



# THE VAST ARMY:

An Allegory.

BY THE

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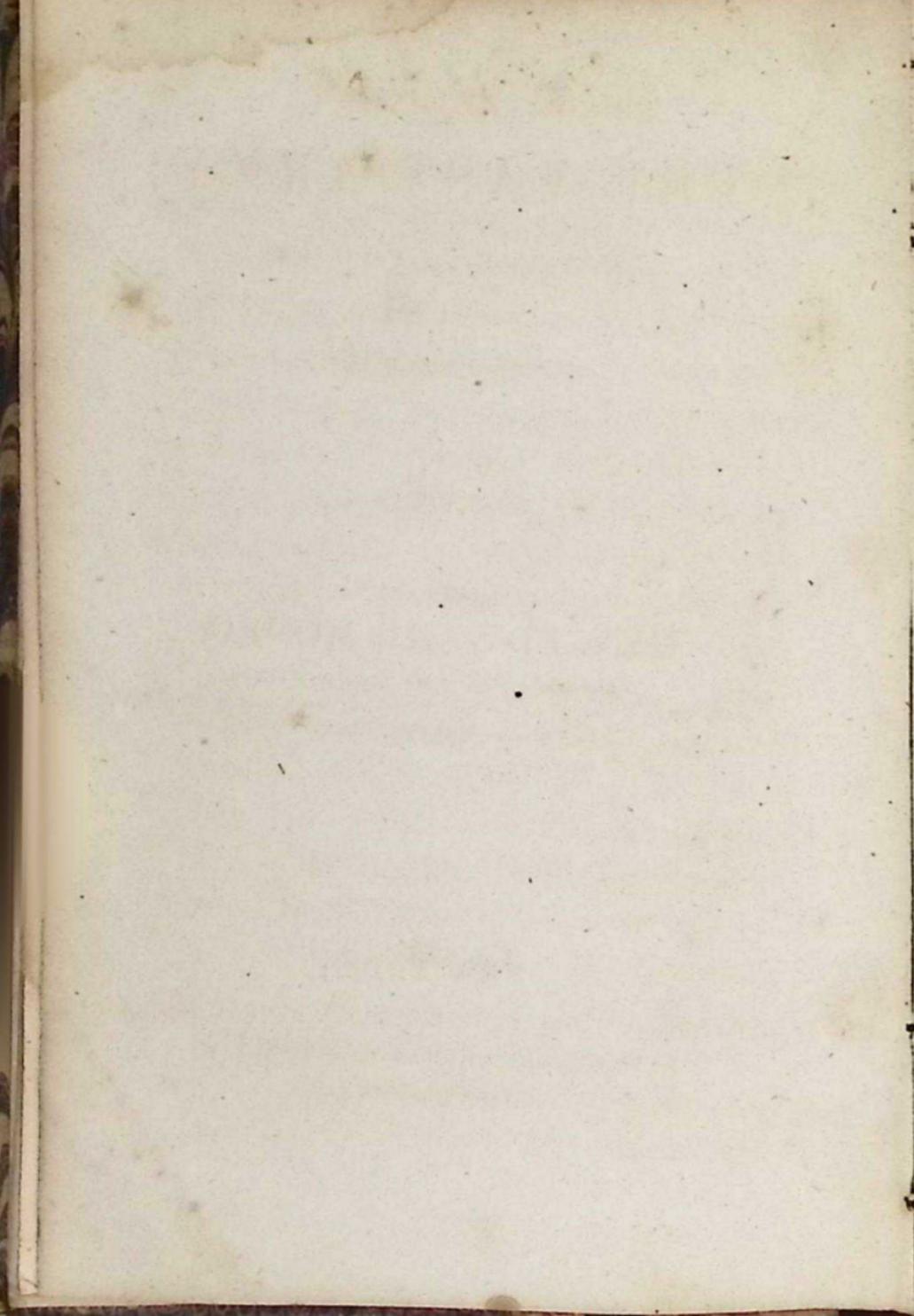
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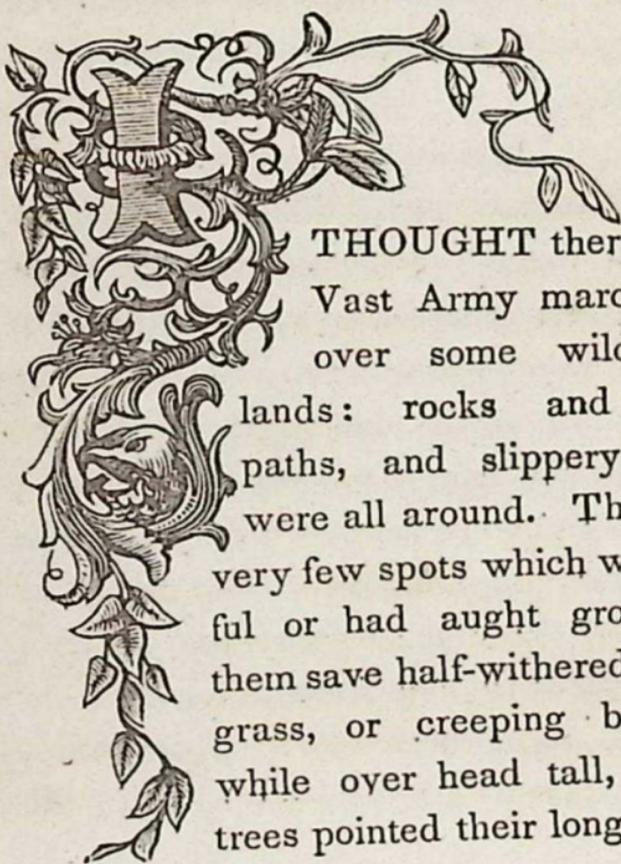


# THE VAST ARMY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE APPOINTED PLACE.



THOUGHT there was a Vast Army marching on over some wild rough lands: rocks and narrow paths, and slippery places, were all around. There were very few spots which were fruitful or had aught growing on them save half-withered stalks of grass, or creeping brambles; while over head tall, lank, fir trees pointed their long and leaf-

less fingers to the wild hills and crags, which went on and on rising in the distance.

The Army was moving through this bleak land, and found it hard work to keep together, or to get forward. I was told they were going against enemies, who were drawn up on a beautiful green and flowery plain beyond the hills, and were many more in number.

I thought I was following this Vast Army, and One walked by my side, who told me all about them. Their movements were strange and wonderful, so as to fill my soul.

I will tell all I saw.

It was late in the evening when I first came into the midst of this Vast Army; overhead the stars were just beginning to come in the pale blue sky. The thin clear crescent of the moon was sailing on with the shadow of the old moon in its arms.

To the east there were many sharp, ragged rocks which pierced up into the

air. I should have thought it would have been dark in this part of the sky, as it was night, and the glow of twilight was in the west. But no; there was a light among those sharp points clearer and softer than the twilight which still hovered on the other side, where the sun had gone down; a clear, beautiful glow of light which made the rocks stand out and black against it, and gave them a sharp terrible look; and though this lovely light was low down in the horizon, and though it was getting on for night when I came, still I saw that every man's brow of that Vast Army, which was turned toward the glow, shone with a pale, lovely, peaceful light, like marble statues look by moonshine, or faces when they are lit up by the blue flame of sulphur.

There was a glow in the west, but it was the sweet fading of sun-light, still it was not half so beautiful; and besides, it grew

fainter, while the glow in the east grew stronger, though very slowly.

And now of the Vast Army.

My guide told me the enemy lay in the west, among mountains, under the sunset, though the Army was constantly looking to the east, because from thence they were expecting a certain glorious King, who was coming with an army of unknown size to help them; besides, this King was their King, and his kingdom lay in far-off lands, where the soft glow was, beyond the hills; and the soldiers of his army were all to go back with him after they had won the victory; and they longed to go, for a lovely land, most lovely, they heard was the land of the King.

It seemed the soldiers of the Vast Army had never seen the King. But still they loved him with a deep love, for he sent over kind messages to them, and all glorious

beings ever marched with them, and attended them, who had seen the King in his beauty in the land which was very far off, and ever and anon they told all-glorious stories of the King and his noble land, as never could have entered their "hearts to fancy." Besides, the King's character was most beautiful, such as men love without seeing the man, and he sent them all kinds of refreshments and help for their weary march.

The fathers of this Vast Army had long ago seen the King, but had been (as I was told) cut off from his own hosts, on account of some dispute in which they alone were to blame, for "in him was no fault;" and he had said, by way of punishment, that the Vast Army should not come back to him till they had gone through the weary march, and conquered their cruel foe. My guide told me, the King longed with a strange love to have them back, and he

said (though it was strange to me) that he had each soldier of the Vast Army in sight of him, as, from the glow, he saw them coming up amid the hills; though they did not see him, since the rocks were so dark and the shadows so heavy.

It was plain that all the soldiers were not to be at the last great battle, for I will tell presently how some dropped away; but I was told that all who left the Vast Army were taken by bright messengers to the King, and that the King would bring them back when he came.

The men of this Vast Army were very many in number, of all sorts and dispositions; they marched in regular order, and were very close in their ranks, and obeyed the orders of those over them strictly. I saw each one had a cross on his brow, which seemed liquid like living water, and their crosses ever caught the sweet light from the eastern glow, and shone with a

most lovely color on the forehead of each soldier of the Vast Army.

Mingled among them were countless beings who followed them, clad in radiant garments, with faces of unsullied purity, who were ever active, moving about amid the soldiers. They were never idle, but always seemed to have their eyes fixed on those they had to guard; and whenever one of the soldiers dropped away, these beings carried him to the host of the glorious King: the air and ground seemed quite taken up with them. My companion told me, they were messengers from the King. I saw, too, there were many dark ones which moved about amidst these messengers, who were bent on evil, and hindering the Vast Army in their march.

The men were advancing with their arms in their hands, and their shields on their bosoms, ready for battle, when I first saw them. My companion beckoned me to

follow him ; for I was standing gazing with wonder at the moving of these soldiers, and the active beings who followed them. I followed him, and he led me through many barren passes of rocks, till on a sudden we stood over where the enemy were. They were drawn up in dense columns and lines over the beautiful plains. It was morning before I saw them, and the glorious sun was bursting full on their colored dresses and glittering arms ; while the red beams caught far away the snowy peaks of the mountains, and shone all burning hot on the vineyards of purple grapes and golden corn which grew in the valley. I thought I had never witnessed a more lovely spectacle. I did not see the lovely glow from the enemy's land, but all intense burning, scorching sunshine.

They were careless and unwatchful, and many stragglers were wandering about over the rich land, gathering fruits and flowers,

or sleeping on delicious banks by cool flowing rivers of blue and silver water. They did not seem to be giving heed to the Vast Army, who I knew were making their sure onward way amid the mountains.

“Do you see,” said my companion, “how many of these men have crosses of fire burning on their brows, running up and down like liquid flame?”

I said, I saw it; “and,” said I, “it seems to me as if the fiery crosses were gnawing with pain the flesh of those who bore them.”

“Even so,” said he, “you have judged truly. These men with the fiery crosses did belong to the Vast Army, and their crosses were then of silver; but since they have left the army, they have become fire!”

I remarked on the very anxious expression the crosses gave to the faces of those who had them.

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But I must go back to the Vast Army,

whom I wished much to watch, and soon returned with my guide to the mountains, along which they were moving.

I saw each one was clad in a vesture of snowy white, and that whenever they went contrary to the orders they received from the King, or those placed over them, a dark black stain was left on their white dress, which no power of theirs could move away; no, nothing but the King himself could take it away, which he was ever ready to do when they came back again to the right way, and grieved over what they had done.

But I must come to the point of my story. Down in a deep hollow among the rocks, while the glow was hovering still and softly over the distant east, three boys were standing; they were soldiers of the Vast Army, and wore their snowy vests, and their silver crosses on their brows, which caught the rays from the hills.

The cold evening air was rising amid the

rocks and caverns ; the Vast Army lay quiet all around : my guide had told me they had been long on their march, and would be very long yet, perhaps, before the final struggle with the foe ; and that very many would be sent for to join the host of the King before the day of the last terrible battle came.

“Ulric,” said a boy whom I had watched some time with great interest, “Ulric, have you heard of the noise among the mountains? they say it has been heard these three days, and men say it is as if the glorious King were coming, for it sounds like chariots driving swiftly on the hills.”

“And what if they have, Albyn?” cried the other ; “what if they have? they are always fancying they hear sounds on the mountains : they say ever since the Vast Army set out, men have fancied the same. I’m not going to be taken in. It’s all fancy, I say.”

“What was the sound like?” asked a young boy who was standing and leaning listlessly against a rock, and playing with the point of his sword. “What was the sound like, Albyn?” said he, looking up quickly and anxiously.

“Like the wheels of many chariots, and the treading of many feet, which move swiftly over the mountains,” said Albyn, looking thoughtfully towards the hills which lay off to the east.

“Do you think it is the King?” said the child, turning round and laying hold of Albyn’s hand.

“I cannot tell, Erza. I know when he comes, he will come suddenly.”

There was a silence for a few moments.

“Oh, nonsense,” cried Ulric, “nonsense, Erza; come with me, boy, and let us go about the sport we were going at, before this stupid Albyn puts all this in your brain.”

Erza lingered, still looking in Albyn's face, yet seeming anxious to go with Ulric.

"I wish I knew if he were coming," said Erza again.

"And why?"

"Because, Albyn, I would not go about the work I promised to do with Ulric."

"Why not?"

"Why not! why, because it's what'll stain my garment; and that must be white, you know, when the King comes."

"Oh, Erza! dear Erza! if you know that, how can you think of going? Suppose the King were to come on a sudden, as they say he will, how would you look when you had known this and would not act on it? what excuse would you have?"

Erza hung his head down, and did not speak. He loved Albyn, but he could not give up his work with Ulric. He moved slowly and hesitatingly away. But before either he or Ulric were out of sight, a swift

messenger came up from the main Army, bearing orders from the leader.

“The noise increases among the mountains,” said the Messenger, “and you are ordered to keep the narrow pass which comes down between yon rocks into the enemy’s land, that no part may be left open to the foe, and that all may be found watching if the King should come. All are ordered to their post,” continued the Messenger, “and each one of you has your own appointed. You, Ulric, are to guard the level ground at the top of the rocks, and by no means to let any one pass you without the watchword given: you, Albyn, are to guard the rocky pass beneath, and to let none pass save over your dead body: and, Erza, you must stand on yonder hill, and keep a look-out, and fire the signal if you see the enemy advance in the plains beneath.”

The boys listened attentively; they did

not linger: those who wore the shining cross were bound to obey.

They each moved to their post. Ulric muttered to himself, "It's an old alarm; they always try to frighten us in this way; the King is not coming, I'll be bound:" and he went sulkily to his post.

Albyn bowed, and went swiftly to the dark pass. Erza, who was pale with fright at the very mention of the King's coming, seemed unwilling to leave Albyn's side, and moved to his place hesitatingly and sadly.

While I was watching them, my guide drew my attention to one or two things I had not noticed.

"See," said he, "how each one has his own place given him to which he is suited; so wise are the leaders of the Vast Army in giving each their place: the hardest place to Albyn the boldest, to Ulric the

easier place, and to little Erza but the work of watching."

I saw each of them had a Being who followed them, and talked with them when they were alone, and helped them with advice. I was told they were secret messengers from the great King.

Down a deep pass, among steep, craggy rocks, in a place where any one could stand across the narrow pass, young Albyn stood alone. The moon was shining clearly in the sky, and shedding its silver light on the white dress of the youthful soldier till it shone in its soft folds like snowreefs; and the black shadow of the rocks was painted in ragged outline on the misty ground. Tall crags rose up above him in thin tapering points; but between them shone the tender glow of light which caught the cross on Albyn's brow.

"Hark, Albyn!" said the Being who

was by him; "hark! there is a sound in the pass beneath."

It was all silent around; not a sound, save where some bird of night stretched its long wing in the moonlight, or flapped it against the side of the rock.

"I hear nothing," said Albyn.

He placed his face near the earth, and plainly heard the sound of many footsteps coming up from the plain beneath.

"I will go down," said he, "and look over yonder crag. I may see them plainer where the moon shines on the plain."

So saying, the young soldier went to the rock with his tall spear in his hand, and his shield on his arm glittering in the night-light, and his helmet which rose above the cross on his brow.

He had no sooner moved off than a dark one of hideous form darted out from behind a rock, and slid up to where the Messenger stood, and leaning on the rock before him,

fixed his small, round, flaming eyes on the bright one, and spoke to him.

“ Lovest thou yon boy ? ”

“ Thou knowest it,” said the other.

“ I will have him ere morning,” said the dark one. “ I have pledged my word and freedom to my King that I will get Albyn’s white vesture black as ink before the sun rise to-morrow ; and I will do it too : nor shall all the messengers of thy vile King hinder me. I hate thy King ; and to ruin young Albyn for ever is worth a thousand years of torment. Ha ! ” and the dark one shouted with wildness.

“ Away ! away ! ” said the messenger, “ do thy worst. His King loves him, and has sent me to guard him ; and while Albyn is firm thou shalt not touch a hair of the boy’s head : while he keeps his garment white, I have power, dark one, to overcome thee ; and thou shalt not prevail. The King has bought him at a great price, and loves

him with a great love. His eye is ever on him. Away!"

"Ha!" cried the other, "dost thou dare me?"

So saying, the evil one, drawing an arrow from his quiver, threw it with all his force at Albyn, who was leaning over the rock with his back turned to the beings. The arrow hurtled through the air, and its fiery point looked as if it would have pierced Albyn through and through. But the Messenger slid like light before the boy, and the arrow, striking on his azure wing, broke into shivers; the ground was scattered with its fragments.

"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper," said the Being.

His voice died away in sweet accents among the hills, and it seemed to me as if an echo came back from the distance, though the words were changed.

“ Because I have set my love upon him, therefore have I delivered him.”

Most soft and lovely was the voice which spoke ; so soft that my soul was filled with it, and it seemed to me to come from the part where the glow was. Albyn looked round quickly, as if he had caught the last accents ; but he did not seem to see the shivered arrow, nor to know aught that had passed, and turned back as quickly to watch something in the pass below.

Meanwhile the dark one had fled behind the shadow of the rock, and the Messenger stood in the path between him and the boy.

But what was Albyn looking at ?

Across the plain, over which the moonbeams' light fell like a flood of misty silver, a small band of men were seen quickly winding their way, armed from head to feet, moving rapidly, but softly, towards the pass which Albyn had to guard. It was

plain they came from the enemy's camp, and were hoping to take that part of the army by surprise which lay in their tents near Albyn's pass.

News of the sound in the mountains and the King's approach had reached the enemy, and made them the more eager to make some impression on the Vast Army. Their power depended on finding them unwatchful at their post. The little party having moved swiftly over the place, came into the black shadow cast by the mountains, and Albyn could see them no more. But he heard their footsteps plainly come nearer and nearer as they approached the pass, and he imagined, by great straining of his eyes, he could catch here and there their spearheads gleaming in some wandering ray of the moon. He was watching this little band while the strife went on with the dark one.

“They are coming now at least,” said

Albyn, throwing himself across the pass under the huge rock. "'Tis strange Erza has given no signal."

As he spoke, an arrow from the plain flew through the air far over Albyn's head, and a shrill, bitter scream was heard far above, as from one mortally wounded.

"It's from Erza," said Albyn; "he was not watching. Poor Erza!" said he, and drew himself up against the rock: he planted his foot across the pass, placed his shield on his breast, and grasping his spear firmly in his hand, with his helmet on his head, the young soldier seemed prepared for a dreadful strife.

"Fear not, for I am with thee," said a voice.

Albyn bowed his head; there was a silence for a moment, deep and awful: the echo of the dreadful scream had died away: then there was the low tread of many iron footsteps, another moment, and the fore-

most of the band of the enemy turned the rock, and stood straight before Albyn.

“Yield thee, or die,” shouted the man, and shook his long spear in his hand.

“I yield not,” said Albyn, “to the enemy of my King.”

By this time the whole band had turned the sharp corner, and quite filled the narrow pass. It seemed a desperate moment for the gallant boy alone against so large a body of men, and they armed with steel from head to foot. But he fought for the King he loved, and what cared he for many or few? The spear flew from the hand of the first foe, and sticking on the rock over Albyn's head, broke to pieces at his feet. A shower of spears instantly filled the air, and fell, thick as hail, round the soldier of the King. His helmet rattled beneath the blows; his breastplate blunted many an arrow's head; and his shield, with which he covered his face, made

more than one sharp point fly back and wound the men who were pressing on.

Not a step had Albyn yielded yet, though his foe were fast gaining ground. It required the greatest clearness of the boy's head to see what he had best be doing; when on a sudden the dark shadow of the evil one was seen gliding from the rock behind the boy's ear. He began to confuse him by whispers.

"See down yonder crag," said he, "more men are coming fast. You will never hold out. You had better give up, and save your life."

Albyn never turned his head, but keeping his eye fixed before him, answered the dark one sharply:

"Away, foul fiend! it is not to numbers I yield."

"But," said the dark one, putting his face before Albyn, and fixing his fiery eye full on the boy, "by giving up kindly, you

will make these men love and serve the good King, your Master. You will do more by kindness than by force."

But the Messenger passed like light across the path, and the dark one in terror fled away.

Full half an hour Albyn held out the pass against the men: it was so narrow that, young as he was, he was able to prevent any passing him. He had struck down three of the enemy dead in the pass; and finding that multitudes were pressing up the pass, he drew from his snowy vest his silver horn, and winding it till the rocks echoed again with the sound, he expected Ulric, or any that was near, to come to his help. But no Ulric came. Still it was Ulric's place to come.

All seemed becoming desperate, when on a sudden more troops were seen winding round the foot of the crags in the distance.

The noise of battle was heard raging among the narrow defiles of the mountains; the clang of trumpets, the prancing of horses, the clash of armor, the shouts of men, all rose in one wild indistinct noise far and wide in the moonlight.

“The enemy are attacking the Vast Army at all sides at once,” said Albyn, leaning faint on his spear, as for a moment the enemy paused at sound of the distant noise.

“Go down and join the great battle: so brave a boy as you will be of great use; far more than in keeping so narrow a pass as this,” whispered the evil one.

“He hath appointed unto all their place. Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find watching,” said the Messenger.

A loud shout was heard on a sudden by the men in the pass, and they disappeared

through a chasm of the rocks. They had descried another pass, and Albyn, faint and weary, was left alone.

“Now, Ulric, do thy work,” said he to himself: “at the first blast of thy horn I am ready to come.”

So saying, he bent down his parched lips to drink of a cool water which gurgled out from the rock, and with his face towards the glow, which shone on the cross on his brow, he prepared himself not to be taken by surprise.

“You see,” said my guide, “how the King has given to each his own work and place, and how it would be wrong for any to leave his post. The soldiers of the Vast Army may not choose their own place. It is always chosen for them by the King Himself, or those placed in authority under Him. Each has his own, and each has the place for which he is for some reason suited. If they think they would do better in

another place, thy are mistaken; for the King is most wise, and knows each one better than he does himself; and he has given great wisdom and discretion to the rulers of his army, to place the soldiers where they are best suited."

"Very true," said I. "The King is most wise. I noticed how young Albyn would not go to the great fight which is waging in the distance."

"Because," said my guide, "he knew he was placed in this very pass by the King, or those in power; and when the King comes he must give account of how he has kept the pass; and though he had done ever so good a work elsewhere, yet if he had neglected this pass, and thereby the enemy had passed by, he would have had a sad reckoning for it at the last account. It will have mattered little what other great things he has done. What the King loves is obedience to the death; and

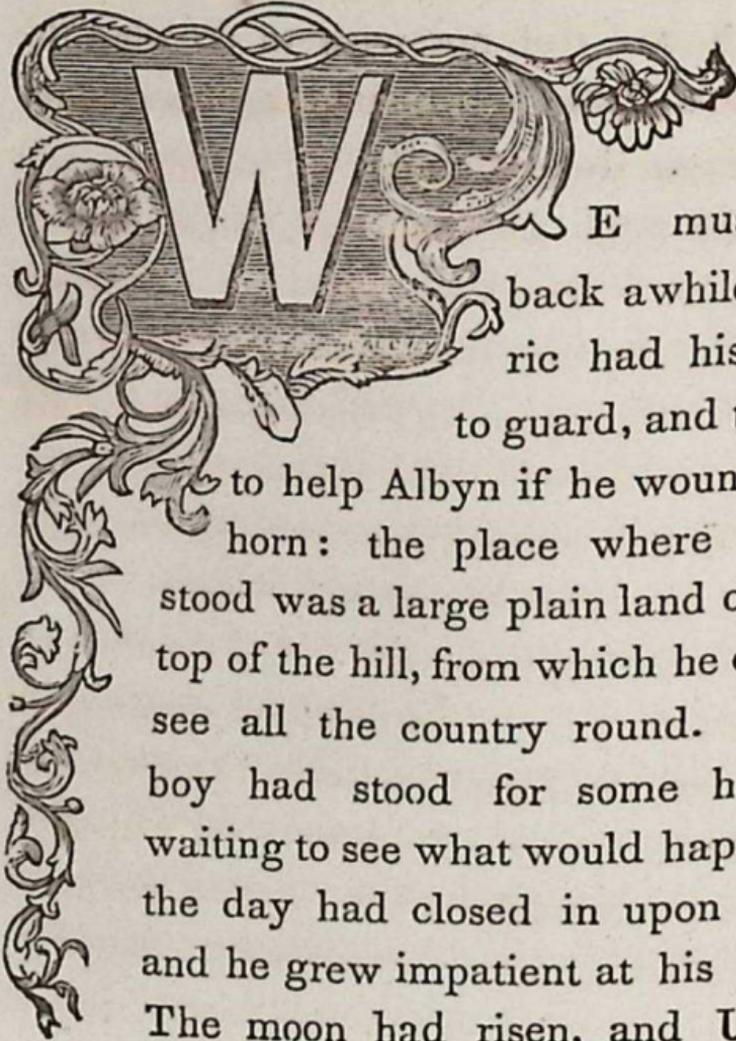
each one must do the work of the station in which he is placed."

"How the Messenger put the evil one to flight!" said I.

"Yes; because Albyn was bravely fighting, and did not wish to do what the evil one told him: if he had, the Messenger could have done nothing."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE PLACE AND DESERTED.



WE must go back awhile. Ulric had his post to guard, and to run to help Albyn if he wound his horn: the place where Ulric stood was a large plain land on the top of the hill, from which he could see all the country round. The boy had stood for some hours, waiting to see what would happen: the day had closed in upon him, and he grew impatient at his post. The moon had risen, and Ulric,

tired of watching, had wandered from his place.

“They will never come,” said he; “no enemy will come to-night: I will go and seek Erza, and ask him to climb yon rocks which look so white in the moonlight.”

A Form passed swiftly across Ulric's path; and as it passed, he heard a voice from the hills, which sounded like an echo far away: “You know not when he comes, at midnight, or at cock-crowing.” Ulric started; the figure and the voice had to do with each other. He looked toward the hills; but all was still, and seemed sleeping, in the pale cold shining of the moon.

“It was but a sound in the mountains,” said the boy; and he went on, turning his back on his forsaken post. At first, the path he had to tread was rough and uneasy, and sometimes so much so that he more than half determined to turn back. Besides, it had many windings, and every minute

he was coming within sight of the pass between the rocks which he had been placed to guard. It looked so cold and silent, so solitary, the place seemed as if he ought to be at it. Erza was stationed above him, and he had some way to go to reach him. Again he fancied he heard footsteps in the pass beneath, as of men treading swiftly and softly ; but the boy was bent on going on, and on he went ; the path grew easier as he advanced. One of the soldiers of the Vast Army hailed him.

“ Whither away, Ulric,” said he, “ with your face turned away from the glow on the hills, which shines so bright to-night ? ”

“ Where ? ” said Ulric, coloring ; “ on business, of course.”

“ Then, I hope, on business of the great King ; for all seem to say he is coming, and you would not be found on your own business when he comes ? ”

“ I shall be back in a minute,” said Ulric, hesitating.

“ Then you have left your post,” said the other earnestly ; “ and the hills are covered with the enemy ; and you say, ‘ back in a *minute* ;’ why, silly boy, the foe may be through the pass in that minute, and then what will become of you if the King comes ? ”

“ Oh, time enough ! time enough ! ” said Ulric. “ He will not come yet ; I shall be back in plenty of time ; ” and he ran laughing on, trying to shake off the uneasy feelings he had.

“ The King, the King come to-night ! ” the words rung in his ears ; and he stole a sudden look at the glow behind the hills ; it was indeed bright, and the black peaks stood out blacker and sharper than ever. There seemed a stir too on the hill ; as he turned his eye back, it fell on the part he

had left. As he glanced at it he thought a figure slid by under the shadow; but it did not hinder him, and on he went to Erza. The little boy was on the level land, keeping his eye fixed intently on the glow over the hill, while his face rested on his hand, as he lay along on the ground. He had left his post.

“The glow looks very bright,” said he to himself: “I wonder if the King is coming;” and his heart beat high, and his hand grew cold and clammy: he turned away, and gathered little dry flowers, which bloomed under the night wind.

“I won’t look at the glow,” said he, “and then I shall forget it; it will be all one tomorrow, and the sun will put out the glow: I don’t want to see the glow, and yet I want to see the King. But I’ll forget it,” said he, while his heart beat so high he could scarce keep it still: the light would throb up high-

er and higher into the sky, and caught the grass where he lay, and threw the shadow of his hand on the ground.

“You will not be ready for the King, by looking at the glow,” said a Voice, “nor by trying to forget it.”

Erza started. “But I am frightened; and want to forget it,” said the child.

“Mind the post which was given you,” said the Voice, “and you will not be frightened; for your eye will not be fixed on the light, and you will be ready when the King comes.”

“Ready when the King comes!” said the boy. “Oh, what a blessing if I were, I do so want it. How I wish Albyn was here, to talk to me, and advise me, and I know he would say, ‘Go to your appointed place.’ Then I will go,” cried he, rising up; and the glow caught the young child’s brow, and the silver cross upon it; he moved to his post. The vast rocks with

their black valleys lay outstretched before him.

“The King!” said little Erza, as he moved on to watch and look out; “what if any harm has come to Albyn below, for my not keeping watch?” said he; “what if any damage is done already, how shall I meet the King, and how can I find out? I wish I had never been divided far from Albyn.”

“Albyn, Albyn, always Albyn with you, Erza,” cried the rough voice of Ulric behind him.

Erza started at Ulric’s voice, so near him. “Yes, I *do* wish he was here,” said he; ‘he always tells me right, and would talk to me about the King’s coming.”

“I don’t believe he’ll ever come.”

“Oh! Ulric, how can you talk so?” said Erza, looking frightened; how very shocking!”

“Come with me,” said Ulric, going

towards the edge of the plain, where it looked out on the rocks and valleys; "see down there, are there not figures moving along among the rocks below? Do you not hear a stir?"

"Oh, Ulric, suppose it should be the enemy of the King coming; and we have been leaving our post, and I have not been watching to give my signal to Albyn below: what shall I do? Back, back, go back quick to your pass, while I look out."

But before he had done speaking, the noise had increased below, and the pass on which Albyn stood had been filled with armed men. An arrow thrilled through the sky and pierced Erza's breast: a cry as much of fear as of pain broke from the poor boy, and he fell on the ground pale and bleeding.

"Bear up my head; lean it on yonder stone, Ulric," said he; "bear it up away from the glow, for I dare not see it; I have

neglected my duty to the great King, and I cannot bear his coming. No, no, place me away from the glow"—and he trembled violently as he spoke, and his eyes were fixed on the light he longed to avoid.

Ulric propped his head up with the stone, and was busy in helping his wounded comrade, when the noise below increased.

"Away, Ulric! back to your post!" cried Erza. "Do not stay here with me, I have been the cause of harm enough to-day."

There was need enough of this warning; for already shadows appeared creeping along beneath the rocks of Ulric's pass, and he had scarcely time to reach it, when two figures issued from the dark crags towards him. They were dressed as soldiers, their swords were in their sheaths, and, as far as Ulric could see, the cross shone on their brows.

"Brave youth," said one, coming towards

Ulric, can you lead us to the captain of this division of the Vast Army? for we are allies of the great King, and would be led to your captain, to speak with him."

Ulric was so confused with his hurried return to his post, and the noise that now increased below the hills, that he could scarcely summon courage enough to think what he had best to do. He glanced at the cross which seemed on their brow, and was on the point of asking to see their pass, which he was strictly bidden to let none go by him without showing. The stranger spoke again before he could ask the question.

"You look a bold youth and gallant," said he. "If the great King's army be made of such as you, there's little doubt of success." So saying, he laid his hand on Ulric's shoulder, and gently led him away from the pass.

Poor Ulric was flattered to hear what

was said, and seemed too willing to be led on to drink in all the flattery the stranger poured into his ear.

The pass was now gained, and the enemy in bands passed hurriedly through it. Some of the foremost of them found Erza lying bleeding on the ground; he was at once made prisoner, bound hand and foot, and was carried away, partly under the hope that something might be got out of him to betray the state of the King's army, and partly to prevent his giving any alarm.

"Oh, Albyn! would you were here! What shall I do when the King comes?" cried the poor boy bitterly. "I have lost the pass by my own neglect—I have not kept my post; he will come, and he will not find me watching: what shall I do?"

But the men only laughed at him, and bid him be still.

Meanwhile the pass was wholly taken,

and all that part of the ground belonging to the King's army, which was very important, as leading the enemy very near the camp of the Vast Army, and giving them power to overlook it. Ulric had not seen Erza taken, and was now in the midst of the enemy's band, who were sitting round a blazing fire drinking and singing. Ulric had turned his face to the blaze, to avoid the sight of the glow which he dreaded looking at, and which ever and anon beat up like a pulse from the bosom of the distant hills.

He had quite forgot, in his movements and under the flattery, the request to show the men to the captain; they had only asked to lead him from his post, and, finding him easily led, they said nothing more about it.

One of the more daring of the enemy put his cup to his lips, and proposed, "Health to the enemies of the King, and a curse on him and his army!"

On a sudden it seemed to rush on Ulric, where he was ; the color mounted in his face, and he sprung up from the ground.

“I am a soldier of the King,” said he, with a faltering voice. “You may not drink that before me ; or, at least, I may not stop to hear it.” And for a moment a throb of light from the mountains caught the cross on his brow.

“Oh, we meant no harm to the King, your master,” said the leader of the men, winking to him who held the cup. “We meant no harm ; it was but said to try you, to see what kind of fellow you were : we see you’re not to be overcome ; you’re a fine fellow ; and if the King has many such in his army, why, he’s a lucky man, that’s all.”

Ulric was delighted with the flattery, and sat down again. But he did not see their laugh, and the look of utter contempt which passed over the face of the man who had spoken.

"I thought you couldn't mean much," said Ulric. "You must forgive me for being too quick; it was from my great wish to do right."

"Oh! yes, yes; we understand," said the man.

Meanwhile a great stir was going on below. The Vast Army were moving on in dense columns, each in his own order and place, to join that party of the King which was expected daily to come up with the King himself from the hills beyond. They had been marching for years, and for years the King had been daily expected; their fathers had looked out for the same, but he had not come, still they expected him anxiously; and though centuries had passed by, they were not tired of expecting him, and felt firmly convinced he was close at hand. Year after year the glow had throbbled and flickered behind the hill, now growing brighter and now less. But he

had not come : the glow grew now more intensely bright, and every eye was anxiously fixed upon it, as the Vast Army marched on to the meeting. The hill which the enemy had just gained by Ulric's desertion of his post and Erza's carelessness, lay right over the narrow pass along which the Vast Army must go, to meet the King, who would be coming along the paths of the mountains ; and the enemy, having gained the hill, might fearfully annoy and harass the advancing columns of the army. It was strange Ulric did not seem the least aware of the harm he had done, nor of the great importance the keeping of the pass was to the cause of the King, nor indeed did I notice it at first. It appeared to him, as it did to myself at first, to be but the change of place of one boy out of thousands. It was not till afterwards that I saw that one soldier of the Vast Army, one boy deserting the pass, might bring

fearful effects on the whole army of the King, for which he must answer.

The stir, as I said, was now becoming hourly greater. The fact was, messengers had arrived, and passed rapidly through the host, saying that the King was really close at hand; and there seemed to be an impression it was so: all were ordered to be watching at their post, at the peril of life and death, and not to flinch by a hair's breadth from their duty. Besides, the enemy were found to have occupied the rocks above, and were seen already in the starlight to be preparing to hurl down rocks and arrows on the columns of the army, as soon as they should pass along the narrow causeway.

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But one pass of the rocks still was safe, and this led up to the highest point, and which was of the highest value to the Vast Army as a watch-tower: this pass was the

one which Albyn kept, and Albyn had stood firmly to his post, so the rock was safe as yet.

He still leant on his spear, recovering from the effects of his wounds. I heard a Voice which seemed to come from the glow, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" It cheered his fainting spirit like cool water to a thirsty man. He lifted up his head—I saw the cross gleam like silver on his brow. A troop of soldiers came hastily up to where Albyn was standing, bearing orders from the captain.

"Albyn," said the foremost, "you have done a good day's work; you have gained a high reward: but the strife is not yet over; I expect the worst is to come. I bear messages and orders for you from the main army."

"I am ready," said the young soldier.

"You have shown yourself able to do well and ably in a small thing, and you are

now to take a high post of danger, for the sake of the King, who is coming."

Albyn bent his head to the order.

"The soldiers of the great King," said the other, "have no easy life of it, and those who do one brave act of danger, are but called to further," continued he.

"You see yonder crag," he continued, pointing to the rock which frowned black and sharp above them, and which Albyn's brave defence had saved from the enemy. "You are to ascend thither alone, and to keep a look-out towards the glow, and to send down accounts of what you see by arrows, while the enemy pass below. It is a post of infinite danger. The enemy holds all the country round; you will be seen by them all, and marked out: but you are counted worthy of the post, and have been chosen out of the King's army to take it. Blessed is that servant whom the King when he comes shall find watching."

Albyn again bent his head, and said he was ready to go.

“There is no time to be lost,” said the Messenger; the greatest excitement and stir is going on below, and messengers unseen and swift have passed through the ranks of the army within these few hours, saying that the King is close at hand, and we must be through the pass before he comes; besides, there is no doubt the glow gets brighter hourly, and strange noises like myriads of chariot-wheels rolling on the wind have been heard to-night.—But we lose time.”

So saying, the Messenger passed on, leaving Albyn and the rest alone.

“He may say what he likes,” said a man of the party, “I don’t believe the King is coming; they’ve said that these thousand years, and he has not come yet. I believe the stir is all for nothing.”

"Nay, but, Lufra," said another, "there are actual sounds heard and sights seen."

"Fool!" said Lufra; "haven't they always said so?"

"Well, well, I can't argue, you know," said the other thoughtfully, and looking wistfully towards the glow. "Come what will, we have a work to do; and you do not mean, you will not do your work?"

"No, no; of course not. But I don't see any need to be so very anxious about it. Do one's duty, of course. Of course, do your duty to the King, as every man should; but don't be thinking every puff of wind in the hill is his chariot," said Lufra contemptuously.

"You mean, you wouldn't run the risk that boy is running," said the other, pointing to Albyn; who, during the last speech, had silently withdrawn, and was preparing for his terrible ascent.

"I should think not," said Lufra scorn-

fully. "But enough of this: let him take his chance; every man to his own taste: you hold your opinion, and I'll hold mine, and he may hold his, though I think him a fool for his pains after all. But I'll to my post in keeping this pass, and enjoy myself at it, by exploring this dark cavern."

"Suppose the King comes while you're there?" said Rolfe.

"Oh, trust him for that; and if he does, why, here I am. You mind your business, and I'll mind mine," said Lufra, going off.

The last words were true enough; for poor Rolfe, though anxious and frightened about the King's coming, still had not courage or resolution to take up his appointed place, and was continually looking out for one he thought better suited to him than the one given to him.

"The captain bid me keep this pass, but I shall not. I am sure to know best what I am suited to; and staying here with

such as you will do me no good, but harm, for I cannot answer your arguments. I shall go back to the main host; I can serve the King best there, I know. Every man knows what's best for himself. I can do more good among a multitude, than in a solitary place like this.

So saying, Rolfe went off to the army, to change his place, and Lufra was soon far out of sight, exploring the deep caverns of the rocks.

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On a crag opposite the peak to which Albyn was climbing, there had gathered a group of men; by their dark brows and low caps, they were of the enemies of the King: they seemed to be dragging along a boy to the edge of the rocks.

“There's only that one condition on which we will save your life,” said the cruel voice of the leader. “Reach yonder boy on the crag—Albyn you call him; bring

him here alive, or hurl him from the rock, and your life shall be saved, otherwise you know your end," said he, approaching the edge of the rock nearer.

Poor Erza's face was deadly pale, as bound hand and foot he stood close to the dark precipice which yawned below.

"If I am dashed to pieces here," said he, "I go to meet the King, whose coming is so terrible to me; and if I do as they tell me, it is to hurt Albyn, and I wouldn't see a hair of his head hurt;" and the fire for a moment mounted to Erza's eye, and the colour to his face, and he refused the conditions of life.

"Do what you will to me, I will not hurt him who stands there at his post: I have done harm enough, and I can't tell how I shall ever meet the King. Oh! my place, my place! my deserted place!" cried he, burying his face in his hands.

"Then go and meet the King, as he

doesn't come to meet you," said the man, lifting the bound figure of the boy up in the air, and letting him fall down the dark abyss, which opened beneath.

Erza uttered a piercing cry of terror and alarm, as his eye fell on the fearful darkness beneath, and a thousand terrible sights rushed before him in a moment—the King, and his neglected post. I saw his white dress float in the air; I saw him hang a moment over its fearful depth; I thought all must be over with him, when I noticed a stir among the men who were looking over the chasm.

"He has caught by his dress on the crag below," cried the man, "and he swings backwards and forwards in the night wind."

"Hurl down this rock on him," said another; "he will not swing long then."

"You are all fools for your pains," cried one who had just joined them, with two or three others who were with him. "Here

is a youth here who belonged to the Vast Army, who says that the young boy has knowledge about the ways and intentions of the King's soldiers, which would be well worth our while to know: you are silly fools to let him slip."

"He can be saved yet," said the foremost man, bending over the crag.

"There he hangs just below, and crying out about the King, I'll be bound, for that's always his cry: and I hear him speaking," said Ulric, who was now plainly one of those among them.

At this moment my eye rested on the figure of Erza. He seemed to be resting on the rock which saved him from being dashed to pieces. Those above did not see that he had been saved on a ledge, where one tended him, who looked like the Messenger of the great King. After a short discussion, the men determined on drawing the little boy up again, that he might

be made use of against the cause of the King.

The work was quickly done ; and without speaking, they hurried Erza to a small cavern, which was formed by overhanging rocks, and thrusting him in, bound as he was, they rolled a huge stone to the entrance, and left him. The little boy fell down, heavily laden with his bonds, to the ground of the dark cave. But though I saw his tears were falling fast down his face, he did not speak or murmur, or did he show the same terror he had on other occasions. I thought, perhaps, the Messenger had said words to comfort him, by bringing him some message from the King he so much dreaded, yet loved ; for my guide told me that the King, through his messengers, knew all the concerns of the youngest in his army, and always exactly sent them what they wanted.

I could not at first take my eyes off Erza

as he lay weeping on the ground. Presently I saw a light on the cross on his brow, which shone brightly like silver; it seemed to come from a crevice in the rock, and made Erza himself look up; and a Voice came, a sweet calm Voice, which breathed softly through the dark cavern, and said, "Fear not, Erza; it is the King's good pleasure to bring you to the kingdom." So calm and beautiful was the Voice, that little Erza scarce breathed with delight and surprise, and I saw the boy's eye light up with joy, and his whole face become for a moment bright, as he looked towards the crevice of the rock from which the Voice seemed to come. I never saw a face so suddenly change from sorrow to joy.

"What a sweet Voice!" said Erza, after he had knelt listening for a while. "I wonder where it was. It seemed to come from yonder crevice where the light comes. I will climb up and see. I wonder if it

was Albyn's voice. But I am always fancying all beautiful sounds are Albyn's, for I love him so. Oh, don't I love him! he's always so kind and good;" and a shade of sadness came over Erza's brow, and a tear again came down his cheek. "Dear Albyn! I'll try and be like him,—brave and good. If only the King will but accept me. He will accept Albyn. But I, poor I, who have deserted the place he put me in!"

While saying this, the boy had crept, as far as his fetters would let him, up to the part where the crevice of the rock was; and I now saw, the light, which had come through and shone on Erza's brow, was from the glow. As soon as the boy had clambered up the rock which seemed to shut in the crevice, he was able to see out into the scene around. He found the space was large enough to force his own body into it. Right before him rose the tall crag,

on which at the top, standing out dark and small against the glow, Erza saw Albyn's figure. It was the crag the enemy were so anxious to gain, and what Albyn's courage had kept, and was still keeping from them. The brave boy was standing firm at his post, looking out and watching for the King beyond the hills, as he had been appointed. He neither left his post from curiosity, nor shrunk from fear.

"There's Albyn," said Erza, trying to draw up his hand to lean more securely on the edge of the crevice. "There's Albyn; how I wish I could get to him! Oh, doesn't he stand brave at his post! and I've left mine: and he can look out for the King; I can't:" and he buried his face in his hands and cried. Again he looked up at the crag.

It was night. The stars were shining clear as crystal drops in the deep sky. The crag stood up, black, and sharp, and

ragged, against the glow, which was certainly throbbing more intensely than usual. On the top of the crag Albyn's figure was still quietly resting, looking out.

“But what's that?” cried Erza, turning his eye down to the lower side of the rock, where a dark figure of one, with his soldier's cloak bound closely round him, was softly and silently stealing up the rugged path which led to the place where Albyn was standing.

The man trod softly and cautiously, making sure of each step, lest he should displace a stone, the fall of which would betray him. His sword hung by his side, and a bow at his back, which was seen by the light starlight.

“Oh, he's going to kill Albyn!” screamed Erza, with an agony of terror; “and Albyn doesn't know he's coming, and will be taken by surprise. Oh that I could get out of this horrid place!” said he, making

a violent effort at the crevice. But the place was too small even for his small body, and he only fell back again.

I saw the dark figure silently mounting a little nearer Albyn along the dark footways, and Albyn's calm figure unceasingly watching the glow, with his eyes fixed so intently that he saw nothing else. The prisoned boy watched the stealthy tread of him who was intent on Albyn's life. Twice he lost him behind the hill where the path wound round it, and twice again, and higher up, he caught his cap with the single feather. A third time he lost him, and a third time the head peered over a crag against the glow.

“One push for Albyn, though it cost my life!” cried Erza in agony; and he made a violent effort to press his body through the narrow causeway. So violent was his effort, that to his own surprise, the boy found himself outside the dungeon in the pure air

torn and bleeding by the ragged rocks, which on all sides had caught him in the desperate thrust. The young boy stayed not a moment, but binding his dress around him, torn and shattered as it was, he rushed towards the hill. His eye was fixed on the small, dark figure of Albyn, and taking that for his guide, rocks and chasms did not hinder him in his desperate effort.

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“The glow grows bright, and there are movements in it, as of shapes I can scarce discern. The noise increases below. Men seem pressing on as to some desperate conflict. What if it be the last!” said Albyn aloud, as he stood at his appointed post.

He looked to see if his sword was keen and bright, and his shield firm and unriven; and the young soldier looked up again to the glow. A Voice said from below, “Watch, and be ready; for the King is at hand!”

More than once Albyn had half-doubted whether he should not leave his place, and go to the pass beneath, where, from the strange noises and stir he heard, he guessed that some unusual pressure was going on. But each time he remembered he was at his post; "and there I will remain," said he, "come what will, till the King or his messengers bid me leave."

An arrow hissed through the air, and struck the shield by Albyn's side. The blunted point struck the ground. The boy started round.

"Take that," cried a voice which Albyn knew, as with the glance of lightning a sword-blade came down on Albyn's head. But, quick as light, an arm was stretched out between his head and the weapon, and received the blow.

"It is all I have to fight with for you, Albyn," cried Erza, "and I gladly give it you," as his shattered arm fell dead and

powerless on Albyn's helmet. It's all I have," continued he, panting for breath, and exhausted with the speed with which he had hastened to help Albyn before the dark, stealthy figure. "And now, at least, you can bear witness to the King that I was at my post, can't you, dear Albyn?" cried he, his eye sparkling with a hope and joy it had long lost, and which seemed to make him forget all his pain in the thought of the King's approach.

"He comes, and his reward is with Him!" said a Voice passing by.

Albyn had scarcely recovered from his surprise, so quickly had all happened, before the youth who had levelled the blow had fallen at his feet, and thrown his arm round his knee.

"Forgive me, forgive me, Albyn! Erza, forgive me! Oh, beg for me to the King!" cried the bitter voice of Ulric.

"Wretched boy!" said Albyn, who was

trying to bind up Erza's bleeding arm, "I forgive you, and Erza does, I know," said he, looking kindly into the pale face of the anxious boy.

But Erza was too much taken up with watching the glow, to heed any thing which was going on. The light was growing so rapidly higher, and the stir so evidently more loud each moment, that there could be no doubt something remarkable was approaching.

"Wretched boy, we forgive you; but for the King, there is no pardon for you, unless you are found at your post," continued Albyn.

"But, where is my post?" cried Ulric bitterly; "I have so long left it, I do not know how to reach it again. Show me the post: Albyn, do show me. I will go," cried the terrified boy. "Come with me, do come with me, and show me, or I shall be utterly lost."

‘I may not come with you, Ulric, I cannot leave my post; you must go seek it alone.’

“But the way is dark and winding, and I know not how to find it,—indeed, indeed, I cannot. Oh that I had never found those wicked men! and then, to think if the King comes, I am not only far, far from my appointed place, but been trying to kill you! Oh! Albyn, what shall I do? what shall I do?”

“Look, look, Albyn!” cried Erza eagerly, and pointing to the glow; “see, see the burning blazing light, and the forms of myriads on the hills, as they bend and move so swiftly in the light. Are they men, or what?”

Albyn turned; it was indeed a wondrous sight. On a sudden, the glow had become intensely bright, and shone like a silver flood. Figures, swift and air-like, seemed

advancing in myriads along the hill-tops and the sound of unnumbered chariot-wheels was rolling among the valleys. Meanwhile, rock and peak, jagged points and shadowed valley, shot back the living lustre of the glow from ten thousand points around; above them the sky burnt with a dark and ruddy lustre, as if the heavens were hot, like a pavement of marl, and the hosts of the army below were struck out so clearly and keenly in the intense light, that you might have counted every man, and could distinguish each plume that waved over their helmed heads: there they were in vast masses below, moving slowly on, while every point on the rocks around shot back the burning light above them.

“It is the King! it is the King!” shouted Erza, throwing himself on the ground, with his face buried in his hands, and so that his wound bled afresh; “I know that it is the

King, and what shall I do when I meet Him? I have left my post, my appointed place. The King! the King!"

Albyn bent his head against the rock, and leant his head on his hand.

Ulric, pale as a ghost, stood by, shuddering, turning his face away from the awful glow, and trying to think there was nothing more than common in the light, while his chattering teeth, and his cold damp forehead, told you how little he believed that it was no more than common.

"Oh! Ulric, away! find your post before it is too late," said Albyn.

A messenger swift as light came up at this moment from the army of the great King. He had a message for each; the time was short in which he spoke.

"You, Albyn, haste to the valley, to lead the centre of the army; for they must at once make an effort to break through the enemy, to join the King, and you are

counted worthy of the place and work: you have been found faithful."

Albyn moved to his post.

"You, Erza, also have your work, to bear the banner along the hill-top, and not to leave it till the King bid you. It bears upon it the sign which the soldiers may look at when weary, and they will be refreshed. You have been careless at your post before; prove yourself worthy of the King's love in-giving you another."

Erza, who still lay with his face covered with his hand, trembling at the sight of the increasing glow, rose quickly. His face was pale, and his eye anxious, yet burning with eagerness to do his work appointed him. The Messenger applied a healing balm to his wound, and Erza silently and anxiously followed Albyn's footsteps.

Ulric yet remained.

"And to you, false boy," said the Messenger sternly, "the King even yet vouch-

safes to give a work. Away to the rear of yonder columns, to follow when thou art bidden; thou hast been faithless nitherto, but even now, if humbly and faithfully you will do your work, you may regain the King's favor."

"Go, go," Albyn said; "go to the place the King will yet give you; for indeed, indeed, Ulric, you do not deserve it, and He is near at hand; I forgive you freely all you have done to me. May the King, when He comes, do the same!"

"I will, I will," cried he; "I will go to my place, and no one shall take me from it;" for he was sorely frightened, and his face was pale, and his whole body trembling.

He set off instantly to his work. He had not gone far down the hill-side, when he saw a light, as of torches, gleaming from a cavern, and the sound of merriment broke out. The whole sky so glowed with the

increasing light, that he could scarcely distinguish the lamplight which burst from the cave.

He was not sorry to turn his face away : the lantern light which he saw from the cavern, at once made him think of escaping the glow ; as he drew nearer to it, the light grew stronger, and the deep shadows and tall barriers of the rocks tended more and more to shut out the glow. Ulric's fears grew less, and he followed the Messenger with a slower step than he set out with : twice the Messenger looked round, and chid him for his tardiness.

“The time is at hand,” said he.

“Ho ! Ulric, is that you ?” shouted a voice, as from the cave ; “whither away so quick ?”

“Do not stop me,” said the boy. “I am going on the King's work ; and the light grows so strong on the hill, I am afraid of lingering.”

“The light,” said the other scoffingly; “and I suppose you are one of those fools who think, because it is a little clearer to-night, that therefore, for certain, the King is coming. I thought you were wiser than that; come in here with us, and you will not see the glow at all, our lamplight puts it out.”

By this time Ulric had faced the cavern, and the glare they had made so effectually put out the other light, that he for the moment forgot it.

“Ulric,” said the stern Voice of the Messenger, “it is your last hope; the King will give you no other post after this.”

The boy hesitated.

“Come in, come in,” cried his old companions; “we have got a matter in hand which will amuse you.”

He looked in: round a fire, in the middle, a large group were seated, armed from head to foot, their faces pale and wan with

the excesses they had been living in, to try and forget the alarm which some of them really felt at the increase of the glow. Their long spears leant against the rugged sides of the cave, and the flame shone on the polished surface of the shields, on which some of them were resting; some seemed in deep conversation, while one or two were looking anxiously every now and then out of the entrance, as if to see the state of the sky; on all their faces the sullen, settled look of distrust and envy was fixed. Ulric had been with them before, they were the same band he was with.

“Oh! come in, come in; what do you stand lingering for?”

The Voice in the distance spoke Ulric's name; it was faint and far, as of one who speaks to a lingerer, and cannot wait.

“I cannot stop,” said Ulric, “I must go, I told you I belonged to the King's army, and must fight for him,” said he fretfully.

“Well, I never thought you’d do that: why, foolish boy, you know we’ve told you before, we’re all friends of the King, and mean to be ready when He comes. It is only some of his foolish subjects we are going to fight against, and to stop their mad expectations of his coming, which so unfits every one for this work, that’s all.”

“Well!” said Ulric, turning his back on the glow, and facing the firelight.

“Ulric!” uttered a voice which was now scarcely more than an echo whispering along the hill in the air. He started and looked; he tried to perceive the shadow of the Messenger’s figure, but in vain: he saw nothing.

It was but a Voice, and that now scarcely more than a whisper; a look of bitter doubt rested a moment on Ulric’s eye.

“It’s too late to go now, at all events,” said the boy.

“Too late now!” said a far off echo.

among the hills; "too late now! too late now!" and it died away.

"Who spoke that?" said Ulric shuddering, and looking round.

"It was your own voice, fool," said the soldier; "don't you know your own echo yet?"

"What a silly one I am!" said Ulric, smiling sadly, or rather trying to laugh; "I shall soon not know the sound of my own voice."

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The band gathered round the fire, and seemed soon lost in deep consultation.

"Who commands the western division, which are to burst their way through the defiles?" asked the Leader.

"Albyn, the young warrior, they say," replied the other; "a Messenger passed swiftly through the host, they say, bearing orders from the King, that young Albyn should have the chief command." The

other was thoughtful. "Albyn is wise as well as fearless. Nothing can deceive him—and who bears the banner which they say gives the King's soldiers courage?"

"Erza," said the other.

"He's a child," said the other, "and can soon be led away from his post."

"Who commands the right wing, which is to make its way over the plain ground?"

"Rolfe," said the other.

"A weak and timid man," said the Leader; "we must to work, and that soon; young Albyn *must* die."

His eye, as he spoke, rested on Ulric, who was leaning on a spear over the fire blaze, listening to every word, and pale as death.

"Ulric," said the Leader—

"It's too late now," said Ulric, starting as from a dream.

"Fool," said the other, "are you still frightened at your own shadow?"

"I forgot," said he faintly.

A footstep hastily stepped across the threshold.

"There is no time to lose," said the new comer; "the whole army is all in motion; young Albyn's presence has raised every drooping heart. The vast banners of the cross wave from the hill; the boy Erza is as bold as a lion; the glow throbs high in the sky. Look, look, you can see it now o'er yonder hill!"

Ulric's sickly eye turned quickly and wildly to the opening, and as rapidly to the fire.

"Too late now!" he muttered; "the fire burns bright on the rock; I think he meant this. I see no glow;" though his face belied his words.

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"You know your work," said the Leader, as he stepped last over the threshold of the

entrance ; “ you each know your post, and you know your reward.”

“ Hurrah !” shouted several voices, who darted down different paths of the rocks : one figure, alone, did not turn to give the answer ; he was climbing alone a difficult path, and seemed taken up with his own thoughts ; the figure moved as of one in anguish and doubt ; now he lingered, and now walked quickly, and then stopped to listen : he looked eagerly towards the glow, and then away from it. “ Each to your post,” said he ; “ each to your post. Yes, that’s the word ; your post, your own post ; they to theirs, and I to mine. But I thought there was something about ‘ too late now,’ wasn’t there ?” and the wild boy stopped and put his hand upon his brow to think. “ ‘ Albyn *must* die,’ and ‘ you know your reward, Ulric ;’ yes ! these were his last words, and I won’t be frightened at a thought and an echo. Besides, I am doing no great harm

I am only acting a part for a time. I really love the King at heart. If I went against these men, they would kill me; and I am not fit to meet the King; and, besides, it would set them more than ever against the true cause, and by seeming to give it to them, I shall win them over: then, to be sure, the King will give me a post to mind. But who's there? who spoke?" cried the boy, looking wildly round, and standing still, "who said that? there! there! who said 'Give him a post, and it's too late now?' who was it?" and he shook all over with fear; all was still as death: he moved on slowly and fearfully, still muttering to himself, "And then, as to killing Albyn, why, I said I would, and that's what I am going for; but it won't be done: of course the King will take care he doesn't die; and though I am going to do it, still you know You know what?" said he, his voice sinking to a whisper, and he again looked round;

“ why, you know I shouldn't really do it, though I am going to do it! Ha! ha! that's droll,” and the boy tried to laugh, and the wild chatter that he made echoed among the rocks and hills, and came back chattering to where he stood. “ Ha! the echo again, it did speak, the old echo, ‘ too late now.’ But I say it's not too late, for I am not going to kill Albyn, I am not thinking of it, nor dreaming of it, I only said I was. I'll desert, I'll go back to the Vast Army, see if I won't; at least I'll say to myself I will, all the while I am on the way to kill him; and if I *say* I am not going to kill him, I shall not feel as if I were,” said he again, winking with his eye, and his voice sinking into a whisper. “ But I am though, ha! who said that? what a fool I was for saying that; I'd better have kept it to myself; *I am not* then, still there was some comfort in *saying* I was going to do

it, it seemed to soothe me. Well, well, here goes ; I am, and I am not."

At this moment he again turned a sharp corner, and the whole of the Vast Army lay outstretched before him ; column after column were moving on in dense masses among the rocks ; above them all the tall and slender figure of their youthful leader. It was a great and solemn sight to see the dense lines all moving on in perfect order, each in his appointed place, scarce a word uttered, while along the edge of the opposite hill, the huge banner moved along at equal pace, borne by a boy, to which every eye of the Vast Army was turned, as they marched in their silent order. Ulric threw himself down, and drew himself along over the edge to look down to the scene that was going on beneath ; he could distinctly see the movements as of silent and rapid millions passing on, and the glow giving an

intense light in the sky above. But somehow it did not seem to strike him, nor to terrify him as it did : between the advancing millions of the King, and the moving columns of the army, the enemy was drawn up in huge masses, to prevent the Vast Army joining the King. There was something awful in the stillness and order in which all the movements were making.

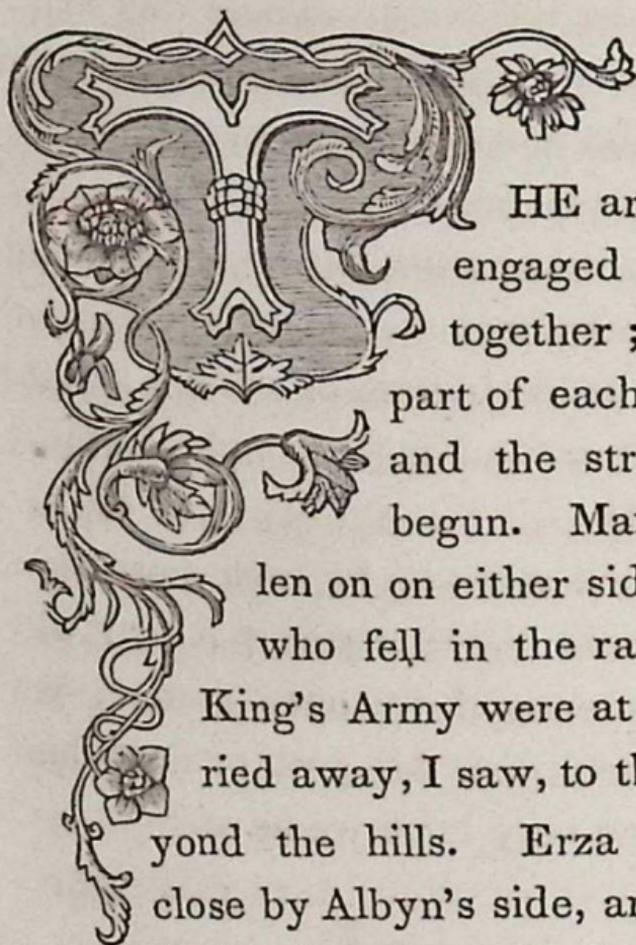
“ Now is my time ! ” said Ulric.

He darted down the hill-side, and found himself presently in the moving columns of the army ; at the bottom of the hill he met the enemies of the King, whom he had just parted with.

“ Our work must be by trick more than by force,” said they ; “ young Albyn will never be managed by open attack ; we must lure him from his post, or draw him aside, it’s the only hope we have.”

## CHAPTER III.

### THE STRIFE.



HE armies were engaged in battle together ; that is, part of each had met, and the struggle had begun. Many had fallen on on either side. Those who fell in the ranks of the King's Army were at once carried away, I saw, to the land beyond the hills. Erza had been close by Albyn's side, and bore the banner bravely. He had not fear-

ed shaft or bolt, which were showered around on every side.

“Meet me, Erza,” said Albyn, “round the point of yonder hills, and bear the banner, and lead those few men with you; it will be a pass gained for the hosts of the King.”

Delighted to have a post of trust, Erza sprang forward, and I saw the banner sail gallantly along as the boy bore it along the pass. The men followed Erza, and all gave way before him and the banner.

The pass grew narrower and darker, and had more than one turn in the direction which led towards the King's army. Erza was in doubt which to take. He knew the time was short, and he must meet Albyn at a given moment: a mistake in the path would be infinitely dangerous; and he stopped to consider. The roar of the battle rose to the sky. He tried to guide himself by that, for he knew Albyn was in the

thick of it. At this moment some figures were seen coming up one of the paths: they were dressed in the dress of the King's army, and came towards Erza: they bowed before the banner as they came near. Eager to get on, and without sufficient thought to notice that the men had their backs turned to the King's advancing army, Erza asked which path led to the point he wished to gain.

"This way," said they, pointing down a left-hand path. "We will go before you, and guide you; for the pass is difficult and dangerous."

Erza quickly consented. The men turned down the pass, and the boy, holding up the banner, followed. The path grew darker and more difficult at every step. Huge overhanging rocks began to darken it, and to make the way more and more difficult. The din of the battle grew gradually more distant, and Erza felt, beyond

doubt, he was not approaching the spot he had meant.

“You are leading me falsely,” cried he, drawing himself up against a rock, as if he would go no further.

The men only continued pointing to the way in which they had been bending, and assured him all was right. One sign Erza might have looked for, which would have decided him,—the glow of light. Wherever that was, the soldiers of the King might be, and no where else. Erza, in his eager desire to obey Albyn, had forgotten to look for it. He now looked round; not a ray of the glow shone on rock, or hill, or stone. The boy grew alarmed. His heart beat high. He had again, he thought, betrayed his trust, and the King would come, and he would not be there to meet Him; He would call him, and he would not be ready.

“I go no further,” said Erza, drawing a

javelin from his quiver, and preparing to make a stand.

The men who followed now grew discontented.

“You have led us so far,” said they, “and we must go on. These men who guide us will not lead us wrong. We will not return.”

“It is through my unwatchfulness that you are all led wrong,” said Erza bitterly, and scarce restraining a tear.

“You may go back, if you will,” said they; “we follow the guides you chose.”

“Go back!” cried the men in front scoffingly. “It is impossible; there is no way back. Come after us, my brave fellows; we will lead you safe. Leave that brain-sick boy to his own wilful way. He will find it no easy work to find his way back, we’ll warrant.”

The manner of the men showed Erza he

was betrayed. Without Albyn, the darkness thickening round him, no glow to be seen, and the noise of the distant battle sounding far off over the hills, poor Erza felt in despair.

“I have again lost my charge, though I meant it well. What shall I do?” He turned round to retrace his steps. “What shall I do if yon men attack me? They never will have brought me to this without carrying out their work further.”

While he thought thus, an arrow struck the rock above his head, and glanced at his feet. It flew from the dark part of the path down which the men had gone. The next instant a footstep came hurriedly up, and one of his own men returned.

“Fly, Erza! fly! they are traitors. The rest of your men have joined them, and they are bent on your life. There is no time to lose.”

Erza began to retrace his lost way.

“Want of watching!” said he to himself; “want of watching! what trouble it has brought on me!”

As soon as he turned, the glow became visible behind the hill, and he took heart.

“This way, this way,” cried the soldier, groping his way in the darkness over some high stones towards a pass in the rocks which seemed to shine with the glow.

“Nay,” said Erza, “we must go over the same way we came. No other way will lead us safely.”

“But the path is dark and long. We shall never find our way; and hark! I hear talking in the distance.”

But Erza knew he must retrace his own steps, however tedious and difficult. Want of watchfulness and thought led him into the trouble.

“This way, this way,” shouted the men behind, who, finding they could persuade

Erza to follow no further, were returning to attack the boy in the pass.

An arrow whizzed through the dark, and the soldier by Erza's side fell dead at his feet. Erza made all speed to escape, but their steps were close behind him, and only the darkness above hid him from them.

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“Where is Erza? where can he be?” cried Albyn, who was engaged in the very heat of the battle, and by determined courage was doing wonders in valor and wisdom. The King's army had been just joined, and the whole mass of the foe cut through. “Where is Erza? for the fight draws near its end, and we shall soon have to meet the King in person, and I would not Erza were away for worlds.”

“Erza has deserted to the enemy,” cried a voice from the crowd.

“It is false,” said Albyn, laying his hand on his sword.

“I saw him,” said the soldier, who stepped out dressed in the King’s colors. “I saw him with a band of the enemy just now going down a pass away from the direction we were taking.”

Albyn looked distressed ; but it was a soldier of the King who spoke, and he did not know how to disbelieve him. He took out his horn and wound it ; three times it sounded, and three times it came back from the hills, but no answer came from Erza.

The night was fast coming on, and Albyn had drawn off to let his men repose, as the armies had separated from the strife ; but Albyn did not sleep : his band filed up a defile of rocks, which, through the legions of the enemy opened a way to the army of the King. Under the rocks, and beneath their huge shadows, Albyn’s men lay down, but each man with his sword drawn, and his shield thrown over his breast. Al-

byn alone was awake and watching. He paced along to and fro the outworks of his post. The light glowed all round, so as sometimes to obscure the light of the moon, which gradually seemed to lose its own light before the advancing glory on the hills. All around glanced the lights of huge fires which the enemy had lit to put out the glow. A figure moved in the light, and was hid again in the shadow. Albyn watched it. Again he saw it come out and return; and each time it seemed to draw nearer to where he was standing. It seemed to be a man, who was crouching down to avoid being seen, and still came closer each leap he took to where Albyn was standing. The young warrior saw it, and placed himself on his guard. At length, with a single bound, the figure sprang on to the wall of rock along which Albyn was pacing his watch. Albyn did not move, but, grasping his sword in his hand, waited

to see what the strange figure which now lay coiled up before him would do. Presently the man, having cautiously looked around, drew himself to his full height before Albyn.

“Whence and who are you,” said Albyn, “who appear thus stealthily? Stand, before you advance another——”

“Hush!” said the man, placing his finger on his lip; “I am one who am weary of serving the enemy of the King, and would join the host you command; and more, I have a secret I can give you worth mines of gold. I can open to you a secret way through yonder hills which will lead you quickly to the very centre of the army of the King.”

“Stand back!” cried Albyn to the man, which, as he spoke, came closer to him. “Stand back! there is but one way to the host of the King, and that is straight before us, and our means of passing, the shield

and sword. There is no other—there is but one way the King we serve has bid us approach Him; and by that way alone we will go.”

“You are foolish,” cried the other. “Rolfe, who I know is good, and works for the King, has just drawn off with a division of his troops, and through the other path is fast reaching the army of the King, far faster than you along this rough way.”

Albyn looked up, and saw that the part of the valley lately occupied by Rolfe and his men was left empty and deserted.

“And how long has Rolfe left us?” cried Albyn, somewhat surprised.

“Only just now,” said the other; “and he has made rapid progress already. He was partly dissatisfied with those who led the army, and felt he could manage better for himself; and so it seems he can, for by taking the other way he is advancing far more easily and rapidly.”

“Poor Rolfe!” sighed Albyn, “he will be found wrong, and on the wrong side, at the last struggle.”

“But of the shorter way,” said the stranger; “will you accept it?”

“I gave you my answer,” said Albyn sternly. “Away from this ledge of rocks, seducer!” said he, “or I must compel thee.”

“At least,” answered he, “I may join the ranks you command. By the cross upon my brow you can see that I belonged to the army of the King once, though by its scorching fire you can see I have deserted his trust. Woe betide me for it!”

“Pass through, then,” said Albyn with hesitation, “and see thou act faithfully. You fight not in the front ranks. Convey this stranger,” said Albyn, “to the back part of the camp,” as a soldier, who had been roused by the stranger’s voice, was drawing near his leader. The man bowed and obeyed, and retired with the strange

Albyn looked after him with an anxious eye, but his thoughts soon returned to his post and the approach of the King.

Before the dawn of day Albyn gave up his post to one to hold a short time while he took rest in his tent. He lay down, and was soon asleep. He had dreams of the work he was called to do, and woke with a start. Something had touched him, and he thought, as he woke, a figure darted across the floor, but it was too dark to see plainly. He thought, too, something pricked him like the point of a sword, but his armor was too good and proof to let him feel any more than he did.

“It is strange!” said Albyn to himself as he laid himself down again. “It is strange!” and again he was just sinking to sleep when a slight movement was heard in his tent, and before he could raise himself he was again struck in the bosom by a hand he could not see. But a second

time the weapon glanced off from his armor, and Albyn sprang from his resting-place unhurt. He made a sudden rush in the dim light at the figure, which he could see making his way from him. He struck at him with his sword, and so surely, that, just as the figure glid from his tent, he wounded him.

“No weapon which is formed against thee shall prosper,” said a Voice.

Albyn sought in vain for the object of his pursuit. It escaped his hands; and the dimness of the morning light prevented his seeing clearly many yards before him. It was plain that he was clearly watched and followed for his death, and he bound his breastplate closer to him, and grasped his sword tighter in his hand. His thoughts were bent on Erza, and, full of anxiety about the boy, he returned to his post. No life of ease Albyn led. Sleep only just enough to fit him for his soldier's work, and food

of the plainest kind to bear him through his day's toil.

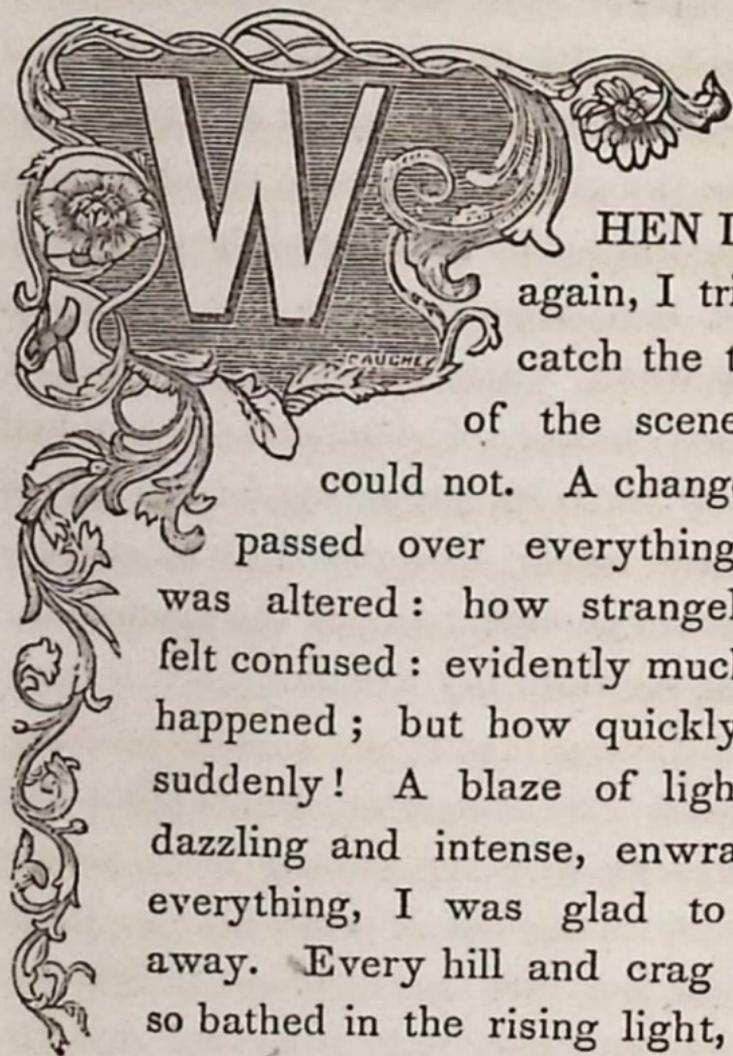
The morning was breaking over the hills, and all the host of the Vast Army were up and stirring, to be ready for the struggle of the ensuing day. Albyn had been anxiously watching for some time the state of the glow in the east, which had far outshone in lustre the light of the rising sun.

The morning broke in full brilliance. There was a stir in the camp—a clash of arms—a flutter of banners—a confused noise of warriors preparing for the fray—a distant sound, like the noise of chariot-wheels, or thunder, among the mountains.

I awoke from my dream.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SUMMONS



WHEN I slept again, I tried to catch the thread of the scene, but could not. A change had passed over everything; all was altered: how strangely! I felt confused: evidently much had happened; but how quickly and suddenly! A blaze of light, so dazzling and intense, enwrapped everything, I was glad to look away. Every hill and crag were so bathed in the rising light, as to

leave not even a shadow where a man could hide himself. Each point and rock were lost in the blaze of fire. I doubted not the King and his army had arrived. I looked anxiously around for those whom I had so long been interested in. It was plain that all were taken by surprise, and, though all had been expecting it, none were as they meant to be. What I could see most clearly, were numbers of the Messengers of the King, who passed rapidly to and fro along the hosts, seemingly bent on some work of their Master's. The enemies of the King were flying in all directions, though some still seemed determined to face the danger.

My attention was first drawn to the form of Erza, who was standing within the defile of the rocks with the banner in his hand; he seemed wounded all over, his face looked pale, and his strength exhausted: a band of men had been attacking him, to

wrest the banner from him, but he had fought for it so valiantly that hitherto it had been in vain.

“My banner! my post!” cried Erza ever and anon, as he turned his now languishing eye up to the flag which floated above him. “My banner! my post! at least I will try and keep it this time;” and he struck another and another blow for the precious charge Albyn had given him.

Sounds of “The King! the King!” now rose on all sides, and Erza turned deadly pale; he trembled all over. The men who were attacking, fell back, and seemed lost in the rising light. Erza’s form alone remained before my eye—he and his banner: the boy’s face was pale as death, and white as marble; his lips quivered, and his hand could scarcely grasp the banner he tried to hold.

“My post! the banner! the King!” said he, “I am at my post at least now,

am I not?" cried he, anxiously turning to the Messenger who stood beside him.

"Thou must follow me at once," said the Messenger; "the King has called for thee."

Then in a moment all the events of the past rushed over Erza's mind and memory, like colors of a summer's sky across the surface of water, and he looked deeply sorrowful, and a cloud of sadness passed over his eyes. Swiftly and silently over the glowing rocks did Erza and the bright one go. Erza held his banner, and the Messenger led the way.

"Called for me! called for me!" said the boy to himself, anxiously. "The King come! come at last! Oh, Albyn, Albyn, would that you were here!"

I saw the poor boy could scarce keep pace with the Messenger, so quivering were his knees, and his heart beat so high.

“Whither away?” said one who passed them.

“To take young Erza to meet the King,” said the other, and the boy again trembled.

At that moment, a loud, wild, and bitter cry arose not far from them. Erza started, he thought he knew the sound; he looked anxiously down a deep ravine at his feet and a high overhanging rock. He saw the form of Ulric,—his helmet had fallen from his head, and lay in shivered fragments on the ground; his shield was also lying in atoms by his side, shattered by a huge piece of a rock which had fallen upon it. The boy was trying to bind his armor of defence close around him, to protect himself, but a burning wind, which rolled down the barren pass, tore it from him as fast as he put it on. Meanwhile he strove, and strove in vain, to find a hiding-place under the shadow of the rocks, but could

find none. The intense light prevented a shadow, and Ulric could not hide himself. Down the pass, towards the agonized boy, came two Messengers, swift and silent. Ulric saw and guessed their message, and uttered the piercing shriek which Erza heard. Ulric placed his hands against his ears, and held them closely.

“I will not hear, I will not hear the message; I know it already.”

But, despite his efforts, an awful Voice passed on, and Ulric could not help hearing it.

“Ulric, the King has called for thee.”

Erza again shuddered at the awful call, and Ulric tore his hair, and, stamping his feet with rage, said he *would* not go. But I saw those Messengers laid their hands on him, and Ulric became helpless as a little child, and in silent despair followed them. His hands were clasped, his hair hung wild

over his shoulders, his riven vest and broken armor hung in fragments about him.

"Erza! oh, Erza!" cried he, as his eye looking up glanced on the youth, who, with his banner unrent, and his face pale as marble, moved swiftly along on the edge of rocks above.

There was a strange contrast in the expression of the two. Erza's pale, anxious, awful brow betokened reverence and intense anxiety. Ulric's worn face and hollow cheek showed an expression of calm despair. Erza's hands were folded cross-wise on his breast. I noticed the cross on the brow of each. Erza's cross was there, and seemed to flicker like a flame of pale uncertain light, now high, now low, but still clearly living, while on Ulric's brow a tongue of burning fire seemed to lick and scorch, and ever and anon he pressed his fingers on his forehead as if in agony.

So they two passed on swiftly and silently behind the Messengers, and the banner Albyn gave him floated in its purple folds above the head of Erza.

A party now crossed their path, of a different manner and appearance. A man, who seemed the leader, was walking quickly on, and, looking round continually, bid them behind to follow. His manner was bold and fearless.

“Come on,” said he; “follow me, we go to join the King, who has reached the faithful army. We go not the same way as the others we have passed or met. But it matters not the way, so we meet the King. All is right with me; I have nothing to fear.”

So spoke Rolfe as he addressed the men by his side. I was surprised to see how his face had gained an expression of confidence and boldness since I last saw him in my dream.

“Be not so confident,” said the voice of a Messenger who came up to him. “Rolfe, the King calls for you.”

I saw a slight change pass over Rolfe's face ; he turned a moment pale, but immediately recovering his confidence and firmness, he followed the Messenger.

“It will matter little,” said he, addressing his guide, “which way we approach the King, so we are there when He calls.”

The Messenger's words were few and solemn.

“There is but one way,” said he, looking onwards.

“And that the way which seemed the best for one's work,” said Rolfe. “To be sure I broke away from Albyn's army and the outward body of the Vast Army, but my heart was in the same cause, so I count it matters little ; and all these good people who followed me are bound up in the same cause with myself.”

“Whether it be for good or for bad,” said the other, “you have brought them into it, and you must answer for them;” and he continued his onward step.

“Oh! true, true;” continued Rolfe, putting on a manner of ease. “I have no fears about that. But how will it fare, think you, with young Erza, who left the King’s cause?”

“I know not, the King will decide; it all depends whether he was at his post—the post the king gave him.”

“His post—the post!” muttered Rolfe, “you make much of that. I have not made *so* much of it; still of course I have made a great deal of it, quite enough. I have no fears.”

“Those who *say* they have no fears, are fearless in words only,” said a Voice.

Rolfe seemed disturbed.

“Well, but,” continued he, addressing the Messenger, “well, but tell me;” but

the Messenger placed his finger on his lips, as if for silence, and Rolfe looked frightened and was still.

I noticed many figures followed Rolfe closely, who seemed to cling to his footsteps.

“Why do you follow so closely, friends?” said he.

“We are bound up with you,” was the answer. “You led us here so far, and we will be by you now, that you may answer for us; for you know, more than we do, why we took the step we did.”

“What step? what step?” cried Rolfe impatiently, yet half-jocosely.

“Why, the leaving the Vast Army,” said they. “We had our doubts, you know, at the time, and they are increased now; you took it upon yourself to lead us away, and you must answer for us now, if we took a false step.”

“Oh, don't fear; don't fear, my good fel-

lows," said Rolfe, "all is safe;" but a falter in his voice betokened a slight doubt in his mind whether it were so.

The men shook their heads, and followed the Messengers of the King. I looked to Rolfe's brow, I saw the mark of the cross, but it was like a furrow, or a channel, dry, without light, and lifeless. As they went on, they crossed the path of more than one who was being led to the presence of the King. I noticed there were very many more than I had seen before, and all were deeply concerned more or less in their meeting with the King. My eye fell on a figure who was hastily coming up from the rocks, following his Messenger, and approaching the place where Rolfe was standing.

There was a settled look of scorn on the face of this man, which seemed to struggle strangely with a feeling of fear which plainly held him.

“Oh, Lufra!” cried Rolfe, “and are you too summoned to meet the King? we are a goodly company. But how are you ready? for you never believed He would come at all; and what is likely to be the case of such?” said he, addressing the Messenger.

The Messenger made no answer, but moved on more swiftly in his onward course. Lufra looked sullen and scornful.

“Nay, don’t be angry,” said the other; “I only wondered how the King would receive you, when you seemed scarce to believe there was a king at all.”

“It remains to be proved yet, perhaps,” said he; but though he tried to wear an expression of boldness and carelessness, his lips quivered, and his voice faltered.

The Messenger turned and looked at him, and an expression of deep sorrow was in his face at Lufra’s last words; his eye seemed to look him through and through;

Lufra felt it, and hung his head, and pulled his soldier's cap more closely over his eyes.

"At least," said Rolfe, "you were not at your post when the King came, and they say that is all that matters."

"Better to be away altogether from one's post, than mind it carelessly as some do," he answered. "I am none of those who have made so much of the thing that is to be done; my care is for the *way* of doing it. It's better at least to be an open foe, than a bad serving friend," he continued in a tone excusing himself. "I love openness, and I doubt not but the King does too. I shall not stand in so bad a plight either, when I think of this one and that who did their work so poorly, and were so easily drawn off their post;" and his voice gained more confidence.

"We must hasten," said the Messenger, 'time is short, and the King waits not.'

Lufra hastened on: I looked at his brow;

I saw at first nothing, no mark, no sign upon his brow; at last I thought I could discover a pale light which burnt there, but it was more the red mark of a fire nearly burnt out.

I noticed that Erza did not stay to look at any who passed him; he moved on, bearing his banner with a look of deep anxiety on his brow.

“Oh, stay! stay, wait for me one little hour,” cried a loud and bitter voice; “hear me! but one little hour! I am undone! I am undone! Cannot you stay one hour, while I gather my scattered fragments?”

“Not a moment!” was the calm stern answer of him who, with his arm stretched out towards the east, was urging the suppliant to follow.

I turned towards the spot: on a rock which overhung a pass, leant the slender form of a youth; at his feet lay a banner, broken, and in shivers, which he was vainly

trying to gather up. As he stood, I noticed large tear-drops coursed their way down his face, and his whole frame seemed to shudder with emotion.

“Oh, it was my post, my post, my poor neglected post! I was bid keep this banner to wave above the pass, and I but left it for a few minutes, and the foe has cut it in pieces; and now I am called to meet the King; and must I go? utterly, utterly unready. Is there no hope? may I not stay to strive to put it together?”

“Away! away!” cried the Messenger sternly; there is no time—the King waits thee.”

“For what?” asked the boy bitterly.

“To give an account of how you have kept your post committed to you,” said he, “and guarded that committed to your charge. *Thou* knowest, Ulla!” said he, again urging him.

Ulla wrung his hands in bitterness of soul.

“And what account shall I give? I left it not half an hour, to join with yonder merry ones in play, and see what it has come to!”

“The time is short,” said the other; “we must go.”

“My post! my neglected post!” cried the boy bitterly, as he passed Erza with his banner shivered and rent, and dragging it after him.

Erza shuddered, and hung his head; “My neglected post!” thought he.

The boy addressed him as he passed quickly by him, as if speaking would relieve his suffering mind. I never thought it would come to this,” said he, looking bitterly at Erza; “I never, never thought it; you are happy, very happy; oh! can you do nothing to help me?” He appealed so sadly and earnestly to Erza, that the boy scarcely knew what to answer.

“What is the cause of your grief?” said he.

“I have deserted my appointed place, and my banner is broken.”

“That is not all,” said a Voice.

The boy hesitated, and hung his head.

A Voice passed by, which said, “When Ulla’s banner fell by his own neglect, a large portion of the soldiers of the King lost their signal and mark, and were lost in the defiles of the rocks, and were taken captive by the enemy; and *they* will all bear witness against Ulla at the King’s bar.”

Ulla shuddered.

“My neglect stops not at the banner’s being broken,” said he bitterly; “and where it will end I know not. Oh! Erza, Erza, cannot you help me?”

“How can I?” said the other kindly; “I would do all I could, but I know not what to do.”

“Oh, I know that, I know that,” said Ulla; “you can do nothing; I am undone! undone!”

At that moment a band of captives were seen being hurried along towards the camp; their hands were loaded with chains, and their necks bowed down.

“Whither away?” said one.

“Whither?” said they; “to the King, to answer for our neglect of duty, by which, damage has come to the King’s cause; but we care not much, for we shall lay all the blame on him who caused it. It was no fault of ours; we never saw the banner float as the leader said it would, and how could we help it? Let the blame fall where it lies.”

Ulla groaned deeply, and smote his breast. “Undone! undone!” said he “Is there not one more hour? Kind sir one hour, and I will firmly hold my place and go through every suffering to keep it. Oh, I would bear years of suffering at my place, if I may only go back and try once more, only once more! Is all hope over?”

The Messenger made no answer, but calmly pointing over his head to the point they were moving to, went swiftly on.

“Then all *is* lost,” said the poor boy, and folding his hands on his aching brow: I heard him speak no more.

“The King is kind and full of love,” said one who came by on the same object, led by a Messenger, “and I am depending on his kindness, so why not you?” he continued, addressing him we just spoke of; “I am confident all is right with me, I have never left the work I had to do, that is, only when I plainly saw I could be more useful elsewhere, and then I used my own judgment, and changed my place.”

“And what was the change?” asked another, who walked by him.

“Why, I was told to give a signal from a hill when the enemy should be seen advancing along a certain road; and after I watched a long time, I saw none were

coming; and hearing fierce work going on below, and knowing how well suited I was to be in the thick of the fight, I went down, and every one praised me for it, and said I had done well, and should be an eminent servant of the King, and should have a high reward."

The other was silent.

"You do not doubt it?" said the first, with a slight anxiety in his manner.

"I do," was the answer; "I do doubt if it will hold good when you meet the King."

"Why?" said the other; "surely I must know best my own line."

"Nay! but I have ever heard that the King is especially jealous about any one changing or choosing for himself; and besides, how know you but what the enemy may have passed over the road at the moment, and so more harm done to the King's

cause, than all the good you did in the fight below?"

His companion grew thoughtful and sad.

"I meant no harm," said he; "I did it for the best."

A silent solemn Voice passed by, which seemed to say, "Over the very road the enemy passed, the moment you ceased to watch, the danger done to the King was great; one hour's more watching would have saved all."

The boy turned ashy pale and spoke no more.

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I will mention but two more of the figures I saw following the King's Messengers. There came a man older than some I had seen, and by his side a youth, who seemed like his son. The father frequently turned to his boy, and appeared in some degree of discomfort.

"Whatever trouble there is," said the

boy in a sullen manner, "you must take the blame."

"Alas! alas!" said the other; who would have thought it would have come to this, to lay all the guilt on me? You seem glad to do it, and then for it to come from you! Oh! me, alas! alas!" cried the father, clasping his hands, and looking with agony towards the glow.

"What is the matter?" said one who was passing near.

"The matter!" said the other; "why, the King gave me a place in the Vast Army, and told me he would trust me, and would depend on me; and I had arms given me, and begun to do my work with determination. But yon boy, whom I loved with my soul, who was in another part of the army, refused to do his work unless I were near him; and without orders I left my work to join him."

"Well! but you went back to it again?"

“No, no; I *meant* to do so in an after day, and he kept me, and I put off going continually; and at last the army joined the King, and I was not there, and now I am called to meet Him, and what shall I do?”

“But, surely, what you did was most natural, for a father to wish to be near his son.”

“Yes, but the King expects nothing but obedience to Him. He will have none served but Him, and no cause thought of but his. A son must not be thought of first; and besides, sir, see how my son treats me; he lays all on me, he turns against me; and so it is always where we place our affections on the wrong object, or even the right one overmuch; the very thing we love turns against us, and proves our ruin; and now all is lost!”

And the poor father covered his face with his hands, and went on; I thought

I noticed the son mock at him and his grief.

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I will mention but one more of the parties I saw, for there were many;—I noticed one, they called him Olfric; his step was firm, and his eye cast down; his brow calm and serene, and its expression peaceful; his soldier's dress was wound around him; on his breast some wounds had been made; he carried his shield and his sword, and the cross glowed brightly on his forehead. I saw one following him close, and crouching down behind him, as I thought he seemed trying to be hid in the shadow the young soldier cast from the glow before him on the ground behind him. The hindmost figure seemed older by some years than the foremost, though his anxious, frightened manner and agitated efforts betokened an alarm that the other did not show

“Who is yon crouching man?” said I, addressing my guide.

“He is one who, having a far fame for his knowledge of arms, instructed many of the soldiers of the King in the mode of warfare, and has indeed formed some of our best soldiers: and young Olfric is one of his best of all; a valiant and faithful soldier has the youth been to the King. But yon man, though he formed so many good men, turned out ill himself, and neglected his own work. Men spoke fair of him for the work he had done for others, and now he is trying to hide in the shadow of him he formed and taught, hoping that will save him.”

“And will it have any effect?” said I.

“None whatever,” was the answer; “none. It is not the fitting others for their post that will do when soldiers meet the King, if they have not been found ready at their own.”

“But,” said I, “if all the army praise him, even its leader?”

“True,” said the other; “but that will not do; there is another Voice more trustworthy than that; nothing is so deceitful and deceived as the opinion of one soldier of another.”

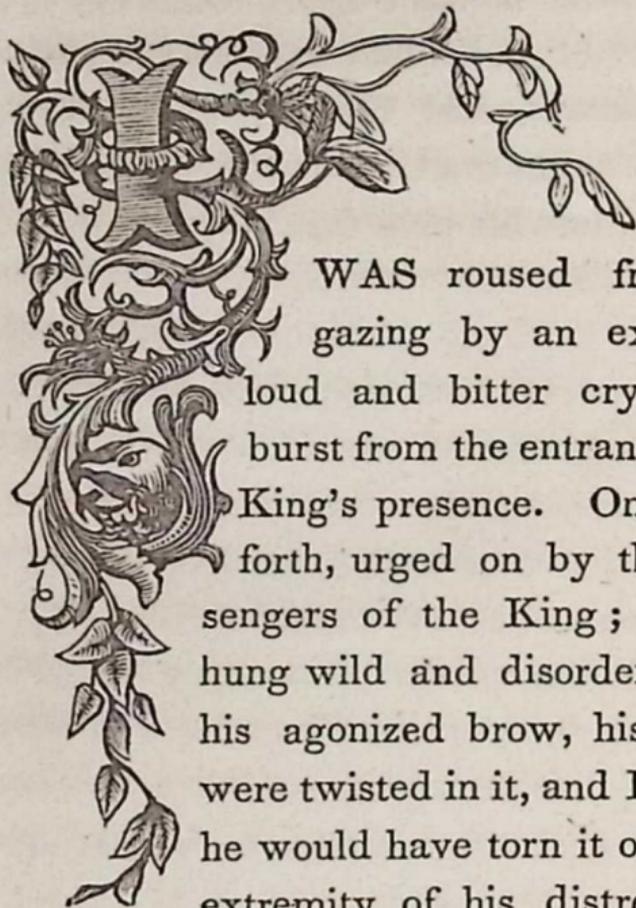
I was thoughtful, I could not help watching the many vain efforts the poor man seemed to make, to be sheltered by Olfric's shadow, but it would not cover him, and could not.

At length the numbers grew so many that I could scarcely distinguish one group from another. All seemed bent on the end of their journey, and were looking forward, with more or less terror, to meeting the King. I followed with my guide, and naturally kept my closest attention on Erza, whom I had so long an interest in. I followed him as near as I could, but when we reached the end of the line of works we

had been moving along, I found we could proceed no further; for the air was thronged with the Messengers of the King, who prevented nearer approach; all I could do was to stand and gaze down, where through the openings in the works I could see the intense light which they said was near the King himself, and through which there were entering and returning those who were led into his presence.

## CHAPTER V.

THE END.



WAS roused from my gazing by an exceeding loud and bitter cry, which burst from the entrance to the King's presence. One came forth, urged on by the Messengers of the King; his hair hung wild and disordered from his agonized brow, his fingers were twisted in it, and I thought he would have torn it off in the extremity of his distress; his

eye glowed red with terror and despair, and as he went along he cried bitterly, "Undone ! undone ! undone !"

Those who followed him, I noticed, urged him on with whips, which added to his sufferings. The agony of his mind seemed far worse than his bodily anguish. They were driving him on to certain hideous and dark chasms among the mountains, which appeared so lonely, and dismal, and chill, so vast and fathomless, that I trembled to look at them. Terrible sounds seemed to come up, sepulchral and hollow, from the chasms ; and the whole scene was such as to fill the mind with deep and awful terror : towards this fearful place the Messengers were hastening the boy.

"It is the place," said my guide, "to which all those go who have been found in arms against the King, and have at all deserted from his cause, to live there for ever apart from his presence."

“For ever?” said I with a shudder.

“For ever,” answered the guide; “there is no hope of return.”

“None,” said I, “even if they humble themselves?”

“None! hope is past. They had their time, and did not do their work; time enough was given, and they had their calling, but they let the time slip, and it is too late; no more will be given.”

“But,” said I, “the King came at last so suddenly.”

“That matters not,” said he, “if they were told to be watching.”

“And so young!”

“Youth and boyhood are no excuse or escape,” answered he.

By this time the agonized boy had come near the place where I stood, and I saw it was Ulric. “Undone! undone!” cried he; “undone!” and he tried to linger: he clung to the rock with fearful agony, as

the Messengers, who followed, by a touch undid his hold, and he was compelled onward. I saw his face was haggard as he passed me, and he was tearing large handfuls of hair from his head, and gnashing with his teeth with horror and despair: I turned sickened from the sad sight, and shuddered. Every now and then I looked after him, and still saw his wretched figure going on, and those bright stern ones who followed him. I heard his voice rise and fall on the wind, and it bore the same tone of agony, "Undone! undone! undone! He said no other word, and the word has wrung in my ears ever since, and the awful tone with which he said it. I saw him just as he entered the awful chasm, and the Messenger gave him over to some I could not see. I saw him give one look back as he left the light for ever, and heard the exceeding bitter cry, "Undone! undone! undone!" as it came up in hollow

echoes from the dark chasm. I was riveted to the spot, and could think of nothing but Ulric ; it filled my soul with horror.

“How dreadful,” said I, “to have a work given us, and not to do it ! how dreadful not to watch ! Happy, happy Albyn, to have been found watching ! How fearful to be found unready, to be overtaken with our work all undone, when we know we had it to do !”

“Fearful, indeed,” said my guide, who had been with one of those who had led Ulric to his fearful doom, and had returned to my side ; yon Messenger says, when Ulric stood before the King, the scene was exceeding awful.”

Now I noticed that no one could tell what passed who had actually seen it, but each spoke as told by others, so exceeding reverent and awful was their feeling about the King. I strove to catch the Messenger’s words as he spoke, and, as far as I could

gather, it was as follows, though his whole manner and each word were so full of awe and reverence, that it was hard for me to gain more than a broken account.

“The multitude which gathered round the King,” said he, “moved back while Ulric was led up by the Messengers who had brought him to the King : the wretched boy stood, and strove in vain to hide his eyes with his hands, that he might not see the dazzling light around him ; but nothing could shut it out, and he trembled so as to terrify those who stood near him, to see one so woefully distressed. It was found he had not the King’s mark upon him ; for the cross still stood upon his brow, but its light was growing red and fiery, and was losing its lustre. There was a pause, in which the poor boy pressed his hands closer and closer to his burning brow. When the King came, he was found among the enemy ; that was enough : he heard it, and

could not deny it. He had twice attempted the life of Albyn, whom he had sworn to slay ; as those told me who had it from others. The manner of the King was exceeding gentle. But Ulric could not look up nor speak."

"But," said I, "his last acts were the effects of ill example. He had got among false men, who seduced him."

"But what led him there?" said the Messenger ; "was it not his own act in leaving his appointed place ? and had he not from time to time many and distinct warnings of the King's approach and his own danger ?"

"But," said I, "the leaving his post a few moments was but a slight offence for so terrible a punishment."

"Nay, see," said he, "see what it led to, it brought him among the King's enemies it helped the enemy to an advantage ; they would never have had such power over the

lives of so many of the King's faithful servants ; it led him on to plot against young Albyn, and to be at last found among the King's bitterest foes."

" True," said I ; " but having taken one false step, it was so difficult to draw back."

" He had many warnings, and might often have turned back, and *did* begin, but returned again to his sin. He had warning after warning : see the King's watchfulness in sending the Messenger to him, to give him hope if he would return to his post, even after his attempt on Albyn's life on the hill ; but he neglected all."

" But," said I, " it was not made so clear to him as it might have been, that the King was so near."

" The King is not wont to make it more clear. He expects his servants to be ever watchful and looking out."

I could say nothing more ; I was silenced ; it was all true.

“And, Ulric,—” said I.

“And he,” continued the Messenger, “having nought to say, was led away; and in his bitterness as he moved away, he caught a sight of Albyn, and stretching out his hand to him, cried, ‘Oh, Albyn! save me! save me!’ but it was too late, and he was forced on: the door was shut—you saw the rest,” said he; but I did not answer, for at the moment I fancied I heard the awful echo from the chasm, “Undone! undone! undone!”

While I was thinking on all he had told me, the Bright One stood by me, and I was again aroused from my thoughts by his voice.

“You seem interested,” said he, “to hear how it fares with the soldiers of the King. There was one who,” continued he, “was summoned to meet Him, just after Ulric was condemned, whose manner and bearing struck the Vast Army who were

standing round. He came forward with a quick step and free manner, so much so that all were awe-struck. He seemed sure of his being safe."

"Was his name Rolfe?" asked I, struck with the account of his easy manner.

"The same," said the Messenger. "He was followed by a number of persons who seemed to dog his steps, though he was fain to shake them off. 'My friends,' said he, 'follow me not just now;' but they clung to him, and said their cause was bound up with his; and I heard it was said against him that he had deserted his post, and was found taking a totally different direction to that appointed him by the King."

"He had deserted the outward form of his army, and taken his own line of operation, and had caused many to do the same by specious words and fair promises; and many of these, by his having led them out

of their appointed place, were brought in such close contact with the enemy, as to be actually shaken in their fidelity to the King altogether, so as to induce them to desert in many cases ; and this they clamorously urged upon him as the cause of their ruin. The only defence he could make was, that he still served the King in affection and heart ; that he only took his own way to show it, that it mattered not whether he remained in the main army or not, so as he worked for the common cause : but in this he was found woefully mistaken ; he had disobeyed the King's word, and had led others away from their posts and allegiance : every word of defence he uttered, the men around him were clamoring against him as the cause of their ruin."

"And what became of him?" asked I, impatient to hear the end of the man who had chosen his own way. But my question was answered in a different way to

that I expected ; for the Messenger, pointing with his hand, led my eye to the entrance through the rocks, where, pale and silent as living death, with his hands crossed on his breast, and his eye fixed with intense despair, as of one thunderstruck and astonished, suddenly Rolfe came forth, driven on by the Messengers, and the door was shut.

“ And is his case hopeless ? ” said I anxiously.

“ Utterly,” said the other. “ He chose his own path, deserted the Visible Army of the King, which alone was an act of high rebellion, and led others to do the same, though he did not mean harm at first ; but it was done, and he must abide the result.”

“ And that,” said I, “ is ruin ? ”

“ Utter and hopeless,” said he.

I followed with my eye Rolfe's sad figure, as it followed Ulric to his fearful doom, I watched it far amid the rocks, till I could

see it no more ; he never stopped. He neither turned nor spoke. I followed him with my eye till he seemed to enter the same awful chasm which Ulric had gone into, and I dared look no longer.

“ There was one,” continued the Messenger, “ who tried to be sheltered by the shadow of another ; he was an old man and came crouching behind the form of one whom he had trained to arms, and seemed to think that his having done that would screen him from the rigor of the King, in having deserted his own post ; but it was wonderful to see how hopeless the poor man’s efforts were ; turn which way he would, the shadow became no shadow, so keen and penetrating was the light which filled everything ; and the old man was compelled to stand forth, for he could find no dark place to hide him from the eye of the King.”

“Then his having trained a good soldier served him in no stead?” said I.

“None whatever; far from it: the King cares more for one act of obedience to his orders, which shows self-devotion or denial, than for the training of fifty soldiers for his cause.”

At this moment the old soldier appeared, tearing his hair and gnashing his teeth in despair: he cried out bitterly at having spent his time in preparing the young soldiers, and having neglected himself. As he passed the threshold I saw him turn continually round, and, clasping his hands, begged to be let back. “One moment more!” said he; “one moment more to get myself ready! only one hour, one short hour!” but the door was shut.

“Did you see aught of one Erza?” said I to the Messenger.

“Erza! yes, indeed,” he answered; “it will be long before I forget him. He

was a young boy, and he held back in the rear of the multitude of the Vast Army. A banner was bound around him, which was stained with his blood ; his face was like what I never saw before, so anxious, so full of earnest inquiry ; and he stood near Albyn the faithful one, and seemed clinging to his dress, and bathing his hands with his tears. I shall never forget it, the bitter look of intense love and anxiety which he cast on Albyn when he was compelled to go forward ; but Albyn could not go with him. He seemed to say kind soothing words to him as they parted, for they chased from him the cloud which was gathering on the poor boy's brow. The boy hung his head on his bosom, and folded his hands on his breast ; his sword, which seemed to have done good work, hung by his side ; his shield hung from his neck ; in one place it had been pierced through. The boy's face was so simple and beautiful, yet

so full of awe and anxious fear, I could never forget it, nor the way in which he left Albyn's side ; they said the King called him ; he looked up to Albyn's face, and said, ' Oh, Albyn ! the King ! the King ! ' It seemed as if meeting the King had long been the object of his thoughts and fears, as if his whole soul had been taken up in how he was to meet the King. Poor boy ! I have heard since, it was his one thought, night and day, how to meet the King."

"And how went it?" said I, anxious to hear the end.

"There was a long pause ; and enemies of Erza's came forward to show how he had injured the King's cause by a false step taken at the first beginning, which had brought about many other errors, and they were clamorous he should be condemned ; but he had bitterly repented it, and gave up his whole time to make amends ; not that he pleaded that for himself, for he pleaded

nothing, but was as one who felt himself all wrong, and remained with his hands folded, and his head fallen on his bosom. All the time I saw not a muscle move in him : his banner and sword bore witness to his efforts and earnestness of late."

"But the end, the end?" said I; "was Erza forgiven?"

"He was," said he. "With his garments white as driven snow, his cross on his brow glowing with heavenly light, his face radiant with perfect peace, his hands still folded in his bosom, young Erza returned to Albyn's side, forgiven."

I bowed in thankfulness.

"And Albyn?" said I.

"Albyn!" said the other. "Before the gathered millions of the Vast Army, he stood before the King. He had kept his post, and fulfilled his work; he had been faithful to the end. I saw him, and I shall never forget him again; the young soldier's

bearing, and his peaceful brow, with the cross, like living light glowing on it: all eyes were on him. He had been found watching, and before the assembled army he received his full reward. I gazed, till I could see no more the young boy's single figure as it stood in the living light; and as I gazed, I found at last my eyes were fixed on vacancy, for Albyn had passed away. He had gone with Erza to the land of the King. They had passed beyond the ancient hills; they had gone to the world of the eastern glow; they were seeing the King they had served, and gazing on him they had loved. They have put off the helmet for the conqueror's crown, and the sword for the harp of joy, in the land where the noise of the battle has ceased, and the soldier strives no more.

THE END.

