as much for thyself," replied Royston, "and thou wouldst have rejected the offer as I do now. We but traverse

the highway of death once, and surely a journey which we are not called upon to take every day, ought to be done becomingly."

"I honour thy heart in this matter," replied the leader; "but beshrew me, if I reverence thine head."

"May I never hear matins again!" said one of the soldiers, "if we do not find an old acquaintance hidden under that suit of armour. Come, Master Page, doff your glittering helmet, and let us look at that bashful face of yours. By my love of woman's lips, you showed yourself a bold hawk, to pounce on such a quarry, and fly off with the mistress, when others would have hovered round, a long summer-day, before they dared to have put their talons on the maid."

"I doff my helmet at no one's bidding," answered Edwin, "and caution thee to keep thy tongue within narrower limits, or thou mayest provoke me to break a few of thy bones."

"Ha! ha! ha! well done my little cup-bearer," replied the soldier, laughing; "so thou thinkest my bones are about the substance of a sparrow's, and that thou couldst as easily crush them. Well! well! I forgive thee! for

since thou hast been hunting for black-berries in the forest with Lady Margaret, perchance thou hast drawn thy sword against some fox's cub, and the victory has made thee valorous."

"I will show thee how I dealt with the remainder of the litter," said Edwin, stepping up with his fist clenched, and dealing the man such a hearty blow on the helmet, that he staggered for the space of several feet; then fell with such force on the floor, that the blood gushed from his mouth.

"Well and fairly hit," said one of the soldiers, stooping to pick up his fallen comrade; "Marry! but thou hast struck him hard; and a few more such blows would soon have converted his helmet to a mortar, and his head to sausage meat. How now, Lightfoot?" added he, placing his companion on the settle; "but thy very name tells that thy heels were safe to come uppermost; thou hadst better been a Surefoot or a Broadfoot."

"Hey, by my faith!" said another, "or Harefoot, so that he had but been fleet enough to have escaped such a blow."

"Up man, and show thyself a Sigwulf," said another of his comrades, "thou mayest yet

obtain the victory. Thou callest thyself a Saxon too; come and I will lend thee mine arm, and be thy Earnulph; surely, thou wouldst show some defence for thine honour. Thou wilt not? well then, I will believe thee to be a descendant of Edgar the peaceable, and would advise thee to take to wife a woman named Wynfreda."

"They might then, perchance, beget a race of fox-cub killers," said another; "or instil valour enough in their brats to wage war with a field mouse."

The crest-fallen soldier, however, made no reply to these taunts, but sat with his eyes rivetted upon the floor."

"Come, let us bestir ourselves," said Anlof who had been appointed leader. "Our orders were to bear away this hag of the heath. Up, old parchment skin!" said he, laying hold of Elwerwolf; "the king would fain reward thee for thy achievements in witchcraft; and Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont give thee some recompense for the murrain thou hast lately spread among the flocks and herds. But whether it will be the burning plough-shares, a plunge into the river, or merely a thrust of thine arm

into a boiling cauldron, I know not. But some chance they will leave thee, I dare be sworn, to prove thine innocence. Though, by Saint Thomas! thou lookest more like a witch than Duskena of the Dark-valley; and she screamed like a thousand fiends before she had borne the red-hot bar three paces, though it weighed not more than a pound."

"Loose thy hold, monster!" exclaimed Edwin, stepping up and planting himself between the soldier and Elwerwolf; "shame on thee, to lay thine hand upon a woman; and one too, whose whole life has been a string of sorrows. Is it not enough that her hut was burnt upon the heath, and that she is compelled to seek shelter under the roof of another, in her old age? By the darkness of hell! I will thrust my sword down the throat of the next villain, who dares to lay hand upon her."

"Put up thy weapon, noble youth," said Elwerwolf, arising; "I have seen blood flow like water-runnels too often. I will obey the summons which these Norman slaves have brought. And dearly shall the baron, whom ye serve—" but her eye fell at that moment upon Margaret's, and she finished not the

sentence. "Well may they fly back to the laws of our Pagan ancestors," continued she, "and seek to render their reasons plausible before the ignorant and the superstitious. But their hearts are harder than those of the unbelieving Danes; and Heaven will avenge itself in due season. I knew that the hour of trial was at hand; but there are others who have to pass an ordeal which they expect not,—and those who shall tremble before the face of a woman, who have never blanched amid the storm of battle, or shaken before the pointed spear. They will see Elwerwolf too soon."

"Leave me not, good Elwerwolf!" said Elfrida, arising and wiping the tears from her eyes; "I shall have none to counsel me if thou goest; and my father," added she, with a deep sigh checking her swelling grief, "I fear me he hath fallen among those who have no mercy. Oh! I had fearful dreams all yesternight, such as were wont to haunt my sleep before my mother died."

"There is a hope, which we see not in our despair, my daughter!" replied Elwerwolf, lifting up her eyes towards heaven as she spoke. "And the blessed saints who are above, and the

good spirits that watch over us below, and preside over our fates, often turn aside the dangers which we think are about to burst upon our heads. The morning that comes in, clothed with clouds and thick gloom, often breaks out into the brightest day, and the clear and blue brow of a summer's sky, is, at times, suddenly darkened. We behold the mighty man of to-day, heralded and trumpeted through the streets; and on the morrow we hear the death-bell, proclaiming that he is no more. The proud hart that leads on the herd in the morning, is oft struck by the shaft of the hunter before even. Long and many have been the years that have passed over my head, and unnumbered the conflicts which these eyes have witnessed; yet, I would not wish to live and see the last handful of brave Saxons expelled from these forests, where they have so long and boldly made a stand against their invaders. They are few, but they yet retain their liberty, and when that is once lost, I would have them die, sooner than see them Norman slaves. Is it too much," added she, raising her voice, "that a Saxon should hold lands within this forest, or a poor woman of the same

race, have a home on the corner of a barren heath. Like the wolf, they have tasted blood, and cannot live unless they gorge upon it daily. They are rich and powerful, yet dissatisfied, while the Saxons are poor, and oppressed with heavy talliage, and heavier grievances. The Normans live in lofty castles stored with plenty, and rendered secure by moats and walls; yet, they begrudge the wild wastes and useless marshes which are scattered over with the reedy huts, and humble hovels of the Saxons. They revel in idleness and luxury, are all knights or nobles; while we eat of the bitter bread, nor look for aught beyond the appeasing of hunger. If the Saxon murmurs, he is beaten or imprisoned; if he resists, he is punished with death; yet, they who are the iron-hearted tax-masters, are but thieves and invaders, without a claim to a foot of that soil, which groans beneath their cruelties. Lead me on, ye Norman slaves!" continued she, walking into the midst of the soldiers, "and prolong the thread of your unenviable existence, by bearing another Saxon to death. They shall have the blood of Elwerwolf, for which they thirst; but, oh! they know not how dearly they will purchase it."

Four of the soldiers were Saxons, and showed no inclination to bestir themselves further in the matter, after having listened to the rambling discourse of Elwerwolf. Even the leader seemed at a loss how to proceed, not daring to return without Margaret and Edwin, whom he had thus unexpectedly found, after having scoured half the forest of Sherwood in search of them.

“ We return not without your company, Sir Page,” said the leader, “ nor would we wish to put your valour to a further test. The lady must also attend us ; nor dare we journey without our old companion Royston, though I should not have slept the less soundly to-night, if he had before this shown a pair of clean heels ; for that affair of the castle promiseth but little of mercy. But he is keeper of his own life.”

“ Thou meanest kindly, honest Anlof,” answered Royston, “ but I have been too long a soldier, to fear death ; and whether we take our last sleep over the battlements, are sent to rest on the battle-field, or drowned in crossing a moat, matters but little to one who has grown familiar with the face of death. De Marchmont shall never say that Royston Gower, who

has so often led his chosen spears into the thickest danger, was himself afraid to die. As for the new leader whose fortunes I have chosen to follow, it resteth with him to say, whether I fall here by his side, like a sworn soldier, or share the fate which is reserved for another day."

"I doubt not thy valour, brave Royston," replied Edwin, extending his mailed hand to the sturdy veteran; "nor have I cause to fear confronting either King John or any of his barons. Elwerwolf is determined upon returning with you," added he, addressing De Marchmont's followers, "nor shall I thwart her wishes. For the rest, they abide with me; unless there are those among you who will cross swords with Edwin of Clifton, and dispute the authority of your true lord."

The soldiers gazed in astonishment upon each other, when they heard this announcement; for they were not wholly ignorant of the slender tenure by which De Marchmont held his possessions, and had always been taught to believe that the rightful heir would one day return and claim his own. But they little deemed that the page, whom some of them had known ever since he was the height of a stag-hound, had

by birth a claim to the strong castle that overlooked the forest of Sherwood; and rightfully owned the rich broad acres, which spread for miles over hill and valley, around the base of the rock. Some tale the oldest peasants and tenants told, of the young Sir Edwin having been borne abroad, when a child, by a distant relative; and that he had, at an early age, entered into some religious order at Rome, and given up all claim to his possessions. Others rumoured that he had taken a vow, and could not come to his rich domains until he had visited the Holy Land. While there were a few who hesitated not to say, that he was perfecting himself in arms, and all the accomplishments of the age, at the gay court of Philip of France. But when he stood forth, and thus openly announced himself among De Marchmont's followers, there was something so earnest in his manner, that scarce one of them entertained a doubt of the truth of his statement.

“ I may not misbelieve you, Sir Edwin,” replied Anlof; “ and, as I was born vassal of your father's, I am bound to do your bidding. But, methinks, it were better that you at once appeared before the king, and made yourself

known; for, believe me, had we chanced to have met you, with our leader at our head, in these forest wilds, neither your name or claim would have been heard of again."

"He counselleth well, Sir Edwin," said Elwerwolf; "there is nothing more to be done until you have made yourself known. Fear not that you will lack proofs to establish your claim, or that any one will dare to interfere when your title is proven. I was mad to advise you to fly any other way than amid your equals; alone, and traversing these wilds, you might be cut off, and but few have knowledge of the deed. King John will be one of the first to welcome your appearance. Let Margaret accompany her father's followers, while yourself and Royston journey together."

"Nay, by the Holy Sepulchre! I leave her not," said Edwin; "we will brave her father's anger together, as we have done many a time ere now. Whatever is her doom, I have sworn to share it. When she fled her home with me, it was for myself alone; when I forsake her, may my name stand dishonoured for ever! We will meet our fate together."

"It is I alone that must sue for forgiveness,"

said Margaret, placing her small fair hand in that of Edwin's. " Deeply hath my father injured thee ; but, oh ! Edwin, thou canst not revenge thyself but through the bosom of his daughter. The same blow that strikes through the heart of the guilty, must pierce the breast of the innocent. Stern and cruel hath he been to others, but hath never nursed his anger against me. Day and night will I plead with thee to forgive him ; or betake myself to a nunnery, and spending my days in prayer and penance for his crimes, sue to heaven for his reconciliation with Sir Edwin de Clifton, and bury the love that I bore only to my father's page, in the deep silence and sorrow of my heart."

" Never, by the hallowed realms of heaven ! shalt thou leave me, unless we are torn asunder by force, and this arm hath lost all power to defend thee," said Edwin, kissing away the pearly tears, that seemed loath to leave their glittering fountains.—" Never, my dear Margaret, will I quit thee, until thou art my acknowledged bride. Sweet will be the remembrance of those days, when the page sighed his love in the ears of his mistress, and was beloved again. Had my life passed in a donjon, thy love were reward enough

to sweeten an eternal captivity; I served but where I adored."

"They speak not of my father," said Elfrida to herself; "but why sit I here, instead of sharing his captivity? He hath never been accustomed to the pent air of a prison; the forest-breeze that brought health to his frame, and freshness to his cheek, was not more free than himself. Elwerwolf sayeth truly; he lacketh not friends. But who will be found bold enough to storm the stronghold of a king, and risk their lives for his release, without any hope of saving him?" The maiden then drew the folds of her mantle closer around her, and throwing herself back in the rude settle, gave vent to her grief in a flood of tears.

"Dry up thy tears, daughter," said Elwerwolf, approaching her, "and let these Normans see, that a Saxon can yet bear all they have power to inflict. The steer laboureth patiently under the heaviest load; and even the dog, when he seeth that his master is down, gives himself up to death without resistance. Grief will not turn aside that which is to come, nor sorrow save us from danger, when the roof-tree is tumbling on our heads. Up and bestir thyself,"

continued she, in a lower tone. "Let the leader of the outlaws know how matters stand with us; and trust me, that if they threaten to terminate as we now fear, there will be harder blows struck than have awakened the echoes of old Sherwood for many a year. Take comfort, and do as I bid thee when we are gone." Saying which, the old woman embraced her, and then hastened the soldiers to depart.

"Get our steeds in readiness, Royston," said Edwin; "we will accompany them of our own accord. Better to know our doom at once, than thus to be kept in suspense. Boldly will I demand my rights; and it is not in merry England that a man possessing a good war-horse and a keen sword, with heart and hand ready at will, need fear of carving out that justice for himself that others may deny him. Quick, I would be gone."

"Even as it pleaseth thee, Sir Edwin," said Royston, departing. "For my part, I would as soon prefer being in the fire as on the spit; the only difference is, that one shall be done a little faster."

The cavalcade were soon in motion, and, as the distance was but short to the palace, Elwer-

wolf chose to walk ; nor did she lag much behind the horsemen, with her long and rapid strides, unless it was to fall back now and then, and converse with Edwin, who rode beside Margaret and brought up the rear. An hour's easy riding brought them through the wild and pleasant bridle-paths of the forest, and in safety to the residence of King John ; where we must leave them for a short space, to return to other actors in our history.

CHAPTER XV.

————— With grave
 Aspect he rose, and in his rising seemed
 A pillar of state: deep on his front engraven,
 Deliberation sat, and public care;
 And princely counsel in his face yet shone—
 ————— Sage he stood,
 With Atlantean shoulders, fit to bear
 The weight of mightiest monarchies: his look
 Drew audience, and attention, still as night.

MILTON.

THE interdict had, by this, come into full force; and King John, in order to counteract its influence, had given orders that feasts and merry-makings, should be held throughout England. He also emptied his coffers with an unsparing hand; not so much to contribute to the amusement of the people, or the furnishing of hogsheads of ale and roasted oxen, as to

show that he dare defy, and set at nought, the terrible edicts that were thundered from Rome. Around the neighbourhood of the court, and under his own eye, all was, of course, unusually gay, and there the greatest opposition was shown to the priests, and the most contempt showered upon the interdict.

Conjurors and fortune-tellers, throwers of daggers, and cups and balls, and those who were rumoured to have dealings with Sathanas, were assembled within the walls of Mansfield, where the king had made the most plentiful provision for their entertainment.

Many of the lower orders, both artisans and peasants, with a few of the wealthier landholders and burghers, had donned their holiday costume, to show that their feelings were more in accordance with the proclamation of the king, than that of the pope. Some of these, however, it must be remembered, formed a part of what is now termed the king's household, or fulfilled his orders, in furnishing forth the different articles of their manufacture, and other commodities used in the palace. These, as may be expected, were foremost to patronize the sports, and gather around dancing dogs and

bears, numbers of which were exhibited in the Market-place, and cut their various capers to the sound of shrill unmusical tabors. The ruder portion of the multitude were congregated around a bear which several curs were baiting, and they seemed highly delighted with his roars, and sallies, and tuggings at the stake, and the barking of the dogs. Jugglers, with their sleight-of-hand tricks, were there, and ballad-singers, some chaunting the praises of the king and defaming the pope. Merchandise was exposed in the various booths, beside which might be seen the keen-eyed Jew trying to allure the young maiden to the purchase of some richly-coloured silk, or other articles. Here and there, too, were seen the forms of an outlaw in disguise, laughing with the merriest, or escorting some lovely damsel through the busy scene.

Some were robed in the quaint May-day costumes, and personating the hobby-horse, fox, bear, and dragon, neighing, and bellowing, and butting against each other, much to the amusement of the spectators, and to the great horror of some monk or friar, who occasionally passed by, with downcast head and

folded arms. Among the group, though in a different dress to that which he before wore, was the same character who had set King John and all his courtiers at defiance on the morning of the chase, and who had escaped on the very steed which was intended for the King. He had long been on the look-out for some amusement, and at length found it in the person of Friar Clement, who, seated on a mule, was returning from some confessional with a jolly red face, which spoke but little in his favour for adhering to the rigid code of fast and penance, set forth in the interdict.

“Thy blessing, holy father,” said Rob of the Raven’s roost, for such he was called; “if, indeed, the pope hath not deprived thee of that holy power, when he sent the curse amongst us.”

“Hinder me not,” replied Father Clement, with a drunken hiccup; “I hold no communion with the accursed; I am fresh from mine office.”

“Aye, marry!” replied Rob, “were it any other than your reverence, we might be forgiven for holding them something more than fresh, and say that they were well nigh drunken. But will you not alight and partake of our

cheer, seeing that we have enough, and it is furnished forth by the king? who, if I comprehend mother church aright, we are bound to obey, even to the kindling of bonfires, or emptying hogsheads of ale."

"Had I not the fear of the pope in mine eyes, and a reverence for all he doth," replied the monk, "I would alight, not so much for the love of the fare, as to rid the town of this great incumbrance of drink and food: which, to aid in consuming, would be to hew down a mountain of sin, and in pity to bear a part of your iniquities."

"Ah, holy father!" exclaimed Rob, with an affected sigh; "they swallow the brown-beer and pasties with a greater relish than they would pardons, or any spiritual dose, that might come from the hands of the infallible father of Rome."

"They are sinful men, brother," answered the friar, making a lurch in his saddle as he spoke; "and would drink to the welfare of Beelzebub himself did they lack a pledge; forgetting that there is a season for all things, and that they should now be sad, when the land is in mourning."

“ Indeed, father, they would drink, were the conflagration of the world to take place,” said Rob, giving a roguish wink to those who had gathered around, “ in hopes that by moistening themselves, they might be proof against the flames. There are some of them,” added he, looking knowingly into the friar’s face, “ who have already drunk until they look like the moon after an eclipse, or a barren mountain in the sunset. Hear you, father, how they are chaunting their profane songs in the open air, at a time when others sing with closed doors.”

“ I will alight and rebuke them,” said the friar, putting on a stupid sober look, “ even as St. Dunstan rebuked the devil.” So saying, and with none of the steadiest step, he entered into the midst of the rabble, just as the hobby-horses were charging each other, and the bear was sending forth its gruffest growls.

“ How now, madmen !” exclaimed the monk, mounting on the head of a hogshead of ale, which was not yet broached ; “ know ye not that all feasting and merry-making is prohibited by his holiness the pope, and”——But before he could proceed any further, a smith, who had been foremost in throwing the hammer, struck

the head of the huge cask with such force, that, together with the weight of the friar, caused it to give way, and in went Father Clement up to the arm-pits in the liquor.

“ Now, by bread and ale !” said one, “ were that the infallible father himself, who, they tell us, neither eats nor drinks, methinks his garments would give the lie to his tongue ; seeing that they are conveying nourishment to his body, and that, too, of a stronger substance than the holy wafer.”

“ It is long since,” said another, “ that his garments were put in steep, or his stole washed. Marry ! they but had their heads shaved at first, to keep their hands close to the missal ; as they were ever before fumbling at their crowns, and busier there than their thoughts were on prayers. It is pity that he has not a show of candles around him, just to set him off like the images of the saints.”

“ And how could you hope to find their garments clean ?” exclaimed a tall brown woman, who was stooping down, and teaching her little toad-coloured child to dance, beside one of the dogs. “ Did not St. Dunstan drive all the women from among them ? and what are you men

without a woman, to take your garments to the brook, and bleach them after in the sunshine; and boil the colewort, and stock the fish, and ply the distaff, and"—

"That will do, dame," said Rob-of-the-Raven's-roost, who, above all things, had a dread of hearing his rib prate, and especially when the subject touched upon household affairs, or, as he was wont to express it, 'matters connected with the roost.' "Will none of you help the holy father out," continued Rob, "and stand godfather for his baptism?"

"I would sooner stand godsire to the exorcising of a haunted hut," said one, "or the christening of a bell, and promise that it shall ward off tempests, swing out lightning, silence thunder, and kill every fiend that comes within five furlongs of the sound. No, by my troth! I will meddle none with the friar; let him call upon his saint, or vow a candle to the stony virgin that stands in the dark niche of his Priory, and hath need of a light. Surely he hath no lack of good things to offer up, seeing that loads are brought daily to the priory, for the release of souls from this newly discovered purgatory, which was first found by the Nor-

mans. By my love of good ale! methinks the prior will take him for a heathen by the smell; as the old pope is wont to find out a Dane, not by the nose alone, but when he hears him swear by the shoulder of his horse."

"They will need no incense," said another, "when the odour of malt mixes with their sanctity. Marry! how they will dream of the cellar over their beads, and fancy a foam on the holy water. See what a plashing he makes. By my troth! he will not leave enough in the hogshead to sprinkle the dust on a Norman's whiskers, or to cool the seat of old Pope Hildebrand, which was once sat in by the devil, after his holiness had drank the health of Sathanas, and thrown the host into the fire."

"Saxon dogs!" exclaimed the priest, extricating himself from the hogshead, and shaking his garments,—“Saxon dogs! no more worthy of converting to Christianity than your own swine. Dare ye thus to sport with the holy ceremonies of the church, ye dregs of Odin and Frea? Back to your heathen faith and perish, like swine as ye are. Away! and swill yourselves in the sty of Woden with muddy ale; ye are unworthy of the blessed light of St. Peter,

and ought to be placed in the same den of ignorance and darkness, from whence sprang Thor and Balder, Kiord, Tyr, and Hiemdal, and all the Valkeries."

"Take breath, holy father," said Rob-of-the-Raven's-roost, "and look out, lest some of these skull-emptiers should appear, like the wolf Fenris in the old ballad, and carry you off to Niflheim; which I hold to be a dry spot, and not half so well stocked with good cheer as your own larder, if report says true; and all the saints forbid that it should belie such holy men!"

"By the true Lord!" exclaimed another, "their larder may well be stocked. It was but two moons since that Zachary of Linbye was ill at ease, when some of the lazy drones and holy gluttons from the priory, persuaded him to leave all he possessed for their use, to save his soul, at the expense of ruining his own family. His daughter, too, because she chanced to have a pair of black eyes, they have frightened into a nunnery; where it is doubtless intended to set her apart for Heaven, should she not chance to find her way into the priory before that time, where she will be sure to be kept as secret as the relics of the saints."

While matters were thus proceeding with Father Clement, Cardinal Langton, mounted on a superb charger, and arrayed in his robe of office, entered the market-place; followed by the Prior of Newstead, and a long train of friars. Without pausing to address any one, he rode up to the ancient cross in the centre, and resigning his rein to an attendant, ascended the steps. The prior also alighted, and took his stand below the cardinal, while several of the friars occupied the lowest step. Bell, book, and candle, were held by an attendant, high enough for the assembled crowd to witness, and many a smile fled the merriest face when they beheld these solemn preparations, for cursing and excommunicating those who dared to disobey the mandates of the powerful pope.

The haughty cardinal stood with one arm extended, and waved his rude audience into a sudden silence without uttering a word; while, with the other hand, he grasped the folds of his crimson mantle, with a dignity that might have become a Cæsar. Behind him, arose the grey and weather-beaten cross, the holy sign of humility and salvation. The proud churchman that stood beside it, wore but little

on his countenance that corresponded with the sacred symbol, but seemed more like a haughty chieftain, stationed beside his banner, and looking defiance upon the assembled multitude around him.

Tabors and cymbals, rebecks, and rotas were all mute, and even the dancing dogs ceased their capering, and crept beside the rude stool, on which their crest-fallen master was seated. The conjuror sat with mouth agape as he saw his audience one by one depart, and gather around the old cross; the bear also got rid of his tormentors; and a bull which had been brought in to bait, as if he smelt that his papal namesake was at hand, rushed down a lane which led to the forest, and was allowed to escape. The swarthy smith leaned on the huge hammer which he was about to heave, and the sinewy wrestlers were left without a ring of spectators to witness or applaud their feats; even the drinking horns were piled in each other beside the round ale-butts, and the remains of the roasted oxen left for the dogs to devour. One or two there were, however, who still ventured to pitch the bar, but this was done out of mere bravado, and soon ceased.

Scarcely a sound was heard in the whole market-place, where but a few minutes before, mirth and music resounded; the very growling of the hounds was audible as they tore the half-dressed meat from the bones.

After having cast an angry glance upon those who came last, and with seeming reluctance, the offended prelate thus spoke :—

“ What deeds have mine eyes witnessed ! Is this meet conduct for men who are within a step of destruction ? Can it be that ye have again fallen back into the heathenism of your forefathers, such as reigned over this land when the blessed Saint Augustine, piloted by the hand of the Highest, breasted the stormy deep, and weighed all danger as light beside your salvation ? Know ye not, that the finger of Heaven is pointed against the land, and that unless by heavy penance and deep contrition ye repent, every living soul within this island will be banished from the pale of the church, and from the glory and happiness of heaven. Is this then a time for merry-making, when the servants of God have betaken themselves to fasting and prayer, that they may avert the terrible doom pending over the land ? Or have ye gone back

to the worship of strange gods, to kneel before the sun and moon, fire and rivers, fountains, rocks and trees; to practise witchcraft, to murder by magic and firebrands, to invoke the grave for vengeance, and call upon the dead to answer? Are ye, again, believers in the aspect of the sky, the voices and flight of birds, the language of the wind, and the entrails of the beasts ye consume for food? Will ye, again, stab one another, and throwing the body into the water, draw your infernal prophecies from the forms which the blood assumes; or place all your faith and hope upon the incantations of Wiglaer and Wicca, and the stormy songs which your fancies hear in the sound of the tempest, the roaring of the ocean, and the rattling of trees? If so, I marvel not at your thus openly rebelling against the holy father of the church.

“Ye have this day done those things which would doom you to eternal torment, were it not that the holy church, like an indulgent mother, intercedeth for the forgiveness of your transgressions, and taketh your crimes to herself, and were it not that I can trace this flow of iniquity and heresy to its corrupt source,

and from one who should have set an example of repentance, I would here, with bell, book, and candle, put out your names for ever, from the book of life. Yes, even here!" exclaimed he, uplifting the bell in one hand, and the book in the other, while the Acolyte held high the lighted taper,—“even here, would I ring out your stiff-necked rebellion, and peal aloud your sins, and swear away your portion in the book of life, and blow out your hope for ever from heaven by a breath, in this holy taper's flame. Never again should the Ostiary admit you within the doors of the house of God, or a bell ring, that prayers might be offered up for your lost souls; not all the wealth of the East expended for masses, could then save ye from the eternal flames. Never more should ye hear the holy words drop like oil from the mouth of the Lector, or behold the Deacon lay the oblation on the altar, or feel your souls bowed down beneath the eloquence of the Mass-priest, while he dealt forth portions of the food which perisheth not. Your hope in God would then be for ever destroyed, and your claim cut off to the inheritance of heaven. Repent, then, in sackcloth and ashes, salute not one another in the street, refrain from

sleeping in soft beds, from polling your heads or beards, or paring your nails, or eating flesh ; let your food be bread, water, and vegetables.

“Twenty paternosters shall ye repeat daily, and each pay a groat, to be expended in masses before the altar of Newstead Priory, for disobeying this day the mandate of the holy successor of St. Peter. From this time, until it shall please his holiness to take off this curse from the land, ye are debarred from all public worship—even the mass, which is offered for your sins, ye shall not witness. The doors of the church are closed on all but the priests. Your dead shall no longer be interred within consecrated ground, but in high roads and ditches, and waste lands, where even the feet of swine shall trample upon their graves. Of no religious rite or solemn ceremony shall ye partake, unless at the hour of death, or the baptism of infants. Even your marriages shall henceforth be holden in the church-yards, and the hands of the bride and bridegroom be united while standing upon the graves of their kindred. Not a bell shall sound either for the living or the dead, but they shall be removed from their high places, and laid upon the

ground, together with the sacred vessels of worship. The relics and images of the saints shall also be strewn on the floor of the church, and covered from the sight of even the priests. The altars shall be despoiled of their ornaments. Ye shall have no saints to invoke, no crosses to prostrate yourselves before, for the very air ye now breathe is cursed, and your own souls are tottering on the verge of perdition. Step aside, henceforth, but one jot from the path I have now marked out before you, and your doom will be the bottomless abyss, the unfathomable regions of fire and despair and suffocating darkness. Obey them, and we will yet intercede with the saints in your behalf."

When the cardinal had ceased, nearly the whole of the assembled crowd fell prostrate on their knees around the rude cross, and some betook themselves to their prayers, while others bent their heads upon their bosoms, or, with folded hands, cast supplicating looks towards the proud-glancing prelate. Rob-of-the-Raven's-Roost remained standing, together with a few of the outlaws, who were too proud to bend before this haughty representative of the pope.

At the bidding of the cardinal (and in full

opposition to the tenor of the interdict) the friars struck up one of their solemn anthems, and deep and impressive was the loud swell of their voices, stealing along the silence of a calm blue summer's sky.

Although the cardinal scowled fiercely upon the few daring auditors, who refused either to bend the knee, or show any sign of repentance, yet, as the loud anthem arose an hundred-voiced, his dark eyes kindled with enthusiasm, and he threw his arm aloft, pointing to the ancient cross which towered above him. One might have deemed, from the animation of his countenance, that his mind had pierced into the future, in which he beheld the unbending monarch of England humiliated, and compelled to kneel for forgiveness at the foot of the pope, whose power he then scoffed at and defied.

But the time had not yet arrived for the fulfilment of that dream, the realization of which, was not far distant, when the proud king held his crown and kingdom as the vassal of Rome. Nor had the anthem closed before King John himself, followed by De Marchmont, and several of his favourites, entered the

market-place, and beheld the triumph which the daring prelate had achieved.

Never did his royal father, Henry II., when closest beset, and baffled by that ambitious, and unbending churchman, Thomas à Becket, burst forth in a more terrible fit of rage; than that which convulsed the countenance of the king, when he beheld this unexpected triumph of the cardinal's. His face grew crimson with rage, and his brow dark as a thunder-cloud. He spoke not, but unsheathing his sword with the rapidity of lightning, he dashed the spurs deep into the flanks of his high-mettled charger, and without regarding the kneeling multitude, burst through their thick ranks, and aimed a blow at the prelate's head. Nor would that undaunted champion of Rome have again thrown down the terrible gauntlet of his church, had not the prior, caught the uplifted arm of the enraged monarch, and thereby staid the stroke.

“Wouldst thou strike down the servant of God?” said the prior, “when he is obeying the representative of Christ, and is sheltered by the holy symbol of our salvation? The very fiends would tremble to behold such an act.”

“I would have the blood of St. Peter him-

self," answered the fiery king, "and all the canting saints to boot, if they thus dared to brave me to my face. By God's teeth! I will be revenged!" added he, sheathing his sword. Then turning to his followers, he exclaimed, "Drag this adder from my path,—away with this slime of Rome to the dungeon. We will see what effect fasting, prayer, and imprisonment will have on this cursed priest."

De Marchmont was the foremost to ride up and show his readiness in obeying the order of the king; but even he was awe-struck by the threatening look of the cardinal, and shrank back like a cowardly cur, that has caught sight of the formidable grinders of some noble hound he has been pursuing.

"They fear to do thy bidding, proud king," said the undaunted cardinal. "Behold! even the grey-headed Hugh de Morville, and Tracey refuse to step forth and touch the servant of Christ, although they accompanied Reginald Fitzurse and Brito, and aided in shedding the blood of the blessed martyr, Thomas-à-Becket, and sprinkling with gore the holy altar of St. Bennet. Hew me limb from limb!" exclaimed he, grasping the rude cross; "and though I perish not

on the steps of the holy altar, yet shall I die embracing the blessed symbol of that religion, which I this day stand forth to advocate, with my naked bosom exposed to your pointed swords."

As he spoke, his tall figure seemed to grow higher, and his fiery eyes to kindle with enthusiasm, until the very forms of the mailed and mounted barons appeared to diminish, while that of the bold prelate rose in strong relief above the gathered crowd, and the rough-hewn cross seemed a pillar, on which he leant like a god, and filled the wide and silent space of the surrounding sky.

The mob raised a long and loud shout, when they beheld this stout champion of the church, thus daringly defy the king and his armed followers.

"Silence, ye priest-ridden curs!" exclaimed the enraged monarch, "or by the fiery cavern of hell I will have ye trampled into carrion beneath the hoofs of our chargers. Is it not enough that I have provided you wherewith to make merry, and ye have in return requited me by taking side with this snake of Rome,—this panderer to the whore of Babylon, who

selleth pardons as merchants sell their ware, and weigheth absolution for the heaviest of crimes, by bumping down the papal balance with gold. Behold!" said he, pointing to the knight, "here stands William de Tracey, who washed for ever from his soul the blood of the traitor Becket, by giving his manor of Duncombe to the monks of Canterbury. And had he murdered my royal father, and thrown in his broad acres that spread over the hays of Elm-valley, he would have obtained forgiveness."

"Blaspheme not the clemency of holy church," answered the cardinal, "nor of the blessed saint of Canterbury, lest, like thy father, the arrows of remorse should pierce thy very bones, and thou shouldst be unheard when kneeling for forgiveness, before the sacred shrine."

"And what was it," said the king, "that made this son of a lowly Saxon citizen, a saint, but open rebellion and base ingratitude to that king, who had raised him from the kennel, to the highest seat of honour? By my love of vengeance, I have half a mind to un-urn the traitor's body, and scatter his dust upon the four winds of heaven. A saint! didst thou say, hypocrite?"

By my soul, the Archbishop of York mounted the pulpit, and announced his death as an act of divine vengeance, and said that he perished in his pride like Pharaoh. Even the bishop of Hereford proposed to throw his body to the dogs, or hang it on a gibbet, as a warning to all rebellious subjects and saintly traitors. A saint, by my faith! I would that I had the firing of a whole abbey of such saints; by the mass, there would be but little sanctity perish in the flames."

"Thou forgettest, blasphemous king," said the unflinching Langton, "that the very same bishop, who would so readily have given the body of St. Thomas to the dogs, did, on the very day that thy father lent his shoulder to the lash, and submitted his kingly flesh to the rod, ascend the pulpit, and declare to the multitude, that King Henry came to seek pardon at the shrine of the saint he had persecuted unto death, and who was then an elder in heaven and a leader of the blessed. Remember what thy father suffered through opposing the church, through oppressing and defying the man, whose name the pope recorded amongst saints and martyrs, and at whose tomb more miracles were

wrought, than were ever known before at any other shrine, saving the holy sepulchre of Christ."

"A curse upon all your saints and martyrs!" said the king; "I despise them as much as I do yourself or the pope, and the whole of your gluttonous and sleepy-headed tribe. Your vigils are but excuses for slumber; your altars and images no better than heathen idols; your ashes, relics, and beads, mouldy trash, containing no more virtue or sanctity than yourselves; your holy water, the mere slop in which you have drenched your drinking-cups after a revel; your cross and pyx, but toys that might please a child, or gain the awe and admiration of the superstitious and ignorant. Let St. Dominic preside over the letting of blood and cutting of corns, the highest ambition to which the old dotard aspired while upon earth; let St. Anthony still be invoked, when you would tame your rampant hogs, or drench your horses, nor trouble him with that adoration which he never dreamed of while here below. Leave St. Hubert at rest, nor disturb the brave old hunter with your uproarious whoop, and discordant halloo. And let old Dunstan enjoy the fame he won by his anvil and bellows, nor raise a clatter louder

than the hammering he made in his smithy. Let St. Urban sleep quietly after the praises he won by leading home drunkards; and St. Julian rest himself, after the many journeys he made with houseless beggars, to earn a penny by furnishing them with straw for the night. Let St. Nicholas still be called upon to still the cries of yelping brats, or enjoy the reputation of being father to an army of children, and a favourite with their mothers.

“ Away with your canting mummery, your airy interdicts, and harmless curses! which do no more injury than braying a man with a feather. Home, fools!” added he, turning round to the mob, “ and make merry to-night at these hypocrites of Rome, and treat their threats as the raving of madmen.”

“ Heaven, and the holy church,” said the bold prelate, “ will ere long launch their thunders at thy head, and avenge themselves on thee for scoffing at that religion, which has withstood the shock of centuries. Thy crown shall be taken from thee, and thy kingdom given to the stranger. Thy cities shall also be wasted by fire and sword; and even those who are now ranged around thee shall fall away, one by one,

and leave thee as a thing cursed and polluted. Men shall wage war against thee with as much hatred and holy zeal, as when they fought for the sacred sepulchre. Tens of thousands of keen swords will fly from their sheaths, at the bidding of the church; and the ocean shall groan again, under the weight of the navies which the waving of her hand will waft across the billows. Thou shalt sue, with gifts and groans, for that mercy which she would now give thee; and repent, in fast and penance, for the impious words which thou hast uttered."

"Out, damnable raven!" exclaimed the king, "nor croak thy false prophecies again within mine hearing. Put the sea between thyself and England within three days, or, by the Mother of God! that cursed tongue of thine shall never more utter a word; for I will have it torn with pincers from out thy head." Saying which, he rode off in the direction of the palace, followed by his barons.

The cardinal addressed the multitude that remained, and exhorted them to adhere to the interdict, as the only means of saving themselves from eternal punishment. Then descending from the cross, he placed himself in front of the pro-

cession, and the friars moved along, with slow measured pace, down the old narrow street which led from the market-place. The sound of the solemn anthem was heard long after their gloomy drapery was hidden from the gazer's sight, by the boles and branches which overhung the winding forest-path that led to the priory. During the long parley, Friar Clement had found means of escaping; and only a few of the mob now remained, among whom were Rob-of-the-Raven's-roost, and two or three outlaws, with whom he seemed to have an acquaintance.

That night King John writhed under the remembrance of the daring threats he had uttered against the church; for, although he was bold as a lion when aroused, yet no sooner was he left to darkness, and his own reflections, than he became a very slave to superstition.

Nor was it long before the scene we have just recorded, that he summoned the abbots, belonging to the Cistercian order at Lincoln, and made such demands, as they were either unable or unwilling to accede to. Upon their refusal, he ordered his soldiers to trample them to death under the feet of their war-horses.

Not a man obeyed his savage mandate, not a spur was moved, or a bridle shook ; they sat like statues upon their steeds, and silently refused to do his bidding. The alarmed abbots hurried back to their monastery, to thank the saints for their miraculous escape.

At night the monarch, who slept in the castle, was ill at ease, nor could Edith's sire (who was then alive, and as thirsty an old Norman as ever placed cup to lip), enliven the drooping spirits of his sovereign. At length he retired to rest, but the hooting owl, and the baying of the savage hounds, which were all night left loose to range round the castle, kept him long awake, and only conjured up horrid sights, and frightful remembrances.

At length he slept, and dreamed that he was arraigned before a severe judge, on each side of whom stood the Cistercian abbots, who were commanded to scourge him with whips and rods ; and when he arose in the morning, he vowed, by the holy rood ! that he still felt the effects of their blows, even to the very bones.

He consulted with his favourite prelate, Prior Phillip, and that politic dignitary, who afterwards became the head of the order of Cister-

cians, prevailed upon him to summon the abbots again into his presence, and seek their forgiveness, since the Almighty had visited him in anger, and might again appear armed with greater terrors. The king obeyed, and the abbots, who came trembling with affright, were received with kindness, and implored to offer up masses for the forgiveness of his sins. He also granted them an hundred marks yearly, with many privileges, to extend their order; and many a rood of broad land, on which they erected various edifices.

Such is the character of King John, drawn by those who were his contemporaries; and no marvel that he groaned in spirit, after the daring front he had that day shown before Cardinal Langton.

END OF VOL. II.

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ROYSTON GOWER.

VOL. III.

ROYSTON GOWER;

OR,

THE DAYS OF KING JOHN.

An Historical Romance.

BY THOMAS MILLER,

AUTHOR OF "A DAY IN THE WOODS," "BEAUTIES OF
THE COUNTRY," ETC.

~~~~~  
"Under the greenwood tree,  
Who loves to lie with me?"  
~~~~~

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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ROYSTON GOWER.

CHAPTER I.

To be thus is nothing ;
But to be safely thus——
* * * * *
Rather than so, come, fate, into the list,
And champion me to the utterance.

Macbeth.

SIR GEOFFREY DE MARCHMONT had brooded over several plans for the destruction of Elwerwolf, and, as he was anxious to obtain the monarch's consent to her death, he advised the necessity of bringing her to trial for witchcraft. King John had yielded somewhat reluctantly to

the arguments which the baron advanced ; for, to do justice to the monarch, although he bore but little reverence to either religion or law, yet his mind had far outstepped the superstition and ignorance, which still reigned among the Saxons. Nor was the wily baron a jot behind his master in these matters ; but he well knew that the solitary life, and odd demeanour of Elwerwolf, had long caused her to be looked upon as the “ wise woman ;” and that her lonely midnight wanderings, together with the habit which she still retained of talking to herself, had long ago been interpreted by the peasants, into dialogues which she carried on with the Evil-one, or those departed spirits which were still supposed to linger on the earth. He was furthermore conscious, that only the old Hag of the Heath, and her son Druth, could furnish any thing like correct evidence of the real secret connected with Edwin of Clifton, and the various stratagems by which he had obtained those vast estates, in, and around Sherwood forest. All these things he had long weighed in his mind ; and as the

power which he had obtained them was commenced by bloodshed, so he still deemed that a further sacrifice of life was necessary, to cement, and render firm the foundations of the tottering fabric on which he stood.

The Norman well knew by what perilous steps he had climbed; but as ambition seldom looks down to contemplate past dangers, or pauses to examine the difficulties of the present, so did he bear onward, never imagining that there was a possibility of any one arising to thwart his plans, or bold enough to defy his power: but madly dreaming, that, as he had hitherto borne down all opposition, so should he still continue to hold undisputed sway.

It was past high noon, when De Marchmont was seated alone in the apartment which King John had allotted him in the palace. The baron seemed ill at ease, and sat with his elbow resting on a costly table, which was partly covered with documents, and hawks' bells, and miscellaneous matters of various kinds, while his forehead was buried in the palm of his hand, and

he seemed absorbed in deep thought. A beautiful falcon, which was perched on the high back of his Gothic chair, alighted upon his shoulder, and began picking one of the long dark ringlets which fell down his cheek. But he struck the bird down, exclaiming,

“ Away, fool ! I am not in the playing mood.”

At that moment, his eye fell on an antique silver cup, embossed with the arms of the Cliftons. Although he had drank from it a thousand times, and often admired the workmanship ; yet never before had the rude boar’s head, enwrought thereon, seemed to grin so frightfully, or show its threatening tusks, and fix its eyes so fiercely upon him. He turned away his head, to rid himself of the fancy ; but his eyes, as if by some involuntary motion, again fell on the drinking-cup. The motto, too, seemed to burst upon him all at once, as if it had been repeated in a voice of thunder ; and the words, “ *Spes mea in Deo,*” seemed engraven upon his guilty conscience.

“ What meaneth this ?” said he, arising and

passing his hand over his brow, like one who has suddenly awakened from a dream, and seeks to trace its cause to some previous thought or past conversation; but still the silver cup seemed to swell out before him, and the angry boar ready to burst into life, while the sounds of "*Spes mea in Deo*" rang like the continuous peal of bells upon his ear. At length he took up the drinking-vessel, and dashed it upon the floor; it rolled beside the table, and making a circle back again, struck the baron's foot; and he started, as if a thunderbolt had burst on the spot.

"And in what has my hope been anchored?" continued he, pursuing the train of thoughts which had forced themselves upon him, like unwelcome guests. "I have betrayed the trust of my dying friend; have made the child of my companion-in-arms a slave, in the very household in which he was born to reign lord. But these are childish thoughts, mere bugbears, which the brave despise. I have but done what thousands beside myself have done; I number

but one among the guilty. Even King John rebelled against his father Henry, and sought to deprive him of his crown; yet this sits not upon his conscience. Away! my hope is in myself. And this youth," continued he, "hath fled with my daughter. Alas! my heart yearneth towards her; she is the only link that drags me back to the human race. And with whom could she wed, nobler than Edwin of Clifton? No! it may not be," added he, pressing his hand to his forehead; "the youth must die!"

The last word echoed through the apartment, and he turned round suddenly, as if in expectation of seeing some one who had repeated the sound.

"I fear me, John of Chester will play false in this game. He looked yester-morn on Edith, as if his eyes would search her very heart. But I will sift him to the soul; he lacks cunning, and cannot counterfeit. Yet I would give him my daughter," added he, pausing. "How unfit are his grey hairs to match with the golden locks of youth, or himself to follow my own

ambitious footsteps. And Edith is by this time safe; to-night I will make her mine. I would that I had the same heart to offer, in exchange for her beauty, that was mine of yore. Foolish thoughts! I might as well wish for the same sleek boyish face which I then wore, unbrowned by the suns of Palestine, and unseamed by the Saracen's sabre. Blood have I shed! and by blood alone do kings maintain their throne. Power was first baptized at a font of blood, and death and slaughter were his godfathers. And this old hag will but be perishing, at most, a few years before her time; and why should she live to embitter my hopes, and blast all those ambitious prospects which I have waded through crime to gain? Druth, too, and Royston have turned upon me, and know too much; and this Hereward, were he gone, would leave me more breathing room in the world. I have gained the middle of a dangerous river, and cannot return. Behind me, the tide roars and swells; before me, the depths and dangers must be fathomed, ere I can pass. After all, it is but leaving a

few acres to these praying monks, and they are sworn to rescue us even from the clutches of the Evil-one himself."

An attendant entered, and put a stop to his further meditations by announcing that the Constable of Chester waited without.

"Admit him instantly," said the baron. "What doth he here? Have I guessed aright—hath he played me false?" But John of Chester appeared himself, his countenance flushed with the speed of his journey.

"How now, noble constable," inquired De Marchmont, "has our plot failed? What dost thou without thy armour?"

"It has, indeed, failed," replied Chester, without noticing the latter remark, "and I have escaped with difficulty to bring thee the tidings."

"Sorry tidings are they to me," answered Marchmont; "and I deemed not that so gallant a knight as thyself would have survived so disgraceful a deed, after having plighted thy solemn pledge. I would have struck a dagger

through her heart," added he, knitting his savage brows as he spoke, "ere she had fled from my keeping; or left my dead body, as the threshold over which she should have passed. But how chanced thy messenger to bring me news that Edith was safe, and in thy hands?"

"It was then even as he said," replied Chester, frowning darker. "Trowest thou that I should send him on a false mission? Since that time she hath been rescued by her kinsman, and that minion, Gloomglendell, who would have paid their lives as the price for interfering in the maiden's behalf, had not those plagues of the forest, the outlaws, have rendered them timely aid."

"'Tis strange!" said De Marchmont, musing; "these knaves are as sure to find out the spot where I have aught to manage as the crows hunt out carrion. I trust thou hast shown a few of them the downward road, as a warning to their companions to be cautious in future how they thrust themselves again upon our privacy."

“They were more than a match for the few soldiers I had around me,” replied the constable, with a sigh; “the bravest of my band fell by the hands of De Lacy and Gloomglen-dell, who fought as if the strength of twenty men was in each of their single arms.”

“No matter,” said De Marchmont, with an affected indifference, “we shall yet recover her. Thou hast seen something of this proud maiden while in thy power: holdest thou her fitting for the high station to which she was born? Or is she only worthy of being taught to work tapestry in her bower, and to leave a long train of woollen saints to cover the walls of some monastery?”

“Nay, an’thou consultest my opinion,” answered the constable, “I hold her worthy of filling the brightest throne in Christendom, or presiding over the proudest lists that can be formed to splinter a lance in, and win the smiles of beauty.”

“By the mass! my Lord of Chester,” said De Marchmont, fixing his eyes as if he would look into the very soul of the constable, “an’

thou thinkest so highly of her accomplishments and beauty, I marvel much that thou didst not send for some priest and wed her thyself. Marry! it would have been a wiser act than to have allowed her to escape, especially with this Gloomglendell."

"Ha! ha! ha! a good joke," said the constable, laughing. "Now thou namest it, I do remember me saying a few passing words to her. But, by my troth, the maiden bristled up like a wolf-dog."

"Thou shouldst have told her," said De Marchmont, with a sneer, "that she was rescued from me by thy powerful arm—that she needed some one to protect her—that I was cruel and ambitious, and cared for nothing but her possessions,—pleaded with her in disguise, threatened her with death,—boasted of thine own accomplishments,—forced thyself upon her when she was alone,—told her that there was a priest in readiness, nay, used a little force; it would have given a colouring to thy suit. In short, done any thing to have prevented her

escape, or kept her from falling into my hands."

"What meanest thou?" said Chester, in astonishment. "Thou hast not been playing the eaves-dropper upon me? Or is this but some feeble pretext for breaking thy pledge? Hast thou found a higher bidder for thy daughter? Dost think I have been playing thee false—been tampering with thy haughty beauty? or art thou intent upon construing an harmless jest into earnest? Wouldst thou have had me ridden by her side like a mute? or regaled her ears with homilies and miracles of the saints? What is thy meaning? If thou thinkest to quarrel with me, throw down thy challenge at once!"

"That may not be," replied De Marchmont; "the Earl of Eltham hath already defied thee to mortal combat, or thou wouldst not have solicited a challenge from mine hands. Whether or not thou hast played me false, rests with thyself to decide. I did but try thee, to see if thou wert current coin; and thy fear,

that I have been playing the eaves-dropper, but speaks too plainly how thou hast dealt with me. I was mad to entrust you with such a mission;—had I undertaken it myself I had done wisely. I fear thou hast played me false in this matter. As to my daughter — ; but no matter.”

“ What, in the devil’s name! could induce thee to send me on this errand ?” said Chester. “ Thou hast the king’s consent to marry the maiden. She is a ward of the crown’s. Why didst thou throw the temptation in my way? Thou wottest well—I am no saint; though, by my faith! methinks the holy fathers themselves would forget their prayers while looking on her face.”

“ They must play cautious, who stake against a king,” said De Marchmont, with an affected calmness; “ and I have shown my folly in being angered against thee. The man who travels with a treasure, acteth unwisely if he lacketh aught by the way. But this king pledged me the maiden before he had seen her

himself, and now, he would not hesitate to divorce his queen, to obtain her; he coveteth her person, more than her possessions."

"No matter," said the constable; "I pledge thee, hand and glove, that I will aid thee in obtaining her. Do what thou canst with her when she is in thy power; for, by all the fiends! I would sooner undertake to make a thief honest, than I would again venture upon either persuading, or forcing this proud damsel to my wishes."

"I will accept thine offer!" said De Marchmont, with a contemptuous look extending his hand; "and crave thy pardon, for the uncourteous manner in which I received thee; I was in truth in an angry mood; I am beset on every hand. But whom have we here?" added he, looking around as the door opened, and King John entered unannounced.

"I thought to have found you alone!" said the monarch. "Welcome, worthy constable, we have not seen you since the chase; you have been wooing I trow, or repeating your pater-

noster in accordance with this interdict ; or, have you been making a two days' shrift before entering the lists with the Earl of Eltham ? By the mass, you look like some unfortunate knight, who has been disarmed by his rival."

"None of these, my liege!" replied Chester, readily seizing upon the hint ; "some few things I did consider it necessary to arrange before entering into this combat, and they have occupied me somewhat longer than I anticipated."

"Humph ! The earl too, I doubt not, hath been similarly engaged!" continued the king ; "or, perchance, compounding with these knave priests for a Christian burial, if he should fall ; for the dogs, I have heard, refuse to inter the dead in the usual cemeteries, since this scarecrow of Rome has been sent abroad. But I am forgetting myself," added he ; "thy daughter is come to pay thee her compliments, De Marchmont, and hath brought with her a lover, to boot : is not thy heart gladdened at the tidings?"

“Your Majesty is pleased to be merry with me!” answered the baron; “I can scarce hope to find such tidings true.”

“Nay, I pledge to thee the word of a king!” said the monarch, “that they are already within the palace, and that the lover is none other than Edwin de Clifton, whose manors and castle thou hast hitherto held in trust until the rightful heir should be found.”

“Some impostor, believe me, my liege!” replied De Marchmont, his countenance changing as he spoke. “I heard tidings of the youth’s death in Palestine, whither he went, for the fulfilment of some vow.”

“Strange!” muttered the king; “he spoke of having lived in retirement within our own realm all his life; but where, he seemed loath to tell. By God’s brow! I believe the youth honest; he in every way resembles his father, and I could almost believe him to be the same Clifton, who, some thirty years ago, moved in my father’s court; besides, he sought our presence out of his own accord.”

“ This youth must be closely questioned, my liege !” said De Marchmont, in the greatest embarrassment ; “ I would crave a few moments conversation with him in private, with your majesty’s permission. There are matters which he must be conversant with, if he is the rightful heir of Clifton.”

“ As it pleaseth thee !” answered the king ; “ something my brother Richard said respecting this youth, which I have forgotten,” added he, musing ; “ we will sift his claims thoroughly.”

“ The Saxon witch waiteth without, my lord !” said one of De Marchmont’s followers, entering at this moment.

“ We will send for her anon !” exclaimed the king, seating himself as he spoke ; “ we would fain look on the face of this hag, of which rumour has spoken so loud of late.”

De Marchmont bit his lip at this announcement, as he replied, “ Your majesty will scarce be able to bring any charge fairly against her, without summoning those witnesses who have suffered through her damnable practices.”

“ Perhaps not !” answered the king, coldly ;
“ Now, on thy knighthood, dost thou believe these rumours ? I would not wantonly waste life ; something too severe we have been of late, and must conciliate the people’s love, or never hope to stem this powerful current, which he of Rome hath let loose upon our land.”

“ I dare not disbelieve what all have asserted as truth, my liege !” said the baron, “ nor would it, methinks, be wisdom to turn a deaf ear to the many voices who call so loudly for justice, and complain of the numerous losses which they have sustained by her spells. I hoped your majesty had decided on this affair before she was summoned hither ?”

“ We are ever willing to give thee an hearing ;” replied the king, in his most serious manner ;
“ and would, moreover, listen to the grievances of our people, when affairs of greater consequence call not for our attention. But, bethink thee, we are now combating a greater power than this, and trying to remove no less a spell than that which the church has thrown around

us. Thou seest how difficult it is to remove this blinded reverence, and superstitious ignorance, which the people suffer these ambitious priests to throw around them. And, by the splendour of heaven ! I swear, that it behoveth us to act cautiously in this matter, and not yield to the inroads of a feebler, and more contemptible superstition at home. I would not, in a word, do a thing that would hold us up to the laughter and derision of the multitude, or call forth the interference of the church."

"In this you act wisely, my liege!" answered the wily baron; "but this is an affair which the church would take up herself. Have they not prayers and forms for the exorcising of evil spirits; and but think how much it would redound to their praise, and strengthen their power, to take up this matter? If your majesty would win the affections of the people, give orders for her trial; it will not need your presence. Remember, it is on record, that Emma, the mother of Edward the Confessor, was accused of the death of her son, by the

practices of witchcraft; and she being innocent, went through the ordeal without any hurt; and doubtless, if this Elwerwolf is free from guilt, she will also escape uninjured."

"And Hereward the Saxon," continued the king, without replying to De Marchmont's remarks,—“he is somewhat popular among these rude forest-people. I would have his trial conducted fairly and openly. I would that his offence had been less, for there is a bold bearing about the man which I dislike not, and a blunt honesty, such as seldom is shown before a king. I am half inclined to forgive the knave.”

“Your majesty's clemency is highly to be praised,” said De Marchmont, with an almost imperceptible sneer; “and I would also plead for his forgiveness, had his offence been less. But might not this neglect of justice be attributed to a fear of these outlaws, whom he has many times aided to escape?”

“There, by heaven, thou touchest me, De Marchmont,” said the king, arising in great excitement. “I would have these robbers de-

stroyed ; and by God's teeth ! will burn the forest both root and branch, but what I will un-house them. This Saxon will we hang, as an example to all knaves who dare to incroach upon our prerogative. But how," added he, turning round on the sudden, "hast thou proof that he has sheltered and abetted the outlaws ? I will have no unfair play, that thou mayest the sooner get hold of his possessions."

"Your Majesty's love," replied De Marchmont, with difficulty mastering the frown which was gathering on his brow, "hath already overburthened me with possessions. And if I have been too forward in the execution of justice, it has been for your own honour, and the preservation of your royal rights."

"I do believe thee," answered the king, leaning familiarly upon the baron's shoulder, "and will not fail to reward thee. But where is Edith of Lincoln ? wottest thou what hath befallen the damsel ?"

"It is rumoured that she hath again returned to the priory," replied De Marchmont,

“in company with her kinsman, and Gloomglen-dell, the youth whom your majesty entrusted with some slight commission to France, and who, as you have heard, aspireth to the noble maiden’s hand.”

“’Fore God! now, he is a bold youth,” said the king, knitting his brow; “and it was none other than he that I designated the knight of the hawk. But he maketh too free if he thinketh to carry off our wards without having permission, and in especial one whose hand we have pledged to thyself. Trowest thou it was he who bore her away at the chase?”

“I doubt it not, my Liege,” replied the baron, catching readily at a hint which told so strongly against his rival. “John of Chester remembers meeting with her in his company since that time,—said you not so?”

“I—I—saw them together,” answered the constable, looking in amazement at the appeal thus made by De Marchmont; “but have explained to you the circumstances before.”

“At what time? where didst thou meet with

them?" said the king, eagerly: "answer me truly, Sir Constable, for we do suspect that our ward hath been dealt foully with; and, by the thunder of heaven thou mayest look to thyself, if thou playest us falsely."

"I am no priest," replied the constable, haughtily, "to keep my horn leaves, and to record every passing occurrence, with time and dates,—it was somewhere without the forest: your majesty will hear all in good time,—meanwhile De Marchmont can record all I know." Saying which, he left the apartment.

"By the death of Christ! we will see to the bottom of this mystery," exclaimed the angry monarch. "I do fear me, De Marchmont, that thou art not wholly free in this matter; but we will summon the maiden to our presence, and from her own lips learn the truth. Hie, knaves, without there," added he, raising his voice, doubtless with an intent to dispatch some of them immediately for Edith. But Elwerwolf of her own accord entered the apartment.

CHAPTER II.

Thou shalt hear me —————
If Heaven have any grievous plague in store,
Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee,
O ! let them keep it, till thy sins be ripe,
And then hurl down their indignation
On thee, the troubler of the poor world's peace.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE countenance of Elwerwolf, on entering the apartment, had stamped upon it a very different expression to that which it generally wore. There was a daring decision planted on her lofty but wrinkled forehead, which showed that her mind was collected, and fully prepared for the scene that was about to open. She glanced upon the monarch and De Marchmont alternately, with so severe and unflinching a look,

that the latter bent his fierce eyes upon the floor, after having in vain attempted to out-look her, by one of his severest frowns. The monarch turned away from her withering glance, and cast a grim smile at the embarrassment of De Marchmont, and pretended a kind of carelessness, by beating time to a martial tune, which he was humming over to himself, and saving the low drumming which was kept up by his fingers, the apartment was as silent as the grave.

At length he broke the stillness which reigned around by a loud "hem," or embarrassed interjection ; then turning round, he looked upon De Marchmont, as if he grew impatient of the delay. But the baron was too deeply buried in his own thoughts to take the hint, and Elwerwolf was the first that spoke.

"For what have I been forced hither?" said she, appealing to De Marchmont ; "if it be that you have repented you of the violence and cruelty which you so plentifully showered upon me when last we met, and seek my forgiveness,

I will willingly give it you, on sundry conditions."

"What may those conditions be, old bel-dame?" inquired the king, seeing that De Marchmont still hesitated to reply, either through the passion which he was then writhing under, or lest the king should hear more than he wished him.

"That he will proclaim himself a villain," replied Elwerwolf, calmly,—“reinstatè Edwin of Clifton, in his paternal rights, confess his many sins, and then betake himself to some monastery for the remainder of his life.”

“By the mass! a marvellous droll penance for a witch to prescribe thee, De Marchmont!” said the king; “what sayest thou to her conditions?”

“That there is one portion I would readily obey!” replied the baron, mastering his rage, and speaking in that subdued tone which ever denoted the most danger,—“could the heir of Clifton be recalled from the dead. As for the latter part of her conditions, methinks, they

would be easier fulfilled, than she would be able to obtain pardon for her numerous sorceries, and all those devilish calamities with which this forest has too long groaned."

"Thanks to thine own injustice!" replied Elwerwolf, "Edwin Clifton yet lives, and to thy sorrow, is even now within the walls of this palace; although, but two days ago, you sent your own follower, Royston Gower, to dispatch him. Thou mayest knit thy brows, and grind thy teeth," added she, "I fear thee not; the time has come that shall see the heir of Clifton justly dealt with. He, whom you made a page in his own household, will, in spite of all your machinations, now rule as rightful master. As for myself, and all that thy malice can bring against me, I tell thee again, that I despise and defy thee."

"Bravely said, my old hag of Endor!" exclaimed the king. "We will call in this page, and, by the splendour of our lady's brow! if he who has represented himself as the heir of Clifton, is none other than De Marchmont's page,

we will read him such a lesson, as shall cling to his memory whenever he lies on his back. Hey! without there," continued he, calling to the attendants in the gallery, "bring forth the youth and maiden who came hither with your master's followers? we will have good witnesses in this cause."

"And lest your majesty should lack true ones!" said Druth the dwarf, striding into the room, with the massy club in his hand, "I held it my duty to be in attendance."

"Ah! art thou come to bay with this she-wolf!" exclaimed the baron, his lips quivering as he spoke; "but your majesty will be prepared for the music we may expect while hunting with such a couple."

"Whither should the cub wend, when it finds the lair empty?" replied Druth, "but in search of the dam. Our old home you burnt to the ground; and since you have started her again from her resting-place, I but wait to know the next that your malice may provide."

"I would that it were the deepest donjon

in yonder castle," said De Marchmont to himself, without openly replying; for Edwin and Margaret had entered the apartment. "What! darest thou then to venture here, and raise thine eyes before me?" said he, looking sternly on his daughter. "And this, I trow, is the presumptuous heir of Clifton?" continued he, glaring like a tiger on Edwin. "My own page, my liege, that has been playing the part of a knight of romance with my daughter! Ho! ho! Clement! to the donjon with this knave of a page! By the holy apostles! if he is in love, bread and water will soon allay his passion."

"Hands off, dog!" exclaimed Edwin, shaking the attendant from his hold into the centre of the apartment, with such force that he fell. "I am the heir of Clifton! You, Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont, can need no proof, well knowing, that while a child I was entrusted, by my dying father, Sir Gurthric, to your care."

Margaret spoke not a word.

"And would at this moment have still re-

mained an inmate of yonder castle," said Elwerwolf, "had you not dispatched Royston Gower to murder him!"

"To murder him! sayest thou, hag?" exclaimed King John, again repeating the question, in a tone, which, like the awful whisper of Macready in Macbeth, seemed to fill the apartment, and with a look as harrowing, as if the spirit of his own murdered nephew, Prince Arthur, had arisen in accusation before him,—“I will not, cannot believe thee, witch! He never could sanction such a crime,” added he, after a long and thoughtful pause.

“Thou surely must have mistaken the message of Royston, good Elwerwolf,” said Edwin, having caught a supplicating look from Margaret, who began to tremble for her father’s fate. “It could but have been to have kept a stricter watch over me. Perchance Sir Geoffrey was an-angered at the words you let fall on the heath?”

“No more than I mistook the imploring glance of the maiden by thy side, Sir Edwin,”

replied the old woman firmly. "From the soldier's own lips did I hear the doom that he was sent to execute. In the dark valley within this forest did he confess it, as a deed, which, only to have named in the eye of day, would have brought a blush over the clear and open face of heaven, and made it ashamed to look down upon a world where such crimes are meditated. Mistake it! sayest thou? Did he not order his red-handed followers to waylay Hereward the Saxon, on his return from the palace? To murder him, and bear away the documents by which the worthy Thane holds the fief of Papplewick? Mistake him!" echoed she, with a look of withering hatred, "as soon mistake on what mission the wolf is speeding, when his howlings fill the forest. Or marvel why the tusks of the wild boar are gilded with blood, when his hoofs are still planted on the rent breast of his victim. God above is witness that I utter but the truth!"

It is impossible to describe the fierce tempest of passion which gathered upon the counten-

ance of De Marchmont while Elwerwolf spoke. At first his hand clutched the dagger in his belt, and he seemed about to spring upon her, and at once silence all further charges ; but then his eye fell on the coldly-fixed and resolute glance of the dwarf, and he shrunk from his purpose, while the current of his anger, which still tore on, might be compared to the silent, but terrible working of a mountain, about to give birth to some fearful eruption. At length his passion thus found vent :— *

“ Witch ! born of a wolf ! and limb of the father of liars ! I would that I had the tearing out of thy polluted tongue. Dost thou not tremble, withered hag ! thus to confront and belie an English noble before his sovereign ? Where are thy proofs to maintain a single charge which is now brought against me ? Produce those of my followers who were appointed to waylay the Saxon. Bring forth this Royston Gower, and see if he still remains in the same false tale which he forged against me ! And this varlet of a page ! You would,

I wot, fain convince me that he is a Clifton, and has been hidden in the dark niche of some monastery, and is now brought forth to claim the possessions which I hold. Nay, I doubt not, but that you are prepared to swear, that I have never before beheld him !”

“ Cease this wordy war !” exclaimed King John, frowning. “ And you, old woman, speak ! What proofs can you furnish that this youth, (whom I well remember as the baron’s page), is the son of Gurthric of Clifton ? By the thunder of God ! if you prevaricate, or try to impose upon me by any of your devilish charms, I will have you chained to a stake, and roasted like an ox. On my soul ! I will do it, though all the winged fiends and bat-headed devils flap their leathern pinions around me while I light the piled fagots !”

“ ’Twould be well, my Liege,” said Druth, not the least daunted by the terrible threat which the king had issued against his mother,” to enquire of Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont by what means he became possessed of the youth,

and how long he has lived in his household as a page?"

The baron threw a fiery look at the dwarf upon hearing this; fierce enough, had it possessed the power, to have accomplished that fearful doom, which is attributed to the scorching glance of the fabled basilisk.

"Right! my curtailed crab-tree," said the king. "Art thou not a near relation of this youth's, De Marchmont? One who was well acquainted with the secret of his birth, and could tell as much about him as the mother by whom he was born. Come, come! speak! Thy lady, in her day, was wont to have two or three laughing-eyed witches in her train. One of them, I could be sworn, bore the very features of this page. Say, have I hit upon the secret?"

The baron only replied by an affected grin, which, whether or not it sanctioned the king's surmises, was difficult to interpret.

"My birth! my Liege," said Edwin, "will lose nothing beside the fairest in this presence.

And had any beside your majesty dared to have spoken aught against it, I would have forced the words back again into his throat with the point of my sword."

"There is a packet in the possession of the prior of Newstead would satisfy your majesty, that the baron's page was none other than the heir of Clifton," said the dwarf. "I would bring it hither in a short space of time, and the prior to boot, who will fully satisfy your majesty on this matter."

"The prior hath sheltered this arch-fiend of Rome," said King John, his mind storing every trifle that worked against his wishes. "Nevertheless, we will hear him on this affair; let him be in readiness on the morrow. And meantime," added he, turning to Edwin, "you remain our prisoner, with none other attendance than the soldier, who accompanied you hither."

"To-morrow, my Liege," said De Marchmont, "is appointed for the trial of the Saxon. And my duty then calleth me into the court as Chief Justice."

“The following day will suit our purpose,” said the king: “meantime, let only this Royston Gower have access to the page’s apartments. De Marchmont, I leave thee with thy daughter, but on no account will I suffer thee to have access to the youth. Druth,” continued he, “thou wilt hold thyself in readiness, and see that thy mother is also cared for. It becometh us to look clearly into this matter.” Saying which, he cast a searching glance at the baron, then departed, leaving only Margaret and De Marchmont in the apartment.

CHAPTER III.

————— Beware :
The dam will wake : and, if she wind you once,
She's with the lion deeply still in league,
And lulls him whilst she playeth on her back,
And when he sleeps, will she do what she list.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE baron paced the apartment with long rapid strides, his shaggy brows contracted, and his frown dark as death. Utterly unconscious of the presence of his daughter, he seemed like a furious lion, struggling in the net of the hunter, and only meditating escape, that he might rush on to revenge. Margaret appeared to shrink within herself, and trembled beneath the anticipated explosion. At length, his eye fell upon her, as he paused suddenly in the centre of the

vaulted hall, and ceased to mutter his deep curses, while he fixed his fiery glance upon his daughter, as if he would at once annihilate her by his baleful look.

The affrighted maiden sprang forward, and falling upon her knees, seized the skirt of his flowing mantle, while she uplifted her supplicating eyes, which were bedimmed with tears, and exclaimed in a tremulous voice, "Father, look not thus angrily upon me!"

The stern features of the Norman gradually relaxed, as he contemplated the sorrowful countenance of his daughter, and for a moment his face wore an expression of tenderness, then sank again into its iron rest, as he replied: "Margaret, thou must never more behold this page, an' thou ventur'est" — he paused, and gently unloosing her hold, added, "I will see that no harm befalls thee, but as for this youth, he shall assuredly die."

"Die!" echoed Margaret, springing up suddenly as if an adder was at her feet; and parting the silken ringlets which had

fallen in wild disorder over her beautiful features, she threw them back with both hands, and stood erect, like an infuriated nymph: "Die!" continued she; "and wouldst thou have his blood upon thy conscience, after having thus long deprived him of his heritage? Oh! say that mine ears deceived me: we must all die, when Heaven willeth it."

"And wouldst thou weigh his life beside thy father's honour," said De Marchmont, the same cold, cruel expression, still resting on his countenance: "I tell thee, that if a thousand lives were necessary to blot out the stain which is now attached to my name, they should be offered up. Thou art unworthy of the name of a Norman daughter, if thou wouldst see thy sire become a scoff and a scorn among the nobles, when his fair fame might be so easily established,—his death will atone for my honour."

"Dearly will that honour be purchased," answered Margaret, "which bringeth dishonour here, and eternal destruction hereafter. The same blow that pierceth Edwin's heart," added

she, with an energy which startled the baron, "will send a pang through the frame of Margaret; and thine eyes shall be witness, that a Norman maiden can die, when all that she thought worth living for is gone."

There was an earnestness in the countenance of the maiden, as she spoke, which told even De Marchmont, that she, who appeared so incapable of being moved, would not hesitate to execute her threat. Her features also seemed, at the time, in some measure to resemble his own; but the likeness was in the kindled spirit, which had so suddenly animated her.

"Say that thou art bent upon his death," continued she, drawing her fine form to its full height as she spoke, while her father quailed before the fire of her eye,—“swear thy most solemn oath that it shall be done! then give me the dagger! and with my own hand will I do the deed, and plunge the reeking blade, wet with his own heart's blood, into my own bosom. But no!” added she, her tears gushing forth like a summer

shower, and her sudden passion lulling itself like the weary tempest, while she again threw herself before her father: "Thou wert wont to love me,—hast called me the image of my sainted mother; and never have these weeping eyes been closed, but a tear trembled upon their lids for thy safety; nor these supplicating lips been shut in the darkness, but a parting prayer has lingered upon them for thee. Oh! say that thou wouldst not compel thine own child to become her own murderer,—to shed her blood, that thou mightest"— Her voice grew inaudible, and she sank her white forehead on the broad hand which she still grasped, while her tears fell, one by one, upon the oaken floor.

The Norman pressed his hand to his brow, and seemed to labour under a load of mental anguish; and, for one moment in his life, did the good spirits (which are said to hold equal sway over the human heart with the evil) poise the beam in favour of mercy. It was but for a moment; and the balance recoiled without pausing midway, but plumped down on the side of

evil; and deceit mounted astride the beam, and grinned again at his hellish triumph.

“Come, dry thy tears,” said the baron, in a voice of affected kindness; “I will not slay him.”

“Nor permit other of thy followers to do him harm?” said Margaret, stilling her sobs as she spoke.

“Thou hast my word that I will not injure him,” answered De Marchmont, placing a suspicious emphasis on the word. “Come, come! thou wert not wont to doubt me?”

“I do thee wrong,” said Margaret, wiping off a pearly tear from her lovely cheek as she spoke, and placing her hand familiarly upon her father’s shoulder,—“I do wrong to doubt thee. But love is fond and foolish; and thou wilt swear, upon this crucifix, that no harm shall befall him,” added she, drawing forth the holy relic from her bosom. “It was once my mother’s, and—but what aileth thee?” continued she, gazing in alarm upon the baron’s altered features. “If I have spoken aught that hath

caused thee pain, oh ! believe me, father, I did it unwittingly."

" Nothing !—nothing, child !" replied De Marchmont, struggling to regain his affected composure ; " but the relic did somewhat move me. I could not press so sacred a remembrance to my unhallowed lips. But why wilt thou thus torture me with thy suspicions ?"

" I do not doubt thee," replied Margaret, in a voice that made musical the echoes of the rude apartment. " But love maketh me jealous ; and oh ! father, never did maiden"—

" Enough !" said the baron, the dark spot again gathering on his brow. " Thou wouldst say, that never maiden yet broke the commands of her father, and felt less regret."

" And Royston Gower," continued she, smiling faintly as she spoke,—“ thou wilt forgive the old soldier what he hath done, and attribute his disobedience to thy daughter's commands."

" They shall both be cared for," answered De Marchmont, with a malicious grin. " At present I have matters of great import, which will

call forth all my attention. Thou wilt leave me for a short space."

Margaret obeyed, and retired to the chamber allotted her within the palace.

Scarcely had she gone, before the baron summoned one of his attendants, and gave orders that Royston Gower should be seized without delay, and be removed to one of the ranger's prisons in the forest. He also commanded, that a strict watch should be placed upon Edwin; and if an opportunity occurred, without its being observed by any of the king's followers, he was also to be borne to some prison belonging to his own keepers.

CHAPTER IV.

Break not your sleep for that, you must not think,
That we are made of stuff so flat and dull,
That we can let our beard be shook with danger
And think it pastime. You shortly shall hear more ;
I love your father, and we love ourself ;
And that I hope will teach you ——

Hamlet.

THE capturing of Royston Gower was not likely to be a matter of much difficulty, for since the arrival of Edwin at the palace, the old crusader had mingled among De Marchmont's followers, both in the scot-ales and stables, as if nothing had been amiss. While he was listlessly sauntering through the various domestic offices around the palace, he was followed at some distance by Elwerwolf, who, in

spite of King John's orders, still contrived to remain free. Royston, however, saw her not, but paused every now and then to accost some well-known menial, or make a remark upon their different occupations.

“Come, Rudolph!” said he, addressing a soldier who was polishing a superb corslet, “lay thy huge fist on a little heavier, and make the front glitter, so that if the devil should chance to look at himself in thy master's armour, he will run away from his own ugliness, and save our keeping up such an army of mumbling monks, and fat friars. An' thou dost not remove that helmet further off, the capul laden with hawk's meat, may chance to set his hoof upon the visor, and I wot well, Belton of Burdockdale will break thine head for such negligence.”

“An' he does!” answered Rudolph, removing the helmet, “so may I thrive if I persuade not the page to run away with his daughter. Hey marry! if I have to turn 'squire myself, and escort them, like a man you well wot off, and

whose face you saw but now when looking in the corslet."

Royston replied not, but whistling his favourite air, turned to a youth who was feeding a long-winged hawk, "Curse on thy mischievous head!" said the old soldier, for the youth held a feather in one hand, and when the hawk opened its beak to snatch the morsel, he thrust the feather forward; "An' I were the king's falconer, I would scourge thy skin soundly, for teasing a ger-falcon in that guise. Of what avail, trowest thou, will all the time be, lost in manning the bird, and thou annoyest her in that manner when thou shouldst stroke and play with her, and carry her on thy fist, and look tenderly into her face."

"An' I know not how to man the hawk!" answered the boy, "I shall get but little more knowledge of thyself, I trow. And my father hath been falconer since King Henry's time, and I wot, well knoweth how to teach me."

"An' thy father was falconer before the flood!" said Royston, "and took the first eyrie

in Eden, I can tell thee that he knoweth but little of his calling. Who, but a goose, would glut a ger-falcon with unclean meat, as thou art even now doing; but look at her round thighs, high flesh, and full mutings; an' she were mine, I would give her a hen's neck or two, well jointed, and well cleaned, and break those kells of fat which are in her body, for unless she is enseamed, one might as well expect a bull to fly, as a bird in such grease."

"An' thou hadst but seen her fly at the heron, yestermorn, by the river Lene," answered the youth, "thou wouldst have talked different. I have heard my father speak of thee, and he calls thee Royston-the-wrong, and Gower-the-gozzard; and says, that thou knowest more about infidels, than hawk-meat, and could as soon bring home the holy sepulchre, as a hawk to her lure."

"Ever despising the counsels of the sage, as our old Leech of the forest hath it!" answered Royston, "and ——"

"Busying thyself with matters that concern

thee not!" added Elwerwolf, approaching, and placing her skinny fingers upon his shoulder.

"Ha! ha! ha! my gay genkin!" shouted the youth, laughing; "there is thy ger-falcon, which, by my troth, is neither so over-done with fat or glut, but she can overtake thee before thou reachest the scot-ale. Whew! my fine bird of the feather; look at her high flesh: were I thou, I would give her hen-necks well jointed, and well cleansed, ha! ha! ha!"

"An' thou keepest not a more civil guard over thy tongue!" said Royston, "I will so pummel thy bones, that thou shalt be compelled to mew thyself for some days, until thou dost cast thy gorge, and come forth with fewer foul words in thy throat."

"Waste not thy time thus foolishly!" said Elwerwolf, "but follow me speedily without the palace gates, and I will await thy coming by the wild-boar-fell, I have that to tell thee, which thou wilt find of more import, than chaffering with this youth."

“ I was about to cross the Otter-briggs !” answered Royston, and empty a cup with some of the foresters, at the Scot-ale, kept by Gilbert of Goderbald ; but since thou lookest as solemn as a thunder-cloud, and as thy tidings may be of some importance to Sir Edwin, I will meet thee by the dark fell.”

Elwerwolf drew her mantle and hood closely around her, when she had passed the outer gate of the palace ; for a bleak north wind had sprung up, and the sky looked cloudy and lowering, as if fraught with rain. The tall knot-grass, the bushy broom, and the wild heather waved to and fro on the wide heath over which she passed : and the shrill cry of some solitary plover, as it circled above its sedgy nest, mingled with the hollow boom of the bittern among the reeds, and the barking of the red-fox in the covert. The sun had long been hidden among the masses of dull grey clouds, and the evening began to set in heavily, and gloomily, and sadly ;—for such is the feeling conveyed to the heart of the wanderer, when

he plods wearily and alone, over the sunless scene.

As Elwerwolf pursued the path along the skirts of the forest, beneath the broad branches of the huge trees, which groaned again at the whistling blast; she seemed like some old sybil, called from her home by the voice of the gathering storm, and about to pierce the "haunted horrors of the nodding wood," to perform her unholy rites. Ever and anon, she turned her cold grey eyes to the blank and cheerless sky, then bent her head again to the earth, and muttered to herself, words, as deep and solemn as the measured moans of the storm. There was something in the sound of the big branches, and the roar that rang through the forest, which awaked the slumbering feelings of her heart, and sent her thoughts on pilgrimage to past scenes and by-gone days; and she seemed only to stumble on the dark land-marks, which sprang up in the chequered landscape of her memory.

"The elements are of a kindred with our-

selves," said she, "and the seasons a book in which the unlettered may read. The sunshine of our life is pictured upon the sky of summer, and our happiness shown in the transitory beauty of the fields and flowers. Our cares are the passing clouds that for a short space obscure the brightness,—the mere sleep of the sun that refresheth him for the morrow. Deep sorrows, and the bleeding pangs of the heart, are the desolating darkness, the naked anguish of winter, a winter that surviveth not another spring. Our tears are but the falling leaves of autumn, preparing the way for another flush of summer joy. But the rooted sorrows of the heart shoot their leaves and shed them within themselves, until root and stem become alike, and the sap flows downward to nourish its hidden grief, and grow in its own bitterness."

She had, by this time, reached the gloomy fell, where (through some previous arrangement) the daughter of Hereward the Saxon, and Robin Hood, awaited her.

“ How now, mother ?” said the outlaw chief, “ thou lookest as dull as a monk at Lent ; what new evil is brewing ?”

“ Evil bringeth nothing new,” answered Elwerwolf, in a solemn voice ; “ did it but seek change there might be hope ; but, like the wolf that has once lapped human blood, it hath ever a craving for the same. Evil hath no changes ; but like the blight that consumeth both flower and fruit, it is still the same destroyer, and only its victims vary.”

“ By the holy rood !” said the outlaw, “ an’ thou talkest thus, with so much misery in thy looks, thou wilt set me dreaming all night, of cutting throats, and beheading barons. Why canst thou not deliver sorrowful tidings with a smile, like Father Philip preaching up abstinence, while his huge double chin, chubby cheeks, and portly paunch, remind us all the time of fatted beeves, and goodly haunches ? Who, in the name of Cain, is about to offer up bloody sacrifice ?”

“ Who ? askest thou ! when the slayer of

Sherwood, the blood-shedding baron, the murdering Marchmont, still lives?" replied Elwerwolf. "And thinkest thou he can sleep soundly, while Edwin of Clifton is upon the earth? while Royston Gower breathes the air of heaven? while Elwerwolf and Druth look on the same sky as himself, and Hereward is yet in the world? and these forests still shelter a few brave spirits? Trust me, the tyrant hath yet many a tree to fell, on which the axe-mark is placed, before he can find enough breathing room."

"By the eleven thousand virgins, who beat their hoofs after St. Ursula, as roguish a lot of romps as ever ran after the reverend fathers of Rome!" said Royston Gower, who had approached and heard the latter part of Elwerwolf's conversation: "An' the baron means to cut all our throats for his own recreation, methinks he will find as much work as the black monk of Barton, who swore that he would hang up all bakers, and follow the example of Scripture, like Pharaoh king of the north, grand

monarch of the barren moors, I doubt not, through his feeding such lean kine."

"Look to thyself, Royston," said the old hag; "the hounds are already in thy slot, and thou knowest the cruelty of the hunter. De Marchmont hath given orders for thy capture, and thirsteth for thy blood. Edwin of Clifton is at present safe from his hands, for the suspicions of King John are awakened, and they have not run so long coupled together, but each Norman hound well knoweth the turns and shiftings of his fellow. Thou wilt be safe in the company of Sir Edwin; but if thou lingerest long abroad, be assured that thou endangerest thy life."

"Thou mightest be of kindred to the devil," answered Royston carelessly, "thou seemest so well acquainted with his ways; like the friars, who are always called in, whenever his horned mightiness hath any matters on hand, as if they were his sworn subjects. But I will, nevertheless, take thine hint, if it be but for Sir Edwin's sake; for, now I remember me, a few of the

baron's fellows, who love me as much as the devil doth divinity, laboured hard with their lungs to draw me to the Scot-ale this evening, and I have promised to empty a cup with them."

"Which thou mayest yet do," said Robin Hood; "and I will provide thee with a few companions, who know well how to set up a score, or cut the tally asunder if they like not the reckoning."

"For the matter of a few broken heads," answered Royston, "methinks my own would stand as much braying as the best of them. But, for the love I bear thine own followers, I will not tempt them into the scuffle, though I wot well on which side the balance would fall. Furthermore, I would fain see how the brave Saxon goeth through his trial on the morrow; for it may be, that my being at liberty may prove of some service."

"It was on that affair I bid thee accompany me hither," said Elwerwolf; "for it will need both caution and force to accomplish his rescue.

Thou hast seen thy father," continued she, addressing Elfrida; "what thought he to the measures proposed for his escape?"

"Refuseth all our aid," replied the maiden, in a mournful voice, "and is resolved upon abiding the issue of this trial."

"Refuseth!" echoed Elwerwolf, starting back, and pausing a few moments in silence; while the fierce brawling of the current, which coursed through the wild dell, mingled with the clattering rain, which, by this time, began to fall heavily, and the loud roar of the waving branches, filled the ear with their solemn music. "Refuseth, saidst thou, maiden?" continued she, her shrill voice ringing above the deep roar of the forest. "Hath he then grown a-weary of his life? Cannot his strong frame bear so much of sorrow as mine own old care-beaten carcass? Or doth he think that justice is to be found in the courts of the Norman, or expecteth to be fairly dealt with by his aggressors? As soon might the minnow sport before the jaws of the voracious pike in security,—the lamb pass by

harmless, after its bleating hath rung on the ears of the wolf,—the partridge sue for mercy when in the talons of the fierce falcon,—or the hart run to the hound for shelter. He is mad, and must be cared for; his woes have flown away with his wits, and he must be dragged perforce from his prison; and that, too, before the morning breaks.”

“Thou dost not see into this matter clearly, good mother,” said the outlaw; “for, if he escapeth, his possessions are forfeited; and they, methinks, are of more consequence to De Marchmont than Hereward’s life. Trowest thou we cannot save him? By my hope in the mercy of Holy Mary! an’ the brave Saxon stood under the gallows-tree, hemmed in by every follower of King John’s, I would save his life, or leave the ground as thickly strewn with dead, as the forest-paths are with the leaves in autumn.”

“Think not, good Elwerwolf,” said Elfrida, “that my father will throw away his life, when there are so many brave hearts ready to peril themselves for his safety. But remember, that

it behoveth him to make a bold stand for his possessions ; and doubt not but that he will both escape and retain his heritage, which hath so long been looked upon with envious eyes by the Normans."

"Nor fear thee," said Robin Hood, "that he will lack a friend in either De Lacy or Gloomglendell, after what we have done for the Lady Edith. Thou wilt find this De Marchmont caught in an unexpected snare, even in the midst of the court over which he will to-morrow sit, as Lord-Chief-Justice in Eyre."

"May God defend the right!" said Elwerwolf. "But thou well knowest the honesty of Hereward, who would not save his life by a falsehood, but will plead guilty in slaying this hart ; which could be nothing less than the Evil-one, in another guise, roaming abroad and seeking for prey."

"Marry ! then he might have borne off either the King or De Marchmont," said Royston, "seeing that he hath a fair claim on them both ;

and it would but be gathering the blackberries before they are fully ripe."

"Make thyself easy, good mother," said the outlaw, "respecting our honest countryman. Elfrida hath already set her heart at rest on this matter; and, when the worst is known, he can but be liberated after his trial. And what if they keep his old homestead? I am the chief ranger of some thousands of goodly acres, and it shall go hard if I cannot find you all a safe nest, under shelter of some of my branches, in spite of the king and all his followers."

"I will believe thee," answered the old woman; "and trust that all may yet end well. My heart also acheth for Edwin, and the maiden Margaret. I marvel how one so kind and lovely could spring from so hard a stem."

"No marvel," answered Royston, "when the same turf nourisheth the deadly nightshade and the violet; and the nettle springeth up beside the primrose. Marry! my old sire was a limb of Sathanas; and I, his own son, according to my old mother's authority, (who has

been dead twenty years, come the Feast of the Archangel, heaven rest her soul!) am but few degrees from becoming a saint."

"That thou hast reached the stage of a full-grown sinner, is a truth," said Robin Hood; "and I cannot gainsay, but that it may be the first step towards a saintship. But I have a few matters to attend to," added he, "and will walk on with you to where a few of my own merry men are in waiting, who shall see you safely within the palace,—a dwelling for which I would not exchange my own green roof-tree."

So saying, they departed from the Wild-boar-fell, and were soon without the skirts of the forest. The wide heath began to look lonely and desolate in the hazy and approaching twilight.

CHAPTER V.

—— Imperious beauty,
Treading upon the neck of understanding,
Compelled me to put off my natural shape
Of loyal duty, to disguise myself
In the adulterous and cobweb mask
Of disobedient treachery.

MASSINGER.

ALTHOUGH the Constable of Chester had promised Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont his assistance in making another attempt to capture Edith, still he had not the least intention of rendering the baron any further aid; and if he had thought for a moment of Margaret Marchmont, she was then forgotten amid his hazardous schemes.

Stung to the very heart with the remem-

brance of the humiliation Hugh de Lacy had compelled him to undergo, and half maddened by the beauty of Edith, and filled with envy at witnessing the affection which existed between the maiden, and the knight of Gloomglendell ; he again daringly resolved to venture upon making her captive, without acquainting either De Marchmont, or any other who was likely to become his rival.

He imparted his design to a few of his chosen followers, and found a ready abettor in Friar Bernard, who belonged to the order of Black Canons at Newstead Priory. Friar Bernard had long been looked upon with a jealous eye by his superior, and several brothers of his order ; for he frequently absented himself from the priory under the pretext of being called to hear some confession, or other matters connected with his calling. He had also received some slight from the Earl of Eltham, and had long cherished an hatred against that noble.

Edith remained at the priory, and she was only prevented from returning to her own resi-

dence, at the castle of Lincoln, after her rescue from John of Chester, by the hope that her presence might, in some measure, be instrumental in serving Hereward the Saxon. Elfrida had already had an interview with the noble maiden, and not only received an assurance from Edith, that she would use all her influence in behalf of her father, but De Lacy and Gloomglendell also promised their aid in procuring the king's pardon.

De Marchmont had already enough on his hands, without interfering further with Edith; and, moreover, felt secure as regarded the possession of the maiden, through the influence of King John: could he but succeed in removing the many other obstacles, that had so unexpectedly arisen before him. As to the fate of Hereward, he already considered that as settled, and doubted not but that he should be enabled to remove Edwin of Clifton from his path, when he had once succeeded in securing Royston Gower. His snares were also planted in readiness for Elwerwolf and Druth; but ano-

ther day brought its own events, and little did he then dream of the bold deed, that was to throw such sudden confusion into the midst of all his carefully laid plans, which were marked out without any regard to the blood that must have been shed, had they been executed.

The Constable of Chester was left alone to pursue his own schemes, and well was it for Edith, that on the night the constable again attempted her capture, the dwarf had stationed himself at the foot of the winding stair which led to her apartment, or the maiden might have been borne away, far beyond all aid, and no one had a knowledge by whom the deed had been executed.

At a short distance from the priory the constable had stationed a score of his boldest followers,—a clump of oaks, which grew on a large mound (probably the site of some ancient barrow), served as a complete screen to the armed horsemen. Their orders were peremptory, and on no account were they to approach the priory, or move from the spot until the

baron returned with his prize, when they were to move off, without the slightest noise, through the wildest and most unfrequented paths of the forest, which led to the borders of Yorkshire.

The moon had not yet risen, when Druth, who kept watch over the apartment which Edith occupied, was aroused by a faint sound in the distance. The dwarf, who had hitherto been contemplating the wild and stormy sky, and watching star after star, as they became buried under the phalanx of clouds, which gradually spread over the heavens, now strained his eyes in the direction of the forest, which was all astir with the approaching storm, for the pattering rain began to fall heavily on the long green leaves.

At first he thought that his fancy had deceived him, and the sound might be nothing more than the rustling of the foliage; but the murmur increased, and seemed to draw nearer to the priory. He listened again! and the tranquil waters of the river Lene made the same low music, as they were wont, throughout

the sleepy night, nor did the rain-drops increase its murmurs. He looked on high, thinking that some flock of wild geese might be winging their way to the next marshes ; but not a speck floated between the forest and the hazy sky. At length he stole along, in the shadows of the trees ; the falling rain, and the swaying of the branches, drowning the sound of his footsteps.

Druth reached the mound on the opposite side to that which the horsemen had entered, and from behind a hawthorn-bush he saw the assembled soldiers, and heard the voices of John of Chester and Friar Bernard in conversation. The dwarf stole cautiously back, and having intimated his fears to Father Clement, and several of the friars, he next gave notice to the knight of Gloomglendell, who was in the apartment with Edith. Having thus prepared the way, he took his station beside the gates of the priory, well knowing what the baron designed.

At length, the constable approached on horseback, the friar walking by the side of his

palfrey. The horse which Chester had selected for his purpose was a heavy looking animal, but to the keen eye of the dwarf, there was a slumbering spirit perceptible, as if he but wanted encouragement to exert his long mis-shapen and slender limbs. The constable was disguised in the dress of a Cistercian abbot. They halted before the gates of the priory, and the friar thus accosted the dwarf:

“Wilt thou bear the tidings to the noble Edith of Lincoln, worthy porter, and tell the lady that Hugh de Leaford, the abbot, who has been elected to the monastery of St. Mary’s of Lincoln, since her absence, wishes to congratulate her on her escape, having heard of the great privation she hath lately undergone; and also to speak with her upon divers matters connected with the tithes and dues in the aforesaid monastery. Step forward, speedily, and announce his wishes, sith thou hast taken upon thyself to guard the noble lady.”

“And for thy kindness, good porter!” said

the disguised baron, "accept this piece of gold."

"I will do thy bidding, worthy abbot!" replied the dwarf, accepting the piece of gold with a grin; "but how came your reverence to ride forth unattended, when there are so many in these forests, who love the slicing of the church?"

"We put our trust in a hidden power, worthy porter," replied the constable, "believing that they watch over the welfare of the church, and into their hands we commit our safety; *Fide et fortitudine*, as one of the holy fathers saith."

The dwarf ascended the winding stair which was close beside the large postern of the priory, without further reply, and bade the knight of Gloomglendell conceal himself in one of the recesses, and in no wise to show his face until the constable had laid violent hands upon Edith, also, telling him, that he had warned his retainers, (several of whom were lodged within

the out-buildings belonging to the priory) to be in readiness.

“ I have a commission for thee, worthy Druth !” said friar Bernard, “ an’ thou wilt but step into the refectory before thou startest on the journey, and refresh thyself, I will keep watch at the gates, then explain to thee the purport of my mission, for thy journey will be as far as the town of Mansfield. When thou hast partaken of food, thou canst bid Roger, thine assistant, keep watch, until thou dost return.”

“ I thank thee !” said Druth, “ and, not having eaten since noon, I will avail myself of thy kind offer.” And Druth entered within the gates, behind which, several friars, together with Gloomglendell’s followers, were stationed.

“ Thou seest !” said the constable, when he had departed, “ that an abbot’s robe, like charity, covereth a multitude of sins, and even this deformed dwarf, who is as keen-eyed as a falcon, suspecteth nothing under our disguise. By the mass, I will throw off the cowl and

hood, and drag her forth in mine own true character."

"But how wilt thou slip the bandage over her mouth?" said the friar; "trust me, that her screams will be heard, unless thou dost it on the sudden, and before she is prepared. An' thou takest my advice on the matter, thou wilt keep up the disguise, and seize her unawares, while she holdeth converse with thee."

"Methinks her voice would scarce be heard by the friars at this distance!" replied the constable, "beside, I doubt not, but the lazy drones are now snoring on the benches, or deep in argument with each other over their cups; for the prior, must by this time, have retired to rest."

"I know not," answered the friar, "but would have thee bestir thyself, for I like not the readiness with which Druth resigned his post; he was wont to be crafty as a fox, and self-willed as a forest bull. Thou wilt do well to speed."

"The constable obeyed, and ascended the

winding stair which led to the apartment of Edith. No sooner had the door closed behind the constable, than several friars, led on by Druth, issued from behind the postern, and captured friar Bernard, and before he had time to raise an alarm, he was dragged away, and secured in a strong cell, to wait his trial before the heads of his order.

“ Fool that I am, to linger here,” said Druth, shouldering his club, and ascending the winding stair. “ What, if the Knight of Gloomglen-dell should chance to receive some foul blow, from this villain’s poniard? I will at least keep watch outside the door, and, at the first sound of footsteps in motion, rush into the apartment.”

Meantime the pretended abbot had seated himself in the lady’s apartment; and well did he drawl out his “*benedicite*,” and thank the blessed saints for the lady’s deliverance, as he sat with his features nearly concealed in the cowl.

“ Said you not the Abbot of St. Peter’s was

ailing?" inquired Edith of the constable, just before Druth came to play the eaves-dropper without the door.

"The holy father hath worn himself to skin and bone," answered the constable, fumbling under his garment with the bandage, which he was getting in readiness for the meditated attack, and which he seemed in no great hurry to attempt, as the friar had agreed to sound a whistle, should any footsteps be heard. "The holy father did purpose to spend a few days," continued he, "with the brotherhood of Crowland, but I wot not whether he hath yet gone."

"The liar!" whispered Blanch, who had concealed herself behind the arras; "but he shall hear the clatter of my tongue, and, mayhap, feel my nails to boot, ere he departs."

"You will tell the holy father, on your return," said Edith, "of my narrow escape from the fangs of this villain of Chester."

"Doubt it not, good lady," replied the constable. "I also feel deeply interested in your

welfare, and will not forget you in my devotions."

Druth grasped his cudgel tighter, when he heard the hypocrite speak thus.

"I doubt not," continued Edith, "but the base baron will yet meet with his deserts; though, by my faith! methinks he can never again look into the face of aught that is knightly and noble, after the disgrace he suffered yesterday, when, stripped of his armour, he was sent forth, amid the hooting and hissing of the outlaws, and the derision of the knights."

The constable writhed in his seat; and, springing up, exclaimed,

"Cursed be the remembrance of their deeds! thus will he repay their scoffs."

And, in a moment, Druth rushed into the room, just as Gloomglendell and Blanch issued from behind the arras, and as the brutal Norman was forcing the bandage over the mouth of Edith.

One blow from the dwarf's club fell upon the constable's arm, and he instantly released his

hold, nor had he strength enough left to offer any resistance; while Gloomglendell said, with a smile of grim mockery,

“ Art thou possessed, holy father? or what hath come over thee, thus to offer violence to a free-born maiden? Surely it must have been the power of the Evil-one that caused thee to commit this deed?”

“ It was while under the influence of Sathanas,” said Blanch. “ And I hold it good, that we give him over to the friars; who, knowing better how to deal with the devil than us harmless women, will doubtless scourge the foul fiend out of him, and remember his deeds in their devotions. The base deceiver! the hoary old hypocrite! I would that I had the scourging of the wretch, from moonrise to matins. Marry! I would teach the monster better, than to come again in this guise.”

“ Work your will on me,” said the unfortunate baron. “ I am John of Chester, and would have——”

“ Belie not so valiant a knight,” said Gloom-

glendell. "Thou art some evil-minded prelate, and wouldst fain throw the blame on this flower of chivalry,—this sworn defender of maidens, and true knight of the holy cross."

"May all the curses of the foul fiends alight upon you!" said the constable.

"Ah! dost thou swear, father abbot?" said the knight. "Nay, then, we must give thee up to the holy brethren. Here, Father Clement," added he, for several of the friars had entered the room; "let this sinful brother be led forth, and undergo a just penance for his crimes. He curseth like a drunkard and a street-brawler; assuredly he is under the influence of the Evil-one."

The baron's arms were secured, and he was led forth by the friars, followed by the dwarf and Henry of Gloomglendell; the latter going forth to see that his own retainers were in readiness, in case the followers of Chester should approach the priory.

"Thou seest," said Edith, turning to Blanch, when they had departed, "how faithfully this

dwarf hath served me. But for his warning, I might again have fallen into this tyrant's power."

"I could almost love the wretch," replied Blanch, "were he not so hideous, (and I could forget the gallant outlaw,) for the service he hath this night done us. Nay, by my creed, I would sooner be compelled to join my fate with his, rather than be again deprived of your presence. Never shall I forget the tears I shed over your wimple and hood, when you were absent, until I could scarce see the distant forest, or look out upon the open heath, so dim had mine eyes grown with weeping;" and the pearly drops again chased each other down her cheeks, while she recalled to memory the anguish she had undergone, during the absence of her fair mistress.

"Thou art a good maiden, Blanch," said Edith; "and I often pined for thy presence during my short captivity, and felt at a loss when I had not thy froward tongue to rebuke. Nay, I could almost shed tears to bear thee

company, when I think of those moments which I spent in watching the sunbeams pass over the parchment, and in wrestling with this ruffianly baron. The holy Virgin be thanked," added she, lifting her divine eyes to heaven, "for the aid she sent to my deliverance."

"Then to think of the wretch venturing hither," said Blanch: "marry, I felt as if I could scarce keep the nails on my fingers, but thought that they would every moment fly off and settle in his cheeks; but I scratched the arras, just to contain myself. And what would have befallen us, had not Sir Henry of Gloomglendell been present?"

"I would not fear trusting my safety in the strong arm of Druth," replied Edith; "as for the Constable of Chester, he is but a coward, or he would not have refused to meet the Earl of Eltham in single combat, when he was challenged. One thing hath my misfortunes done; they have reconciled my kinsman, to Gloomglendell, otherwise he might have adhered to the king and De Marchmont."

“And the poor Saxon maiden,” said Blanch: “my heart bled when she pleaded for her father; would she but say the half of what she uttered here, methinks his majesty could not deny her boon.”

“I know not that,” replied Edith; “he is a tyrant, and cruel as the hungry wolf; and I would not like to cross his path when he is in an angry mood. De Marchmont, also, presides over the court of Eyre: I wot but too well how this trial will terminate. But Gloomglendell bids me take comfort,—and I have faith in his word.”

But, leaving the lady and her attendant to discuss these matters, we must follow the Constable of Chester, who was led into a small chapel in one of the transepts of the priory, to be dealt with according to his deserts.

CHAPTER VI.

Quoth Hudibras, that's answered soon :
Give us the whip, we'll lay it on.

* * * * *

For saints may do the same things by
The Spirit, in sincerity,
Which other men are tempted to,
And at the devil's instance do ;
And yet the actions be contrary,
Just as the saints and wicked vary.

HUDIBRAS.

THE Constable of Chester was dragged per force into the small chapel, which was generally appropriated to acts of penance, and where corporeal punishment was inflicted on those friars who were reluctant to scourge their own shoulders, and on such of the domestics as had trans-

gressed the rules of the order. The cell was devoid of ornament, saving a rude crucifix cut out from the wall, a bench, and a wooden frame, to which the culprits were fastened. Several lighted torches were stuck in the iron branches on the wall, or held by the assembled friars. Some of them also held lashes of whipcord, and thongs of leather, in readiness for the operation. Several similar instruments of torture hung around the walls, and were always in readiness, should any of the holy brethren, in a pious fit, feel inclined to scourge their bodies in private, just by the way of penitential recreation, and as a set-off against some affront done to the soul. Many of the burly brotherhood believed that the constable was none other than the abbot of Lincoln, who had been taken in such a very unclerical deed, as attempting to carry off a noble maiden. Nor did it prove of any avail, when he began to plead and explain his true character; for some of them shook their heads, as if in doubt of the truth; and others only replied, that he laboured under the power of the

Evil-one, which, by the grace of God, they would cast out. John of Chester tried his strength with the broad-shouldered friars, but it was to no purpose, for they succeeded in bringing him down on his knees, and then securing his hands to the strong wooden machine made for the purpose: over it was a Latin motto, which in English read, "*By many stripes will he be healed.*"

All being in readiness, father Nicholas addressed the brethren as follows: "St. Ambrose hath assigned that penance consisteth of two kinds, namely, that which is taken up voluntarily, and from a notion of pure repentance; and that which we force upon our sinful brethren: even as a kind leech crammeth down his unsavory medicines; which, although unpleasant to the taste, are nevertheless wholesome, and right fitting for the weal of the body. And whereas our fallen brother hath resisted the kind infliction which we intend to deal forth, he hath shown that he cometh not to partake of our penance in the spirit of affection, forgetting

that whom we love we chasten. And further, that he who loveth his brother, spareth not the rod ; and furthermore, in accordance with the blessed maxim of St. Martin, ‘ By our stripes are we healed,’ thereby meaning that we repent and forget not our sins, nor the remembrance of our many transgressions ; which said stripes, like the marks in a tally, serve to remind us of the number of our iniquities. Therefore, brethren, begin the good work.

“ May the curse of ten thousand fiends alight upon you !” roared out the constable, writhing again under the lash. “ An’ I escape your hands, and burn not down every rafter on your roof, and pitch you headlong into the blazing ruins, may I never again lift battle-axe.—O ! O ! desist, knave priests !”

“ Cease for a few moments,” said father Nicholas, “ he beginneth to bewail his sins, and there is hope ; albeit, the Evil-one is still strong within him, and inciteth him to rebellion ; but since he doth not as yet repent truly, with sighs and groans, and abundance of tears, we

must not desist. For what saith St. Augustine : 'Thy repentance shall be deep,' thereby denoting that ye spare not the lash ; 'and sincere,' meaning that ye lay on in good earnest ; 'and sharp,' which further indicateth that ye lose no time between the blows ; 'and long,' furthermore, meaning, that ye cannot beat your brother too much. Therefore resume the good work.'

"Methinks, holy father," said friar Clement, who next took up the lash and seemed in no hurry to begin, "that it were well to let our unhappy brother inflict a small portion of his own penance, seeing that we may deal our blows somewhat heavier than it suiteth him to bear."

"Brother Clement," replied Nicholas, "I have not forgot how thou didst inflict thine own punishment, for eating flesh at Lent, when the prior ordered thee to make twenty red lashes upon thine own shoulders, which, instead of doing with the whip, thou didst effect by staining thy back with blackberries. Nor should we have discovered the cheat, had not thy lips been stained with eating of the residue."

“Which thou knowest, holy father, I did fully explain to the satisfaction of every brother of mine order,” answered Clement; “for the Leech hath said that the blackberry is a sovereign remedy against old wounds; and I did it to prepare myself for the intended flagellation, not having fully recovered from a former one, which was given me with greater force than my crimes craved. And I did fulfil a part of our blessed motto, by waiting until my stripes were healed.

“Thou forgettest, brother,” said father Nicholas, “that in sparing the flesh, thou encouragest the spirit within to further rebellion; for what saith St. Oswald, ‘We know not the tree by the leaves or the branches, but by the fruit thereof.’ Which meaneth, that we shall judge of the actions, which are the fruit; and if the fruit is evil, we shall dig about the tree, which meaneth to mortify the flesh; and cut off the exuberant branches, which also signifieth applying the axe, which is the lash, to the branch, which meaneth the body.”

“Thy explanations are ever ready,” worthy father, answered Clement; “and, like the monk who took off the goose’s head because it hissed at his homily, and, as he fancied, derided his bad Latin: thou bringest marvellous reasons for thy sage interpretations. But what saith St. Augustine?—

He spares his own body who loves his own soul,
For ever, together, they go cheek by jowl.”

“What art thou thinking of, brother!” exclaimed Father Nicholas; “art thou quoting the vile songs which are sung in Scot-ales and hostleries, and at market-crosses; and attributing such base compositions (as were composed by the vile itinerant, the minstrel Blondell, to kill the idle time of a monarch,) to the blessed saints.”

“Not being so deeply skilled in this vagabond lore, holy father, as yourself,” replied friar Clement, “I deemed that it might be a complin, composed by the worthy saint, and

knew not but it might roll as solemnly in a good Latin hexameter as our own *Placebo*."

"Thou wastest time, good brother," continued Nicholas, "and wilt do well to aid in the conversion of our sinful brother, who is guilty of all the primary sins, hypocrisy, pride, falsehood, covetousness, and slander."

"How thou wilt prove all these things, holy brother, baffleth my wits," said the friar, still lingering as if loath to use the lash. "That the unfortunate abbot hath coveted the maiden, I deny not; but remember that we are commanded to love one another; and what said St. Ursula to her eleven thousand virgins, 'Be ye kind unto every father of the church, but commune not with the ungodly;' thereby shewing that they might mingle with the members of the holy order, in every form of worship, from matin to complin, but with none others. And if our misguided brother forgot, for a moment, his love to heaven, and divided it with the beauty of the maiden, remember that St. Dunstan was captivated by the assumed shape of

the Evil-one; nor was it until he had seized him by the nose, with his holy tongs, that Sathanas appeared in his true form."

"Inasmuch, worthy brother, as the latter part of thine argument hath reminded me of the necessity of our duty," said father Nicholas, "seeing that our stripes, like the tongs of the blessed saint, will restore our unhappy brother to his former state. I would have thee proceed with the punishment, lest he should return like the dog to wallowing in the mire like a sow, or like a sow to the vomit like the dog. The dog, meaning himself, the mire being the maiden, and wallowing, which, according to St. Ambrose, should be read swallowing, for the swallow flieth; the meaning, thereby, being plain, our sinful brother, the dog, would swallow or fly away with the mire, meaning the maiden. As to proving the several sins with which I have charged him, they are plain, as the likeness of St. Bernard in our missal, which was taken from a description given of his blessed features by a shepherd, who hath often heard

his sire tell, how his grandsire had seen the holy saint, and thus monk Anselm made the picture on good authority."

Just then the knight of Gloomglendell entered the cell, having been arranging such forces as he could muster within the Priory, in readiness, in case of an attack. The constable of Chester cast a supplicating glance at the knight, and said, "An' thou be'est a man, thrust thy dagger into my heart! and let not one, whose breast has confronted the armies of France, and whose shield has flashed back the yellow brow of the infidel, be thus exposed to the taunts and scoffs of these hypocrites. By the order of knighthood, to which thou belongest, and of which I have, until these few days, been a worthy member, do me this act, and I will bless thy hand for the deed!"

Gloomglendell replied not, but, with his dagger, cut asunder the leathern thongs by which the limbs of the constable had been secured, and ordering Druth to restore his gar-

ments, he himself dismissed him in safety from the gates of the Priory.

A smile passed over the features of Friar Clement, when he saw John of Chester liberated; nor did he feel any reproach within himself, for having spared the broad shoulders of the baron, and spent that time in argument, which would otherwise have passed in blows. The holy brother had as much love for the lash, as the hungry days of Lent; nor did he believe that half that boasted goodness could be found in penance, which he himself could extract from the bowels of a pasty. John of Chester seemed to have lost all his haughtiness: for when he departed he no longer carried his stately figure erect; but retired with his head bent and his eyes fixed on the ground. To be twice foiled within so brief a space, was more than his spirit could brook, and when he reached his followers, he bid them move on, and led the way through the forest in the direction of the north.

Meantime Father Nicholas and Friar Clement still held on their argument.

“Thou hast not yet convinced me,” said Clement, “how our poor brother (in whose liberation so great a miracle hath been wrought) is guilty of all the sins laid to his charge.”

“Is he not an hypocrite,” said Father Nicholas, “for having come in the disguise of a servant of the holy church, thereby assuming that, which he is not? And was it not also pride which caused him to put on the dress of an abbot, when that of a lowly monk might have answered the same deceit? Did he not obtain access to the maiden by falsehood, and also covet her? and, moreover, slander the character of the Abbot of Lincoln, by doing these deeds in his name? And it grieveth me deeply when I think that he hath escaped with so few stripes, even, I fear me, before he is healed.”

“Certes, these are evil deeds, holy father,” said the friar, with a mournful shake of the head; “and I thank the blessed saints that I have never been guilty of such crimes, although I have been once or twice overtaken in my

cups. But even in this I heard a voice exclaim, 'Friar Clement, remember that thou art no more than man!' and were it not for these failings, and the cravings of my stomach during fasts, I fear me that my horn would become exalted, and I should imagine myself a saint. Once have I risen in my pride, even when I addressed the assembled multitude who were disobeying the holy interdict. But the very blow that the smith struck with his hammer, when he immersed me into the malt liquor, even that sound said, 'Friar Clement, thou art no more than man!'"

"Lay not this flattering hope to thy soul, brother," said Father Nicholas, "nor thus seek to cover thy failings. How canst thou thank Heaven that thou art only a drunkard and a glutton? May not the murderer console himself by the same rule, and thank Heaven that he hath not robbed the holy church; or the usurer thank the saints that he is not guilty of gluttony; or the felon bless himself for having paid the prior his dues; the covet

ous man console himself by never having plundered a widow; the slanderer return thanks for never having robbed a man in the king's highway; the hypocrite boast that he hath never neglected to say his paternosters daily; and the miser sooth himself with the thought that he oweth no man a silver penny. Believe me, good brother, that the Evil-one never permitteth us to halt long, if we want to throw a cloak over our own failings, but is ever ready with the shadow of his wing, to darken what we would fain conceal."

"Thou strikest somewhat heavily, Father Nicholas," said the friar, "and, excepting when thou art interpreting holy writ, makest thy arguments to tell. But I hold it good that we should have a faith within ourselves, and somewhat of a just appreciation of our merits as well as failings. Faith, my brother, I hold to be the key which unlocks the gate of our hopes, even as Lance unlocketh the larder. Nor does the food found therein bear far from the realization of our hopes hereafter; for, in this wise,

hunger begetteth an appetite, which is faith—we reach the larder, which is hope. Lance bringeth forth the key, which is charity; and we enter therein, and partake of the reward which faith, hope, and charity held out to us.”

“I would fain persuade thee, brother,” said Father Nicholas, “to draw thy reasons from the works of the holy fathers, instead of the larder. Thy metaphors savour of the meat-market, and thy comparisons smack of the ale-cup. Wouldst thou, in addressing thy flock, draw such inferences as these, and hold up virtue as consisting in an abstinence from venison, or make self-denial to exist in refraining from the wine-flask. No, brother, it would be like wearing the sackcloth, and shirt of scourging hair over the gaberdine when we do penance, and not where they would bite through the very skin.”

“The cold night-air is gnawing at my stomach, worthy father,” said the hungry friar, “and unless appeased will keep up a rumbling within my frail tenement, which will break my

slumbers worse than the howling of a dog. I will argue this matter with thee on the morrow :” so saying, he departed from the chapel, and was speedily followed by the few remaining friars.

CHAPTER VII.

What shall he have that killed the deer ?

As you like it.

THE eventful morning, appointed for the trial of Hereward, at length arrived, and the inhabitants of the forest seemed to have caught the sad aspect of the sky, which was dull, heavy, and overcast with masses of lowering clouds. The drizzling showers, which beat in at the grated window where the brave Saxon was imprisoned, together with the leaden and weary appearance of the heavens, threw a painful and melancholy sadness over his feelings, of which he in vain attempted to rid himself.

Notwithstanding the unfavourable state of

the roads, which were rendered slippery and dangerous by the heavy rain that had fallen in the night, numbers had flocked from the most remote quarters of Sherwood to witness the trial; for Hereward had long been popular in the forest, and was looked upon by the people as the defender of their liberties, ever since he had dared to dispute the boundaries with Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont.

Neither was the fame of the worthy Saxon the only object which drew together such an unusual concourse of people, so much as the enormity of the offence, which was considered the highest, that could be committed against the forest laws, and, compared to which, the murder of a man would have been held lightly, since the latter might have been compounded for by paying a trifling sum. Added to this, no royal-hart-proclaimed had been killed within the boundaries of Sherwood Forest, within fifteen years. The last, King Richard had chased from thence into the forest of Barnsdale, in Yorkshire, which, not being recovered, was pro-

claimed at Tickell, Doncaster, and in the adjacent neighbourhood, and was eventually killed by Mark the maltster of Mansfield, who had suffered death for the offence. Numbers of the inhabitants remembered the trial of Mark, and, while they communed together with solemn countenances, and many a knowing and mournful shake of the head, the beholder might easily judge, how, among themselves, they had decided the impending fate of the unfortunate Saxon.

The building destined for the trial of Hereward was the same in which the Court of Eyre, or Forest Court, had been held ever since the days of William the Conqueror. It was an ancient edifice, and had probably been used as a place of worship by the Anglo-Saxons, even before they were converted to Christianity; for the rude but defaced images of Woden, Thor, and others of their heathen gods, might even then be traced in the almost shapeless masses of sculpture which filled the various niches.

Although the rude mansion was built of that

hard stone, for the produce of which Mount Sorrell is yet so famous ; it had, nevertheless, during a long course of years, undergone many repairs, which might be distinctly traced in its numerous styles of architecture. One or two of the original and truly ancient windows still remained, with their arched frames and zig-zag ornaments, so closely resembling the form of sharks' teeth. The old doorway was also extant, and, in point of architecture, resembled the windows, saving that the external arch was much larger than the inner ones, and retired with a beautiful and vaulted perspective, to the size of the ponderous oaken, and iron-studded door.

The interior of the building consisted of only one large apartment, the roof of which was arched, and supported by short massy columns, that gave a heavy and clumsy look to the fabric. Where the pillars stood, they also threw a deep shadow over the floor of the apartment, only varied by a dull bronzy light, which streamed in through the rich and heavy splen-

dour of the painted windows, and chequered the pavement of the hall like a partially lighted forest-path.

There was a gloomy and solemn appearance about the building, which seemed to have fallen upon the spectators ; and the half-lighted darkness, that hung over the vaulted and low-browed roof, threw a kind of ominous and awful hue over the thoughtful countenances of the silent audience, so diffusing itself among them, that they had the look of a group of statues, and seemed to become a portion of the shadowy mansion.

In a high chair of state, covered with crimson and cloth of gold, and placed at the upper end of the apartment, sat Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont, as lord chief justice of the Court of Eyre. A table stood at his feet, covered with the same gaudy material, and emblazoned in the centre with a large white hart of silver, which seemed browsing on a tree of ruddy gold. Around this, were seated the writers appointed to keep the records of the Forest-court. At the

end of the table, and full in front of De Marchmont, stood Hereward the Saxon, guarded by six soldiers, bearing partisans. The remainder of the dais was occupied by agistors, verdurers, wardens, regards, beadles, foresters, and all the numerous orders of officers, whose duty it was to be present at the court, and report all offences against vert or venison, or any other trespass upon the rights of the forest.

The body of the hall was filled with a mixed multitude, some of whom had business at the court, but the greater portion were assembled out of curiosity, and that love of making a holiday upon every occasion that offers,—a privilege which is still strictly maintained by the hard-handed artizans of the present day.

A few knights loitered about at the upper end of the hall, and the light which fell upon their burnished armour or costly dresses, gave a fine relief to what would otherwise have seemed a heavy picture. A small door opened near to where the chair of state was placed, and gave ingress and egress to the numerous officers,

who, during the different trials, were compelled to pass to and fro. The banner of England, with its three lions blazing in gold, hung over the head of De Marchmont, and at once proclaimed that the present tribunal was a royal court.

The Norman baron seemed ill at ease, and kept shifting his position in the gorgeous chair which he occupied, and evincing as much restlessness as if he had been seated upon a nest of adders. Once or twice he attempted to outlook the Saxon prisoner, but Hereward shrank not beneath his glance, but with folded arms and collected countenance, confronted the proud tyrant with so calm a dignity, that he at last fixed his eyes upon the table, which was placed at his feet, and seemed absorbed in deep thought.

At length the baron arose, and casting a grim look of half gratified malice upon the Saxon, thus addressed the court:—

“ Verdurers, Regarders, Agistors, Wood-

wards, Forest Keepers of every degree, and unto all here assembled, I now speak. As this court is only holden once every third year, and as that time is elapsed since last I sat here to dispense justice, I call upon every forester, noble and lowly, to present whatever offences have been committed, or held over from the Court of Attachment, and whatever matters are also beyond judgment of the Court of Swanimote, and to keep nothing back. So help you, God, in the day of doom.

“ I demand to know what offences have been committed, either against vert or venison, since the last sessions in the king’s forest, or any other place within its limits? or, whether there has been any unlawful hunting near to, or within the said places, by day or night? Whether any trespasses have been committed in fence-month; or any one found within the forest, under any pretext whatever, at that forbidden season? If any assarts, wastes, or enclosures, have been made; or any one hath enlarged his grounds, or planted his hedge, or made a ditch,

and thereby encroached upon the forest boundaries? Has any land-mark been destroyed, any mine of delf, stone, clay, marl, turf, iron, or any other matter, been made? Or does any tanner, or white tawer, dwell near the forest, and tan the hides of stolen deer? Has any church, house, swine-court, neat-hut, or sheep-cot been erected within the forest? and by whom? Has every inhabitant, of the age of twelve years, been sworn true to the forest? Has any ground been ploughed, or leaps made to the prejudice of the deer; or any swarm of bees, honey, or wax, been taken away since the last session? Has any one dared to make a haven, or creek, or new road, by which timber or venison may be carried away, either by barge or wain? Hath any forester taken an undue fine or reward, and for the same secreted some offender? Have any deer been found dead or wounded, and has such been given to the hospital, or priory, and the head and skin to the freemen of the next town? Have all the dogs within the forest had their fore-claws cut off? or hath any

man in harvest-time brought a grey-hound within boundaries, under colour of its watching his wallet? Whether any body who has liberty to hunt vermin of chase, foxes, wild-cats, pole-cats, or squirrels, and under pretext thereof, have killed or chased the deer? Hath any unlawful person, living within the forest, within their houses, secreted any bows, shafts, hounds, or engines, by which they may destroy the deer? Has any one hunted the king's deer within seven miles of the forest, or at any time within forty days before the king's hunting, or after the same? Or if any one privileged, hath hunted either before sunrise, or after sunset, or with any of his own serfs? Has any man been in the purlieus, and having found a deer feeding, gone against the wind and killed it with bow, or hound, or waylaid it at any gap or ditch where it usually walketh? Or has any one ridden or walked through the paths of the forest with hounds, and not kept them safe by his side in a leash, tied with a fast knot? Has any covert of fern furze, or underwood, been de-

stroyed, to the injury of sheltering the deer, where they haunt or fawn? Have any swine been found in the forest at pannage-time, or unringed, and, by turning up the soil, injured the pasturage of the deer? Have any of the king's oaks been cut down without warrant? or has any one, beside the keepers, walked the forest with bows and arrows? or has there been any unlawful gathering of cheminiage? or taking away of acorns, crabs, or other mast, from the forest? Has any one been bold enough to kill the deer which the king was hunting, or been guilty of the unpardonable crime of killing a hart-royal-proclaimed, the punishment of which is death?"*

The baron paused, and all eyes were turned towards the unfortunate Saxon. A deep murmur ran through the court, intermingled with a

* The curious reader is referred to *Manwood's Forest Laws*, first published in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and compiled from original documents, some of them bearing date as far back as the time of William the Conqueror, and Canute the Dane.

sigh of pity, and a few groans, while one or two were bold enough to hiss, but whether at Hereward or De Marchmont, they said not; and all again remained as silent as the grave.

Several officers then presented their different rolls, enumerating the various offences which had been committed. And as there were no counsellors in those days, and but few attempted to defend the charges brought against them, matters were soon concluded by referring to former judgments. One massy volume of reference, containing the decisions of Glanvil, (a justice of Eyre, in the time of Henry II.) was the principal authority from whence De Marchmont gave judgment, and might be said to stand in the same stead as Burns' Justice does in the present day. Clauses were quoted which had been standing from the time of the Conqueror. But the reign of Rufus seemed to have been one in which the most laws had been enacted, and from whence had been compiled those edicts called, the Assizes of Woodstock.

Although it will be digressing from our story

to enumerate a few of the most remarkable charges which were brought forward on that day, they will, nevertheless, serve in some measure to justify the conduct of those who had set them at defiance, and been proclaimed outlaws. Some of them were curious in themselves, and others worthy of recording, if only for their unreasonableness, and the light they throw upon the manners and customs of those ancient and almost forgotten times.

The first case decided was against one Christian, a smith, who possessed a freehold within the forest, or land which he could not reach without entering the forest boundary. His crime was in fetching one of his own horses from his own field before sunrise, as he had occasion to start early on a long journey. He was found guilty of trespass, and of disturbing the deer while feeding, at so untimely an hour, and sentenced to a year's imprisonment, or the payment of a heavy fine.

Another, although a Fletcher, and carrying home new bows and arrows to the lodge of a

verdurer, the latter having ordered the same, was sentenced to imprisonment, having been taken with them on his person, within the forest, which he was compelled to pass; and he was sentenced to imprisonment for having the same found upon him.

A third was fined for having built a shed on his own freehold, situate near the forest, the act alleging that new buildings were wont to scare the deer, and that, as the Conqueror had removed churches, and even whole villages, to give them quietness and shelter, so no man could be allowed to erect even a shed near the forest, and on his own ground, without his majesty's leave.

One offence which had been committed two years before, and the perpetrator of which had been dead nearly twelve months, was, nevertheless, brought forward, and the next heir found guilty of the crime.

Such was the nature of the Norman forest laws, that had there been no heir, the tenants

residing on the estate of the deceased could be brought to judgment.

One Nicholas of Clifton was fined heavily for cutting down a tree on his own estate, without permission of the justice of Eyre, or in the presence of a verdurer. For the king claimed a property in every tree, and the foresters could enter any man's estate and cut down browse for the deer. Nor must a landholder fell a tree on his own freehold without permission, if it stood near the forest.

Another complained that he had had his ox taken by force, for keeping a dog whose foreclaws had not been cut off, although the said dog was under three months old, and incapable of chasing the deer. But the law mentioned nothing about ages, and he was compelled to pay a heavy fine to redeem his ox.

An old man, whose hair was white as silver, and with tears streaming down the time-worn furrows of his cheeks, demanded justice for the death of his son, who had been killed by a forester while attempting to escape. Even wit-

nesses were by, to swear that the youth only entered the thicket to gather crabs. But the law stated, that if any forester killed an offender who was flying from pursuit, such forester should not be brought to justice for the crime. Many a deep groan, mingled with hootings and hissings, was raised in the court when De Marchmont quoted this clause; and the enraged baron ordered the officers to strike down the next who dared to break the silence of the court, and all was again still.

Many were the charges brought against different individuals for chasing deer. And although several of them could bring witnesses to prove that at the time, they were only driving them from their own home-enclosures, or from out the standing corn, yet their evidence was entirely disregarded, and they were sentenced to fines or imprisonment. One man only was doomed to lose his right hand, as he was taken in the fact of carrying off a deer which he had slaughtered.

Such were the laws of England before the

passing of Magna Charta, and many an ancient hill and tranquil valley, which we traverse daily, contains the graves of those forgotten patriots whose blood was spilt in struggling to overthrow the strongholds of oppression, and upon whose mouldered dust is laid the foundation of our glorious liberty. A liberty yet disgraced by a few relics of the barbarous age, the embers of which are still alive in the codes for *trespass* and *game-laws*, in the maintenance of which, blood is even now wantonly shed.

The charge against Hereward was at length brought forward, the regards and rangers being duly sworn, and many forms gone through, which, considering that the Saxon denied not the offence, were entirely useless. De Marchmont also attempted to magnify the crime, in a speech teeming with malice and falsehood.

Although the enormity of the offence required twelve witnesses, who were compelled to swear that they had seen the deed committed, and as there were but six present when the deer was

slain, and one of the six was afterwards killed by the hound, others were sworn. For, saith the law, "such oath is good, because a man cannot appeal against the evidence of any sworn officer, although the said officer did not witness the trespass."

Several of the inhabitants of the forests, near neighbours of the Saxon in particular, came forward to give evidence, that at the time the royal hart was killed, proclamation had not been made either at the cross of Mansfield, or Papplewick. But this De Marchmont set aside by declaring, that the aforesaid proclamation became a law from the moment it received the king's signature.

Several dared to vent their disapprobation at this announcement in deep murmurs, for the proclamation had been signed on the evening of the chase. But all complaints were on a sudden hushed, for at that moment King John, attended by several of his nobles, among whom were Hugh de Lacy and Henry of Gloomglen-dell, entered the court.

The monarch threw himself into a seat on the right of De Marchmont, and motioned for the trial to proceed.

The brave Saxon met the gaze of the king without shrinking, and a faint smile faded over his features, as he received a nod of recognition from Hugh de Lacy, for Hereward remembered well the bold stand the noble earl had made in his defence, when bearded by the Normans in the palace. Leaning against a pillar was seen the stalwart form of the outlaw chief. His brown brow almost concealed by the deep shadow of the column, while his deep-dark eyes discerned every object that moved. Nor did he escape the glance of De Lacy and Gloomglendell. Even the keen eye of King John alighted upon him, but it was only for a moment, and he knew not that it was the monarch of Sherwood who returned his fierce scowl.

CHAPTER VIII.

I do defy him, and I spit at him ;
Call him—a slanderous coward, and a villain.
Which to maintain, I would allow him odds ;
And meet him, were I tied to run a-foot
Even to the frozen ridges of the Alps,
Or any other ground inhabitable,
Wherever Englishman durst set his foot.
Meantime, let this defend my loyalty,
By all my hopes most falsely doth he lie.

SHAKSPEARE.

THERE was a fearful silence in the court, when the foresters came to that part of the evidence which touched upon the resistance made by the Saxon on the morning of his capture, and especially when one of them, in a tremulous voice, described, how their comrade was borne down and torn to death by the stag-hound. The

whole assembly seemed to listen with suspended breath; and when the witness admitted that Hereward had endeavoured to call off the hound, but was prevented from doing aught further on account of his hands having been bound, a low murmur of applause ran through the hall.

“But were not the dogs first set upon you by the Saxon?” enquired De Marchmont.

“The hounds remained quietly by their master’s side,” answered the forester, “until we attempted to seize him, and he had drawn his sword and wounded Thorold of Lamley in the arm.”

The baron knit his brows more closely, and expressed his disapprobation of the answer by muttering something to himself. Then again resumed his interrogations as follows: “Said ye not that he boasted of the deed; and after having offered resistance, and wounded two of you, and being then with difficulty disarmed, regretted that the One-handed outlaw was not

by his side, that they together might cut down every witness, and leave no sign of the deed?"

The ranger admitted that such words had been used by the prisoner; but added, that he had pleaded ignorance of the proclamation, which from the early hour that the hart was slain, they were bound to believe he had not heard of.

It would be a waste of our own time, and a useless encroachment upon the reader's patience, to record all the evidence which was that day given against the Saxon. So far were their statements contradictory, that one swore the prisoner clapped his hands together and hallooed, to urge on the dogs in attacking the rangers, while another unflinchingly asserted, that he heard Hereward say, his sole purpose for rising so early on that morning, was to waylay and kill the hart-royal. Although the Saxon denied not the charge against him of killing the deer, yet the court wasted a great portion of the day in foolish and useless interrogations, and numerous absurd forms, too many

of which are retained in the present day, in some of our own codes of law.

At length, King John began to evince an impatience; and as De Marchmont wished to deepen the crime of the prisoner before he was called upon to make his defence, he arose and thus addressed the court, having previously occupied their attention for a considerable time by stating the case:—

“Nobles and foresters, and all who are here assembled, the crime with which Hereward the Saxon stands this day charged, is one so unusual and heinous, that in the reigns of former kings, he would have been led from the spot where the deed was done, to immediate death, without either trial or delay. Nothing less than the clemency of his majesty, that value which he has for the life of the meanest of his subjects, and a wish to dispense justice openly and fairly, have caused him to deviate from the harsher, but equally just measures, which were adopted by his predecessors.”

A look of sly mockery sat upon De March-

mont's features while he passed this eulogium. Nor did King John appear at all at his ease, but evinced a restlessness, which bespoke how little he cared for so false and uncalled-for a compliment.

“To kill a deer at any time,” continued the baron (saving under great restrictions), “is unlawful, without the king's leave, or permission from those, whom it hath pleased his majesty to appoint, to keep watch and ward over the forest. But to kill one which the king hath caused to be proclaimed, through almost every burgh, hamlet, and thorp within the shire, is the greatest breach that can be committed against the forest laws; and has ever been punished with death. But if, after having done so heinous a deed, the offender, instead of showing signs of sorrow, or seeking by penitence and submission to crave forgiveness, or make restitution, he, in place thereof, openly and daringly avoweth his crime, and even maltreateth and killeth those officers appointed by the king to guard the vert and venison, every hope of mercy is then banished

by himself. Added to this, the prisoner hath long been in league with the outlaws who infest these forests, and hath given shelter to many of them who have slain the king's deer, and aided in their escape from justice. Through the kindness of former kings, and in respect for the power and wealth which his ancestors once possessed, this very offender has been allowed to retain a great portion of the property of his forefathers, in a land, which, by the aid of Heaven, and a few good swords, has been given to other conquerors. This alone should have induced him to have kept watch over the king's forest, and protected the deer, instead of killing them unlawfully, slaying the foresters, and giving shelter to outlaws and robbers. Many more deeds could I enumerate, in which by falsehood and malignant aspersions, he hath endeavoured to sully the name and honour of those who have hitherto sat high in the land, and enjoyed the full confidence of the sovereign. But as these things bear not upon his present crime; and it is, moreover, evident that they only sprung from

envy and hatred, and a rooted rebellion to all law and order; and, furthermore, as the intention was an aim at my own reputation, I shall pass by them. There is, therefore, nothing further to urge, the prisoner having admitted that he slew the hart-royal-proclaimed, and it having been fully proven, that he maimed the rangers while in the execution of their duty; and that one of his own stag-hounds, did, under his own eye, tear and rend George of Grimsthorpe, one of the king's foresters, in such wise that he died upon the spot, unshriven."

A long and deep murmur rang through the hall, when De Marchmont had concluded, and many a dark brow showed the disaffection that reigned in the hearts of the auditors. Some there were who boldly hissed at the baron, and Robin Hood fiercely grasped the long yew shaft which he held in his hand, and which could readily be strung, as if undecided whether or not to wing one of the arrows, which were concealed under his long gaberdine, at the heart of the Norman.

As yet Hereward had scarcely uttered a word since the commencement of the trial, and when De Marchmont had ceased speaking, he fixed his eyes upon the baron, and muttered, in a low deep tone, "Liar!" then resumed his piercing gaze, as if astounded at the falsehoods the Norman had so solemnly advanced.

The Saxon well knew that it was useless to reply to the various charges which had been sworn to against him, for, as we before stated, the forest laws did not admit of an offender swearing against an officer. For thus saith the forty-fifth clause, under the head of "*Duty of a regarder*:"—"If the regarders set forth in their certificate (or on their oath) that they DID go through the forest and view the trespassers which they certify (swear to) and present, WHEN IN TRUTH THEY DID NOT, yet such presentment, certificate (and oath) IS GOOD, because a man cannot by LAW traverse the return (oath) or certificate of a sworn officer."*

* See Manwood's Treatise on the "Forest Laws," p. §25.

The court for a short space of time was silent as death, and many thought that through very hopelessness, Hereward had given himself up to his fate, nor intended to advance aught in his defence. They waited breathlessly to hear the sentence of death pronounced.

King John was the first to break the awful silence, by saying, "Saxon! hast thou nothing to urge in thy defence?"

"Nothing," replied Hereward, "I killed the deer!" The Saxon paused, and although he spoke not aloud, his voice seemed for a moment to fill the vaulted hall. Then all again was quiet as the grave.

"Then let the sentence be recorded," said the king, after a long pause. "To us there is left no further power when the criminal pronounceth his own guilt."

"Your laws leave me not a chance of defence," answered Hereward boldly. "I knew not of the proclamation, yet it became a law as soon as it was pronounced. The grant by which I hold my possessions, giveth me full power to slay

the deer found thereon, nor nameth an exception. Yet of what avail are these things," added he, pointing to De Marchmont, "when he who presideth over this court, thirsteth for my blood! I scorn to sue for pardon, where I have committed no crime, and where mine own conscience tells me that I have acted as became a true Saxon. If I can no longer enjoy those rights which were handed down to me by my forefathers, I am willing to die in defending them. But before this assembly I now declare, that Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont is an unmeet judge, and I hold him unworthy to occupy the seat of justice; and do here solemnly swear, in the presence of both God and man, that he commanded four of his own followers, namely, Gilbert-the-Cruel, Martin of Inglewood, Brace-of-the-Black-belt, and Brian-the-Bow-kneed, of Snake-bent-hollow, to waylay and murder me, on my return from the palace, and to take from me the grant by which I hold mine inheritance. Martin of Inglewood, and Brian-the-Bow-kneed, await without, and will swear

to the truth of my assertions. Gilbert-the-Cruel was slain, by those who fought in my defence."

De Marchmont replied not to the accusation, nor did a change pass over his countenance; so firm a reliance had he upon his high rank, and the proud station which he occupied.

"Thy charge availeth thee nothing," replied King John, "the baron hath solemnly denied all knowledge of such a deed. And thou well knowest, that we may not believe the oath of the vassal in preference to the word of his lord, nor can we admit the evidence of a thousand Saxon thanes to preponderate over that of a Norman noble."

"Shame on the rulers of a land," said Hereward, "who refuse to administer justice honestly, but measure honour by a man's estate, and cover his crimes, because he is in possession of a castle. Who believe that none but the guilty live in granges, that thieves are only

to be found in the thorpes, and that rogues and murderers dwell but in rude huts, and the muddy sheds of the marish. Who weigh a man's word by the weight of gold he possesses, and measure his innocence by the meers that mark out his hydes of land."

"As we found the laws fixed by our royal predecessors," answered King John, with a deep frown, "so, by the help of Heaven, and our own good sword, will we maintain them. Thinkest thou that the word of a Saxon thane is to bear down the honour of a noble; or trowest thou that the days when wiggamotes were held are returned? I tell thee," added he, with a look of scorn, "that none less than a knight must impeach the honour of the noble De Marchmont. There are no lack of such, thou seest, in this assembly; but who, thinkest thou, will be foolish enough to splinter a lance in thy behalf, or buckle on armour for a cause which thou canst not prove?"

Hereward stood with his eyes bent upon the floor in silence, not a lip in the whole assembly moved; and just at the moment that Robin Hood was about to step up, and plant himself beside the brave Saxon, Sir Henry of Gloomglendell came forth from amid the nobles, and stationing himself beside Hereward, exclaimed, in a loud voice, which caused the arched hall to ring again, "I, Henry of Gloomglendell, am witness that the Saxon speaketh but the truth, and vow, by the honour of a true knight, that I heard Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont command four of his own followers to way-lay Hereward the Saxon, in the forest; to hew him limb from limb, and bear away the charter by which he holds his inheritance."

"And I," exclaimed the Earl of Eltham, "do here, by my knighthood, avouch for the honour of Henry of Gloomglendell, and will hold myself the sponsor in this just cause. And to him who holdeth that the knight hath

falsely accused Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont, I will be his assoine, and on mine own body, repel the charge. There lieth my gage:" so saying, he drew off his heavy gauntlet, and placed it on the table.

A loud shout rung through the vaulted hall at this announcement, and was returned by the crowd waiting without. For numbers had assembled around the court, who could not gain admittance, and had doubtless mistaken the sound, as a signal that the Saxon was acquitted.

"This is but a conspiracy, my Liege," said De Marchmont, arising from his seat, while his eyes glared again with rage; "a plot formed against me, that I may be deprived of the hand of Edith of Lincoln, who hath long looked favourably on this very knight, by whom I am now so basely and falsely accused. Sir Henry Gloomglendell," added he, grinding his teeth as he spoke, "I deny the charge thou hast brought against me, and defy thee to mortal combat."

“That thou deniest it, I marvel not,” replied Gloomglendell, coolly, “since thou didst dare to deny all knowledge of Edith before his majesty, when she was borne away by thy commands on the day of the chase, and thine own daughter was the reward held out to John of Chester, for doing the deed. As to thy challenge, I willingly accept it, and by the help of God, will prove the truth of what I have uttered on thy body, to the death.”

“By my father’s tomb, I fear thou hast been playing us falsely,” said King John, looking angrily at the baron: “was not our royal word sufficient to ensure the maiden, without engaging others in the matter, and then denying all knowledge of our ward?”

“Had I not your majesty’s permission to”——

“Take her to wife, whenever it was thy pleasure,” said King John, anticipating what would be De Marchmont’s reply; and fearing an exposure of the double part he had himself played

in the affair. "But by the aid of heaven, we will sift this matter to the bottom: in the meantime, the lists shall be erected in the meadow opposite our own palace, and on the morrow let the combat take place. The Earl of Eltham," added he, turning his glance to where Hugh de Lacy stood, "hath long been burning to display his prowess; and we also ordain that the gage of battle be fulfilled between him and the Constable of Chester, in the same lists. Saxon," continued he, his eye alighting upon Hereward, with a cold and cruel expression, "since thou considerest our chief justice in Eyre unfit to be thy judge, we ourself do doom thee to death on the morrow; and sentence thee to be hung on the high oak, without the lists, after the combats have been decided. It grieveth us that we cannot extend to thee our mercy, but the laws of our royal forefathers must be adhered to. Foresters, lead back the prisoner to the donjon; and, on peril of your lives, let him not escape."

A deep murmur of disapprobation again ran through the hall when this sentence was passed, and some one, more bold than the rest, exclaimed, "Who expects mercy from the murderer of Prince Arthur?" The voice came from near the door, but by whom the words were uttered was not known to the king, although the form of Robin Hood was seen cowering behind two tall outlaws, upon whose lips a half savage smile then rested.

Meantime, Hereward was again led away to his donjon, which was within the hall of trial, and to which access was gained by descending half a score of rude and broken steps, through a heavy trap-door, near the dais. The donjon was lighted from without, by a kind of loop-hole or window, if such it may be termed, sunk in the ground, like that of a modern cellar, and strongly secured by iron bars.

The court was soon empty, King John having retired with several of his nobles to the palace,

and the rest of the multitude having dispersed to their homes, or the different Scot-ales, for such was the term given to inns kept by foresters in the olden time. Numbers there were who had come from a considerable distance, and who found shelter in the neighbouring hamlets and different hostelries within the town of Mansfield, where they awaited the more important events of the following day.

CHAPTER IX.

Clarence. How darkly, and how deadly dost thou speak !
Your eyes do menace me : Why look you pale ?
Who sent you hither ? Wherefore do you come ?

Both murderers. To, to, to——

Clarence. To murder me ?

Both murderers. Ay, Ay.

Richard III.

NOTWITHSTANDING the sudden shock De Marchmont had received by the unexpected interference of Gloomglendell, he was still determined to follow up those daring schemes, which his ambition had first prompted him to. Royston Gower had been seized during the time that Hereward's trial took place, and he was in safe keeping in one of those prisons which

were set apart for such as had committed trespass against the forest laws, until either the court of Attachment or Swanimote were held. The capture of Royston was a matter of consolation to him, for he had no fear but that the old crusader would, either through threats or a reward, be induced to remove Edwin of Clifton from his path. The Norman had also the firmest reliance upon his own prowess, nor doubted for a moment the possibility of being conquered in the approaching combat, by so young a knight as his adversary.

De Marchmont had seen his daughter since he returned from the trial, nor did her answers to the many questions which he put respecting the page, in anywise serve to abate that hatred which he still cherished against him. For he dreaded the influence which Queen Isabella had over the monarch, and would much rather have welcomed the tidings of his death, than have heard that Edwin of Clifton stood in high

favour with the royal consort. As it was, however, he felt more eager than before, to get rid of the youth, and buckling on his sword, he issued from the palace by a private postern, where his steed was in readiness, and struck off in a brisk gallop, in that direction which led to the spot where Royston Gower was imprisoned.

In spite of the warning of Elwerwolf, and a promise that he would be on the alert, Royston was easily persuaded to drink a cup with his old companions, and readily fell into the snare which they had prepared. Gilbert of Goderbald, the host of the Scot-ale, in which the old soldier was captured, and a boon-companion of Royston's, did not, however, relinquish his merry guest, without striking a blow in his behalf; and had not the old crusader dived so deep into his cups, they would have cleared the rude hostelry of the rangers, and won the victory, in spite of the numbers by which they were opposed.

How different was the serenity of the night, which had closed over the forest, to the tumult that raged in the heart of the Norman! The moon rode high and bright upon her starry throne, and the calm blue of heaven slumbered like a sea at rest; scarce a leaf moved its green tongue to prattle to the flowers beneath, or a branch stirred its many-fingered hand, to wave a good-night to the drowsy brook, which seemed to steal along in its sleep. The foot-fall of the deer was muffled, and the fox peeped out from his covert, as if he could not pollute the holy moonlight by his nocturnal murders.

But De Marchmont felt not the tranquillity which reigned around him; the howling of the sleet-charged blast, and the rude roar of the forest-trees, would have better accorded with the turmoil of his feelings, than the listening quietude. His thoughts dwelt only on blood; and, like the wolf when chasing its prey, he regarded not the path he was pursuing, but

bent his thoughts on the panting victim, on which his fancy had already alighted.

But his mind was ill at ease, and at one moment his imagination threw him into the lists, and he set his teeth together, while dealing imaginary blows on the casque of Gloom-glendell. Anon, he was again in the hall of justice, and heard the deep voice of the knight thunder forth his accusation. Then his thoughts reverted to Edwin, and the musical voice of his daughter again rang upon his ears. Druth and Elwerwolf, Chester, Hereward, and the outlaw, followed each other in succession, like faces moving by in a dream; the crowded images of horror and hope, that people the interminable caverns of waking thought; and are even seen by the fancy in the dull embers of the fire.

At length he reached the rude hut, in which Royston Gower was then captive; and exchanging a nod of recognition with the sentinels, entered the low doorway.

A dim and single torch shed its umbered light over the desolate apartment, and gave a bronzy tinge to the thoughtful features of the old soldier, who was seated on a rude oaken block; to which he was also fastened by fetters. He sprang up, on the appearance of De Marchmont, so suddenly, that his chains rattled again, and drew in his long stride by a quick jerk; like some mastiff rushing from his kennel, and drawn back by that very force which impelled him forward.

For a moment or two they stood gazing on each other in silence, for not a sound was heard, saving the measured footsteps of the sentries without.

“It grieveth me,” said the baron, at length breaking the silence, “to see one in these vile gyves, who has so often shared my secret counsels, and so boldly led my bravest lances into the thickest fight.”

“It grieveth thee not,” answered Royston

Gower, "we have been acquainted of old; spare thy affected pity, and compel me not to disdain thee. Thou hast come to see me before I die. What wouldst thou with me? be speedy, for I wot well, that those who fall into thy power have but short time for shrift, and I would not waste my last moments idly."

"Thou art not yet so near the gates of death," said De Marchmont, "that thou hast need to think of a confessor; I could but ill spare thy life, while so many enemies yet move in my path."

"Then thou wouldst keep me, as Miles of the Moor did his terrier," said Royston, with a sneer; "which, when it had killed all the rats that infested his granary, he hung up, for reasons good—he had no longer need of it! I buy not on thy terms!"

"Thou wert not wont to be backward," continued De Marchmont, "when I was hard bested, or had an enemy that I would be rid of."

“ I have done many an evil deed for thee,” replied Royston, in his most solemn manner; “ some of which have sat heavily upon my conscience this night. It was through your persuasions that I quarrelled with the bearer of Montpenel’s banner; and, albeit I slew him in fair fight, yet had he done me no injury; and I would that his blood was clear of mine hands.”

“ An’ thou lettest these things disturb thee,” said the baron, “ then art thou indeed changed; sought he not to take the lead with his lances, at the battle of Anjou? Nay, I will bear the weight of his death, since it was occasioned by defending mine own banner, an’ it sitteth so heavily upon thee. Trowest thou that if Marmaduke de Montpenel had dared to dispute the pre-eminence with England, I would not have challenged himself, as thou didst his esquire? Aye! marry, would I, and every rebel leader of Poictou.”

“ But thou canst not so easily reconcile me

to the death of Leonard the tanner," said Royston, "when, at thy bidding, I smote him under the fifth rib."

"Was not his dagger lifted at mine own throat?" said De Marchmont, "thinkest thou that the meanest follower, who ever bore cross-bow in my ranks, would not have done the same deed? Aye! without even his leader's bidding. Psha! if thou wilt accuse thyself of aught, methinks thy disobeying my last commands, may furnish thee with matter of reproach."

"By the holy martyr of Canterbury!" exclaimed Royston, "I would give my helmet full of gold pieces, an' they were in my possession, if I could as readily reconcile my conscience to a forgiveness of all my deeds, as I can for disobeying thee in that matter: nay, I have ventured a notch on my tally for that very act, as a set-off for one of my old sins."

"But why didst thou not refuse to execute

my mission?" said De Marchmont, "thou hast disobeyed me ere now, and I have sent others on mine errand; nor hast thou had a jot less of my favour."

"Thou speakest truly," replied the old soldier; "but I had a yearning towards the youth, and knew too much of the chase to unloose another dog on the deer, which I would have spared."

"Royston," said De Marchmont, "I had not thought that thou wouldst have deceived me. You have, by this one act, overthrown a fabric which it took me years to erect, and the whole of my policy to keep together."

"But have I not lightened thy mind of a load of guilt?" inquired Royston, "by saving his life, although in opposition to your wishes?"

"And left in its place a load of anguish;" answered De Marchmont, mournfully. "Thinkest thou that power can be upheld without shed-

ding blood, any more than a plant can be brought to perfection without rain? How trowest thou rule was first gained, but by blood? and by such is it kept up."

"Let others then shed it," replied Royston, "I like not the task. In a fair field and a just cause, I have never yet drawn in mine hand; but to take away a life, which harmeth no one, and that too, without a quarrel, belongeth not to my calling."

"What hatred hath the hawk to the heron?" said De Marchmont, "assuredly none, and yet he striketh it down. What the hound to the hart? the wild-cat to the cony? and yet each prey upon the other."

"It is their nature," answered Royston, "they know not different, and man teaches them to become more cruel."

"It is the love of power," replied De Marchmont; "the laurels of victory are bathed in blood; and even beauty welcomes, with a

warmer embrace, the warrior who has dyed his blade the deepest in gore."

"Thou speakest but sad truth," replied Royston, glancing fixedly at the Norman; "and well knowest that I have shed enough in my time, to keep the monks employed in offering up masses for a score of years to come. What wouldst thou that I should do? speak, unless the deed thou meditatest is too black for utterance."

"Plunge thy dagger into the heart of this Edwin of Clifton," said De Marchmont, setting his teeth as he spoke, as if his own hand was about to deal the blow. "Do this, and thou wilt set my mind at rest."

"Wherefore should I do this?" inquired Royston, "he hath done me no injury; furthermore, he is the son of Gurthric of Clifton, and thou knowest well that I was his sworn vassal."

"To save thine own life," answered De Marchmont, sternly.

Royston eyed the baron in silence, and fixed his keen glance upon the harsh features of the Norman, which showed gloomily before the flickering flame of the torch, until De Marchmont seemed to shrink from his piercing gaze, as he impatiently demanded his answer.

“ I might escape from thy hands, by only promising to do this deed,” answered Royston ; “ but had I as many lives to lay down, as there are links in these vile fetters, every one of them would I gladly sacrifice ere I would do him scathe. Thou hast mine answer.”

“ The torch will be consumed, ere one may number a thousand,” said De Marchmont, eyeing the link, which was fast wasting. “ Until then do I give thee to decide upon this matter. If thou concludest to my wishes, thy reward shall be good store of wealth, and thy life. If otherwise, death is thy doom ! Thou alone hast access to his chamber.”

“ Then is n y doom fixed,” answered Roys-

ton, "and thou mayest save thy time, by putting the sentence into execution. Once have I saved the youth's life, nor did I expect to purchase it by aught less than mine own death: it will but be taking the leap a little before thyself. I am prepared for my doom, and shall die in a better cause than I ever before risked my life for in thy service."

"Settest thou then so little store by thy life," said De Marchmont, "when the saving of it would but be numbering another crime to thy long score, if thou didst my bidding?"

"And the taking of it," answered Royston, "will be but another deed to thine own account. Nor do I care, if I carry the clearest tally to my reckoning. Many a time have I risked my life in thine own brawls, and thinkest thou I shall fear to lay it down in a good cause?"

"That was when thy blood was warmed," continued De Marchmont. "Thou wilt find it another matter in having a noose thrown around

thy neck, and being hauled under the arm of one of those lofty oaks without, to die the death of a dog."

"Taunt me no longer, savage tyrant!" exclaimed Royston, springing forward, until his fetters clanked again, and he was within arm's length of the baron. "Lead me to what death thou willest. I, who have lain wounded on the scorching sands of Palestine, a long night, and a burning day, without a drop to quench my thirst, can bear the worst that thy devilish malice may invent. Yet," added he, in a lower tone, and seating himself upon the rude block to which he was secured, "it is hard for one who hath fought for the holy sepulchre, and crossed swords with the bravest knights of Normandy, to die the death of a common felon."

"Then do my bidding, and live," answered De Marchmont.

"Never!" replied Royston Gower; "I will abide my doom."

At that moment the torch expired, and left the rude hut in deep darkness.

De Marchmont departed without further reply; he but paused to whisper to the sentries, and the sound of his horse's feet, as they rung upon the stillness of the night, for a moment fell heavily on the heart of the old crusader. But this lasted not long, and the conversation of the guards without, soon attracted his attention, as they held consultation together respecting the best method to despatch him.

"I would fain honour the old soldier with something better than a rope," said one. "Marry! 'twas a bold deed to save the youth; and were it not for my own neck, by the mass! he should escape."

"Humph! thou wouldst have more love for his life, than thine own," muttered his companion, in a deep surly tone; "an' I would endanger my third nail to save the neck of the

finest knight, that ever sat in saddle, may I be kicked like a football."

"An' thou couldst do it, without endangering thine own precious body," said the other, "wouldst thou not? Bethink thee, this Royston Gower hath run many a risk for others, and seemeth to care so little for his own life, that it were pity to deprive him of it; in especial as it hath stood so many in such good stead."

"Thou hast more pity than wit," said a third; "methinks it were folly to risk our own carcasses in an affair, for which we should scarce be thanked."

"Or deprive ourselves of so rare a sight," said the other, "as seeing how new a caper this fellow will cut, who hath beheld so many of the infidels hung, and hath no doubt studied the twist of their legs."

"Then, in God's name! bring him forth," said the first speaker; "but, remember, that I meddle not in the matter."

“Then will I back to the baron,” said his companion, “and tell him thou hast refused to do his bidding.”

“Thou mayest back to the devil, an’ thou wilt,” replied the other, “from whence I believe thou hadst first thine origin. But before thou stirrest one step in the direction of the palace, thou shalt first become better acquainted with the edge of my blade. Canst thou not do this bloody business for De Marchmont without mine aid. Thou knowest that I vowed to meddle no more with his murderous plans, after that affair with Hereward the Saxon, in the forest. I will follow his banner, and fight for him in a fair field, but leave others to do his deeds in the dark.”

“Thou forgettest,” replied the other, in a more subdued tone, “how near an escape I had from swinging on the battlements, when this Royston, with the page and our young lady, fled from the castle. Methinks he had

but little love for my neck, when he knew at what peril I uplifted the portcullis, or allowed any one to pass; and that it was only upon conditions that I did my best to capture him, that I was allowed to live."

"All this I know," answered his companion; "but was it not a brave deed to save the youth? And what thinkest thou will be thy reward, should De Marchmont fall to-morrow in the lists, and this Edwin of Clifton become owner of his father's possessions? Wouldst thou not then give thy right hand, if thou hadst allowed him to escape?"

"By the cross of Christ! I thought not of that," replied the advocate for death. "Nay, I am for his escape as soon as thou wilt. But what," added he, "if the baron should come off conqueror in to-morrow's fray? and thou wottest well, that he hath a strong arm, and a sure aim."

"We will then go over to the side of Edwin

of Clifton," was the answer, "he will need followers; and, if what is now whispered abroad be truth, he hath already made good his claim to Nottingham Castle. Should this fail, we will even go over to the outlaws: our reception will be none the cooler through having saved the life of Royston Gower."

"Not the yolk of a stock-dove's egg would I give for any one of your lives, had ye but harmed a single hair of his head," exclaimed a deep voice from behind the hut, and Walter-the-one-Handed, followed by half-a-score of archers, drew up before the guards.

"Which way sped the Norman?" enquired Walter, looking round, as if in astonishment at not finding him there.

"He rode off but now in the direction of the palace," replied the soldier.

"After him, archers," exclaimed the Saxon; "an' ye but capture him, our leader will fill

your pouches with gold. I will follow anon with the prisoner."

The archers obeyed, while Walter-the-one-Handed entered the hut with the guards, and liberated the prisoner.

"Come forth, my brave knight-errant," said Walter, grasping the broad hand of Royston, as he led him forth into the moonlight. "By the mass! we had not found out thy haunt, but for one of our followers having dogged the steps of De Marchmont hither; and we had a full north-country mile to traverse ere we arrived to thine aid. But, by the sling and stones of David, an' we but overtake this Norman, we will plant his feet nearer to heaven, than they will be again for a thousand years to come; for he shall hang without hearing; and I wot well that the weight of his sins will stretch the cord."

"I thank thee, friend Walter," replied Royston; "though, by the mass! I fear me, that I

shall never have chance again, to be so near dying in a good cause."

"Tush! thou knowest not that," said the One-handed Saxon. "Old death is not so bad a fellow; but he sometimes giveth us a fair chance of falling. I would not thank him, if he let me be shot to the heart while plundering a priest; but, beshrew me, I should scarce murmur at the old javelin-darter, if he struck me through, while storming the abode of a tyrant."

The outlaws speedily returned with the tidings, that De Marchmont was by that time nearing the palace, and that further pursuit was useless.

"The devil keepeth a sharp look-out after his own," said Walter; "but, I doubt not, that he will have run his race ere another sunset: for, by St. Dunstan! fame speaks loud of the prowess of this Gloomglendell, and I would give this goodly kingdom, were it mine own, to sit in the young knight's saddle on the morrow.

But let us begone," added he, "for there is game to be struck before sun-rise, and our chief is, I doubt not, impatient to see the foot of Hereward once more pressing the sweet heather; and it may be that there are a few blows in reserve for us, and right loth should I be to lose my lawful share."

So saying, he led the way, and was followed by Royston Gower, and the very sentries, who, but a few moments before, were so eager to despatch the brave old soldier.

CHAPTER X.

Her cheeks so rare a white was on,
No daisy makes comparison,
 (Who sees them is undone.)
For streaks of red were mingled there,
Such as are on a Katherine pear,
 The side that's next the sun.

Her lips were red ; and one was thin,
Compared to that was next her chin,
 Some bee had stung it newly.
But oh ! her eyes so guard her face,
You durst no more upon them gaze,
 Than on the sun in July.

SIR JOHN SUCKLING.

GREAT was the astonishment of King John on his return from the trial of Hereward, at beholding the Prior of Newstead in the same apartment with his royal consort; Edwin of

Clifton was also present, and had passed the greater portion of his time, while in the palace, in the company of the queen and Margaret.

Isabella of Angoulême was one of the most celebrated beauties of that age; and, although she had been dragged from the arms of her betrothed husband, the Count de la Marche, and forced into a marriage with King John, she, nevertheless, submitted patiently to her fate.

There was a calm sorrow upon the brow of the young and beauteous queen, which, although it quenched the fire of her brilliant eyes, and gave a faintness to her ravishing smile; it also threw a softness over her loveliness. Her small sweet mouth revealed the even rows of pearly teeth, each matching each, like the starry rim of the daisy; her white forehead, and the finely formed Grecian nose, together with the bell-like beauty of her chin, would have formed an excellent model for a seraph, or any of those celestial faces with which the old masters

peopled the skirts of a glory, when displaying the splendour of heaven. Her white and taper neck was bared ; and, as the upper part of her green tunic of costly velvet, was bordered with the richest ermine, the white down composed beautifully with the pure ivory of her skin, like a belt of snow encircling a cluster of lilies. Her long brown hair also fell in graceful and natural curls over the spotless ermine, and here and there rested on the unsullied snow of her shoulders, like the tendrils of the vine falling over the white wings of a dove.

A thin crown of gold encircled her divine brow ; and, although it neither added to her graces, or the majesty of her countenance, yet, somehow, it sat well upon her, and seemed to mingle the goddess with the mortal.

Her voice was like the distillation of all sweet sounds, low, and silvery, and soft as the thrilling and mellowest notes of the blackbird. Even the heart of the holy Prior tingled again

beneath her utterance, as if his soul had been spell-bound by the music of an enchantress.

The minstrels of that age have compared her beauty to a shield of silver surrounded with roses, in which the stars are mirrored ; and her smile, to morning breaking over a hill-top, whereon a thousand silken banners are displayed, and each one fluttering over a bed of the choicest flowers.

Nor had those charms lost a jot of their influence on the evening that she rose to welcome the king, after his return from the forest-court. Nay, they seemed to have thrown out their beauty more fully, like those flowers which only unfold themselves when the sun is withdrawn ; for she had that day listened to Margaret Marchmont who " had told her love," and the memory of the Queen Isabella had flown back to the hours of her youth, when just such emotions had swelled in her own young heart ; when she loved, and was beloved again, by the

valiant and noble Count de la Marche. Nor must it be forgotten that Isabella still cherished her affections in silence, in that subdued remembrance which becomes the sweeter, because it is past, and that, after the death of King John, she married the count, to whom, in her younger days, her heart and hand had been betrothed.

Armed in the full power of her beauty, which she had on that night set off, in the most bewitching form, and well knowing how little King John could withstand her charms, she approached him with one of her winning smiles, and while he stooped to press the swelling honey of her lips, he forgot the face of Edith of Lincoln.

Like Helen of Greece, her beauty had been the means of causing a fierce and terrible war, in which even Philip of France had interfered, and which devastated the provinces of Poictou and Aquitaine, and rolled through all the wide domains of Normandy. Marvel not then, my

fair readers, if she prided herself on her surpassing loveliness, or now and then lingered long before the burnished mirror of silver, which flashed back those charms that had awakened the deep throat of war, and assembled thousands in the iron ranks of battle. If she was vain, what wonder? for, whenever was beauty and vanity separated, after having once met together in woman?

Rulers of monarchs and monarchies! arbiters of the fates of emperors, and princes, and all those great rulers of the earth! Man calls himself the head; but oh, Woman! thou art the neck, and dost move the head wheresoever thou willest.

“By the holy mass, my fair queen,” said King John, eyeing her with as much delight as when he was first struck by her beauty in the lists at Angoulême; “mine eyes, by looking upon the coarse features of those churls who infested the court to-day, seem as much dazzled

by thy looks, as when a burst of sunshine flashes through a dark cloud, and suddenly gives a life to the earth. How now, worthy Prior," added he, "I trust that thou hast rid Newstead of the cardinal."

"The holy prelate hath betaken himself to Rome," replied father Ambrose; "and will, I fear, ere long return, armed with greater terrors than this interdict."

"I will not flinch, though the whole power of Rome should come thundering at my gates," said the king; "none other shall rule in mine own realm, saving myself."

"And wilt thou not trust the sceptre now and then into my hand," said the fair queen, looking out from her azure eyes, like the evening star, peeping alone, through the blue pavilions of twilight. "But no," added she, "I should banish thee three days from my presence, for absenting thyself until this hour, without naming it to our majesty; nor would I

pardon thee, if thou repented, until after matins."

"Not if I came and pleaded in the silent night!" said the king, looking at her with such an expression of tenderness, that many would marvel how so much feeling could be thrown into a countenance in general so ferocious; "wouldst thou not forgive me an' thou wert alone?"

"An' I did," answered the queen, with a bewitching look, "it should be on condition that I reigned sole monarch, and thou amongst the rest should be compelled to do my bidding."

"And what might be the first act that would grace thy fair and absolute reign?" said the king, smiling, nor regarding for a moment the prior and Edwin, who were in earnest conversation at the further end of the apartment. "Wouldst thou limit our hours to pleasure? so many to be passed gathering flowers, such

a number to listening to the singing of birds, and if we behaved like liege subjects, so many allowed us, to sun ourselves in the lustre of thy beauty.”

“ I would do none of these !” replied the queen, biting her pretty lips ; “ I would for one whole year close the doors of war, and erect a temple to peace, and build the walls of your warlike weapons, and canopy the building with your banners ! your swords should be overgrown with myrtles, and the wild woodbines be taught to run up your tall spears.”

“ But wouldst thou not let us hunt ?” said the king ; “ assuredly we should grow weary of resting under our walls of armour for so long a space, making pillows of our pennons, and sitting on our shields : wouldst thou find us no amusement ?” added he, running his fingers through her clustering ringlets.

“ I would summon all that were aggrieved,” answered the beautiful queen. “ And my first

court should be holden for all lovers ; and the first cause I would give ear to, should be that of this young knight and the love-smitten maiden."

"Thou art a very woman, Isabella," said King John ; "and beshrew me, if we will not bring thy judgment to bear on this matter. How sayest thou, reverend prior?" added he, turning round and addressing father Ambrose ; "have we thy consent to begin our reign of rebellion, by giving away the daughter against the sire's consent, and so rewarding a runagate page, and setting a most excellent example to all future attendants, who are entrusted with the keeping of a goodly castle, and a fair young lady?"

"An' your grace can meet with all pages of such noble birth as the worthy youth here present," said the prior, "you need not fear to match them with the proudest daughters of the land, in special," added he, presenting a roll of parchment to the king, "if their titles

can be as fairly proven as Sir Edwin of Clifton's."

"By the face of heaven!" exclaimed the monarch, starting back, after having perused the document, "the very hand and seal of our royal brother Richard (whom may heaven assail): how came it into thy possession?"

"I found it among other documents," replied father Ambrose, "which were left in the keeping of the worthy prior Bennet, who died suddenly after holding his last Christmas feast,—heaven rest his soul! They fully explain De Marchmont's trust."

"They do! they do!" answered the king, handing over the scroll to Isabella; "there needs no further proof. I would that this charge had been brought against any ten of my followers, rather than at the door of De Marchmont. But we cannot move further in this affair, until the combat is decided on the morrow."

"It will not be needed, my Liege," said the

prior; "but I would not that the noble youth were entrusted too near the baron's person," added he, in a lower tone; "for I fear me that he would leave no obstacle that stood between himself and his possessions."

"The affair resteth not on such bad grounds," replied the king, "but I may yet serve the youth, nor anger so brave a follower as De Marchmont. Come hither, sir page," said he, calling Edwin nearer: "Art thou willing to give up the half of thy possessions, providing we present thee with the hand of the maiden thou hast already made so bold a claim to?"

"I will take Margaret and think herself alone possession enough, without any other wealth," answered Edwin, "an' your majesty will but place me in a fair way to win honour in your service."

The eyes of Isabella kindled with admiration, when she heard the noble youth speak thus; nor could she avoid for the moment calling be-

fore her the fine form of the Count de la Marche, when he alone stood up in her defence, and defied John of Anjou to single combat for laying claim to her hand. And stepping aside, she opened a side-door, and leading Margaret into the room, placed her hand within that of Edwin's, saying, "Take her, brave Sir Edwin, the queen of England will bear all the blame that may arise from this union. And were it mine own hand that thou didst thus sue for, and take me for myself alone, and it were mine to give, I could scarce say thee nay."

"Hold, fair wife," exclaimed the king, "thou art going somewhat beyond us in this matter; much depends on the fate of to-morrow; and until then, it were well not to let our falcons fly too far."

"Didst thou not promise to take my judgment in this affair," said the queen, placing her graceful hand upon the arm of the king, and chasing the frown from his brow by one of her

tender glances ; “ callest thou thyself my loyal subject, and art so ready to rebel against my commands ; and have I not vowed to be their essoine, and answer to the call of all dangers.”

“ Truly thou hast,” replied the king, returning her grasp affectionately ; “ and I wot well that thou wilt overthrow all comers, as thou hast done me ere now, by one of thy witching glances. For, by the mass, never did Wicca work more wonders by her spells and curses, than thou hast wrought with the sorcery of thine eye ; and I trow thou mightest be brought to trial, and more magic laid to thy charge, than will ever be proven against the old Hag-of-the-heath.”

“ I fear me,” said the prior, “ that few who accuse Elwerwolf of so many misdeeds, can number up their sins and get through their confession with so little reproach to themselves, as she doth. Nor should I have known that the document was in my possession, which gives

the heir of Clifton a just claim to his heritage, had not the old woman remembered, that it was lodged in the hands of Prior Bennet."

"I will lift up my voice in behalf of Elwerwolf," said Edwin: "sorrow hath made her melancholy; and she talks to her cares, as if they were other beings. I have many a time heard tell, by those who stood without her hut, that they deemed she was conversing to some one within, until they entered, and found her communing with her own thoughts."

"Thou speakest truly," said the prior, "something she doth know beyond those in her station, and is skilled in the secrets of herbs, and hath wrought many cures; having gathered much knowledge in the art of healing from the leech, who dwells hard by; but nought of evil belongeth to Elwerwolf, more than clingeth to all our natures."

"I do believe thee, worthy prior," answered the king; "and albeit she hath spoken some-

what harshly of ourselves, yet so have hundreds done, which our vengeance hath not visited. But the night is wearing apace, and the eye-lids of our fair queen look as if they would fain curtain their stars ; and we have matters which call for our presence early on the morrow.”

So saying, he took the hand of Isabella, and conducted her into an inner room ; the prior also departed, leaving Edwin and Margaret sole occupiers of the spacious apartment ; but at what hour they separated our story saith not.

CHAPTER XI.

Barnardine.—I will not consent to die this day, that's certain.

Duke.—O, sir, you must! and therefore I beseech you,
Look forward on the journey you shall go.

Barnardine.—I swear, I will not die to-day for any man's persuasion.

Measure for Measure.

OUR story returns to Hereward the Saxon, who, after his trial, was again consigned to the donjon; and, owing to the terrible threat, which King John had sworn to execute if the prisoner escaped, the guards appointed to keep watch were doubled. Many of the rangers had persuaded their cup-companions to become sentries for the night; holding forth, as a temptation,

that the hogsheads of Gilbert of Goderbold, should furnish wherewith to make them merry. Many a journey had been made to the Scot-ale, and many a foaming jug emptied before midnight : nor was Hereward forgotten amidst their mirth ; for several visits were made to his donjon, and the ale-cup offered him to drown his care. The Saxon, however, scarce tasted of the beverage, for his spirits began to droop ; and he was afraid that the outlaw had forgotten him, or that the force on guard were too strong for the foresters to attempt his rescue.

But Robin Hood, true to his pledge, had long been reconnoitering around the ancient hall, and had stationed a strong band of his followers in an adjoining copse. Nor would the outlaw chief so long have delayed the meditated rescue of the Saxon, had not his numbers been weakened by the absence of Walter-the-one-Handed, and those who accompanied him, to liberate Royston Gower.

Between the thicket, where the outlaws were stationed, and the hall in which Hereward was a prisoner, spread a smooth greensward; and, as the moonlight streamed without interruption, upon the open space, it required considerable caution on the part of the archers, to make themselves acquainted with the movements of the sentries.

Among those who had been induced to keep watch was Rob-of-the-Raven's-roost, whose consent had been obtained, more by the promise of drink, than any feeling of loyalty he entertained to either the king or De Marchmont. Rob was the last dispatched to the hostel in the forest; and, as he had to pass the thicket in which the outlaws were concealed, he was seized by two of the yeomen, and brought before Robin Hood.

Great was the astonishment of the outlaw chief, when he beheld the prisoner, who, with a huge leathern-bottle buckled on his back,

showed his teeth, and laughed loudly when he saw the leader.

“By St. Dunstan!” said Robin Hood, extending his hand; “an’ thou art among the number of our foes, we have little to fear from thee. How, in the name of Sathanas, came they to trust thee?”

“Marry! I know not,” replied he of the roost; “but few of them, I trow, wot of my deed on the morning of the chase, and those who did, thought I might as well be snapped by you of the green jerkin, as a better man. Beside, my old crony, Wat-of-the-mill, prevailed upon me to pass the night with them, and you wist well that he would do the Saxon a good turn.”

“An’ Wat be also of your number,” said the outlaw, “matters may yet speed well, for it will grieve me to waste the blood of one of these knaves. Muster they strong?”

“Near three score,” answered Rob, “but

half of them are already well nigh conquered by the weapons of Gilbert of Goderbold, for he hath supplied us with his oldest and strongest ale, and, by the mass! he would not spare his strong arm, dare he but array himself on the side of the Saxon."

"He will not be needed," said Robin Hood ; "speed thee on thine errand, and take with thee one or two of mine own followers, and bring as much liquor as you can well bear. In the meantime I will disguise myself. Thou canst readily say, that I was some lounging fellow thou didst pick up at the Scot-ale, who, for the value of a cup of beer, was prevailed upon to accompany thee. I would fain see how matters stand before we begin the attack."

"It will need but little caution," replied Rob-of-the-roost, "for some of them already see double, and would as soon take thee for our host of the forest as another. Two or three of the rangers have, however, refrained from the

cup, knowing that the safety of their heads, depends on keeping a sharp look-out."

"We need not fear," said the outlaw; "one blast of my merry bugle will bring force enough, should we need it."

By such time as Rob-of-the-raven's-Roost had returned, the outlaw had arrayed himself in the gaberdine of a peasant, and taking up a large leathern bottle, he accompanied his companion to the hall."

"Whom hast thou there?" said one of the rangers, stopping them at the entrance of the building.

"Nick of Nutthall," replied Rob readily; "one of our bark-peelers, who has some dealings with the tanner of Mansfield, and was about to pass the night at the Scot-ale; but for the sake of old companionship, he hath journeyed with me, and brought with him a goodly load, which, an' ye object not, ye may lighten ere we wend farther." The ranger drank a cup

with them : and the same reply served to all interrogations, as they entered the hall.

The keen eye of the outlaw chief soon swept over every point of defence, nor did he avoid remarking, that several, who appeared to have drunk but little, were stationed behind the different pillars, and well defended from any attack from the doorway.

A large fire was kindled in the centre of the hall, and as there was no chimney, the smoke rolled in billows along the vaulted roof ; and rendered the atmosphere almost suffocating. Around the fire was seated a merry group ; some of them singing at the highest pitch of their voices, and rolling their drunken heads in time to the barbarous tune. A few were stretched full-length on the floor, and kept up a nasal chorus to the song, while they slept overpowered with drinking. Here and there the red light of the fire flashed upon the umbered brow of a sentinel, who still retained his post beside the massy

columns. The door was open, that they might communicate with those without, for several rangers kept watch before the strong and grated window of the donjon.

The ale-cup passed quickly, and as there were many present who had long known Hereward, and felt a deep interest in his fate, their conversation soon turned on the Saxon.

“Holy Virgin! to have to die without our own consent,” said one, looking thoughtfully into the tankard, which he had more than half emptied at a draught, “’tis very hard. Ay, marry is it;” and he shook his drunken head knowingly, and having emptied the cup, gave a deep sigh. “To be hung on a tree, too, in the cold air;—ay, very hard.—To be trussed up in one’s own bed, and to put a hand out now and then, and bid adieu to old friends, and say to them, ‘I’m about to die,’—there’s a comfort in that; no hurry, no force, nobody to say, ‘You must die.’ Ay, marry and well-a-day! I like free-will; no

force ; free-will for me. Not to let a man die at his leisure, 'tis very, very hard !”

“Thou art right, Yeland,” replied another, whose drunken eyes kept winking like an expiring flame. “But they have no kindness, Yeland, no kindness. They might assuredly let him get in his harvest first, turn his cattle into silver pieces, and at the dead time o’ the year, then, it would not so much matter ; a man would not have so much to think of, and might make a spare day for such a purpose. But now ! it’s cruel ; hay-monath hardlings gone, and th’ corn will soon be upon th’ rustle. Yeland, they’ve no thought.”

“And to leave his good ricks of peason,” said Yeland, “and two tubs of souse, and no time to count his foisen, or to say he pardons an old grutch ; and only the other day he sold a wain-load of pease-straw to the friars of Newstead, to pack up their stock-fish for the winter, and I wot well that Coswold the steward hath

not yet paid him. Ay, I think I see him paring his saffron-plot ; it steaded many a neighbour, for they never lacked for aught he possessed, and he never gathered his fruit until the moon was in the wane, nor set his beans before St. Edmund's day, nor went to bed without broth, nor ever paced his fields without looking into th' hedges for yokes and shafts, for rakes and forks. Ay, marry, he was a good husbandman and a clever."

"Thou speakest truly, Yeland," answered his drunken companion, "and well could he hit a buck, and give a black crow a taste of the bolt, when it went bobbing up the furrows like a black friar, poking his head into every hut to collect his Peter's-pence. But, alas ! he will soon be as the leaf which we tread upon, and the mire in which we set our foot, or the ale which we drink, that is soon forgotten. Body o' mine ! but I would fain take a cup with him before he setteth out on his blind journey ; for

as friar Clement saith, it is many a long league to Paradise ; and he persuaded old Gaffer Gregory to eat well before he started, lest he should be too late for the feast."

"Hold thy cup, friend," said the outlaw, "and I will fill it to the brim, that thou mayest take it to the worthy Saxon."

"Alas ! he hath been tried many times since moon-rise," replied the man, "but will scarce wet his lips. Nevertheless, I will drink it in all sincerity to him, and may he have an easy parting !" and he again drank deeply ; then continued : "Death is a sorry sight. A day agone I turned up a scull in mine home-stead, and marvelled whose it had been. 'Thou hast no care now,' said I, holding it in mine hand ; 'and yet thou hast eaten and drunken, stored stock-fish and bacons, partaken of fatted beeves, roared out thy Christmas-carols, made merry at harvest-feasts, sown and mown and reaped, been cold and wet, laboured in the hot

summer, 'muttered thy paternoster, ogled a bonny damsel, patted thy dog, and mayhap chased the brown buck, and smacked thy lips over a cup of good ale, and had thy load of troubles!' But it made no reply; its teeth were left, and I wondered how many times they had been closed together in eating of good things.—But I drink to all," added he, emptying the cup. "Death is a sorry sight."

"An' I were to bear a cup to the Saxon," said Robin Hood, "methinks I might prevail on him to drink. Many a tankard have we drained together, when we have been driving a bargain for the bark, ere we could settle for the loppings."

"An' thou canst," said one of the rangers, "we will hold it good service, for we would not part from him with unkind feeling; and he wot-teth well that our duty must be done, or woe betide ourselves."

"I will do mine endeavour," said the outlaw, arising; and he approached the trap-door which

led to the donjon. Wat-of-the-Mill was one of the guards at that moment, and his post was to keep the descent to the prison. Rob-of-the-raven's-roost had whispered to Wat the outlaw's secret; and he, nothing loath, gave him entrance. Near the doorway was laid several of the guards, who had fallen asleep through sheer drunkenness. As Rob-of-the-roost assisted in uplifting the door, he threw down a mantle which had covered one of the drunken sentinels.

“Nay, shut me not in!” said the outlaw; “I will but be a short space with him; and, by my troth, the air of this cell smelleth somewhat cold.”

To this the sentinel, after some demur, consented, keeping, however, a sharp eye on the entrance of the donjon.

Hereward was seated on a block of stone, and the bleak night-air streamed in through the barred window, by which he sat, until his teeth chattered with the cold. There was no light in

his cell, saving that which fell from heaven, for the cold moonbeams streamed full into the prison, and revealed every object; and as the donjon was built so secure, the Saxon wore no fetters.

“Up,” said the outlaw, seizing his hand and throwing the mantle over his shoulder, “drink off this cup of ale, it will cheer thee; then do something for thy liberty.”

The Saxon knew his voice and cordially returned his grasp; but shook his head, as if in despair of regaining his freedom.

“I have force enough without to storm the place,” said the outlaw, “and carry away roof and rafter. An’ this plan fails, we can but try our strength; though, by the holy cross, I fear me it would cost much bloodshed. I will stand on the steps midway, and converse with thee a moment: when the faces of the guards are from me, I will put down mine hand thus; do thou then steal out gently, and throw thyself among

the drunken swine who are snoring on the dais. Shouldst thou be discovered, I will ring out such a blast on my bugle, as shall bring three-score brave men to our aid."

"Come, Nick," shouted one of the rangers from above, "an' thou tarriest longer we shall lock thee down with the Saxon."

"I come," answered Robin Hood, and stood with his body above the floor of the hall; then exclaimed before ascending, "I will bear thy wishes to thy daughter, and also see that she receives the sum thou hast named from the steward."

"Reach the bar," said Wat-of-the-Mill to the ranger, who stood beside the doorway. The man moved three paces, and Hereward stole behind Robin Hood unperceived, and crept beside one of the drunken guards. His feet, however, would have prevented the door from closing, had not Wat given them a hearty kick, as he exclaimed, "Further off, thou drunken brute, or

we will lower thee into the donjon;" the door was let down with a loud crash, and the ponderous iron bar, again thrust in between the staples. Robin Hood once more took his seat by the fire, which having burnt low, left the upper end of the hall in deep shadow, or the Saxon might not so easily have escaped.

Wat-of-the-Mill again resumed his post, and the ranger continued his measured step, confining it to ten paces to and fro, beside the entrance to the donjon.

"And hast thou prevailed upon him to drink with thee?" said Yeland.

"Ay! marry have I," answered Robin Hood, "and I doubt not but a cup of such ale will assist him to sleep, for he laid him down but now."

"Gave he you any commands?" said another, "in his earthly matters, for methinks a man would not leave the world without setting his affairs in the best form."

“ Something he said,” answered the outlaw, “ respecting these things, but, by the mass ! I have almost forgotten. But now I remember me, he hath left friar Clement his large drinking-cup, the prior a toe-nail which belonged to St. Cuthbert ; how he came by the blessed relic I wot not. There is also a stone on which Thomas a Becket once set his foot ; part of a tree that St. Dunstan rubbed himself against ; and a cinder from his holy smithy : these he hath bequeathed to the church.”

“ Humph ! the holy friars say not masses for cinders,” replied Yeland ; “ I fear me, if he hath left them nothing of more value, he will bide long in purgatory.”

“ Not if the holy fathers set their shoulders to the wheel,” said Robin Hood. “ Amos of Annessly was in two moons, but on payment of twenty marks on All-Hallows eve, friar Nicholas came next morning with the tidings, that Amos was safe out of the penal flames.”

“ By bread and ale !” said one of the rangers, “ this talk of purgatory maketh me thirsty, and our leathern bottles are as dry as a monk’s homily at Lent. Come, Rob-of-the-roost, rouse thyself, and trip over again to Gilbert Goderbald’s; we will not keep dry vigils while we have a cross in our pouch, to prevent the devil from dancing his jigs.”

“ Budge thyself,” said Rob, setting his foot upon the only blazing branch in the fire, and raking together the embers, “ or rouse some of yonder drunken and sleepy-headed keepers; I will not go alone. Whip not a jaded horse too much, nor over-run a willing hound. Catch me then thy neighbour, as the proverb hath it.”

“ Nay: I will make one for the nonce,” said Robin Hood arising; “ an’ thou wilt with me. I will also awaken one of yonder knaves who lie together as snug as acorns heaped up for the winter’s mast.” So saying, he took up the empty bottle, and made a feint to arouse one or

other of the sleepers, but only received a grunt or a curse for his pains. At length he approached Hereward, and with an affected and unsteady step, the Saxon readily accompanied them from the hall.

Well was it that the outlaw regained his followers; for, impatient at his long stay, they had just formed the resolution of commencing an attack upon the guards. Walter-the-one-handed had also returned with Royston Gower, and would have brooked no longer delay, for the morning had already begun to show the crimson braid on her brow above the forest, and they feared that some ill had overtaken their leader. Elfrida was amongst the outlaws, and long and fervent was the embrace between the maiden and her father: nor could she resist the joyousness of her heart, and the gratitude that flowed therein; but, throwing her arms around the neck of the outlaw chief, she implanted a kiss

on his nut-brown cheek, then blushed at so bold a deed.

“The blessed Virgin be praised!” said Hereward, as they moved off in the direction that led to the haunts of the outlaws;” my foot is once again on the bounding turf of the green forest; and, like a bird, I feel as if I could fly over the whole scene at once, so much is my heart overjoyed after this painful captivity.”

“Ay, marry! were there nought beside,” said Robin Hood, “it were well worth living for, to spend one’s days in exploring these wild and shaggy nooks of the forest, to make our way through the dense underwood, so dark and closely interwoven, that sunbeam hath never pierced the spot, or any human foot before pressed down the brown bracken, or the biting bramble. Let me be the captive of green trees, and my prison-house walled in with the rustling foliage of summer.”

“Then to force one’s way through a barrier

of woodbine," said Little John, "the very flowers poking themselves into your face, as if to say, 'Is not mine a perfume.' Or, to come suddenly upon a little town of wild roses, so thick seem the flowery population, that we know not which to pluck, where all are alike beautiful. Marry, I could kiss the green sod in so pretty a place, for love of its solitude and silence."

"Or to watch the summer songsters," said Will Scarlet, "sailing away after each other, with their silver wings outspread, like the barques on our own sweet Trent; the long silky brown grass in the wide glades, turning their white edges to the sunshine, like the ridges of the sparkling waves. By the holy Mary! such sights have stirred me like listening to the sweet minstrelsy of Allan-a-Dale, when he singeth, until the tears roll down our cheeks, and we get drunken through the very pleasure of grief."

"By my troth, it is right pleasant, in the sweet summer-time," said George-o'-the-green,

“and how it maketh one’s heart leap to see some handsome hind, with her face as meek as the blessed Virgin’s, and her eyes as gentle as the lady Edith’s, spring up and bound over the dense coppice, which she could not penetrate. Or some stag, with his huge antlers, scarcely to be noted from the brown boughs under which he passes. Oh! ’tis heaven to witness such sights.”

“Or to see the blackberries hanging like so many tin pans which have been often used,” quoth the tinker of Tickell; “and the lilies, like a sheet of new soder, and to peep at the openings between the leaves, just for the world like a cullender, and the clear hazels, with their stems straight as the shaft of a hammer, marry, ’tis right pleasant.”

“Well struck, tinker,” said Royston Gower; “an’ thou hadst been gifted like Allan-a-Dale, thou wouldst not have left out the woodpecker;

for, by his hammering, I hold it good that he belongeth to thy craft."

Their conversation then turned on the forthcoming events of the day; but scarce one of them doubted the issue of the combat, though some of them wished that Hugh de Lacy had been matched against De Marchmont.

The sun had arisen by such times as they reached the green forest glade, and many of the outlaws were anxious to begin their morning-meal, that they might be in time to witness the combat.

The consternation of the rangers, when they discovered that Hereward had escaped, was so great, that not one of them dare venture to bear the tidings to king John, for they well knew what fate awaited the messenger, and they agreed among themselves that the matter *should* remain a secret, until the Saxon was summoned for execution.

CHAPTER XII.

Therewith they 'gan, both furious, and fell,
To thunder blows, and fiercely to assail :
Each other bent, his enemy to quell,
That with their force they pierced both plate and mail,
And made wide furrows in their flesh's frail,
That it would pity any living eye.
Large floods of blood adown their sides did raile,
But floods of blood could not them satisfy.
Both hungered after death : both chose to win, or die.

FAERY QUEENE.

NEVER had a brighter morning broke upon
Sherwood Forest, than that which gilded the
topmost boughs of its ancient trees, on the day
appointed for the combat between Sir Geoffrey
de Marchmont and Henry of Gloomglendell.
The painted palisades that marked out the lists,

on the smooth green meadow fronting the palace, glittered again in the golden rays; and the white tents, reared at either end for the accommodation of the knights, made the eye ache under such a mass of unclouded light.

There was, however, something serious in the appearance of the scene; it lacked the covered galleries and gorgeous pavilions, which were so usually erected in that age, for the spectators to witness the combat: and looked more like a place in which life and death were about to hover. The turf was covered with daisies, and they lifted up their white heads, as if they alone pleaded for peace.

At an early hour, the ground without the lists was occupied by a large concourse of people, who had assembled from every town and hamlet that belted the wide forest of Sherwood; and many a blow was exchanged between these rude auditors, before they had settled themselves in their places. As the ground was nearly level, it

was a matter of no small merriment to behold the jostling and cramming for places; or to witness some little porsy man endeavouring to work his way before his tall companion, who overtopped him by the head and shoulders. Nor did the butt-ends of the lances, which the marshals of the lists kept in quick motion on the heads of the most forward, wholly prevent some more curious than the rest, from occasionally mounting the palisades.

Henry of Gloomglendell, attended by Hugh de Lacy and half-a-score men-at-arms, at length reached the place of combat, and long and loud were the shouts of the assembled crowd as they welcomed his entry into the arena; and he retired amid their acclamations into the tent. His squire waited without, and held his shield and lance, while a groom stood with the reins of his splendid war-horse thrown over his arm.

Shortly after his arrival, a loud flourish of trumpets was heard in the direction of the pa-

lace, and King John riding abreast of Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont, and followed by their numerous attendants, both on foot and horseback, approached the lists. The baron also entered the tent which was allotted him, over which the banner of the white-hart floated. His enemy displayed no ensign. The king took his station without the lists, about midway on the eastern side, while Hugh de Lacy occupied the same position opposite. The lady Edith, guarded by De Lacy's followers, awaited the fate of her lover at some distance from the arena, nor could all the entreaties of her noble kinsman prevail upon her to witness the combat.

At length a trumpet was sounded, and a herald entered the lists and proclaimed aloud the laws of the combat, which prohibited any undue advantage from being taken on either side. It was the wish of De Marchmont that the usual oaths and ceremonies might be spared, to which his foe consented.

As the champions were stationed at the north and south end of the lists, they had an equal advantage of the sun; and the wind scarcely waved a leaf on the surrounding forest-trees.

The knights had, by this time, seated themselves in their saddles, Gloomglendell having mounted without the aid of stirrup. De Marchmont slowly and deliberately took his seat on his charger. The countenance of the baron, before closing his visor, wore a cruel and determined look, a kind of savage confidence; and while he gazed for a moment upon his antagonist, a half sarcastic smile, as if of boasted triumph, curled his upper lip. Gloomglendell, on the other hand, returned his glance coldly: but, without displaying any sign of either fear or malice, his whole demeanor shewed that he was firm and collected.

“This vent-brace sitteth not aright,” said De Marchmont, extending his arm to an esquire;

“ the elbow moveth not freely ; shift it round about half a finger’s breadth.”

“ Royston Gower last buckled on this suit,” said the squire, “ and now I remember me, ordered the vent-brace to be sent to the armourer, as the rivets had received a slight strain.”

De Marchmont drew back his arm with a jerk, and the mention of Royston Gower drove the colour for a moment from his cheek ; and he even wished that the old crusader was by his side, believing that he had long before set out on his last journey.

Little did he deem that Royston was then among the crowd, and even at that moment had his eyes firmly fixed upon him.

At length King John made a signal, and a loud flourish of trumpets warned the marshals to look narrowly around, and see that every thing was in readiness within the lists. The knights also let down their visors, and took their shields and lances from their attendants.

Those of the crowd whose curiosity had caused them to hang over, or creep under the palisades, also drew back.

The last note of preparation was sounded, and each knight flew to his post, at the very extremity of the lists. All around was silent as death, even the very sound of moving the lance, was heard above the stillness; the whole assembly seemed to have but one breath, and that was hushed; while the strained eyes, and parted lips of the multitude, showed how narrowly they watched the first encounter.

Another signal was given, and a flourish of trumpets rang out clear and shrill, and mingled with the thundering of the coursers' hoofs, as they rushed to the charge. Like two wild bulls, about to engage each other, did the steeds meet in the combat, as if they had caught the hostile spirit of their riders. Meantime the champions, with lances couched, closed in mid career, neither changing the point of aim in

the encounter; but each striking fairly and fiercely at his adversary's shield (a plan often adopted in the first attainte, to try each others strength), and shivered the weapons up to the very grasp.

Not a rivet was loosened, or an advantage gained on either side. They met like pillars of iron, clashed together for a moment, and withdrew without injury. Even the steeds recovered themselves, as each recoiled upon its haunches at the same instant of time, as if they had been pieces of an equal machine, moving by the self-same power.

A loud shout was raised by the assembled crowd, at witnessing so unusual a course, and many a voice applauded De Marchmont, as he stood ready for the next charge; which had never before been lifted up but in hootings and derision.

Each champion took a fresh lance from the attendants. Gloomglendell snatching one at

random, from the five or six which were offered, while his opponent was careful in selecting that, which seemed both strongest and toughest. It was, however, evident, from the attention each paid in poisoning their fresh weapons, that neither intended to throw away the least advantage, each having ascertained the strength of his opponent.

All was again as mute as the grave, not a murmur ran through the assembly, and for another moment the whole scene bore a greater resemblance to a vast picture, than a breathing multitude. The signal was again given, and swift as a mass of rock, thundering from the headlong height, the knights sped from their post, each levelling his lance at the other's helmet.

Fully and fairly did De Marchmont strike, and shiver his weapon to a thousand pieces, upon the ventail of Gloomglendell; while the latter, throwing out his elbow, as he gave full force to the stroke, struck the helmet of the

baron on one side, with such power, that it was wrenched round, and the visor brought to a line with the left shoulder, which the grating overlooked. For a moment, De Marchmont staggered in his seat, and with arms thrown out, seemed as if falling from his saddle; when he instantly recovered himself by an involuntary grasp of the bridle, and dragging asunder the clasps of his helmet, replaced it, and drew in so long and deep a draught of the fresh air, as left no doubt but that in a few more moments he would have been suffocated.

Meantime Gloomglendell retired again to his post, willing to give the baron full time to recover the shock he had sustained, before they ran the last course. Nor had De Marchmont received much injury; but it was clear, from the fierce manner in which he grasped his weapon, and the savage rolling of his eyes, that seemed to flash like fire, from between the bars of his visor, that the lion was at last aroused

within him. His opponent, however, appeared quite collected, with eye and hand as fixed as marble: his whole soul and thought concentrated upon the result of the next blow he was about to strike. The lances, with which they were prepared to run the last course, appeared stronger than the former, and showed a higher finish about the point, for the heads were made of burnished steel, of the finest temper.

The minds of the spectators were now excited to the highest pitch; and it might be discovered, in the compressed lips, the clutched hands, and the eager straining of the eyes, that numbers had bent their whole souls upon the combat, and regarded it with as much interest, as if they themselves were the champions of the field.

At length the signal was given, by a low solitary trumpet; yet so solemn and startling, amid the deep silence reigning around, that many a heart was chilled again with the sound.

Not so with the combatants, whose spirits kindled under the shrill blast, while they urged on their coursers with a fearful and terrible speed, the tramping of their hoofs shaking the earth around. Steadily and firmly did each knight point his lance at his adversary's helmet, each more bent upon dealing a decisive blow, than seeking to avoid one; and striking, as if they had thrown the whole strength of their bodies into each single arm; while the clash which their lances and armour made, rang again through the echoing dingles of the forest.

So unerringly had De Marchmont taken his aim, and dealt the stroke with such terrible force, that the point of his lance alighted upon the bars of the young knight's ventail; and, had not the fastenings of his helmet burst, horse and rider must have gone to the ground. As it was, however, only the helmet was struck off, and went rolling in the lists; while the

knight recovered himself in his seat, and, saving a slight scratch on the cheek, was uninjured.

Not so with De Marchmont, for Gloomglendell, with the same unerring hand, struck the visor of the baron, and with such force, that the head of his lance plunged deep between the bars, and both horse and rider rolled over on the green sward ; while from between the grating of the ventail rushed forth a torrent of gore.

The colour fled many a cheek when they saw the helmet of Gloomglendell fall, and there were those who could not avoid burying their faces in their hands when they beheld the baron stretched within the lists, and saw the broken head of the lance projecting from his visor.

King John descended from his steed, and entering the lists, stood beside the wounded baron, who was surrounded with his own attendants and several of the men-at-arms. Sir Henry Gloomglendell had also alighted from his war-

horse, and with folded arms and a serious brow gazed in silence upon his prostrate foe, for the helmet had been removed.

“Is there no one here,” said the monarch, “who, for either the love of God or gold, can staunch these wounds?”

“I know somewhat of the healing art,” said the old leech, who has before figured in our pages, and who, hearing that one of his guests was about to enter into combat, had come provided with several medicines to the spot. “I know somewhat of the healing art,” continued he, edging his way up to the very side of the king; “and as it regardeth colds, or rheums, or advice in preparing food; and all the cardinal”—

“The devil fly away with the cardinals,” said the monarch, “an’ thou canst render the baron any aid, let it be done this instant.”

“I fear my skill will avail nothing here,” said the leech, stooping down and examining

the wound, which he began to cleanse with lint, and a clear liquid which he took from a small phial. "Let him, however, be borne into one of the tents, and I will administer a small dose of the ether of Hebe, with a decoction of the vitriol of Venus, and the blood of the red dragon."

The bleeding and senseless form of De Marchmont was conveyed into his own tent, followed by the leech and two of the attendants.

For a moment King John regarded the group as they bore away the wounded knight; then turning to Gloomglendell, he said sternly:

"I do regret me risking the life of so bold a baron in the foolish quarrel of this Saxon; and thou, Sir Knight, hadst I doubt not, more an eye to the hand of Edith, than any good-will towards this churl, who, by the brow of God, shall die within the hour."

"Whatever were my motives, my liege," replied the knight, "my quarrel with the baron

was just, and however much I may regret his fall, I have nothing to reproach me, on behalf of the Saxon whose life he did seek. Edith of Lincoln will never become his bride should he recover, but would rather spend the remainder of her days in some nunnery. Such is the mind of the maiden in that matter."

"The constable of Chester hath fled this challenge," my liege, said Hugh de Lacy, approaching, "and I hear hath betaken himself to the North, at the instigation of Langton, and joined those dissatisfied barons, who are attempting to renew the charter granted by the first Henry."

"May the curse of Heaven alight upon the craven!" exclaimed the angry monarch. "And this ambitious prelate hath, I doubt not, hurried to Rome, solely to hasten the sentence of excommunication; but, by the soul of my father, an' I yield to either pope or baron, I will first fire every castle within my realm; ah! and pour forth such a horde over the land as never de-

luded England since the days of the Conqueror. But what need a king fear," added he, putting on that winning countenance which no one could better assume, "while he has by his side such warriors as the Earl of Eltham, and Sir Henry Gloomglendell? And, now I bethink me, Sir Knight, should De Marchmout recover, he will, I doubt not, for some time rest quietly, without troubling himself about a bride, and we may soothe him with the possessions of this Saxon; and for thy valour will bestow upon thee the hand of Edith, that is, providing we have the noble earl's consent."

"That will I readily give, my liege," said De Lacy, "and methinks your majesty will find my fair kinswoman nothing loath. But here she cometh, and will, I doubt not, speak in her own behalf."

"We trust that thou hast at last bethought thee of a boon," said the king smiling, as Edith approached, "and would have thee remember

that we have not forgotten our promise on the day of the chase."

"Nor the costly gift by which it was accompanied," replied the high-born maiden, returning the rich crucifix. "I have a boon, and would crave the fulfilment of the promise so solemnly given."

"Thou hast it without even naming thy request," said the monarch, placing the hand of Gloomglendell's within her own.

"I thank your majesty also for this gift," replied the maiden; "but this was not my boon. I would crave that the life of Hereward the Saxon may be spared."

"The damsel hath shot too far for me," muttered the monarch to himself, biting his lip and knitting his brow. "By the mass, maiden, I would rather grant thee the proudest castle and the richest acres within my realm," continued the king: "canst thou think of no other boon?"

“None other, my Liege,” replied Edith, firmly; “your majesty has given me a gift, which to-day I sued not for; but this redeems not your royal pledge. I must have the life of the Saxon spared, with the full restoration of his possessions, or hold your honour for ever forfeited.”

“I grant thy boon,” said the king, after some hesitation; “though, by the splendour of Heaven, had I thought that thou wouldst have requested me to spare his life, he should have been hung before sunrise.”

“Then your majesty must have done it before the moon had gone down,” said Royston Gower, who stood near at hand.

“What meanest thou, knave?” enquired the king, glancing fiercely upon him.

“No more than that he was prepared for your majesty’s kindness,” answered Royston, with provoking indifference, “wotting well that

you intended to pardon him, and so betook himself away, a little before the time."

"By the thunder of Heaven, I will hang up every ranger, if he hath escaped," exclaimed the fiery king: "how now, knaves," added he, turning to three of the forest keepers, who stood near at hand, "speaketh this fellow but the truth?"

"He doth, an' it please your majesty," replied one of the keepers; "but how he hath been rescued no one knoweth, unless the Hag-of-the-heath hath aided him to escape."

"Speakest thou of me?" exclaimed Elwerwolf, stepping up and looking into the keeper's face, who no sooner saw her than he took to his heels, and hurried off in as much affright as if Satan himself had appeared. "Hereward hath escaped, my Liege," added she, looking full in the king's face; "nor would all the forces that your majesty could muster around this forest have kept him longer prisoner. Bless the holy

saints ! that you have not his blood upon your conscience."

"His crime merited not death, my Liege," said the Earl of Eltham ; "and bethink you that affairs of greater import now call for your attention. For no less a power than the church of Rome, and many of your own rebellious barons, are leagued against you."

"Thou speakest truly, noble earl," replied King John. "We have many a worse foe than the brave Saxon ; and I doubt not but he was somewhat too closely pressed by De Marchmont. But by my faith, it was a daring deed to kill the royal hart ; however, he hath our forgiveness, and shall hear no more from us on this matter, while he keepeth true to the forest."

Just then Margaret de Marchmont, with her hair unbound, and the tears streaming down her cheeks, rushed into the lists, and entered the tent into which her father had been removed ; for she had learnt the issue of the com-

bat from an attendant. Edwin of Clifton, though with less speed, followed her, but recognising the knight of Gloomglendell, he approached him, instead of entering the tent.

“I challenge thee to single combat, Sir Knight,” said the youth; “thou hast this day been the cause of drawing tears from the only eyes that were ever dear to me; and for every drop they have shed, will I have recompense in thy blood.”

“Come to me when thou hast duly reflected,” replied Gloomglendell, “and hast seen another summer or two pass over thine head; and if thou then repeatest thy challenge, I may answer thee—but not now.”

“Art thou mad?” exclaimed Royston Gower, “thus to confront a knight, who hath overcome his opponent in a fair combat.”

“Or hast thou not rather reason to rejoice in the baron’s fall,” said Elwerwolf, “when he sought to take away thy life?”

“Or knowest thou not,” said Royston, “that but yesternight I was in his power, and that the conditions which he held out for me to save myself, were to take away thy life? How I escaped from his hands I will tell thee anon.”

“Let us begone,” said King John; “there has been a hand at work in these matters, which although invisible, is stronger than our own.”

“And a heart,” muttered an outlaw to himself, “which beats under a less weight of crime, than that of a king’s.”

“Her sorrow hath maddened me,” said Edwin, extending his hand to Royston Gower; “and I would battle with mine own shadow, an’ I deemed it had caused Margaret a moment’s grief.” Saying which he rushed into the tent.

Meantime King John had returned to the palace; and although Edith (who accompanied him thither) leant on the arm of her lover, yet she heaved many a sigh while she listened to

the monarch, who, during their walk across the meadow, recounted all he had heard, respecting Edwin of Clifton, and Margaret Marchmont.

The crowd gradually dispersed; nor had much time elapsed, before Hereward the Saxon heard the tidings of his full pardon from the king. But few of the immense multitude who had that day witnessed the combat, pitied the fall of Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont.

CHAPTER XIII.

The mind that broods o'er guilty woes,
Is like the scorpion girt by fire,
In circle narrowing as it glows,
The flames around their captive close,
Till inly searched by thousand throes,
And maddening in their ire.
So writhes the mind remorse hath riven,
Unfit for earth, undoomed for heaven ;
Darkness above, despair beneath,
Around it flame, within it death !

BYRON'S *Giaour*.

ON a rich couch, covered with cloth of crimson, was stretched the bleeding and agonised frame of Sir Geoffrey de Marchmont: beside him knelt his lovely daughter, her face buried in the broad palm of her father's hand, which

she was bathing in tears. Around the form of the wounded Norman was thrown his own banner, it being the only covering which was near at hand ; the figure of the white-hart, emblazoned thereon, fell over his breast, and was kept in constant motion by the painful workings of his broad chest. Over the baron, bent the thin pale features of the leech, while two attendants stood in the back-ground, and Edwin of Clifton occupied the entrance of the tent.

The painful silence which reigned there, but ill accorded with the loud shouts of the rabble without, and all those sounds, consequent upon the breaking up of a large concourse of people ; for ever and anon, some merry laugh rang through the canvas walls.

The ears of the baron occasionally caught the sound, and he made several attempts to arise from the couch, and would have suc-

ceeded, had he not been held down by the physician.

“ Ah ! dare they to laugh at me now ? ” exclaimed he, raising his voice, and lifting his head above the folds of the banner. “ At me ! who needed but to knit my brow, and the boldest of them quailed before me. ’Tis time to die,” added he, in a lower voice, “ while a Norman noble hath lived to be laughed at by a churl. But this arm hangs nerveless now ! the sinew refuses to swell up, even at an insult—the blood runs coldly through my veins ”——

“ Thou wilt break my heart, dear father, an’ thou talkest thus,” said Margaret, her deep sobs sounding audibly in the surrounding silence. “ Oh ! take comfort, thou wilt yet recover. The holy saints are gracious, and will not turn a deaf ear to the prayers of the child, when they are offered up for the preservation of a father.”

“ Dear father ! ” echoed the baron, after a

long pause. "The holy saints!" added he, again remaining silent. "Margaret! —, yes, it was her own voice!—who, saving herself, would forgive me? Oh! I feel a pang, deeper than that inflicted by mine enemy," added he, writhing on his couch; "it rankles at the heart. Father! and in what do I deserve the name? Mock me not! or call me the cruel, the ambitious, the unfeeling, the unnatural, the deeply-to-be-cursed father! Away! Oh! torture me not.—Leave me to die! surrounded by mine own agony."

"Father! dearest father!" continued Margaret, her tears gushing forth like the summer-rain; "Oh! say that thou dost pardon me; but whisper that I am forgiven, and thou wilt ease mine aching heart. Bid me not leave thee. Look upon thy rebellious child, and Heaven will bless thee; thou shalt yet recover, and we again be happy, as when thou wert wont to hold me

on thy knee, and bless me ere thou didst leave the castle."

"Never! never! never!" muttered the baron, heaving a deep sigh, which caused his swelling breast to uplift the emblazoned banner. "Those days are for ever gone! I gave away my affection to ambition, and bartered my peace for power. Pollute not thy pure lips, by pressing them against my guilty hand. Oh! it is dyed with blood!"

"My tears shall wash out the stains," said Margaret, "and my orisons draw down forgiveness from Heaven. Take comfort, my father; you have been but as a wave of the river in the strife, moving amid the commotion. You but followed those which led, and others as fierce burst forth behind you, and all but obeyed a more powerful element."

"Alas! not so," replied the baron, in a faint and mournful voice. "They spent their fury upon the shore, and their strength was ex-

hausted with the tumult that bore them along ; but mine rolled into the dark caves, and gloomy caverns by the rocks, and carried their foaming anger into the nooks, where peace and silence had before reigned. Flatter me not, I was the vulture that filled mine eyes with cruelty, when my maw was over-gorged with the slaughter."

"Heaven is merciful, father," continued Margaret, "and the holy church hath power to save the most guilty of her children. Day and night will I intercede with the Blessed Virgin in thy behalf, and Edwin shall implore the reverend fathers to put up prayers for thy forgiveness."

"Edwin!" exclaimed the baron, withdrawing his hand, and pressing it to his bleeding brow; "Oh! the remembrance of his sire—my violated oath—the injuries I have done the noble youth—and the crime I was about to execute, sink with a thousand curses on my soul, and weigh me down beyond the remotest

gleam of hope. Why was the arm of my adversary so weak, that he struck not down both life and memory at a blow, and spared me these tortures, that cut into the very heart, and drown the feelings of all other pain?"

"Oh! kneel with me, Edwin," said the maiden, springing up, and leading the dejected youth to the side of the dying Norman's couch. "An' thou lovest me, tell him, he is forgiven. Thou wilt, thou dost forgive him," added she, as Edwin grasped the baron's hand. "Holy Virgin! look down, in pity, upon this scene, and take me to thyself, lest, amid the uncertain future, I mingle not the bitterness of grief with my sorrowful joy, or forget the hour, that now telleth me it were a pleasure to die."

"Leech! Leech!" exclaimed the baron, his utterance almost choked with grief, "hast thou no drug, that, in kindness thou canst administer, and spare me this double death? None!

none!" added he, faintly, and sinking his head again upon the couch. "The molten fire, that burneth my brain, kindled itself, and would impregnate the deep ocean with its heat. Oh, death! strike! strike! an' thou hast but one shaft left, in mercy let it fly at this heart."

"Bear up thy courage," said Edwin, his voice tremulous with grief. "Remember the blood thou hast shed in fighting for the holy sepulchre—the days thou hast spent on the burning sands of Palestine. Oh! they are enough to wash out the deepest guilt. Thou hast done me no hurt. Had my days been passed among the nobles of the land, my hours spent in pursuing the transient path that leads to glory, my ears deafened with the clamorous plaudits of fame, I had not known, I had not loved Margaret."

De Marchmont replied not; but his hand returned the grasp of Edwin's and Margaret's, and a faint smile played for a moment upon

his pale face, like a ray of light suddenly revealed between the closing clouds of darkness. His lips moved, but their sounds were lost, and life and death seemed to pause amid their struggle, as if for a moment they had mutually given up the contest.

“Canst thou not save my father?” said Margaret, looking with imploring pity at the leech. “Oh! do thine utmost endeavour, and I will load thee with gold, and bless thee for ever for so kind a deed.”

“I fear me my skill will be of no avail,” replied the leech, shaking his head sorrowfully. “I marvel that the spirit hath so long held the mastery over the frail flesh, without escaping through one or other of the gates of death, which are built like posterns in every part of the wall of life, and are ever readily opened. The body resembleth the everlasting lamps of the ancients, which while enclosed, burnt pure and bright by the circulation of

nature, purified of all the grosser qualities; but no sooner were they exposed to the oleaginous vapours, than the gold *talcum* lost the vital spirit. So a wound letteth in numerous particles of impure principle, which, being at war with the elements of life, rush in, and at once settle upon the eternal ether, like a legion of ants."

"Thy reasons are too deep, learned leech, for a maiden's comprehension," replied Margaret, in a melancholy voice. "An' thy wisdom will condescend to lower itself to my simple capacity, I would fain have thy opinion, that I may prepare myself for what is in store. Canst thou save my father? Oh! answer me truly, as thou wilt thyself be called upon to reply in the day of doom. He sleepeth," added she, casting her tearful eyes upon the face of the baron. "Oh! tell me, will he again awake, or is it the sleep of death?"

"I cannot make that known, maiden, when

the sulphur of death is as yet contending with the sulphur of life," replied the leech; "for even as two knights at deadly feud with each other, come to decide the mortal struggle in the lists, so do these spirits combat when they are brought together. Sleep is but the darkness under cover of which the spiritual sulphurs hold their contest; and although we see them not contending, yet do they as assuredly wage war together, as the stars, which, when angry with each other, fly from their stations in the etheric blue, and under the covert of the gloominess engage; for what saith Endulia, 'the stars fought against each other in their courses,' like the elixir of life battering with the sulphur of death."

"He regardeth me not," muttered the maiden, gazing on the pallid features of her sire. "And yet men hold him in marvellous repute, as one who can open or shut the gates of life and death, by his skill in the healing art. But see," added

she, "my father speaketh; yet I hear him not! his lips move; and yet I know not what they crave."

"Away! show not thy fleshless ribs here!" said the baron, writhing and raving in his restless slumber, and unconscious of what he uttered. "Thou didst provoke me to the deed. I would have given thee life—life for death, Royston Gower! I fear thee not, gibber, gibber—thy bony cheeks to the moon,—I—I will follow thee—avaunt!"

"Who calleth on me?" said Royston, entering the tent, followed by Elwerwolf.

But De Marchmont regarded them not; his eyes lacked lustre, and although open, saw only a dense mistiness, an immensity of space, peopled with the forms his fancy had shaped, and which were then fast fading away.

The old crusader gazed upon the dying Norman in silence; and Elwerwolf folded her hands together, while her cold grey eyes settled upon

the baron's countenance. "Alas! how changed," said the old hag, in a sepulchral voice; "can that be he, at whose frown every vassal trembled; whose bidding, the boldest man obeyed? Oh, vengeance! how little hast thou to brood over: come hither, revenge, and behold how weak the power, that thou hast so long meditated to overthrow; fiery anger may calm himself beside this couch, and hatred marvel at the cause that stirred him to dislike. Oh, death! thou divester of passions, humbler of pride, and remover of malice, is this all against which we were arrayed? Thou makest the tiger so quiet, that an infant might sleep with its hand in his jaws; and canst make the wolf a seat for the wayfarer. Thou puttest forth thine hand, and the strong man is helpless. Disobeyer of tyrants, overthrower of kings, scatterer of armies, mighty Death; more terrible in thy silence than the stormy shout of contend-

ing thousands. Oh! who will dare to oppose themselves against thy power?"

She fell on her knees beside the lifeless form of the Norman; and with her skinny hands buried in the crimson folds of the gaudy banner, offered up a long and silent prayer to Heaven. Not a sound was heard within the tent: the old physician held the hand of the dead warrior within his own, but spoke not a word; and the deep grief of Margaret, flowed on without a sound.

At the feet of Royston Gower was laid the shield of De Marchmont; the rich emblazonry, dimmed and dented by many a hard blow, his cross-handled and ponderous sword was reared at an angle of the tent. Royston took up the massy weapon, and drawing the blade from its scabbard, stood gazing upon it in silence.

"Ah! I have scoured thee ere now," said the old crusader, after a long pause, and heaving a deep sigh, "when the fierce sun of Palestine

has flashed down upon us both, and thou wert incrusted with the blood of the Saracen! Many a time have I seen thy polished side in the moonlight of the desert, when only the cry of, 'Save the holy sepulchre!' rung over the wide silence of the wilderness. Thou wert as terrible to the infidel, as he, whose name the Syrian mothers did utter, when they frightened their children into silence. This deep gap," added he, pressing his thumb on the spot, "telleth of the deeds done at the storming of Acre, when the lion-hearted king led him to his own tent, and drank to his valour, in a goblet of the wine of Cyprus. Ascalon, and Joppa, are recorded upon this blade; and many a brave deed which mine own eyes have witnessed, in the trenches, and on the battlements. Then," added he, gazing upon the cold features of the baron, "then was it the glory of thy followers to serve thee, for thou wert noble in heart: and had not King John poured his poison into thine ears,

thou wouldst even now have been the pride and honour of England's chivalry."

He thrust the blade again into its scabbard, and stood with his arms folded in silence.

Just then one of the friars from Newstead priory entered the tent, and exclaimed, "Am I then too late; hath he gone unhouselled, unshriven? and I, that come with such a tardy pace, might have flown hither in time to have smoothed the rugged path, and pointed to the home of hope beyond the grave. To fasting, and prayer, and severe penance, do I doom myself, that I may thereby make restitution to the soul of the deceased, and set an example to the brethren of mine order. Why did I not fly on the wings of the wind, and outstrip the messenger of death? Couldst not thou, worthy leech, keep in the hovering life for a short space by the power of thine art, until the shriven spirit went with lighter wing on its long journey?"

"My skill availeth not," replied the leech,

sorrowfully, "when the spirit becomes overshadowed by the gloomy portal of death; for then, even the elixir of life loseth its divine efficacy, and refuseth any longer to mix with the impure particles of the flesh; the divine medicine becoming blunted, and of no avail, as the sulphur of death predominates over the pure ether of life. The universal spirit floweth from the stars; and as it is single and pure of itself, so does it refuse to act, when the darker principle of death hath before stepped in, and filled up the passages of life; but let it once enter, and take up its first position, and the sulphur of death rolleth by it, as harmlessly as the lightning above the humble daisy."

"My mind is too much troubled, learned leech, to understand thy reasons," said the friar, "but if thou wilt accompany me over the meadow, as I must speed to apprise my brethren, that they may offer up masses for the soul of the departed, I will hearken to thy words." So

saying, they left the tent together, when the friar thus continued to reply : "if I comprehend thee aright, thou meanest when the body is free from disease or dangerous wounds, thy medicine doeth it no injury ; and when once it is subject to pain and pest, thy drugs are of no avail."

"Even so," replied the leech, "providing the danger is great ; for thou seest, holy father, that the body differeth somewhat from the soul, inasmuch as the latter may be attended to after death. But the divine medicines, not having power like your marvellous masses, when the spirit of life hath fled, lose all their efficacy in another life. Nevertheless, holy father, if you could but pack up a small portion of the elixir of life, in the same packet with your masses, I doubt not but that they would unite together, and would somewhat alleviate the pangs of purgatory."

"The holy church can alone administer to the diseases in another state," said the friar ; "there the skill of the leech availeth not ;

prayer, my son, is then the divine medicine, requiems, and long intercessions."

"Right, holy father," replied the leech, "and whether the medicine acteth aright, or the patient taketh it not, there are no friends to come with their abuse, no relatives with their doubts, no envious rivals with their disputes; all are satisfied, for the sick man cannot then murmur at his physician."

"There thou art in error, worthy leech," answered the friar; for even the church is importuned by the impatient relatives of the deceased, to hasten the release of the soul from purgatory, even before they have duly paid the sums for masses, which the crimes of the departed do call for."

"In that, holy father, your masses have the vantage over the divine medicine," said the leech; "for all the gold of Ophir cannot advance its virtue, or hasten on its power; wealth aideth

not its working, nor doth the non-payment of monies, cause it to delay."

"Thy medicine requireth not to be fed, worthy leech," answered the friar; "it needeth not clothing, nor labourers; whereas the release, or cure of souls requireth much exertion. Friar Clement would soon need masses for himself had he not wherewith to eat, and drink, and strengthen his heart for prayer, and his voice for psalmody."

"I will impart to thee a secret, holy father," said the leech, "an' thou wilt in return endeavour to discover, how my elixir of life will act on the bodies of those in purgatory. Which I doubt not, would be of greater service there, seeing that there are not so many particles of death afloat, and that some must live to a great age, considering the years they have numbered here; and adding those which pass over their heads, before they escape the penal flame, an' they have not wherewith to pay for masses."

“If thy secret will benefit the holy church,” said the friar, “I will in return render thee good service.”

“Fear not that,” replied the leech, “inasmuch as it will be the saving of much unnecessary food, by which means the friars will be enabled to offer up masses with less expense, and to run through them in shorter space of time. Thus, by taking my golden air of life, they will but need one meal from sunrise to sunrise, and my spirit of ether voluble will cause their tongues to move at double speed, so thou seest, twenty masses will be said or sung in place of ten, and less weight of food consumed, and thine own priory might take in as many souls to redeem from purgatory, as other two abbeys or monasteries could find prayers for. The food that now sufficeth a day for one hundred friars, would then be more than enough for three; the ether of volubility would enable them to say as great a number of masses as six hundred friars;

thus, you might enlarge the priory, and in time say masses for all the souls in Christendom."

"But would not thy medicines then become a part of the service, seeing that they thus aided in the rescuing of so many souls?" inquired the friar.

"For which his holiness might reward me with a saintship," replied the leech; "or instal me sole head of the order of Elixir of Life, to be circulated through the holy empire: and the right reverend leech, my successor, to be chosen from the order of mine own cardinals."

"I fear me," replied the friar, "that however valuable might be the golden air of life, it would scarce be so welcome to the stomachs of my brethren as the poorer pottage and less refined beef; or so gladly accepted by the holy church as the common gold with all its dross. As to thy elixir of life, I doubt, if it would hasten so many from the regions of purgatory,

as it has hurried thither. Thou art still rendering the church aid, by furnishing her with numbers of souls, for which she daily offers up masses. Thou canst not kill and cure by the same weapon."

"Ever despising the counsels of the sage," said the leech, "but I covet not the riches of this world, or, by my secret, I could keep up a great host of monks and friars, feed them with the golden air of life and the ether of volubility, and make them patter their prayers in so short a space, that the doors of purgatory should need enlargement, so great would be the rush of those I should daily release."

"Thou couldst not well drive them out, in greater numbers than thou art now sending them thither," said the friar.

"I will no longer hold converse with thee," answered the leech, "lest thou provokest me to anger, for when the body groweth warm, a greater number of the impure particles settleth

upon it, and I have already, by opening my mouth to thee, swallowed much of the gross principle."

So saying, they separated where two roads met, one leading to the priory, and the other to the dwelling of the leech within the forest. The friar went to prepare his brethren for the obsequies of De Marchmont, and the physician to swallow the elixir of life, and to free himself of the impure particles which he had devoured, by parting with too much of the ether of volubility.

CHAPTER XIV.

Time rolls his ceaseless course. The race of yore
Who danced our infancy upon their knee,
And told our marvelling boyhood legends store,
Of their strange ventures happ'd by land or sea,
How are they blotted from the things that be!

Lady of the Lake.

It comes not within the compass of our story to describe the obsequies of De Marchmont: the friars of Newstead received a goodly sum for performing the last offices to the deceased; and as a thousand masses were considered necessary to be offered up for the departed, these were also agreed for, and, as in all large dealings, were thrown in at the rate of six-score to the hundred. Friar Clement demurred to so

many prayers being thrown away at so low a rate; but Father Nicholas silenced his objections, by reminding him that it was a long job, and paid for beforehand; and, moreover, that they had only then five in purgatory, and that one was a poor woman, whose daughter could only bring a few new-laid eggs every morning for the prior's breakfast, to purchase one prayer per diem, which he must remember was but light labour. Clement was satisfied, and after a good meal, his tongue began to patter prayers faster than ever lamb wagged its tail.

Margaret's sorrow was deep and sincere for the death of her father, nor had her days of mourning ceased, when she bestowed her hand on Edwin of Clifton. Although the page soon appeared as the bold baron, at the head of five hundred formidable followers, and became one of those mail-clad statesmen, who legislated with drawn swords, and compelled King John to sign the Great Charter, yet, before Marga-

ret de Marchmont, his proud soul bowed, and his stormy speech subsided to tenderness, whenever addressed to her own ear.

Royston Gower was appointed as the leader of his lances; but whether the old crusader was at the Scot-ale, when the trumpet sounded to horse, or lounging in the mews, mattered not to the cavalcade; they moved on, and if he chanced to overtake them at a brisk gallop, or never came at all, his conduct called forth no reproof from Sir Edwin of Clifton. So years rolled on, and when Edwin and Margaret were borne to the last home of the mighty Cliftons, and the forms of the knight and lady were cut out from the grey granite, he in all the panoply of "awful mail," and she with the stiff gorget, and mantle of "lengthy float,"—their proud tomb was raised beside the old soldier's.

Time has long since worn away the quaint verse, which recorded the virtues of the old crusader: the only remnant which we can offer

to our readers, is a small portion which was preserved in the archives of Newstead, and is doubtless a translation by some friar, about the time of Chaucer, and reads as follows:—

“ He aneath dolben, pare wħanne bemes soun-
 den,
 Spilt Heathness bloud, thoff pborne in humble
 hede
 Aforen God we truste, none agilte will thanne be
 founden,
 In memorance of þe Heathness bloud he shede,
 Sith þhis prare for þe soul of Royston Gower,
 Edwin de Clifton made.”

“ He beneath buried—ready when the trumpet’s sound,
 Spilt heathen’s blood, though born in humble state.
 Before God, we trust, no guilt will then be found,
 In remembrance of the heathen blood he shed,
 Since this prayer for the soul of Royston Gower, Edwin de
 Clifton made.”

The nuptials of Henry of Gloomglendell, and

Edith of Lincoln, were celebrated in the priory of Newstead, in full opposition to the interdict. And although Friar Clement slyly rebuked Father Nicholas, for aiding in the ceremony, he also took care to lend his aid in setting aside part of the sentence ; and for two days paid no regard to the fasts, but eat and drank like a very friar. And if rumour belies not so holy a man, on the third morning when summoned to chaunt matins, he had drank away all remembrance of his Latin, and to the great horror of the holy brothers present, burst forth in one of those godless staves, which, in the night, he had been chiming with Royston Gower over their wine-cups ; and for which he was doomed to bread and water, a dark cell, and to those stripes, in the healing efficacy of which he much doubted.

Amid the turmoil of future times, John of Chester and Hugh de Lacy became again reconciled, and, together with Henry of Gloom-

glendell, clung closely to the interests of King John, during his long controversy with the Pope, and were even present, when the monarch and Cardinal Langton feasted together, after the sentence of excommunication was withdrawn. Nor did they fall from the side of the sovereign, until he had filled the country with foreign troops, and wasted it with fire and sword.

Elwerwolf continued to reside with Hereward the Saxon, nor had the honest thane any farther quarrels with the rangers, as Edwin of Clifton became, by right, the Lord Keeper of Sherwood forest, and Chief Justice of the Court of Eyre; and although some of the outlaws still continued to send a shaft among the dun deer; yet never did the war-cry of Clifton sound, but they were found arranged under his banner.

Robin Hood was still their leader; but times had changed, and the bold outlaw's face had become familiar to King John; and in after years, when mustering his merry men, at the

summons of the Baron of Clifton, he assembled them before the mansion of Hereward the Saxon.

Elfrida would often be seen at the door, holding in her arms a little dark-eyed urchin, while the thane held the hand of another; and Robin Hood would pat their little heads, and mayhap press the cheek of the young Saxon mother at parting, and his eyes would brighten as he turned to reply to one or other of the youngsters as they exclaimed, "Father, speed home quickly." His sons were, for ages afterwards, celebrated in the forest for being good drawers of the long-bow; nor does the authority from which we quote, make any mention of the outlaw being bled to death by the abbess of Kirkley. Whatever might be his title as Earl of Huntington, et cetera, we can find no estate to match his name at that period, but believe that he lived beloved by Elfrida, or May-rain, as she was called by the outlaws, through her sweet and

gentle temper, and which might, after the worthy matron's death, be converted into maid Marian. But the Hoods of Hucknall believe not this; and as they are, doubtless, descendants of the bold outlaw's, having resided in the forest of Sherwood for centuries, (for which see the parish records,) their word ought to have some weight. Nevertheless, it is recorded that after the outlaw chief had espoused the daughter of the Saxon, he performed many a bold deed, and feathered many a shaft at the hearts of the invaders, let loose over England by King John.

Walter-the-one-handed, and Little John, never lacked a warm nook, or a pasty, while Hereward and his brave son-in-law kept open door at Papplewick; but they still preferred to empty their evening cup over a red fire in the forest.

"Wottest thou aught of Lincolnsire?" said Will Scarlett, as they were one night seated

around their green hearth in the old glade, soon after the marriage of Edith.

“Ay, marry do I,” answered Little John; “from the edge of the Humber to the castle of Newark, which I hold to be somewhat beyond the meers of the shire.”

“Is the land right pleasant?” continued Will; “hath its air as sweet a smell as our own forest, and doth it abound in goodly woods and herds of stately deer?”

“Monks and monasteries are somewhat plentiful,” replied Little John; “for, by the mass, never was sky so be-pricked by spire and tower as that over the shire of Lincoln; the very clouds are doomed to penance, from the Foss-dyke to the fall of the Trent. You have scarce room to fly an hawk; for ten to one that the quarry dasheth out its brains against a steeple before it is struck by the falcon. But why dost thou inquire? surely thou art not going to forsake the sweet shades of old Sherwood?”

“Methinks a warm couch and a bonny bride are better than the roar of the naked trees, and a home in some shed or cavern within the forest, during the winter season,” replied Will; “and the hand of Blanch, with the office of head ranger to Sir Henry of Gloomglendell and the lady Edith, are matters that turn not up every day.”

“Thou speakest soothly,” answered Little John. “The maiden herself is no mean *guerdon*; an eye like a star, and a lip like the berry of the wild-rose. By the holy rood! I would scarce say nay to thine offer. There are some sweet forests anent the huge towers of old Lincoln, and many a wild wood crowns the hills above fair Danesborough, and slopes down those gentle declivities that dip into the river, spots well known to the hart and hind. By the mass! I have thought a thousand times of the foot and ancle the maiden displayed, when last she danced in our green glade at the nuptials of Edith.”

“I had thought that Druth was about to be placed in the household of Gloomglendell,” said Walter-the-one-handed.

“The dwarf will not forsake his watch by the priory,” replied Will Scarlet ; “beside, the poor fellow hath given himself up to the melancholies ever since the departure of the Lady Edith, and peeks and pines like a very ghost ; and when the Lady bade him adieu, and put her white hand to his lips, (which, by holy Mary ! they were unworthy to touch,) instead of covering it with kisses, by my creed ! he trembled like a leaf in the autumn blast.”

“By St. Dunstan,” said Walter-the-one-handed, “I am half aggrieved that the old Norman is dead. Cruel he was, but lacked not a few good qualities ; and his offer to take me into his own service, after I had all but swung him from his own battlements, hath often clung to my memory since that day. I would have mine enemy in thrall, or be constantly at blows

with him, but death compelleth one to look on the fairest side of the tree when it is fallen, for only that seemeth to live ; the bad is taken away, and goeth into the grave. I have not struck a blow since he hath departed."

"And our chief," said Little John, "hath scarce spent a whole day with us since he rescued the Saxon from the rangers. Bad times these, Walter; an abbot might ride to the furthest end of Sherwood, and not find a mark less in his mail, when he reached his journey's end, for what our captain seemed to care."

"For my part," said the tinker of Tickell, "I have been thinking of repairing the rents in my budget, and again betaking me to my old trade; for if we have no one to lead us on to uplift a shaft against either priest or friar, why I must e'en take to dealing blows again on pots and pans, for my arm hath been so inured to hammering the bones of rangers of late, that they pain me through very idleness."

“ And I,” said Rob-of-the-Raven’s-roost, who had stepped in to empty a cup on that evening with the outlaws, “ will again set about mustering up all the herds of swine around the forest, and endeavour to get a groat by tending them in the fast-coming autumn, while they pick up the mast. I must blow mine horn for my bread, an’ there is nothing better in the wind.”

“ Fear not but there will soon be fresh game a-foot,” said Walter-the-one-handed; “ when the devil and the pope lay their heads together, be sure that they intend not that we should remain long in idleness. Beside, I hear that the barons are already mustering strong, and about to curb the growing power of this King John: trust me, he betook not himself and train so speedily from the palace for nought; and many of the nobles have refused to aid him in the new uproar that is now breaking forth in Normandy, until he hath first signed some articles which they have already drawn together.”

“ I fear me,” said Little John, “ that we shall have no share in the feast ; and by St. Christopher, I would traverse a few leagues to be in the midst of the tumult, where right English blows are exchanged.”

“ The times may yet alter,” said the Pindar of Wakefield ; “ an’ they do not, I will e’en take up my pounding staff again, and hunt up lagging heifers and stray herds in the sweet green lanes ; and whistle like a bird the whole summer through ; and spend my gains in the winter, beside the snug hearth of Gilbert’s *Scot-ale*.”

“ And when thou canst neither find hoof nor herd in the bye-ways,” said Little John, “ thou wilt help the cattle to leap some wide drain, by a few blows from thy long staff ; or set some gate ajar, or break down a goodly fence, rather than lack prisoners for thy pinfold, wilt thou not ?”

The Pindar only replied by a grin ; and

throwing himself back on the green sward, he watched for a few moments the white stars which twinkled above the tranquil forest, and soon fell asleep. The remainder of the outlaws speedily followed his example, some throwing themselves down to rest at the mossy stem of a tree, or under the rude sheds that extended on the left of the green glade. The pale pillar of smoke gradually dwindled away, until the embers of the fire became a dead white mass, and no sound was heard within the forest, saving the footfall of some outlaw on the watch, whose measured step kept time to the sylvan chorus, which he chaunted, to wile away the silence of the night.

THE END.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR,
"A DAY IN THE WOODS."

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

Athenæum.—The prose as well as the poetry of this work is well written. They contain much pleasant description of natural objects, with occasional bursts of imagination of a higher order—such as often visit the sons of genius with peculiar vividness.

The Times.—He is essentially poetical. He sees every object with the eye of a poet, and expresses his conceptions in language poetical. His prose is also good, both as to clearness of expression and correctness of style. He is a much better writer than many modern authors who doubtless consider themselves his betters.

Globe.—This is a singular production, bearing on every page the stamp of originality and genius. It is filled with deep pathos and picturesque description, and every page is crowded with thoughts and images gathered from the rich storehouse of Nature. It teems with beautiful descriptions of old woods, flowery valleys, green leaves, and murmuring waters. It is rarely we have fallen in with so pleasant a volume.

Courier.—The author seems to have been born a poet. His verse is the very personification of tenderness and feeling. There is so genuine a spirit, and such taste, harmony, and originality about his poetry, as to stamp him a man whose conceptions emanate from the genuine sources of poetic inspiration. His prose, too, is at once nervous and original, and claims the reader's attention from its simplicity and tenderness.

Morning Post.—Exquisitely tender, full of deep feeling, and imbued with a rich vein of that philosophy of thought and raciness of expression peculiar to our old poets. He has sent forth some poems that would have done credit to the greatest veterans in literature.

New Monthly Magazine.—Mr. Miller's poetry contains an intrinsic excellence which need not fear a competition with the most successful writers of the day. Upon such writings as these any critical remarks are quite unnecessary. What we have extracted will, we imagine, be quite sufficient to establish the author in the good opinion of all who have a heart to feel or, a mind to appreciate the power of genius.

Atlas.—This book is full of the faults of an imagination running wild; but there is such a flush of original enthusiasm through the whole, and such an eager pleasure in the enjoyment of the beauti-

Opinions of the Press on "A Day in the Woods."

ful, that we can afford to compound for those defects: it exhibits in every page proofs of deep feeling, and a reverence for Nature.

Kentish Observer. — The inspiration of genius is stamped upon every page of this volume, and a deep and impassioned tone of poetical feeling pervades the whole work.

Court Journal. — This work is of a cast that will bear criticism, — true and strong in feeling, and as refined in expression as it is homely in sentiment.

Dispatch. — The author of this volume is a man of unquestionable genius; the book is well and eloquently written, full of truth and glowing with enthusiasm, and in his verse there is a tenderness exquisitely affecting.

Edinburgh Observer. — Fertile as the past season has been in the production of many an elegant volume of light reading, we have not seen any one possessing more merit than this work. It is a beautiful volume.

Fox's Repository. — Our author's associations with the woods are of the true poetic and religious cast. A story which contains many touches of fine and delicate feeling, runs throughout the work. It must be read, not in extract, but continuously, to receive its due measure of appreciation. From its varied and pleasing contents we should recommend it as a present to young people, whose hearts no less than minds would be improved and enlightened by the perusal.

News. — Full to overflowing of the richest poetic feeling, and given with all the spontaneous freshness that renders the effusions of unhacknied genius more attractive than the most laboured and even most finished compositions of experienced cleverness.

Old Monthly Magazine. — This work displays a mind of much native elegance, with no inconsiderable portion of genius. It is redolent of a love of Nature and Nature's works. It is full of tender thoughts and beautiful imagery. It is a wonderful volume.

Monthly Review. — Among all the poets, we know none who could be preferred to this unpretending author. His excursions into the fields of poetic enterprise seem to have been of the most successful description. He certainly culls with judgment and clothes with beauty the fruits of his genius; his acquaintance with Nature is perfect and complete. His poems picture to our minds the vigorous energy of action which is so exclusively the gift of an original genius.

Opinions of the Press on "A Day in the Woods."

Morning Advertiser.—The author is gifted not only with a truly poetic fancy, but with great powers of description: the love of Nature burns within him with a force which knows no limits.

Tait's Magazine.—Many of the light sketches are both fanciful and elegant, and show that the author is at home in the woods, and in one region of the heaven of invention. Some of the sketches of rustic life and English scenery reminded us pleasantly of the rustic sketches of the Howitts and Miss Mitford.

Public Ledger.—The beauty of this work is not greater than its boldness, and the combination of the two places the author in a very high rank amongst the geniuses of the age. His mind loves to dwell upon the associated images of Nature, and to weave them into fantastic and ever-varying forms. He revels at will in the green fields, or floats on the overshadowing clouds, and pours forth his divinest minstrelsy without let or hindrance.

Satirist.—The style is pure, and there is about it an elevation of thought and a nobleness of sentiment which stamp the author as no common man. There is an enthusiasm which delights, and a delicacy of feeling which all must admire.

Metropolitan.—The prose in this volume is not less elegant and smoothly turned than the verse. We say it at once and boldly, that the work far surpasses any thing that Bloomfield ever wrote. The literature of the day has gained a valuable accession.

Felix Farley's Bristol Journal.—The work is filled with pathos and picturesque description, and every page is crowded with thoughts and images drawn from the simplicity of nature, and expressed in language of pure poetry, such as true genius only could have used. We have seldom before met with a book on which we could bestow so much unqualified praise. True poetic prose, such as our author writes, is, in our judgment, but a few steps removed from the highest rank of eloquence.

Buckinghamshire Herald.—The author of this truly poetic volume, is one of those favoured children of the muses, who sees nothing but with the eye of a poet. His verse is the very personification of tenderness and feeling. This work is such as only a poet could pen; every sentence breathes of the spirit of poetic harmony.

Glasgow Constitutional.—We do not care how soon we meet this author again; he has some of the right stuff in him, as a poet and observer of nature. The sentimental, in connexion with natural objects, is the element in which he lives, and moves, and breathes. There is a gladsome spirit in him, and a joyous sym-

Opinions of the Press on " Beauties of the Country."

pathy with the lovely things of this life. A fresh feeling for the beautiful and the graceful, is deep in his nature, and he has an exquisite eye and ear for all sights and sounds, that come upon him from the depths of the merry woods.

Nottingham Mercury.—This work contains some of the most delightful passages we ever remember to have perused. It is the exquisite language of nature, bounding over sunny hills, and gliding through green clustering forests.

“ BEAUTIES OF THE COUNTRY.”

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

Literary Gazette.— We have again experienced a sincere pleasure in dwelling on the natural freshness and poetical imaginings of Mr. Miller; his are no cockney scenes of rusticity, to be mistaken for rural beauty; he has lived in the country, and has observed its features; and he paints them faithfully and well. His trees actually luxuriate; his streams flow; his fields are spread out in all their varieties; his sunshine produces languor on the flocks and herds; his moonlight sheds a calm lustre o'er the silent earth; his images are just; his effects true; and his reflections full of interest and character. The volume is embellished with twenty-six beautiful wood-cuts.

Examiner.— To the real lovers of Nature this work will be most welcome. It is written with graphic truth and in a healthy tone. Mr. Miller describes his object to be, to embody in his volume “ whatever is most beautiful or poetical in country life and scenery.” All this he has done, and has also portrayed with vividness and skill, many of the old country customs and festivals.

Spectator.— Mr. Miller's book is a capital guide to the pleasures of the country, and may rank next to “ Howitt's Book of the Seasons,” while, as regards utility, it exceeds that charming work.

Naval and Military Gazette.— Having spent the greater portion of his life in the country, he has been enabled to describe its pleasures, pastimes, and enjoyments, its green fields, fragrant woods, and ever-varying scenes, with the pencil of the painter and the language of the poet; a more delightful volume cannot be taken up.

Opinions of the Press on " Beauties of the Country."

Bell's Messenger.—We like Mr. Miller's present-book much ; it is Gilbert White, written by a poet, and possesses, not only the quaint simplicity, but the high and honest enthusiasm of love for Nature, which we find in the works of that old English gentleman, Evelyn. We think the following passage on the associations of rural scenery as fine a specimen of poetical prose as there is in the English language.

Dublin Quarterly Review. — We have seldom perused a work on this subject that has afforded us greater pleasure ; it evinces, throughout, much originality of conception ; and though written in prose, is replete with the imagery and language which belongs to the finest poetry. We would recommend it to every person ; it would improve their taste much, and inspire them with a love of every thing beautiful in nature. The illustrations are very spirited : the frontispiece is quite a gem.

Analyst.—A work which, whether we regard the style, sentiments, and acquaintance with the literature of our country by which it is characterized, or feel the patriotic spirit and commendable desire to turn the attention of his countrymen to the pleasures which are free and open to all, which it breathes, would reflect the highest credit upon any author of any rank, however distinguished that might be.

Loudon's Magazine of Natural History, New Series.—The author dwells upon the trees and flowers that beautify the earth, and the creatures that sport upon its surface. It embodies the sentiments and emotions of a mind capable of appreciating, in the most exalted degree, those sources of enjoyment that spring from the contemplation of natural objects ; indirectly, it is as valuable a contribution to science as some works that come before us with a definite quantum of new information.

Sporting Magazine.—Mr. Miller's sketches of rustic life and English scenery, display a mind of much native elegance, and his descriptions of the beauties of nature, are very graphic.

Sun.—This is the work of a writer who has a true appreciation of the beauties of Nature. Mr. Miller has brought to his task all the zeal of an enthusiast, and in many of the scenic sketches shows himself possessed of much poetic sensibility. His introductory stanzas are full of grace and feeling.

Sunday Times.—The talented author of these pages should have lived amongst Arcadians ; his thoughts and feelings are all imbued with the elegant and unaffected simplicity of that fabled age. This is, indeed, a delightful book. The style is admirably adapted to the subject. His descriptions of rural scenery, and

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rural customs, are such as might be expected only from a man who possessed a fine perception of, and a keen relish for, those beauties, which the dweller in cities would wholly overlook.

Observer.—Mr. Miller is already favourably known as the author of a " Day in the Woods." The present is a much larger work; it is a goodly volume. Many of his descriptions of the beauties of Nature are pleasing and graphic. The volume is highly interesting, and is full of variety. The arrangement is good.

The Scotsman.—The sketches of the appearances of the country under the influence of the various seasons, are at once accurate and graphic, and, in many instances, both poetic and eloquent. Mr. Miller is an enthusiastic lover of Nature in all her characters and moods, and is extremely successful in imparting his fervour to his descriptions, every one of which are glowing with the deep intensity of his own feelings.

Kentish Gazette.—Here is a book which is equally acceptable at the fireside on a winter's eve, or a shady grove in the height of summer. The volume requires no recommendation; a hasty glance at its pages will ensure its success.

Somerset County Gazette.—The design of this work is to sketch the Beauties of the Country at the different seasons of the year, and the author has done it with the pencil of one who loves Nature devoutly, and who, educated in the free air of an English village, has his best feelings, and earliest affections, and brightest joys, and holiest aspirings, associated with the rose-covered cottage, the oak on the green, the hills and copses, the green fields and the gay flowers; all these and the thousand other enchantments of the country, he dwells upon with an eloquence of rapture which charms the dullest reader.

Woolmer's Exeter Gazette.—This is a highly interesting volume. The descriptions of rural customs, objects, scenery, and the seasons, for each month in the year, being written in a very agreeable style. The author is evidently a true admirer of Nature, and sketches, with the hand of a master, the charms of the country, and the advantages of pastoral life in all its changes, from the opening spring to ice-bound winter.

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