

THE
J. G. S. Hunter
KING'S HIGHWAY.

A NOVEL.

BY

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THE KING'S HIGHWAY.

CHAPTER I.

WE have said that Wilton Brown paused and gazed through the mist at the figure of a man advancing towards him, and to the reader it need not be told who the person was that thus came forward. To Wilton, however, the conviction was brought more slowly; for, though he had heard the sound of a familiar voice, yet it seemed so improbable that voice should be the voice of Lord Sherbrooke, that the idea never struck him till the figure became so distinct as not to leave a doubt.

"Good God, Sherbrooke!" he exclaimed, advancing towards him at length, "can it be you?"

"And I may well ask, Wilton, if it be you," said Lord Sherbrooke, in a tone so sharp and angry, so unlike his usual voice and manner of speaking, that Wilton drew back astonished, imagining that he had given his friend some unknown offence. But Lord Sherbrooke grasped his arm, exclaiming, "Hark! There they are! They are close upon us, Wilton! I have fallen in with a nest of Jacobites, I fancy, ready for an outbreak, and they are after me. Have you any arms?"

"Here are plenty of pistols, my lord," said the messenger, who knew him.

"Ah, Arden, is that you?" he exclaimed. "Give me a pistol," and he took one from the messenger's hand. "Here are three of us now, Wilton," he exclaimed, with a laugh, "and one of us a messenger: enough, surely, for any dozen Jacobites in England."

There was something wild, hasty, and strange in Lord Sherbrooke's manner, which startled and alarmed Wilton a good deal.

"For Heaven's sake, Sherbrooke," he said, "do nothing rashly. Let us see who they are before you act."

"Oh, I will do nothing rash," replied Sherbrooke.

"But here they come! just like Jacobites, gabbling at every step. Who goes there, my masters?" he exclaimed, at the same moment. "Don't advance, don't advance! We are armed! The first man that advances I shoot upon the spot!"

"Those are the men, those are the men!" cried a loud voice from the other party, who were now seen coming up in a mass. "Rush upon them! Rush upon them, and tie the messenger!"

"Oh, oh!" cried Arden. "They have found me out, have they! Stand by me, my lord! Stand by me, Mr. Brown! They are rushing on!"

"Then here's for the midst of them!" cried Lord Sherbrooke; and, instantly levelling his pistol, he fired, though Wilton was in the very act of holding forth his hand to stop him.

The moment the fatal flash had taken place there was a reel back among the advancing guard, though they were at several yards' distance when the pistol was fired. A confusion, a gathering together, a murmur succeeded; and, while Lord Sherbrooke was in the very act of exclaiming, "Give me another pistol, Arden!" there was heard, from among the party who had been approaching, a loud voice, exclaiming, "By —, he has shot the lady! and she was only fainting, after all. See how the blood flows!"

The words were perfectly distinct. Lord Sherbrooke's hand, which had just seized the other pistol that the messenger had held out to him, suddenly let it drop upon the ground. It was not possible to see the expression of his face fully, for his head was turned away; but Wilton felt him grasp his arm as if for support, trembling in every limb.

"Good God! what have you done, Sherbrooke?" exclaimed his friend.

"I have killed her, I have killed her!" cried Lord Sherbrooke, gasping for breath; "I have killed the dear unfortunate girl!" and, letting go Wilton's arm, he rushed forward at once into the midst of the other party, exclaiming, "Stand back! Let me forward! She is my wife! Stand out of my way! How in the name of Heaven did she—"

He left off without concluding, and nobody answered. But the tone of bitter grief and agony in which Lord Sherbrooke spoke was not to be mistaken: there was

in it the overpowering energy of passionate grief; and everybody made way for him. In a moment he had snatched the form of the unhappy lady from the man who held her in his arms, and, supporting her himself, partly on his knee, partly on his bosom, he kissed her again and again vehemently, eagerly, we may almost say frantically, exclaiming, "And I have killed thee, my Caroline! I have killed thee, my beloved, my wife, my own dear wife! I have killed thee, noble, and true, and kind! Oh, open your eyes, dear one; open your eyes and gaze upon me for a minute! She is living, she is living!" he added, wildly; "she does open her eyes! Quick, some one call a surgeon! A hundred guineas to the first who brings me a surgeon! God of heaven! how has this happened? Oh, yes, she is living, she is reviving! Wilton, for pity's sake, for mercy's sake, help me!"

Wilton Brown had followed Lord Sherbrooke rapidly, for a sudden apprehension had crossed his mind immediately the words were pronounced, "I have shot the lady," lest, by some accident, Lady Laura had fallen into the hands of the people who were approaching, and that she it was who had been wounded or killed by the rash act of his friend.

The moment he came up, however, he perceived that the lady's face was unknown to him, and he saw also that the men who stood round, deprived of all power and activity by a horrible event which they only vaguely comprehended, were anything but the persons he had expected to see. They seemed to be almost all common sailors; and, though they were, in general, evidently Englishmen, they were habited more in the fashion of the Dutch seamen of that day. They were well armed, it is true, but still they bore not the slightest appearance of being connected with Sir John Fenwick and the party to which he was attached; and the horror and consternation which seemed to have taken possession of them all at the injury which had been inflicted on the unhappy lady, showed that they were anything but feelingless or hardened.

One rapid glance over the scene before his eyes had shown Wilton this; and he now stood beside Lord Sherbrooke, gazing with painful interest on a picture, the full horror of which he divined better than the others who surrounded them.

Almost as Lord Sherbrooke spoke, however, and before Wilton could reply, the lady made a slight movement of her hand, and raised her head. Her eyes were open, and she turned to Lord Sherbrooke, gazing on his face for a moment, as if to be certain who it was.

"Oh, Sherbrooke," she said, at length, in a faint voice, "fly, fly! I was very foolish to faint. I am better now. The men will be upon you in a minute! Oh Heaven, they are all around us! Oh, how weak it was to faint and keep you here till they have taken you! I am better now," she said, in answer to a whispered inquiry of Lord Sherbrooke, as he pressed her to his heart. "But I must have hurt my shoulder in falling, for it pains me very much." And, putting her hand towards it, she drew it suddenly away, exclaiming, "Good Heaven, it is blood!"

"Yes, dearest—yes, beloved," replied Lord Sherbrooke, "it is blood; blood shed by your husband's hand; but oh, inadvertently, dear girl. I rashly fired among the men that were pursuing me, and have killed the only woman that I ever loved!" And he struck his hand vehemently against his forehead, with a gesture of despair that could not be mistaken.

"Come, come, young gentleman," said a man, who seemed the leader of the bluff sailors around him, "don't take on so. Some one has gone for a surgeon. There's a clever one at Halstow, I know, and, mayhap, the young lady is not so much hurt. At all events, you did not do it to hurt her, that's clear enough; and I rather fancy we've all been in a mistake together. For, if you were flying from people looking out to take you, you were not the goods we were after; for we were looking for people that were coming to take us. They came down and said that a gentleman had come down with a messenger to look after our little traffic, and have some of us up for it. Now we intended to plant the messenger in the bog till we had got all things ready and the ship off, and it was him and his people we were after. But come along; bring down the lady to Master Plessis's. She will be taken good care of there, I warrant you. Here, Jack Vanoorst! you're a bit of a surgeon yourself, for you doctored my head when the Frenchman broke my crown one day. See

if you can't stop the blood, at least, till we get the lady to old Plessis's, and the surgeon comes."

A broad-built elderly man advanced, and, with whatever materials could be obtained upon the spot, made a sort of bandage and compress by the dim light, and applied it dexterously enough, while Caroline lay with her head upon her husband's bosom, and her hand clasped in his.

Sherbrooke looked down in her face while this was done with agony depicted in his countenance; nor was that agony rendered the less by seeing a faint look of happiness come over her face as she thus rested, and by feeling her hand press gently upon his. It all seemed to say, "I could willingly die thus."

When the bandage had been applied, Lord Sherbrooke, though he shook in every limb with agitation and anxiety, took her in his arms and raised her, saying to the man, "Now show me the way."

But that way was long. The young nobleman put forth his strength too much at first in the effort to carry her quickly, and, after bearing her on for about a mile, he paused and faltered.

"Let one of our people carry her," said the captain of the vessel which was lying in the river at no great distance from Plessis's house; "there is near a mile to go yet."

Lord Sherbrooke turned and looked round. Wilton was close by his side.

"Wilton," he said, "Wilton, you take her. With the exception of herself, you are my best friend. Gently, oh gently! She is my wife, Wilton, and I know you will not mind the burden."

"Pardon me, lady," said Wilton, as he took her gently out of Lord Sherbrooke's arm, and she raised her head with a faint look of inquiry. "It is your husband's sincere friend, and I will bear you as carefully as if I were your brother."

She made no opposition; but no answer, only stretching forth her left arm, which was the unwounded one, to Lord Sherbrooke: she let her hand rest in his, as if she wished him to retain it; and Wilton remarked, but not displeased, that she suffered not her head to rest upon his bosom, as it had done upon that of his friend.

Considerably taller, and altogether of a more powerful frame than Lord Sherbrooke, he bore her with great-

er ease ; but anxiety made it seem an age till a glimmering light was seen through the trees at no great distance.

Lord Sherbrooke was then in the act of proposing to carry her again, but the good sailor who had spoken before interfered, saying, "No, no, let him carry her. It will only hurt her to change so. There's the house close by, and he's stronger than you are, and not knocked down with fright, you see, either, as you are, naturally enough. Run on, boy, run on," he continued, somewhat sharply, to a lad who was with them ; "run on, and tell old Plessis to get down a mattress to carry the lady up in."

The boy sped away to execute this kind and prudent order ; and in a few minutes more the whole party stood upon the little stone esplanade before the dwelling of Monsieur Plessis. That worthy personage himself was down, and already in a state of great anxiety and tribulation, being one of those who have an excessive dislike to anything which may bring upon them too much notice of any kind.

The mattress, too, had been brought down ; but, when Wilton gazed through the door, he turned quickly to his friend, saying, "I had better carry her up at once, Sherbrooke. I can do it easily, and it will save her the pain of changing her position more than once."

Without waiting for any one's consent, he accordingly began to mount the staircase, and had just reached the balustrade of the little sort of square vestibule at top, when the door of an opposite room opened, and the Lady Helen stood before him.

To Wilton, who knew nothing of all the secrets of Plessis's house, which the reader is already informed of, the sight was like that of an apparition ; and to the Lady Helen herself, the sight of Wilton bearing Caroline in his arms, while the light of the lamp that Plessis carried before them shone upon the pale but still beautiful countenance of the poor girl, and showed her dress and that of Wilton both thickly stained and spotted with blood, was not less astounding.

"Oh, Wilton, Wilton," she cried, "what is this ? Caroline, my sweet Caroline, for Heaven's sake, speak ! for Heaven's sake, look at me !"

The next moment, however, her eyes fell upon Lord Sherbrooke ; his countenance also as pale as death ; his coat, and collar, and face also bloody.

"Oh, young man, young man," she cried, "is it you that have done this?"

"Yes, Lady Helen," he answered, rather bitterly; "yes, after nearly killing her in another way, it is I who have shed her blood. But the first was the criminal act, not the last. The shot was unintentional: the wounds given by my words were the guilty ones."

"No, no, Sherbrooke!" said Caroline, raising her head faintly, and again stretching out her hand towards him. "No, no, dear Henry. You love me, that is enough!"

She could speak no more; and Plessis, whose senses were in a state of greater precision than those of any other person, exclaimed eagerly, "Don't stand here talking about it, but carry the lady to her bedchamber. This way, young gentleman; this way, this way!"

And, passing by, he led onward to the room in which the unfortunate lady had received her husband's note that very morning. Wilton laid her gently on the bed; and, closing her eyes for a moment, she gave a slight shudder, either with chilliness or pain. But a movement in the apartment caused her to look round again, and she said eagerly, "Do not leave me, Sherbrooke! Do not leave me, my husband. You must stay with me *now*."

"Leave you, my Caroline!" he said; "oh no! I will never leave you more! I must atone for what I have done. Only promise me, promise me, Caroline, to live, to forgive, and to bless me."

"I do forgive you, I do bless you, Sherbrooke," she answered.

Before he could reply, a gentleman habited in a riding-dress, and a large red roquelaure, entered the room hastily, threw off his hat and cloak, and advanced at once, with a somewhat rough air, to the bedside.

"What is this?" he said quickly, but not in an ungentle tone. "Where is the lady hurt? Bring me linen and water. You may give her a little wine too. She is faint from loss of blood;" and, advancing to the bedside, he took Caroline's hand kindly in his own, saying, "Do not be alarmed, my dear. These things happen every day in battle; and women get well better than soldiers, for they are more patient and resigned. I see where the wound is. Do not be afraid;" and he put his hand upon her shoulder, running it round on both

sides. The moment he had done so, he looked about him with a bright and beaming smile upon his lip, and the colour somewhat up into his cheek.

"She will do well," he said; "let no one alarm himself: the ball has passed upon the right of the artery, and I feel it just above the scapula. She will do well!"

An audible "Thank God!" burst from every lip around; and Caroline herself, at the sudden change from the apprehension of death to the hope of life, burst into silent tears.

"What are all these men doing here?" demanded the good surgeon, turning bluffly round. "Leave none but the women with me, and not too many of them."

The sailors began to move away at this command, and Wilton followed; but Lord Sherbrooke kept his place, saying, "I must remain!"

"And why should you remain, sir?" demanded the surgeon. "Who are you?"

"I am her husband, sir," replied Lord Sherbrooke, firmly and distinctly.

"Oh, sir, that makes a very great difference," replied the surgeon. "I make you a very low bow, and have nothing to say; only I hope you will behave quietly and rationally, and talk as little as possible."

"I will do everything, sir," replied Lord Sherbrooke, with a somewhat stately look, "I will do everything that may tend to promote the recovery of one I love so well."

At this moment Wilton was in the doorway; but the Lady Helen laid her hand upon his arm, saying, "Wait for me in the neighbouring room, Wilton. I must speak with you before you go."

Wilton promised to remain, and quitted the chamber. He found at the top of the stairs the greater part of the sailors whom he had seen before, and with them Plessis himself and another man.

The sailors were talking with Plessis vehemently; and Wilton soon found that the worthy Frenchman was using all his powers of vituperation in various tongues—French and English, with a word or two of Dutch every now and then, and some quaint specimens of Portuguese—to express his indignation at the sailors for the unlucky business in which they had engaged.

The master of the vessel was defending himself stoutly, saying, "Why, didn't I meet the boy from the Blackamoor's Head at the very door of the place here?"

and didn't he tell me that there was a man coming down with a messenger of state to seize the ship and the cargo, and you, and I, and every one else?"

"Poo! nonsense, nonsense," cried Plessis; "all stuff and exaggeration. No messenger, I dare say, at all. So be off, all of you, as fast as you can go; and get out of the way for fear of any inquiries being made."

"Why, here's the young gentleman himself," cried the master: "he don't look like a messenger, sure enough. But there was another man that ran away; he may have been the messenger."

The man looked to Wilton as he spoke, who instantly replied, "You are right, sir. He was a messenger; but neither he nor I came hither about anything referring to you. Indeed, neither of us even knew of your existence before we saw you."

At that moment the stranger, who was standing beside Plessis, and who was very different from the sailors in appearance, stepped forward to Wilton, and said in a low tone, "May I, sir, ask your name?"

The countersign that Green had given him immediately returned to Wilton's memory, and he replied, "My name is Brown, sir, but it might as well have been Green."

"Oh no, sir," replied the stranger, in the same tone, "every man should keep his right name, and be in his right place, which is the case with yourself in both respects at present;" and, turning to Plessis, he said, "This is a friend of the colonel's, Plessis. He sent me down to meet him and bring him here, because he could not come himself."

"Oh, oh!" said Plessis, looking wise, "that's all right, then. I saw that he spoke to the Lady Helen. Take him into the saloon, captain, and I'll come to you in a minute, as soon as I've got the house clear, and everything quiet again. I expect some gentlemen to meet here to-night, to take their bowl of punch, you know."

"This way, sir," said the person whom the Frenchman had called captain, turning to Wilton, and leading him on into the large room, which was now quite vacant. The moment that he was there and the door closed, the stranger came close up to him, saying, "Where is the messenger? Had you not a messenger with you? I waited on the road for you three quarters of an hour."

"I rather think," replied Wilton, "that I was misdi-

rected by the landlord of the inn, and a series of unhappy mistakes has been the consequence."

"Which are not over yet," exclaimed the other; "for here are we, only two men, with very likely a dozen or two against us, with no power or authority to take the lady from out of their hands, and with nothing but our swords and pistols."

"Oh no!" answered Wilton; "you mistake. I have sufficient authority both from her father and from the secretary of state."

"Ay, but not like the face of a messenger!" replied the other; "that is the best authority in the world with people like these. By Heaven, the only way we can act is to make a bold push for it at once, to get hold of the young lady, and carry her off before these men arrive. Plessis is sending away all the sailors: he'll not try much to oppose us himself. There is one man, I see, at the end of the other corridor, but we can surely manage him; and, very likely, we may get the start of the others by an hour or so."

"Let us lose not a moment," answered Wilton. "I will send for the Lady Helen, who may give us more information."

"Let me go and get it from Plessis himself," replied the man; "I will be back in a minute. I know how to deal with the rogue of a Frenchman better than you do. If he comes back with me, take a high tone with him: determination is everything."

Thus saying, he quitted the room, and for about five minutes Wilton remained alone, meditating over what had passed, if that could be called meditating, which was nothing but a confused series of indistinct images, all out of their proper form and order.

CHAPTER II.

THE first person that entered the room was the Lady Helen, who came forward towards her young friend with her eyes sparkling and a smile upon her lips.

"Oh, my dear boy," she cried, "this has been a terrible night, but she is better: there is every hope of her

doing well. The ball has been extracted in a moment, the bleeding has ceased, and the comfort of her husband's love will be more to her, far more to her, than the best balm physician or surgeon could give. But now tell me, Wilton, what brings you here. Did you come with this gay gallant, or have you—though I trust and believe you have not—have you taken any part in the wild schemes of these rash, intemperate, and vicious men?"

"I am taking part in no schemes, dear lady," replied Wilton; "I only come here to frustrate evil purposes. I came furnished with authority, and accompanied by a messenger of state, to deliver Lady Laura Gaveston, who, I understand, is at this very moment in this house."

"That is most strange," said the Lady Helen; "I wrote to—to him who—who—whom you saw me with, in short, to tell him that they had brought the poor girl here, never thinking that you, my boy—"

"It was the person you speak of," interrupted Wilton, "who told me of her being here. One of his people is in the house with me at this present moment; but the messenger has fled in the late affray. I understand that a number of the men who brought her hither are to be here to night; we shall be then but two against many if we delay; and it is absolutely necessary that we should find out where the lady is, and carry her off at once."

"Oh! I will find her in a moment," replied the Lady Helen. "But I know not whether they will suffer her to pass out of her chamber."

At that moment, however, Plessis, and the personage whom he called captain, entered the room in eager conversation.

"It will be ruin and destruction to me," cried Plessis; "I cannot permit it! I cannot hear of it! nor can you manage it. There are three men here; one in the house, one at each gate. You are only two."

"But we are two men together, and two strong men too," replied the captain; "and they are all separate. So I tell you we will do it."

"Oh, if you choose to use force, you may," replied Plessis; "but the consequence be upon your own head."

"Come, come, Plessis," replied the other, "you know you don't like a noise and a piece of work more
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than any one else. Do the matter cunningly, man, as you are accustomed to do. Get the fellow in the hall, there, down quietly out of the passage into the brandy cellar; I will follow him and lock him in. When that's done, all the rest is easy."

Plessis smiled at a trick exactly suited to his taste; but he hesitated, nevertheless, at putting it in execution, lest the fact of his having taken any part therein should come to the knowledge of men from whom, at different times, he derived considerable advantage. Present evils, however, are always more formidable than distant ones, and Wilton bethought him of trying what a little intimidation would do with the good Frenchman.

"Listen to me, sir," he said, in a stern tone. "Instantly do what you are told, or take the consequences. Here is my authority, from the secretary of state, to demand the person of this young lady from the hands of any one with whom I may find her. A messenger came down with me to High Halstow, with a warrant for the arrest of any person who may be found detaining her. It is, however, my wish to do all things quietly, if you will allow me. The duke, her father, does not desire the business to be conducted with harshness—"

"A duke!" exclaimed Plessis, opening his eyes with astonishment. "A duke and peer! Why they only told me that she was the daughter of some turncoat, who would betray them, they feared, if they had not his daughter in pawn."

"They deceived you!" replied Wilton. "She is the daughter of the Duke of Gaveston. But I have no time to discuss such points with you. Instantly do what you are told. Get the man out of the way quietly; give the lady up into my hands, as you are hereby formally required to do, or I immediately quit the house, raise the hue and cry, and in less than an hour this place shall be surrounded by a hundred men."

Plessis hesitated no longer. "*Force majeure!*" he cried. "*Force majeure!* No one can resist that. What am I to do? I will act exactly according to your bidding. You are witness, madam, that I yield to compulsion."

"Yes, Monsieur Plessis," replied the Lady Helén, "lawful compulsion."

"Well, Plessis, do as I bid you at once," replied the captain. "Get the man down into the brandy cellar, quickly!—I saw the door open as I passed—and either lock him in or let me do it."

"You are a tall man and I am a small man," replied Plessis; "I have not the gift of turning keys, captain. I'll send him down, however;" and, taking a Venice glass from the mantelpiece, he went to the little vestibule at the top of the stairs, and called to the man who was sitting in the corridor beyond.

"Here, Harrison," he said, "I wish you'd go down and get the gentleman a glass of brandy out of the cellar. The door's open. Make haste, and don't drink any—there's a good fellow."

The tone in which Master Plessis spoke showed that he was no bad actor when well prompted. The man, who was completely deceived, came forward without the slightest hesitation, took the glass out of his hand, and went down stairs.

The moment he had passed, Plessis put in his head, and beckoned with his finger to the captain, who ran down after the other in a moment, leaving the door open, and Plessis listening beyond, with some slight apprehension. That apprehension was increased by hearing a word or two spoken sharply, a struggle, and the sound of glass falling and being broken. Wilton sprang out of the room to aid his companion; but at that moment there was a sound of a door banged sharply to, a key turned, and he met the captain coming up the stairs laughing aloud.

"By Heaven, the fellow had nearly bolted," he said. "But there he is now, safe enough, and I dare say will find means to console himself with Master Plessis's brandy casks. He might have made himself quite comfortable if he hadn't dropped the glass like a fool. Now, Plessis," he continued, entering the room, "go for the lady as quick as lightning. Let us lose no time, but make sure of the business while we can; and, I dare say, if you get yourself into any little scrape soon—as indubitably you will, for you never can expect to die unchanged—this gentleman will speak a good word for you to those who can get your neck out of the noose before it is drawn too tight. Come, make haste, man, or we may all get into trouble."

"I will go," said the Lady Helen; "I had better go.

It will alarm her less, and she has been terrified and agitated too much already, poor thing."

Thus saying, she left them; but the lady returned alone in a moment after, saying, with some consternation, that the man had got the key of the door with him.

"Oh, that is nothing!" exclaimed Plessis, laughing; "I am never without my *passe-partout*;" and, producing a key attached to a large ring from his pocket, he gave it into the hands of the Lady Helen, who returned to her kind task once more.

Scarcely had she left the room, when there came the sound of a man's step from the passage, and Plessis darted out. The footfall which he heard was that of Lord Sherbrooke, who was seeking Wilton; and, as soon as the young nobleman saw him, he advanced towards him with both his hands extended, saying,

"Oh, Wilton, dear friend, this has been a terrible night. But it is in the fiery furnace of such nights as this that hard hearts are melted and cast in a new mould. I feel that it is so with mine. But to the business that makes me seek you," he continued, in a low tone, seeing that there was another person in the room, and drawing Wilton on one side. "Listen to me! Quit this house as fast as possible. I find you are in a nest of furious Jacobites, and there may be great danger to you if found here. I remain with my poor Caroline; and, far away from all the rest, have nothing but fear, although the warning that she gave was intended for me. You speed away to London as fast as possible. But remember, Wilton! remember: mention no word of this night's event to my father. He does not expect me in town for several days, and I must choose my own time and manner to give him the history of all this affair. He holds me by a chain you know not of, the chain of my heavy debts. I am at liberty but upon his sufferance, and one cold look from him to Jew or usurer would plunge me in a debtor's prison in an hour. The man who has debts he cannot pay, Wilton, is worse than any ordinary slave, for he is a slave to many masters. But I must away," he continued, in his rapid manner, "for I have left her with no one but the servant-girl, and I must watch her till all danger be past."

"I trust she is better," said Wilton; "I trust there is no danger."

"They tell me not, they tell me not, Wilton," replied Lord Sherbrooke; "but, now that I have been upon the very eve of losing a jewel, of which I was but too careless before, I feel all its value, and would fain hide it trembling in my heart, lest fate should snatch it from me. Say nothing of these things; remember, say nothing of them."

"But Arden, but Arden," said Wilton, as Lord Sherbrooke was turning away; "but the messenger, Sherbrooke. May he not tell something?"

"The cowardly villain ran away so soon," replied Lord Sherbrooke, "he could hear nothing, and understand less. He is a cautious scoundrel, too, and will hold his tongue. Yet you may give him a warning, if you see him, Wilton."

"Here is the lady, sir," said Plessis, entering, and addressing Wilton. "I will go down stairs and see that all is safe below."

"He will not let the man out of the cellar?" demanded Wilton, as Plessis departed.

"I have taken care of that," replied the captain, holding up a key; "but let us not lose time."

While these few words were passing, Lady Helen and Laura entered, the latter pale, agitated, and trembling, less with actual apprehension than from all she had lately undergone. At that moment she knew not with whom she was going, or what the manner of escape proposed. All that the Lady Helen had told her was, that somebody had come to set her free, and that she must instantly prepare to depart. She had paused but for an instant, while the lady who brought her these glad tidings wrapped round her some of the garments which had been procured for her journey to France by those who had carried her off; and all the agitation consequent upon a sudden revival of the hopes that had been wellnigh extinguished, was still busy in her bosom, when, as we have said, she entered the room.

The first object, however, which her eye fell upon, was the fine, commanding form of Wilton Brown. It were scarcely fair to ask whether, in the long and weary hours of captivity, she had thought much of him. But one thing, at least, may be told: that, with him, and with a hurried and timid examination of the feelings of her own bosom regarding him, her thoughts had been busied at the very moment when she had been dragged

away from her own home. The sight of him, however, now, was both joyful and overpowering to her; the very idea of deliverance had been sufficient to agitate her, so that she shook in every limb as she entered the room; but when she saw in her deliverer the man whom, of all others, she would have chosen to protect her, manifold emotions of a still more agitating kind were added to all the rest. But joy—joy and increased hope—overcame all other feelings, and, stretching out her hands towards him, she ran forward as he advanced to meet her, and clung with a look of deep confidence and gladness to his arm.

"Do not be frightened, do not be agitated," he said; "all will go quite well. Are you prepared to quit this place immediately?"

"Oh yes, yes, instantly!" she cried; but then her eyes turned upon Lord Sherbrooke, and the sight of him, in company with Wilton, seemed to cloud her happiness; for, though she still looked up to Wilton's countenance with the same affectionate and confiding glance, yet there was evidently a degree of apprehension in her countenance, when, for a moment, she turned her eyes to Lord Sherbrooke. She bowed her head gracefully to him, however, and uttered some broken thanks to him and to Wilton for coming to her deliverance.

"Pardon me, dear Lady Laura," replied Lord Sherbrooke. "I must accept no part of your thanks, for my being here is entirely accidental, and I cannot even offer to escort you on your departure. It is Wilton who has sought you bravely and perseveringly, and I doubt not you will go with him with perfect confidence."

"Anywhere, anywhere," said Lady Laura, with a tone and a look which, at another moment, might have called up a smile upon Lord Sherbrooke's countenance; but his own heart was also so full of deep feelings at that time, that he could not look upon them lightly enough even for a smile when he detected them in another.

"I will go down and make sure that there is no trickery below," said the man called the captain; "and, when I call Now! come down with the lady, Mr. Brown."

Lord Sherbrooke at the same moment took leave of them and left the room; and Lady Laura, without quit-

ting her position by Wilton's side, which she seemed to consider a place of sure refuge and support, held out her hand to the Lady Helen, saying, "Oh, how can I thank you, lady, for all your kindness? Had it not been for you, I should never have obtained this deliverance."

"I need no thanks, my sweet friend," replied the lady: "the only things that give sunshine to the memories of a sad life are some few acts of kindness and sympathy which I have been able to perform towards others. But, if you want to thank me," she added, looking with a smile upon Wilton, "thank him, Lady Laura, for he is the being dearest to me upon earth."

Lady Laura looked somewhat surprised; but Wilton held up his finger, thinking he heard their companion's call. It was not so, however, but only a quick step upon the stairs; and the next moment the captain entered, with some marks of agitation on his countenance.

"By ——!" he said, "there seems to me to be a whole troop of horse before the house! such a clatter of iron-shod feet! I fear we have the enemy upon us, and Plessis has run to hide himself, frightened out of his wits. What can we do?"

"Come all into the lady's chamber, or into mine," said Lady Helen: "perhaps they may not think of searching for her. At all events, it gives us a chance, if we can but get across the vestibule before they come up. Quick, Wilton! come quick!" and she was leading the way.

Before she got to the door, however, which the captain had closed behind him, the tramp of heavy boots was heard upon the stairs, and a voice calling, "Plessis! Plessis! Where the devil are you? The whole house seems to be deserted! Why, what in Satan's name, is here? Here's blood all the way down the stairs! By Heaven, it wouldn't surprise me if the Orangemen had got into the house. We must take care that there isn't a trap. Give me that lamp, Cranburne. You had better have your pistols ready, gentlemen. How can we manage now? Two of you stay and guard the corridor, while we go in here."

There seemed now to take place a low-toned conversation among them, and the Lady Helen, with a pale countenance, drew back towards Wilton and Laura.

The captain, on his part, unbuttoned his coat and drew out a pistol from the belt that he wore underneath: but Wilton said, "Put it up, my good friend, put it up. Do not let us set any example of violence. Where there are nine or ten against two, it is somewhat dangerous to begin the affray. We can always have recourse to resistance at last."

"Oh, not for my sake! not for my sake!" said Lady Laura, in a low voice. "For Heaven's sake, risk not your life for me!"

"Let us keep this deep window behind us," said Wilton, speaking to his companion, "for that will give us some advantage, at all events. Draw a little behind us, dear Lady Laura. We will manage all things as gently as we can."

"Let me speak to them, Wilton," said the Lady Helen: "from one circumstance or another, I must know them almost all."

As she spoke, the large, heavy latch was lifted, and the door slowly and cautiously opened.

CHAPTER III.

A PAUSE of expectation, even if it be but for a minute, is sometimes the most painful thing in the world; and the heart of poor Laura at that moment, while the door was being slowly opened, and all their eyes were fixed eagerly upon it, felt as if the blood were staid in it till it was nearly bursting. Wilton, who saw all that took place more calmly, judged, by the careful opening of the door, that there was a good deal of timidity in the persons whom it hid from their view. But when it was at length opened, the sight that it presented was not well calculated to sooth any one's alarm.

In the doorway itself were three well-armed men, with each his sword drawn in his hand, while behind these, again, were seen the faces of several more. The countenance of the first, Sir George Barkley, which we have already described, was certainly not very prepossessing, and, to the eyes of Laura, there was not one who had not the countenance of an assassin. It was

evident that Sir George Barkley expected to see a much more formidable array than that presented to him and his companions in the persons of two ladies and two armed gentlemen; for his eyes turned quickly from the right to the left round the room, to assure himself that it contained no one else. There was a momentary pause at the door; but, when it was clear that very little was to be apprehended, the troop poured in with much more hasty and confident steps than those with which they had first approached.

Two or three of Sir George Barkley's party were advancing quickly to the spot where Wilton and the lady stood; but the young gentleman held up his right hand suddenly, putting his left upon one of the pistols which he carried, and saying, "Stand back, gentlemen! I do not permit men with swords drawn to come too close to me till I know their purpose. Stand back, I say!" and he drew the pistol from his belt.

"We mean you no harm, sir," said Sir George Barkley, pausing with the rest. "But we must know who you are, and what you are doing here, and that immediately."

"Who I am, can be of no more consequence to you, sir," replied Wilton, "than who you are is to me; which, by your good leave, I would a great deal rather not know, if you will suffer me to be ignorant thereof; and as to what I am doing here, I do not see that I am bound to explain that to anybody but the master of the house, or to some person authorized by law to inquire into such particulars."

"Mighty fine, sir," said the voice of Sir John Fenwick, as he advanced from behind, "mighty fine! But this is a mere waste of time. In the first place, what are you doing with that lady, who, as her father's friend, I intend immediately to take under my protection."

"Her father, sir," replied Wilton, with a contemptuous smile, "judges that the lady has been somewhat too long under your careful but somewhat forcible protection already. I beg leave to give you notice, Sir John Fenwick, that I am fully authorized by the Duke of Gaveston, Lady Laura's father, by a writing under his own hand, to seek for and deliver her from those who have taken her away. I know you have been too wise and prudent to suffer yourself to be seen in this

business hitherto, and, if you will take my advice, you will not meddle with it now. Stand back, sir; for, as I live, I will shoot you through the head if you take one single step forward; and you know I will keep my word!"

"But there is more to be inquired into, sir," exclaimed Sir George Barkley; "there is blood—blood upon the stairs—blood—"

"Hear me, Sir George," said Lady Helen, advancing. "You know me well, and must believe what I say."

"I have the pleasure of recollecting your ladyship very well," replied Sir George; "but I thought that you and Miss Villars had sailed back for France by this time."

"Alas! Sir George," replied the lady; "poor Caroline, I fear, will not be able to be moved. She has met with a severe accident to-night, and it is her blood, poor child, that you saw upon the stairs. This gentleman has had nothing farther to do with the matter, except inasmuch as he was accidentally present, and kindly carried her up stairs to the room where she now lies."

"That alters the case," said Sir George Barkley; "but who is he? We have heard reports by the way which gave us alarm. Will he pledge his honour as a gentleman never to mention anything he has seen this night—or, at least, not for six months?"

"On that condition," demanded Wilton, "will you give me perfect freedom of egress with this lady and the gentleman who is with me?"

"Not with the lady!" exclaimed Sir George Barkley, sharply; and, at the same moment, Sir John Fenwick, Rookwood, and Parkyns all surrounded the Jacobite leader, speaking eagerly, but in a low tone, and evidently remonstrating against his permitting the departure of any of the party. He seemed puzzled how to act.

"Come out here again," he said; "come out here, where we can speak more at ease. They cannot get out of this room if we keep the door."

"Not without breaking their necks from the window," replied Rookwood.

"What is that small door there at the side?" said Sir George Barkley. "Let some one see!"

"'Tis nothing but a cupboard," said Sir John Fen-

wick; "I examined it the other night for fear of eaves-droppers. There is no way out."

"I shall consider your proposal, sir," said Sir George Barkley, turning to Wilton: "stay here quietly. We wish to offer no violence to any man; we are very harmless people in our way."

A grim smile hung upon his thin lip as he spoke; and looking from time to time behind him, as if he feared the use which Wilton might make of the pistol in his hand, he left the room with his companion. The moment after, the lock of the door was heard to turn, and a heavy bar that hung beside it clattered as it was drawn across.

"A few minutes gained is a great thing," cried Wilton. "I have heard of people defending themselves long by forming a sort of temporary barricade. A single cavalier in the time of Cromwell kept at bay a large force for several hours. In this deep window we are defended on all sides but one. Let us do what we can to guard ourselves on that also."

The furniture was scanty; but still the large table in the middle of the room, and a sideboard which stood in one corner, together with chairs and various smaller articles, were speedily formed into a little fortress, as it were, which enclosed the opening of the window in such a manner as to leave a space open towards the enemy of not more than two feet in width. Wilton exerted himself to move all these without noise, and the captain aided him zealously; while Laura clung to Lady Helen, and hid her eyes upon her new friend's bosom, anticipating every moment the return of the other party, and the commencement of a scene of strife and bloodshed.

It is to the proceedings of those without the room, however, that we must more particularly direct our attention.

"In the name of Heaven, Sir George," exclaimed both Rookwood and Fenwick, as soon as they were on the outside of the door, "do not let them go on any account. Our whole plan is blasted, and ourselves ruined for ever, if such a thing is to take place!"

"Why," continued Fenwick, "this youth, this Wilton Brown, is secretary to the Earl of Byerdale, a natural son of Lord Sunbury, it is supposed, brought up from his infancy in the most violent Orange principles;

and he will think himself justified in breaking his word with us the moment he is out of the house, and bringing upon us the troops from Hoo. He knows me well by sight, too; and, if he be let loose, I shall not consider my life worth a moment's purchase."

"Even if you could trust him," said Rookwood, "there is the other, Captain Byerly as they call him, Green's great friend, who threw the money, which Lowick offered him to quit Green, in his face. If the tidings we just now heard, that the matter has taken some wind, be true, this fellow Byerly will bring down the soldiers upon us, and swear to us anywhere."

"But what am I to do?" demanded Sir George Barkley, hesitatingly. "We shall have bloodshed and much noise, depend upon it."

"Leave them all locked in where they are," said Sir William Parkyns; "they can do no harm there. Let us ourselves, like brave and determined men, carry into execution at once the resolution we have formed. Let us turn our horses' heads towards London; meet at Turnham Green as was proposed; and, while people are seeking for us here in vain, the usurper's life will be brought to an end, and his unsteady government overthrown for ever. Everything in the country will be in confusion; our friends will be rising in all quarters; the Duke of Berwick, I know, was at Calais yesterday; the army can land in two days; and the advantages of our situation will all be secured by one prompt and decided blow. I say, leave them where they are. Before they can make their escape, the whole thing will be over, and we shall be safe."

"Nonsense, Sir William," cried Fenwick, "nonsense, I say. Here is Plessis, has evidently played into their hands; the man we put to guard the girl has been bribed off his post; the window itself is not so high but that an active man might easily drop from it, if he could see clearly where to light below; ere noon to-morrow, the tidings of our assemblies would reach Kensington. William of Orange would not stir out, and the whole plan would be frustrated. We should be hunted down through the country like wild beasts, and you would be one of the first to repent the advice you have given."

"But, my good friend Fenwick," said Sir George Barkley, "all this is very well. But still you do not say what is to be done. Every one objects to the plan

which is proposed by another, and yet no one proposes anything that is not full of dangers."

"For my part," said Charnock, who had hitherto scarcely spoken at all, "for my part, if you were to ask my opinion, I should say, Let us walk in—we are here eleven or twelve in all, twelve I think—and just quietly make a circle round, and give them a pistol-shot or two. If people *will* come prying into other persons' affairs, and meddling with things they have no business to concern themselves about, they must take the consequences."

"Not in cold blood, not in cold blood!" exclaimed Rookwood.

"And the women!" said Sir John Fenwick; "remember the women!"

"I hope William of Orange won't have a woman with him to-morrow," said Charnock, coolly, "or, if he has, that she'll not be upon my side of the carriage; I would never let a woman stand in the way when a great deed was to be done."

"Well, for my part," said Fenwick, "I agree with Sir William Parkyns, that no time is to be lost in the execution of this business; but I agree also with Captain Rookwood, that it would be horrible to cut these men's throats in cold blood. What I propose is this, that we at once demand that they lay down their arms, and that, pledging our word of honour no evil shall happen to them, we march them down, one by one, to the boat, and ship them off for France. It will be an affair of three hours to get them embarked; but that will be time well bestowed. We can then proceed to the execution of our scheme at once, and in far greater safety. If they make any resistance, the consequence be upon their own head."

"But," said Sir George Barkley, "depend upon it they will not go. There is a determination in that young fellow's look which is not to be mistaken. He will submit to no power but that of the law."

"Well, then," said Sir John Fenwick, "frighten him with the law! Declare that you will take them all before a magistrate, to give an account of the blood that has been shed here. There is blood on his collar, and his face too, for I saw it; and the whole stairs is spotted with blood. Tell them that both the men must surrender and go before a magistrate. The ladies, you

can say, may go where they like, and do what they like, but the men must surrender. Let half of us go down with the men, and lead or force them to the ship, while the rest bring down the two women a few minutes after."

"That is not a bad plan at all, Fenwick," said Sir George Barkley. "Let us see what can be done by it. We can but come to blows at last."

While the latter part of this conversation had been going on between Fenwick and Barkley, the Jacobite called Charnock, and a dull-looking man not unlike himself, but only shorter and more broadly made, had been speaking together in a low voice behind. At first their conversation was carried on in a whisper; but at length the man said somewhat louder, "Oh, I'll do it! That's the only way to settle it. You take the one, and I'll take the other. We don't readily miss our mark, either of us."

"Let Sir George begin his story," replied Charnock. "There must be some talk at first, you know. Then get quietly up behind our timid friends here, and, when I give a nod, we will both fire at once."

"I understand," answered the other. "You had better see that your pistols are primed, Charnock, and that the balls are not out, for you rode at a rate down that hill which would shake almost any ball into the holster."

"I looked just now," said Charnock; "it's all right. Let us keep pretty near Sir George;" and, turning round, he came nearer to Sir George Barkley, who was just finishing his conversation with Fenwick, as we have described.

While holding this long consultation, the insurgents had not been many paces from the door, and they now turned and re-entered the room. The state of defence in which Wilton and his companion had placed themselves showed a degree of determination that seemed to surprise and puzzle them a good deal; for Sir George Barkley again paused and spoke to Sir John Fenwick, who was close behind him.

"The more reason for doing as we propose," replied Sir John to his friend's observation. "They will not resist-going before a magistrate—at least Wilton Brown will not, and we can easily manage the other."

Sir George Barkley then advanced another step, saying to Wilton, who, notwithstanding the barrier he had

raised, was still quite visible as far as the waist, "We have consulted, sir, on what is necessary to do with you, and, if your own account of yourselves be true, you will readily acquiesce in our determination. If you resist it, you show that you know yourselves to be guilty of some crime, and we must deal with you accordingly."

"Pray, sir, what is your determination?" asked Wilton. "For my part, I require free permission to quit this place with this gentleman and Lady Laura Gaves-ton; and nothing shall prevent me from so doing at the risk of my life."

"You shall do so, sir," replied Sir George Barkley, "but you shall go before a magistrate in the first instance. Here are evident marks of violence having been committed upon the person of some one; the staircase, the vestibule, the corridors are covered with blood; your coat, your collar, your face are also bloody; and we feel ourselves bound, before we let you depart, to have this matter strictly inquired into."

"Oh, go before a magistrate at once," said Laura, in a low voice: "we have nothing to fear from that, and they have everything."

"Showing clearly that it is a pretence, dear lady," replied Wilton, in the same low tone. "Keep behind the barricade. I see one of those men creeping up from the door with a pistol in his hand. Sir," he continued, addressing Sir George Barkley, "in those circumstances, the best plan for you to pursue will be to bring a magistrate here. I neither know who you are nor what are your views; but I find this young lady, who has been carried off from her father's house, illegally brought hither, and detained. I know the house to be a suspected one; and although, as I have before said, I neither know who you are nor what are your views, and do not by any means wish to know, yet the circumstances in which I find you are sufficiently doubtful to justify me in refusing to quit this spot, and place myself in your hands, unless every man present gives me his word of honour as a gentleman that I shall go free whithersoever I will. If, therefore, you think a magistrate requisite to inquire into this business, send for one. I think, however, that you would do much better to plight me your word at once, and let me go. I know no one but Sir John Fenwick here;

therefore, I can betray no one but him; and to Sir John Fenwick I pledge my word that I will not mention him."

It was evident that Sir John Fenwick put no trust in such assurances, and he was seen speaking vehemently with Sir George Barkley. At the same moment, however, a low conversation was carried on, in a slow and careless sort of manner, by Charnock and the other, who were just behind.

"I can't get a shot at the captain," said Charnock, calmly. "His head is covered by that table they've set on end. Stop a bit, stop a bit!"

"Better let me settle this young fellow first," said the other, "and then the stupid fools will be obliged to make a rush upon the captain. When once blood is drawn, they must go on, you know."

"Very well," replied Charnock, "I don't care," and there was the sudden click of a pistol lock heard behind.

"His eye is upon you," said Charnock. "Make haste! He is cocking his pistol!"

The man instantly raised the weapon that was in his hand, and was in the very act of firing over the shoulder of Sir George Barkley, when his arm was suddenly knocked up by a blow from behind, and the ball passed through the window, a yard and a half above Wilton's head.

Wilton instantly dropped the muzzle of his pistol without returning the shot. But there was a cause for his so doing, which none of the conspirators themselves, who were all eagerly looking towards the spot where he stood, had yet perceived.

While Charnock and the other had been speaking, a young gentleman had suddenly entered the room, and, pushing rapidly forward through the group in the doorway, he had advanced to the front and knocked up the hand of the assassin just as he was in the very act of firing. The new comer was dressed in dark-coloured clothes, and more in the French than in the English costume of that day, with a curious sort of cravat of red silk tied in a bow beneath the chin. He wore his hat, which was trimmed with feathers, and a large red bow of ribands, and in his hand he bore nothing but a small cane with an amber head, while his person dis-

played no arms whatever, except a small riding sword, which every gentleman wore in that day.

His figure was tall and commanding; his countenance open, noble, but somewhat stern; and there was to be remarked therein the peculiar expression which the pictures of Vandyck have handed down to us in the portraits of Charles I. It was a melancholy expression; but in Charles that melancholy seemed somewhat mingled with weakness; while, on the stern brow and tightly-compressed lips of the young stranger might be read, by the physiognomist, vigour and determination almost approaching to obstinacy.

The same, perhaps, might have been said of him which was said by the Roman sculptor when he beheld the picture of Charles, "That man will not die a natural death;" and in this instance, also, the prophecy would have been correct. But there was something that might have spoken, too, of death upon the battlefield, or in the deadly breach, or in some enterprise where daring courage needed to be supported by unshrinking pertinacity and resolution.

The sound of the pistol shot fixed all eyes for an instant upon that particular point in the room towards which it had been fired; but the moment that the conspirators beheld the person who now stood among them, they instantly drew back in a circle. Every sword was thrust into its sheath, every hat was taken off, while, with a flashing eye and frowning brow, the young stranger turned to Sir George Barkely, exclaiming, "What is all this, sir? What is this, gentlemen? Are ye madmen? or fools? or villains?"

"Those are hard words, your grace," replied Sir George Barkley, "and hard to stomach."

"Not more than those persons deserve, sir," replied the stranger, "who betray the confidence of their king, when they know that he is powerless to punish them."

"We are serving our king, my-lord duke," replied Sir John Fenwick, "and not betraying his confidence. Are we not here in arms, my Lord of Berwick, perilling our lives, prepared for any enterprise, and all on the king's behalf?"

"I say again, sir," replied the Duke of Berwick, "that those who abuse the trust reposed in them, so as to ruin their monarch's honour, his character, and his

reputation, are tenfold greater traitors than those who have stripped him of his crown. There is but one excuse for your conduct: that you have acted with mistaken zeal rather than criminal intent. But you have aggravated the guilt of your plans by concealing them till the last moment, not only from your king, but from your commander-in-chief. All here who hold commissions, or, at least, all but one or two, hold them under my hand, as generalissimo of my father's forces. Those commissions authorize you to raise men for the service of your lawful sovereign, and to kill or take prisoner his enemies arrayed in arms against you, but to assassinate no man; and I feel heartily ashamed that any person leagued in this great cause with me should not be able to distinguish between war and murder. However, on these subjects let us speak no more at present, for there are matters even more important to be thought of. I heard of this but yesterday morning, and, at the imminent peril of my life, have come to England to stop such deeds. I sought you in London, Sir George Barkley, and have followed you hither; and, from what I have heard, I have to tell you that your coming to England has been discovered, and that, for the last four or five days, a warrant has been out against you without your knowing it. This I learned, beyond all doubt, from my Lady Middleton. There is reason, also, to believe, that your whole designs are known, sirs, though it would seem all your names have not yet been obtained. My advice, therefore, is, that you instantly disperse to different parts of the country, or effect your escape to France. For you, Sir George, there is no chance but to retire to France at once, as the warrant is out."

"It most fortunately happens," said Sir George Barkley, "that a ship is on the point of sailing, and lies in the river here, under Dutch colours. Your grace will, of course, go back in her."

"No, sir," replied the duke, "I shall go, as I came, in an open boat. But you have no time to lose, for I know that suspicion is attached to this spot. In the first place, however, tell me what you have here? What new outrage is this that I have just seen attempted? If I had not entered at the very moment, cold and cowardly bloodshed would have taken place five minutes ago."

The duke's eyes were fixed upon Wilton as he spoke, and that gentleman, now seeing and understanding whom he had to deal with, put back the pistol into his belt, and advanced, saying,

"My lord, it is probable I owe my life to your interposition; and to you the circumstances in which I am placed will be explained in a moment. In your honour and integrity I have confidence, but the murderous purpose which you have just disappointed shows how well I was justified in doubting the intentions of the men by whom I was but now surrounded."

"Had you given them no offence, sir?" demanded the Duke of Berwick. "I can scarcely suppose that so dark and sanguinary an act would have been attempted, had you not given some cause. I saw the pistol levelled over Sir George Barkley's shoulder, while he seemed speaking to you: That I considered a most unfair act, and stopped it. But you must surely have done something to provoke such deeds. Good heavens! the Lady Helen Oswald!" he continued, as the elder lady advanced, with Laura clinging to her. "Madam, I fully thought you were at St. Germain. Can you tell us anything of this strange affair?"

"But too much, my lord," replied the lady, speaking eagerly; "but too much for the honour of these men, who have thought fit to violate every principle of justice and humanity. This young lady beside me has been dragged from her father's house by the orders of some of these gentlemen here present, beyond all doubt. This young gentleman has traced her hither, legally authorized to carry her back to her father; and, although he plighted his honour, and I pledged my word for him, that he would do nothing and say nothing to compromise any of the persons here present, they not only refused to let him depart, but have, as you saw yourself, most treacherously attempted to take his life while they were affecting to parley with him."

"Madam," said the Duke of Berwick, in a sorrowful tone, "I am deeply grieved and pained by all that has occurred. I confess I never felt despondency till I discovered that persons, pretending to be my father's friends, have made his cause the pretext for committing crimes and acts like these. I have already heard this young lady's story. All London is ringing with it; and the Earl of Aylesbury gave me this morning what

is probably the real explanation of the whole business. We will not enter upon it now, for there is no time to be spared. I feel and know—and I say it with bitter regret—that the deeds which these gentlemen have done, and the schemes which they have formed, will do more to injure the cause of their legitimate sovereign than the loss of twenty pitched battles. Sir George Barkley, I beg you would make no reply. Provide for your safety, sir. Your long services and sufferings are sufficient to make some atonement, and I will take care to conceal from the ears of the king, as far as possible, how you have misused his authority. Sir John Fenwick and the rest of you gentlemen must act as you think fit in regard to remaining in England or going to the Continent. But I am inclined to recommend to you the latter as the safest expedient. You will leave me to deal with this gentleman and his friends; for I need not tell you that I shall suffer no farther injury or insult to be offered to them. As to the personage who actually fired the pistol, I have merely to tell him, that, should I ever meet with him in circumstances where I have the power to act, I will undoubtedly punish him for his conduct this night."

The conspirators whispered for a moment among themselves; and at length Sir William Parkyns took a step forward, saying, "Are we to understand your grace that you will give us no assistance from the French forces under your command?"

"You are so to understand me," replied the Duke of Berwick, sternly: "I will not, sir, allude distinctly to the schemes that you have formed. But you are all well aware of them; and I tell you that I will give no aid, support, or countenance whatsoever either to such schemes or to the men who have formed them. At the same time, let me say, that, had there been, instead of such schemes, a general rising against the usurper—ay, or even a partial rising—nay, had I found twenty gentlemen in arms who needed my help in the straightforward, honest, upright intent of reseating their sovereign on his lawful throne, I would not have hesitated for a moment to land the troops under my command, and to have made a last, determined stand for honour and my father's rights. As it is, gentlemen, I have nothing farther to say, but take care of yourselves. I

shall remain here for a couple of hours, and then return with all speed to France."

"But does not your grace run a great risk," said Sir George Barkley, "in remaining so long?"

"I fear no risk, sir," said the Duke of Berwick, "in a righteous cause; and I do not wish that any man should say I was among the first to fly after I had warned others. You have all time, gentlemen, if you make use of it wisely. Some, I see, are taking advantage of my caution already. Sir George, you had better not be left behind in the race. You say there is a ship in the river: get to her, and be gone with all speed."

"But the captain will not sail without the Lady Helen," said the conspirator, with some hesitation: "she, it seems, has hired the vessel, and he refused this morning to go without her."

"That shall be no impediment," said the lady. "You may tell the captain that I set him free from his engagement, and I will give an order to his grace that the money may be paid which is the man's due. I told you before, Miss Villars had met with a severe accident, and I can neither quit her in such circumstances, nor go till she has recovered."

"Will you be kind enough, madam," replied Sir George, who always had thoughts for his own safety, "to write what you have said in these tablets? Here is a pencil."

The lady took the tablets and wrote; and, while she did so, two or three more of the conspirators dropped quietly out of the room. The Duke of Berwick at the same time advanced and said a few kindly words to Lady Laura, and spoke for a moment to Wilton with a familiar smile in regard to the risk he had run.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I was almost afraid that I should myself meet with a shot between you; for I saw you had your pistol cocked in your hand, and expected that the next fire would have been upon your side."

"I saw you knock his arm up, sir," replied Wilton; "and, though I was not aware of the name of the person who entered, I was not a little rejoiced to see, at least, one man of honour among them."

"Alas! sir," replied the duke, in a lower tone, "they are all, more or less, men of honour; but you must remember that there is a fanaticism in politics as well as

in religion, and men will think that a great end will justify any intermediate means. An oak, planted in the sand, sir, is as soon blown down as any other tree; and it is not every heart that is firm and strong enough constantly to support the honour that is originally implanted in it against the furious blasts of passion, interest, or ambition. You must remember, too, that those who are called Jacobites in this country have been hunted somewhat like wolves and wild beasts; and nothing drives zeal into fanaticism so soon as persecution."

"My lord, I am now ready to depart," said Sir George Barkley, approaching, "and doubt not to be able to make my views and motives good to my royal master."

"There is none, sir, who will abhor your views so much," replied the Duke of Berwick, proudly, "though he may applaud your motives. But you linger, Sir George. Can I do anything for you, or for those other gentlemen by the door?"

"Nothing, your grace," replied Sir George Barkley; "but we would fain see you provide for your own safety."

"Oh, no fear, no fear," replied the duke. "Gentlemen, good-night. I trust to hear, when in another land, that this bad affair has ended without evil consequences to yourselves. To the cause of your sovereign it may be a great detriment; but I pray God that no whisper of the matter may get abroad so as to affect his honour or bring suspicion on his name. Once more, good-night!"

Sir George Barkley bowed his head, and, followed by three others who had still lingered, quitted the room.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE came a pause after the conspirators were gone, and the Duke of Berwick gazed down upon the floor for a moment or two, as if thinking of what was next to be done.

"I shall be obliged to stop," he said at length, "for an hour or so, till my horses can feed, for they want refreshment sadly. To say the truth, I want some myself, if I can obtain it. I must go down to the stable

and see; for, though that is not exactly the place to procure food for a man, yet, in all probability, I shall get it nowhere else. I found the good master of the house, indeed, who is an old acquaintance of mine, hid in the farthest nook of his own stable, terrified out of his life, and assuring me that there would certainly be bloodshed up stairs."

"I will go down and look for him, your grace," replied Captain Byerly, coming more forward than he had hitherto done. "You will find no lack of provisions, depend upon it, in Monsieur Plessis's house."

"One moment, sir," said the duke, stopping him as he was going: "have I not seen your face before?"

"Long ago, sir, long ago," replied the captain. "I had the honour of commanding a troop, sir, in your regiment, during all that sad business in Ireland; Byerly is my name."

"I remember you well, sir," said the duke, "and your good services. Should we meet in France, I may be able to repay them, especially if your views are still of a military kind."

Byerly bowed his head without reply, but looked much gratified; and, while he proceeded to look for Plessis, the duke once more turned to the Lady Helen.

"I am sorry," he said, "to hear from your account, madam, that an accident has happened to Miss Villars. I have been so long absent from St. Germain myself, that it is not very long since I heard of her father's death. May I inquire if she is seriously hurt? for I should apprehend that, after what has occurred, persons holding our opinions would run considerable risks in this country, and be subjected to a persecution even more severe than heretofore."

The Lady Helen replied simply that her young friend was seriously hurt, and could not be removed; but she avoided carefully all reference to the nature of the injury she had received. The duke then turned the conversation to indifferent subjects, spoke cheerfully and gayly with Lady Laura and Wilton, and showed that calm sort of equanimity in circumstances of danger and difficulty which is partly a gift of nature, and partly an acquisition wrung from many perils and evils endured. Ere long, Byerly returned with Plessis, and food and wine were speedily procured. The tables were set in order, and the duke remained for about a quarter of an

hour refreshing himself, while Wilton and the two ladies continued to converse with him, delaying their departure at his request, lest any of the more unscrupulous conspirators should still be lingering in the neighbourhood.

Plessis, however, was evidently uneasy; and he did not scruple at length to express his fear, that, among all the events of that night, something might have happened to call the attention of the world at large upon what was going on in his dwelling.

Wilton's apprehensions in regard to the duke were somewhat of the same nature; for he remembered that Arden, the messenger, whom he now knew to be a thorough coward, had fled at the beginning of the whole business, and would most likely return, accompanied by as large a force as he could raise in the neighbourhood.

These fears he failed not to communicate to the Duke of Berwick; but that nobleman looked up with a gay smile, replying, "My good sir, my horse can go no farther. I rode one to death yesterday, and this one, which I bought in London, is already knocked up: if I must be caught like a rat in a rat-trap, as well here as anywhere."

"But will it not be better," said Wilton, "to accompany me and the Lady Laura to High Halstow, where you can instantly procure a horse? We must proceed thither on foot. I suppose you are not likely to be known in this part of the country, and my being with you may shield you from some danger."

"By no means a bad plan," said the duke, starting up; "let us go at once! When anything feasible is proposed we should lose no time in executing it."

Wilton was ready to depart, and Lady Laura was eager to do so. Every moment, indeed, of their stay made her feel fresh apprehensions lest that night should not be destined to close without some more painful event still than those which she had already witnessed.

She turned, however, to the Lady Helen before she went, and, with the peculiar sort of quiet grace which distinguished her, approached her gently and kissed her cheek, saying, "I can never thank you sufficiently, dear lady, for the kindness you have shown me, or the deliverance which I owe, in the first place, to you; and I thank you for the kindness you have shown me

here, as much as for my deliverance; for, if it had not been for the comfort it gave me, I do believe I should have sunk under the sorrow, and agitation, and terror which I felt when I was first brought hither. I hope and believe, however, that I do not leave you here never to see you again."

Lady Helen smiled, and laid her hand gently upon Wilton's arm.

"There is a link between him and me, lady," she said, "which can never be broken; and I shall often, I hope, hear of your welfare from him, for I trust that you will see him not infrequently."

Lady Laura blushed slightly, but she was not one to suffer any fine and noble feeling of the heart to be checked by such a thing as false shame.

"I trust I shall," she answered, raising her eyes to Wilton's face; "I trust I shall see him often, very often; and I shall never see him, certainly, without feelings of pleasure and gratitude. You do not know that this is the second time he has delivered me from great danger."

The Duke of Berwick smiled, not, indeed, at Lady Laura's words, but at the blush that came deeper and deeper into her cheek as she spoke. He made no observation, however, but changed the conversation by addressing Wilton: "Wherever I am to procure a horse under your good guidance, my dear sir," he said, "I must, I believe, take another name than my own; for, though Berwick and London are very distant places, yet there might be compulsory means found of bringing them unpleasantly together. You must call me, therefore, Captain Churchill, if you please; a name," he added, with a sigh, "which, very likely, the gentleman who now fills the throne of England might be very well inclined to bestow upon me himself. Lady Helen, I wish you good-night, and take my leave. Master Plessis, I leave the horse with you: he never was worth ten pounds, and now he's not worth five; so you may sell him to pay for my entertainment."

Bowing to the very ground from various feelings of respect, French, English, and Jacobite, Plessis took a candle and lighted the duke down stairs, while Wilton followed, accompanied by Laura and Captain Byerly. The outer door was then opened, and the whole party issued forth into the field which surrounded the house,

finding themselves suddenly in the utter darkness of a moonless, starless, somewhat foggy night.

From the little stone esplanade which we have mentioned, lay a winding road up to the gate in the walls, and along that Wilton and his companions turned their steps, keeping silence as they went, with the listening ear bent eagerly to catch a sound. It was not, indeed, a sense of general apprehension only which made Wilton listen so attentively; for, in truth, he had fancied at the very moment when they were issuing forth from the house, that he had heard a low murmur as if of people talking at some distance.

The same sound had met the ears of the Duke of Berwick, and had produced the same effect; but nothing farther was heard till they reached the gate, and Wilton's hand was stretched out to open it; when suddenly a loud "Who goes there?" was pronounced on the opposite side of the gate, and half a dozen men, who had been lying in the inside of the wall, surrounded the party on all sides.

Several persons now spoke at once. "Who goes there?" cried one voice again; but, at the same time, another exclaimed, "Call up the messenger, call up the messenger from the other gate."

These last words gave Wilton some satisfaction, though they were by no means pleasant to the ears of the Duke of Berwick.

The former, however, replied to the challenge, "A friend!" and instantly added, "God save King William!"

"God save King William!" cried one of the voices: "you cry that on compulsion, I've a notion. Pray who are you that cry 'God save King William?'"

"My name, sir, is Wilton Brown," replied the young gentleman, "private secretary to the Earl of Byerdale. Where is the messenger who came down with me? Be so good as to call him up immediately."

"Oh! you are the young gentleman who came down with the messenger, are you?" said one of the others: "he was in a great taking lest you should be murdered."

"It was not his fault," replied Brown, somewhat bitterly, "that I was not murdered; and, if it had not been for Captain Churchill and this other gentleman, who came to my assistance at the risk of their lives, I certainly should have been assassinated by the troop of Jacobites and smugglers among whom I fell."

The Duke of Berwick could not refrain from a low laugh at the description given of the persons whom they had just seen; but Wilton spoke loud again, in order to cover the somewhat ill-timed merriment of his companion, asking of the person who had replied, "Pray who are you, sir?"

"I am head constable of High Halstow," replied the man, "and I remained here with our party while Master Arden and the rest, with the soldiers from Hoo, went round to the other gate."

"Why did not the cowardly rascal go in by this gate himself," demanded Wilton, "instead of putting you, my friend, at the post of danger?"

"Ay, it was shabby enough of him," replied the man; "but I don't fear anything—not I."

"I'm afraid, my good fellows, it is too late," replied Wilton. "All the gang have got off near an hour ago. If that stupid messenger had known what he was about, this affair would have had a different result; but he ran away at the first shot that was fired. Have you sent for him?" he continued, after a moment's pause.

"Oh yes, sir, we've sent for him," said the man, "though it's not much use, if they are all gone, sir."

"Oh yes," replied Wilton, "you may as well make a good search among the grounds and in the hedges. It will say something for your activity, at all events. I shall go on to Halstow, but I wish one or two of you would just show us the way, and, when Arden comes up, tell him to come after me immediately. I have a great mind to put him under arrest, and send him up to the earl for his bad conduct."

The tone in which Wilton spoke, and the very idea of his arresting the arrestor of all men, and sending up the messenger of state as a common prisoner to London, proved so impressive with the personages he addressed, that they made not the slightest opposition to his purpose of proceeding, but sent one of their number to show him the way.

Accompanied, therefore, by Lady Laura, the Duke of Berwick, and Captain Byerly, Wilton proceeded as fast as possible up the lane. When they had gone about a hundred yards, however, he said, "Captain Churchill, will you have the kindness to give the lady your arm? I will follow you somewhat more slowly, for I want to speak a few words to this fellow Arden. He must not

see you if it can be avoided," he added, in a low tone; "and I think I hear him coming."

It was, indeed, as Wilton had imagined. Arden had come round with all speed, and joined the head constable of High Halstow, demanding eagerly, "Where is Mr. Brown?"

"He is gone on," replied the constable, "with the other gentlemen; and a mighty passion he is in, too, at you, Mr. Arden. He vows that you left him to be murdered, and that he would have been murdered, too, if it had not been for that Captain Churchill that is with him."

"Captain Churchill!" cried the messenger; "Captain Churchill! Why, Captain Churchill was sick in bed yesterday morning, to my certain knowledge!"

After a moment's thought, however, he concluded that the person who chose to assume that name might be Lord Sherbrooke, and he asked, "What sort of a man was he? Was he a slight young gentleman, about my height?"

"Oh bless you, no," replied the constable. "There wasn't one of them that was not three or four inches taller than you."

"Captain Churchill!" said the messenger; "Captain Churchill!" and he added, in a lower voice, "I'll bet my life this is some d—d Jacobite, who has imposed himself upon this foolish boy for Captain Churchill. I'll be after them and see."

Thus saying, he set off at full speed after Wilton and his party, and reached them within a minute after that gentleman had dropped behind.

"Is that you, Mr. Arden?" demanded Wilton, as he came up. "Stop a moment, I wish to speak to you."

"And I wish to go on and see who you've got there, sir," said Arden, in a somewhat saucy tone, at the same time endeavouring to pass Wilton.

"Stop, sir," cried the young gentleman, catching him by the collar. "Do you mean to say that you will now disobey my orders, after having left me to provide for my own security, with the dastardly cowardice that you have displayed? Did not the earl direct you to obey me in everything?"

"I will answer it all to the earl," replied the man, in an insolent tone. "If he chooses to put me under a boy, I do not choose to be collared by one. Let me go, Mr. Brown, I say."

"I order you, sir," said Brown, without loosing his hold, "to go instantly back, and aid the people in searching the grounds of that house! Now let me see if you will disobey!"

"I will search here first, though," said the man. "By —, I believe that's Sir George Barkley on before there. He's known to be in England. Let me go, Mr. Brown, I say, or worse will come of it!" and he put his hand to his belt as if seeking for a pistol.

Without another word, Wilton instantly knocked him down with one blow of his clinched fist, and at the same moment he called aloud, "Captain Byerly! and you, constable, who are showing the way; come back here, and take this man into custody, and bear witness that he refuses to search for the Jacobites in the way I order him. Constable, I shall want you to take him to town in custody this night. I will show you my warrant for what I do when we get to the inn."

The two persons whom he addressed came back instantly at his call; and, when the messenger rose—considerably crestfallen from Wilton's sudden application to measures which he had not expected—he found himself collared by two strong men, and led along unwillingly upon the road he had before been treading.

"Do not let him chatter, captain," Wilton whispered to Captain Byerly as he passed on: and then, immediately walking forward, he joined the Duke and the Lady Laura. Byerly, who understood what he was about, kept the messenger at some distance behind; but, nevertheless, some sharp words passing between them reached Wilton's ear during the first quarter of an hour of their journey; then came a dogged silence; but at length the voice of Byerly was again heard, exclaiming, "Mr. Brown, Mr. Arden says, that, if you will overlook what has passed, he will go back and do as you order."

"I shall certainly not look over the business," replied Brown, aloud, "unless he promises not only to obey my orders at present, but also to make a full apology to me to-morrow."

"He says he will do what you please, sir," replied Byerly; and Wilton, turning back, heard the sullen apologies of the messenger.

"Mr. Arden," he said, "you have behaved extremely ill, well knowing, as you do know, that you were placed

entirely under my orders. However, I shall pardon your conduct both upon the first occasion, and in regard to the present business, if you do now exactly as you are told. By your running away at the time you ought to have come forward to assist me, you have lost an opportunity of serving the state in a manner which does not occur every day. In regard to the gentleman who has gone on, and whom you were foolish enough to think Sir George Barkley, I pledge you my honour that such is not the case. Sir George Barkley cannot be less than twenty years older than he is, and may be thirty."

"He's not Captain Churchill, though," replied the man, doggedly.

"Do not begin to speak impertinently again, sir," said Wilton, in a sharp tone. "But go back, as I before ordered, with the constable: you know nothing of who that gentleman is, and my word ought to be sufficient for you, when I tell you that he has this very night not only aided me in setting free the Lady Laura, but absolutely saved my life at the risk of his own from the very gang of Jacobites in whose hands you most negligently left me. To drop this subject, however, I have one more caution to give you," he added, in a lower voice. "It is Lord Sherbrooke's wish that you should say not one syllable in regard to his share in the events of this night."

"Ay, sir, but I ought to ascertain whether he be safe or not. I know he has his wild pranks as well as most young men; but still one ought to know that he's safe."

"If my word for you is not sufficient on that score," replied Wilton, "you will find him at the house to which I directed you to go. It is now clear of all its obnoxious tenants, and, I doubt not, Lord Sherbrooke will speak to you for a moment, if you wish it."

Thus saying, Wilton turned upon his heel, and, walking quickly onward, soon overtook the Duke of Berwick and Lady Laura. They were now not far from High Halstow, and the rest of the way was soon accomplished. But, as they passed into the door of the public-house, Captain Byerly, who came last, touched Wilton on the arm and whispered, "Do you know that fellow is following you?"

"No, indeed," answered Wilton: "what can be done?"

"Go and speak to the master of the house," said Byerly, quickly. "I will wait here in the door, and take care he does not come in. The landlord will find means to get the duke away by the back."

"I dare not trust him," replied Wilton, in the same low tone. "I feel sure he has betrayed me once to-night already."

"If he did," answered Byerly, hastily, "it was because he thought you on the wrong side of the question. He's a well-known man hereabout, and you may trust him with any secrets on that side."

Wilton followed the Duke of Berwick and Laura as fast as possible, and found the landlord showing them into a small sanded parlour on the left hand, after passing a door which swung to and fro with a pulley.

"Come in here, landlord," he said, as he passed; "come in, and shut the door. Have you a horse saddled?" he continued.

"I have one that can be saddled in a minute," said the landlord, looking first at Berwick and then at Wilton.

"Have you any back way," continued Wilton, "by which this gentleman can get out of the town without going through the street?"

"Ay have I," answered the man; "through our stable, through the garden, lead the horse down the steps, and then away to Stroud. There's no missing the way."

"Well, then, sir," said Wilton, grasping the duke's hand, "this is your only chance for safety. That rascally messenger has followed us to the door, and, doubtless, if there be any magistrates in the neighbourhood, or constables left in the place, we shall have them down upon us in ten minutes."

"Come with me, my lord, come with me!" cried the landlord, bursting into energy in a moment. "I know who you are well enough. But they sha'n't catch you here, I warrant you. Come into the stable: there's not a minute to be lost; for there's old Sir John Bulrush, and Parson Jeffreys, who's a magistrate too, drinking away up at the rectory till the people come back from Plessis's house." Berwick lingered not; but, taking a quick leave of Lady Laura, and shaking Wilton's hand, he followed the landlord from the room.

Laura and Wilton stood silent for a minute or two, listening to every sound, and calculating how long it might

be before the horse was saddled and the duke upon his way. Before they imagined it possible, however, the landlord returned, saying, in a low voice, but with an air of joyful triumph, "He is gone; and, if they were after him this minute, the way through my garden gives him the start by half a mile."

"And now, landlord," said Wilton, "send off some one on horseback to get us a conveyance from Stroud to carry this young lady on the way to London. I suppose such a thing is not to be procured here."

"That there is not," replied the landlord; "and, unless I send your horse, sir, or the messenger's, or the captain's, I have none to go."

"Send mine, then, send mine," replied Wilton. "But here comes Captain Byerly himself, bringing us news, doubtless."

"No news," answered Byerly, "except that the rascal went up the street, and I followed him to the door of the parsonage. Your parson's a magistrate, isn't he, Wicks?"

The landlord gave a nod; and Byerly continued, "By Jove, I'll be off, then, for I'm not fond of magistrates, and he'll be down here soon."

"You had better bid them bring down a chaise for the gentleman and lady from Stroud," said the landlord. "That will save me from sending some one on the gentleman's horse."

"No, no, landlord, no, no!" answered Byerly; "you are not up to a stratagem. Send your ostler with me on Mr. Brown's horse. We'll go clattering along the street like the devil, if we can but get off before the justices come down, and they'll take it into their wise noddles that one of us is the gentleman who has just gone. Come, Wicks, there's no time to spare. We shall meet again. Mr. Brown, good-night, good-night. I shall tell the colonel that we've done the business much more tidily than I could have expected it." And, without farther ceremony, he quitted the room.

Another pause ensued, during which but a few words passed between Wilton and Lady Laura, who sat gazing thoughtfully into the fire. Wilton stood by the window and listened, thinking he heard some distant sounds as of persons speaking, and loud tongues at the farther end of the street.

A minute after, however, there came the clatter of

horses' feet upon the pavement of the yard; and, in another instant, Byerly's voice was heard, saying, "Come, put to your spurs," and two horses galloped away from the inn as hard as they could go.

CHAPTER V.

It is wonderful how scenes of danger and difficulty—it is wonderful how scenes of great excitement of any kind, indeed—draw heart to heart, and bind together, in bonds indissoluble, the beings that have passed through them side by side. They are never to be broken, those bonds; for between us and the persons with whom we have trod such paths there is established a partnership in powerful memories, out of which we can never withdraw our interest. But it is not alone that they are permanent which renders them different from all lighter ties: it is that they bring us closer, more entirely to each other; that, instead of sharing the mere thoughts of what we may call the outward heart, we enter into the deepest recesses, we see all the hidden treasures, we know the feelings and the ideas that are concealed from the general eye of day; we are no longer kept in the porch, but admitted into the temple itself.

Wilton was left alone in the small parlour of the inn with Lady Laura; and, as soon as he heard the horses' feet gallop away, he turned towards her with a glad smile. But, when he did so, he found that her beautiful eyes were now fixed upon him with a gaze deep and intense; a gaze which showed that the whole thoughts and feelings of her heart were abstracted from everything else on earth, to meditate on all that she owed to him, and on the things alone that were connected therewith.

She dropped her eyes as soon as they met his, but that one look was overpowering to the man who now certainly loved her as deeply as it is possible for man to love woman. Many a difficulty and doubt had been removed from his mind by the words which Lord Sherbrooke had spoken while affecting to seek for the warrant; and there were vague hopes of high destinies in

his heart. But it must be acknowledged, that, if there had been none, he would have given way even as he did.

He advanced towards her, he took her hand in his, he pressed it between both his own, he kissed it tenderly, passionately, and more than once. Lady Laura lifted up her eyes to his face, not blushing, but very pale.

"Oh, Wilton," she said, "what do I not owe you!" and she burst into tears. The words, the look, the very tears themselves, were all more than sufficient encouragement.

"You owe me nothing, Laura," Wilton said. "Would to God that I had such an opportunity of serving you as to make me forgive in myself the rash, the wild, the foolish feelings that, in spite of every struggle and every effort, have grown up in my heart towards you, and have taken possession of me altogether. But oh, Laura, I cannot hope that you will forgive them; I cannot forgive them myself. They can—I know they can—only produce anguish and sorrow to myself, and excite anger, perhaps indignation, in you."

"Oh no, no, no, Wilton!" she cried, eagerly, "not that, not that! neither anger, nor indignation, nor anything like it; but grief—and yet not grief either—oh no, not grief! Some apprehension, perhaps some anxiety both for your happiness and my own. But if you do feel all you say, as I believe and am sure you do, such feelings, so far as depends upon me, should produce you no anguish and no pain; but I must not conceal from you that I very much fear my father would never—"

An increasing noise at the door of the house broke in upon what Laura was saying. There were cries, and loud tongues, and vociferations of many kinds; among which, one voice was heard exclaiming, "Go round to the back door!"

Another person, apparently just under the window, shouted, "I am very sure that was not the man!" and then added, "Bring out my horse, however; bring out my horse! I'll catch them, and raise the hue and cry as I go!"

At the same time there were other voices speaking in the passage, and one loud, sonorous tongue exclaiming, "Ah, Master Wicks, Master Wicks! I thought you would get yourself into a scrape one of these days,

Master Wicks;" to which the low, deep voice of the landlord was heard, replying,

"I have got myself into no scrape, your reverence. I don't know what you mean or what you want. Search? You may search any part of the house you like; I don't care! If there were twenty people here, I have nothing to do with it. I can't refuse gentlemen to put up their horses, or to give them a bowl of punch or a mug of ale. There, sir, there's a gentleman and lady in that parlour. Pray, sir, walk in, and see whether they are Jacobites, or smugglers, or what nots."

As these words sounded close to them, Lady Laura sunk down again into her chair; and Wilton, drawing a little back, hesitated for a moment whether he should go out himself and notice what was taking place or not. The question, however, was decided for him by the door of the room being thrown suddenly open, and the rotund person of the clergyman of the parish, bearing, in the "fair, round belly, with fat capon lined," the sign and symbol affixed by Shakspeare to the "justice of peace," entered the apartment. He gazed with some surprise upon two persons who, notwithstanding some slight disarray in their apparel from all the events which had lately taken place, still bore the appearance of belonging to the highest class of society.

The reverend justice had entered the room with a look of pompous importance, which was diminished, but not entirely done away, by evident surprise at the appearance of Laura and Wilton. The young gentleman, however, was not particularly well pleased with the interruption, and still less with this domineering air, which he hastened to extinguish as fast as possible.

"Pray, sir, what do you want?" he demanded, addressing the magistrate, "and who are you?"

"Nay, sir," answered the reverend gentleman, "what I want is to know who you are. I have here information that there is in this house a notorious Jacobite malefactor, returned from beyond seas contrary to law, named Sir George Barkley. I am a magistrate for the county, sir, and I have information, I say."

"Upon oath, sir?" demanded Wilton.

"No, sir, not upon oath, not upon oath," replied the clergyman, "but, what is quite as good, upon the word

of a messenger of state, sir; of Mr. Arden, the council messenger, sir."

"Landlord!" exclaimed Wilton, seeing the face of Wicks among several others at the door, "be so good as to bring Mr. Arden, the messenger, here. Bring him by the collar, if he does not come willingly. I will be answerable for the consequences."

The magistrate looked astounded; but the landlord came forward with a grin and a low bow, saying, "The gentleman has mounted his horse, sir, and ridden after those other two gentlemen who went away a quarter of an hour ago; but, Lord bless you, sir," he added, with a sly look, "he'll never catch them. Why, his horse is quite lame."

"The fact is," replied Wilton, "this man Arden did not choose to come in here, as he well knew I should certainly send him to London in custody, to answer for his bad conduct this night. Sir, I beg to inform you that I am private secretary to the Earl of Byerdale, and that this young lady, the daughter of the Duke of Gaveston, having been carried off from the terrace near his house by agents, it is supposd, of the late King James II., for the purpose of drawing over her father to support that faction, the duke, who is pleased to repose some trust in me, authorized me, by this paper under his hand, to search for and deliver the lady, while, at the same time, the Earl of Byerdale intrusted me with this warrant for the purposes herein mentioned, and put this man Arden, the messenger, under my direction and control. At the very first sight of danger the messenger ran away, and, by so doing, left me with every chance of my being murdered by a gang of evil-disposed persons in this neighbourhood. On his return, with a large body of constables and some military, to the house of a person who is named Plessis, I understand he refused to obey the orders I gave him, and followed me hither, alleging that one of two gentlemen who had come to my assistance, and to whom I owe my own life and the liberation of this lady, was the well-known personage called Sir George Barkley. Those gentlemen both departed as soon as they saw us in safety, and I am ready to swear that neither of them was Sir George Barkley; the person this messenger mistook for him being a young gentleman of four or five-and-twenty years of age."

"Phoo!" cried the magistrate, with a long sort of whistling sound; "Sir George Barkley is a man of fifty, with a great gash on his cheek. I remember him very well when—"

But then, seeming to recollect himself, he paused abruptly, adding, "But, pray, who was this young gentleman who so came to your assistance, sir?"

"I never saw him in my life before," replied Wilton, "and the name he gave himself was Captain Churchill."

"To be sure, to be sure!" cried the clergyman; "a younger brother of my Lord of Marlborough's."

"Some relation of the Marlborough family, I believe," replied Wilton, dryly. "However, I do not know the earl's brother myself, nor am I aware whether there is any other Captain Churchill or not; but this was a young gentleman evidently under thirty, and, consequently, he could not be Sir George Barkley."

"I have searched the house high and low," said the voice of another stout gentleman, who now pushed his way into the room, "and can find nothing but a sick cat up in the garret."

"Ay, ay, Brother Bulrush, ay, ay," replied the clergyman; "ay, ay, it is all explained. It is all that messenger's fault, and he has now run away again. This worshipful young gentleman is secretary to the Earl of Byerdale, the great minister; and I'm sure we are both very sorry to have given him any trouble."

"You have given me no trouble at all, gentlemen," replied Wilton; "and I have only to beg, that, if the messenger return after I have gone, you will send him up to town to-morrow morning in the custody of a constable. I shall not fail to report to Lord Byerdale your activity and zeal upon the present occasion; which, indeed, may be of some service, as I am sorry to say that serious remonstrances have been made regarding this part of the country, it being intimated that smuggling, coining, and even treasonable meetings and assemblies, are more common here than in any other part of Kent."

"Indeed, sir," replied one of the justices, somewhat alarmed; "indeed, it is not our fault. They are an unruly set, they are a most unruly set. We do the best we may, but cannot manage them. But, sir, the young lady looks fatigued and tired. Had she not better come up to the parsonage, and rest there for this night? She

shall have a good warm bed, and Mrs. Jeffreys, who is a motherly sort of woman, will be quite delighted to take care of her ladyship."

"Or Lady Bulrush either, I am sure," said the other magistrate. "The manor-house is but half a mile."

Wilton turned to Laura to inquire what she thought fit to do; but the young lady, not very much prepossessed in favour either of the motherly sort of clergyman's wife or the more elevated Lady Bulrush, by the appearance and manners of their marital representatives, leaned both her hands upon Wilton's arm, feeling implicit confidence in him alone, and security with him only; and, raising her eyes imploringly to his face, she said, in a low voice, "Indeed, indeed, Wilton, I would rather not; I would rather go home to Beaufort House at once, to relieve my poor father's anxiety."

"In truth," he replied, in the same tone, "I cannot but think it would be better for you to obtain a night's rest if you can, rather than to take a long journey after such terrible agitation as you have undergone."

"Do not ask me; nay, do not ask me," she said; and then turning to the magistrates, who were conferring together, and settling in their own mind that a match was undoubtedly to take place between the Lady Laura and the Earl of Byerdale's secretary, she added, "I am very anxious to return to my father, gentlemen; and, as a carriage has been already sent for from Stroud, I would certainly prefer going on to-night. I will very gratefully," she added—her apprehensions of some new dangers occurring at the little public-house coming back upon her mind—"I will very gratefully accept the shelter of the parsonage, till the carriage arrives from Stroud, if by so doing I shall not keep the lady up beyond her usual hour."

"Oh, not at all, madam, not at all," replied the clergyman: "Mrs. Jeffreys will be delighted to see you. Let us lose no time. Wicks, when the carriage comes, send it up to my house. Ma'am, I will show your ladyship the way."

Laura, however, still clung to Wilton's arm as her best support; and, following the clergyman together, they proceeded to the parsonage, escorted by a number of footmen, farming-servants, and people collected in haste, who had come to the examination of Wicks's house. On their arrival they were ushered into a tall

dining-room with carved panels, the atmosphere of which was strongly imbued with the mingled odour of punch and tobacco, an unsavoury but, at that time, very ordinary perfume in the dining-room of almost every country gentleman. The mistress of the mansion, however, proved, in point of manners and appearance, considerably superior to her lord and master, and did all that she could to render this beautiful girl, cast for the time on her hospitality, as comfortable as the circumstances would admit.

It is not to be denied, indeed, that both Wilton and Laura could at that time have very well spared the presence of any other persons; for there were feelings in the hearts of both which eagerly longed for voice. There was much to be told; there was much to be explained; there was much to be determined between them. There was, indeed, the consciousness of mutual love, which is no slight blessing and comfort under any circumstances; but that very consciousness produced the longing thirst for farther communion which nothing but love can give.

When all has been said, indeed; when the whole heart has been poured forth; when the first intense feelings of a new passion have worn away, or, having grown familiar to our bosoms, surprise us no longer, we can better bear the presence of others; for a look, an occasional word, even a tone, will convey to the mind of those we love all that we could wish to say. But when love is fresh, and every feeling produced thereby is new and wonderful to our hearts; when we make hourly discoveries of new sensations in our own bosoms, and neither know how to express them nor how to conceal them, the presence of others—cold, indifferent, strange—is no slight punishment and privation.

Laura endeavoured, as far as possible, to keep down such feelings, but yet she could not drive them from her bosom. The minutes seemed long, tedious, and heavy: from time to time she would fall into a fit of musing; from time to time she would answer wide from the question; but it fortunately so happened that the events which had lately occurred, and her anxiety to rejoin her father, were causes sufficient to account for greater inequalities of conduct than these.

In the mean time, Wilton was subjected to the same, or even greater pain, from the impossibility of saying

all that he could have wished to say, and he had, moreover, to contend both against the civility of his landlord individually, and the curiosity of the two magistrates conjointly, who did not fail, during the time that he remained, both to press him to eat and drink, in spite of all denials and remonstrances, and to torment him with questions, many of them frivolous in the extreme, not only concerning the events in which he had been lately engaged, but also in regard to everything that was taking place in London.

Nearly two hours passed in this unpleasant manner ; but at length the joyful sound of carriage wheels announced that the man who had been sent to Stroud had returned. Laura was eager to set out ; but the motherly care of good Mrs. Jeffreys detained her for some time longer, by insisting upon wrapping her warmly up in cloaks, and mantles, and hoods, to guard against the cold of the wintry night.

At length all was ready ; and Wilton led her down to the carriage, which, it seems, had been procured with difficulty ; the machines called post-chaises being not so common in those days as they became within fifty years afterward. The two magistrates stood bowing low to the young lady as she entered the tall, long-backed, but really not uncomfortable vehicle. The landlord of the inn, too, and his ostler, were there ; and Wilton failed not to pay them liberally for the services they had rendered. He then briefly gave his own address and that of the duke to his reverend entertainer, and entered the carriage beside the Lady Laura with a heart beating high with the hope and expectation of saying all and hearing all that the voice of love could speak.

CHAPTER VI.

For once—perhaps the only time that ever such a thing happened in this world—hope and expectation were not disappointed. Wilton seated himself by the side of Laura, the postillion cracked his whip, which was then as common in England as it is now in France, the horses went forward, and the wheels, roll-

ing through the little street of High Halstow, were soon upon the road to Stroud.

There was a silent pause between Wilton and Laura for some minutes, neither of them could very well tell why; for both of them had been most anxious for the opportunity, and both of them had been not a little grieved that their former conversation had been interrupted. The truth is, however, that very interruption had rendered the conversation difficult to renew; for love—sometimes the most impudent of all powers—is at other times the most shy and bashful. Wilton, however, found that he must not let the silence go on much longer, and he gently took Laura's hand in his, saying, perhaps somewhat abruptly,

"Dear Laura, everything that we have to say to each other must be said now."

"Oh, Wilton!" was her only reply; but she left her hand in his, and he went on.

"You had just spoken, when we were interrupted," he said, "words that made me very, very happy, though they were coupled with expressions of fear and apprehension. I have nothing to tell you, dear Laura, that can altogether remove those fears and apprehensions; but I can say something, perhaps, that may mitigate them. You are not aware of the circumstances in which I have had the happiness of seeking you and finding you this night; but you doubtless heard me mention that it was your father who intrusted me with the search; and surely, dear Laura, that must show no slight trust and confidence on his part; may I add? no slight regard."

"Oh, I am sure he feels that for you," replied Laura, "quite sure! but yet such a trust shows, indeed, far more regard than I knew he entertained, and that gives me some degree of hope. Still I cannot judge, Wilton, unless I had seen the manner in which my father did it. You must tell me all that has been done and said in this unfortunate business: you must tell me everything that has occurred. Will you? and I will tell you, upon my word, exactly what the impression is that it all makes upon my mind."

Wilton had not spoken of their love; Laura had not mentioned the subject either; but they had done fully as much, they had referred to it as a thing known and acknowledged. Wilton had recalled words that had

made him very happy, and Laura had spoken of hopes which could only apply to her union with himself.

He now, however, told her all that had occurred, briefly though clearly. He dwelt not, indeed, on his own feelings during the painful events lately past: but the few words that he did speak on that subject were of such a kind as to show Laura instantly the distress and anxiety which her disappearance had caused him, the agony that he had suffered when he thought that she was lost to him for ever. The whole of her father's conduct, as displayed by Wilton, seemed to her strange and unaccountable: and well it might do so! for her lover told her the terrible state of mind in which the duke had been at first, and yet he did not think fit to explain, in any degree, the causes which he felt sure had prevented her father from joining in the search himself. Notwithstanding all that had taken place in the presence of Laura, he judged it far better to avoid any mention of the unfortunate hold which Sir John Fenwick had obtained over the duke, by drawing him in to take a share, however small, in the great Jacobite conspiracy of the day.

Laura, then, was greatly surprised at all she heard; and that Wilton should be employed in the affair seemed to her not the least strange part of the whole business. An expression of this surprise, however, induced Wilton to add, what he still in some degree feared, and had long hesitated to say,

"I do not, indeed, believe, dear Laura," he said, "that your father would have trusted me so entirely in this business, if it had not been for some words concerning myself which were spoken to him by Lord Byerdale when I was not present. They were repeated to me afterward by Sherbrooke, and were to the effect that, although, in consequence of some of the late unfortunate disturbances in the country—the rebellions, the revolutions, the changes of dynasties that have happened within the last twenty years—it was necessary to conceal my birth and station, yet my blood was as pure and ancient as that of your father himself. This, I think, made a change in all his feelings towards me."

Wilton felt the small rounded fingers of Laura's hand rest for a single instant more heavily in his own, while she drew a deep long breath, as if a weight had been taken from her bosom.

"Oh, Wilton!" she said, "it makes all the difference in his views. It will make all the difference in our fate. You know that it would make none to me; that the man I loved would be loved under any circumstances of fortune or station, but with him it is the first, the greatest consideration. There may be difficulties still; there may be opposition; for, as you know, I am an only child, and my father thinks that nothing can equal what I have a right to expect; but still that opposition will vanish when he sees that my happiness is concerned, if the great and predominant prejudice of his education is not arrayed against us. Oh! Wilton, Wilton, your words have made me very happy."

Her words certainly made Wilton happy in return; indeed, most happy. His fate had suddenly brightened: from all that was dark and cheerless, from a situation in which the sweet, early dream of love itself but rendered everything that was sombre, painful, and distressing in his course, more gloomy, more bitter, more full of despair, it had changed to the possession and the hope of all that the most sanguine imagination could have pictured of glad, and joyful, and happy, to the prospect of wealth and station, to the hope of obtaining the being that he loved best on earth, and to the certainty of possessing her early, her first, her warm, her full affection.

Had Wilton given way to what he felt at that moment, he would have clasped her to his heart and sealed the covenant of their love on the sweet lips that gave him such assurance of happiness. But he remembered that she was there alone with him, in full confidence, under the safeguard of all his best feelings, and he would not for the world have done one thing that in open day could have called the colour into her cheek. He loved her deeply, fully, and nobly; and though, under other circumstances, he might scarcely have hesitated, he now forbore. But again and again he pressed his lips upon her hand, and thanked her again and again for all she had said, and for all the hopes and glad tidings that her words implied.

Their conversation then turned to love, and to their feelings towards each other. How could it be helped? And Wilton told her all; how the passion had grown upon him, how he had struggled hard against it, how not even despair itself had been able to crush it; how it had

gone on and increased in spite of himself; how intense, how ardent it had become. He could not tell her exactly, at least he would not, what he had felt on her account when he believed that she was likely to become the bride of Lord Sherbrooke; but he told her fully, ay, and eloquently, what agony of mind he had endured when he thought of seeing her give her hand to any other man, without affording him an apparent chance of even making an effort for himself. In short, he gave her the whole picture of his personal feelings; and there is no woman that is not gratified at seeing such a picture displayed when she is herself the object. But to a mind such as that of Lady Laura, and to feelings such as were in her bosom, the tale offered higher and nobler sources of delight. The love, the deep love which she felt, and which was now acknowledged to her own heart, required every such assurance of full and ample return as his words afforded, to render it confident and happy. But, from the display of his feelings which he now made, she felt, she saw, she knew that she was loved as she could wish to be; loved as fully, as intensely, as deeply as she herself loved; loved with all those feelings, high, and bright, and sweet, which assured her, beyond all question, that the affection which she had inspired would be permanent as well as ardent.

Wilton won her, too, to speak upon the same subject as himself, though, of course, he could not expect her to dwell upon what she felt in the same manner. There was a great difference: on the one hand, all the sensations of his heart towards her were boldly avowed and minutely detailed; the history of his love was told in language straightforward, eager, and powerful. The love of her bosom, on the contrary, was shadowed forth rather than spoken, admitted rather than told; her feelings were referred to, but not depicted.

"You make me glad, Wilton," she said, "by telling me all this; for I almost feared—and was teasing my own heart about it at the rectory—lest I should have done the unwomanly thing of loving first; I will not call it being too easily won; for I should certainly despise the woman who thought anything necessary to win her, when once she really loved, farther than the conviction of her lover's sincerity, and honour, and nobility of spirit. But yet I thought that even you might somewhat despise me if you found that I had loved you be-

fore you loved me. And yet, Wilton," she added, after a momentary pause, "I cannot help thinking that, even if it had been so, I should have been more pardonable than many people, on account of the very great services you have rendered me at various times, and the perils you have encountered in my behalf. How could I help loving a man who has twice risked his life for me?"

"Oh, dear Laura," replied Wilton, "those services have been very small ones, and not worthy of your naming. I certainly did strive to conceal my love," he continued; "but I believe that, let us struggle against our feelings as we will, there are always some signs and tokens which show to the eyes of those we love—that which is passing in regard to themselves within the most secret places of our bosom. There is a cabalistic language in love, Laura, unknown to any but those who really do love, but learned in a moment when the mighty secret is communicated to our hearts. We speak it to each other without knowing it, dear Laura, and we are understood without an effort if there be sympathy between us."

In such conversation wore the night away as the carriage wended slowly onward. Two changes of horses were required to carry Laura and her lover back to the metropolis, and bells had to be rung, ostlers and postillions wakened, horses brought slowly forth, and many another tedious process to be gone through, which had brought the night nearly to a close before the carriage crossed the wide extent of Blackheath, and passed through a small part of the town of Greenwich, which had then never dreamed of the ambitious project that it has since achieved, of climbing up that long and heavy hill.

Wilton and Laura had sufficient matter for conversation during the whole way: for, when they had said all that could be said of the present and the past, there still remained the future to be considered; and Laura entreated her lover by no precipitate eagerness to call down upon them opposition, which, if it showed itself of a vehement kind at first, might only strengthen instead of diminishing with time. She besought him to let everything proceed as it had hitherto done, till his own fate was fully ascertained, and any doubt of his birth and station in society was entirely removed.

"Till that is the case," she said, "to make any display of our feelings towards each other might only bring great pain upon us both. My father might require me not to see you, might positively forbid our thinking of each other; whereas, were all difficulties on that one point removed, he might only express a regret that fortune had not been more favourable to you, or require a delay, to make him certain of our sincere and permanent attachment. After that point is made clear, let us be open as the day with him. In the mean while, he must receive you as a friend who has rendered him the greatest and deepest of services; and I shall ever receive you, Wilton, I need not tell you, as the only dear and valued friend that I possess."

"But suppose, dear Laura," said Wilton, "suppose I were to see you pressed to marry some one else; suppose I were to see some suiter in every respect qualified to hope for and expect your hand—"

"You do not doubt me, Wilton?" said Lady Laura.

"Oh no!" he replied. "Not for a moment, Laura. But it would be very painful."

"It would be so to us both," she replied; "but I would take care that the pain should soon be brought to an end. Depend upon it, Wilton, it will be better as I say; let us not, in order to avoid uncertain pains and dangers, run into certain ones."

Wilton at once yielded to her views, and promised to be entirely guided by her opinion.

The day broke upon them just as they were passing through London on their way to Beaufort House; but the night which had just passed had left them with changed feelings in many respects. It had been one of those eventful periods which come in, from time to time, like revolutions in states, to change entirely the very constitution of our whole thoughts and feelings, to give a new character and entirely new combinations to the strange microcosm within us. That great change had been effected in Laura by that which is the great first mover of a woman's destinies. She loved and had avowed her love; she was married in spirit to the man beside her, and she felt that, to a heart like hers, eternity itself could not dissolve the tie which had that night been voluntarily established between them. She viewed not such things as many, nay, most other women view them; she looked not on such engagements, she

looked not on such affections, as things to be taken up and dropped, to be worn to-day in the gloss of novelty, and cast away to-morrow like a fretted garment; she judged not that it was the standing before the altar, and receiving the ring upon her finger, and promising to wear out earthly existence with another human being, that constitutes the union which must join woman to the man of her heart. But she regarded the avowal of mutual love, the promise of unchanging affection, as a bond binding for ever: as, in fact, what we have called it, *the marriage of the spirit*: as a thing never to be done away, which no time could break, no circumstances dissolve: it was the wedding of—for ever. The other, the more earthly union, might be dear in prospect to her heart, gladdening to all her hopes, mingled with a thousand bright dreams of human joy, and tenderness, and sweet domestic peace; but if circumstances had separated her the next hour from Wilton for ever, she would have felt that she was still his wife in heart, and ended life with the hope of meeting him she had ever loved in heaven. To take such ties upon herself, then, was, in her estimation, no light thing; and, as we have said, the period, the short period of that night, was sufficient to effect a great, a total change in all the thoughts and feelings of her bosom.

The change in Wilton was of a different kind, but it was also very great. It was an epoch in man's destiny. His mind was naturally manly, powerful, and decided; but he was very young. The events of that night, however, swept away everything that was youthful or light from his character for ever. He had acted with vigour, and power, and determination, among men older, better tried, and more experienced than himself. He had taken a decided and a prominent part in a scene of strife, and danger, and difficulty, and he had (to make use of that most significant though schoolboy phrase) "placed himself." His character had gone through the ordeal: without any previous preparation, the iron had been hardened into steel; and if any part had remained up to that moment soft or weak, the softness was done away, the weakness no longer existed.

CHAPTER VII.

IF we were poets or fabulists, and could invest inanimate objects with all the qualities and feelings of animate ones ; if, with all the magic of old Æsop, we could make pots and kettles talk, and endue barn-door fowls with the spirit of philosophy, we should be tempted to say that the great gates of Beaufort House, together with the stone Cupids on the tops of the piers, ay, and the vases of carved flowers which stood between those Cupids, turned up the nose as the antiquated, ungilt, dusty, and somewhat tattered vehicle containing the Lady Laura Gaveston and Wilton Brown rolled up.

The postboy got off his horse ; Wilton descended from the vehicle, and applied his hand eagerly to the bell ; and Laura, who had certainly thought no part of the journey tedious, did now think the minutes excessively long till the gates should be thrown open. In truth, the hour was still an early one ; the morning cold and chilly, with a gray, biting east wind, making the whole scene appear as if it were looked at through ground glass ; and neither the porter nor the porter's wife had thought it expedient to venture forth from their snug bed at such an unpropitious moment. A second time Wilton applied his hand to the bell, and with more success than before, for in stays and petticoat, unlaced and half tied, forth rushed the grumbling porter's wife, with a murmured " Marry come up : people are in great haste : I wonder who is in such a hurry !"

The sight of Wilton, however, whom she had seen very lately with the duke, but still more the sight of her young lady, instantly altered her tone and demeanour, and, with a joyful swing, she threw the gates wide open. The chaise was drawn round to the great doors of the house, and here a more ready entrance was gained.

" Is the duke up ?" demanded Wilton, as the servant opened the door.

" Oh yes, sir," replied the man ; " he was up before daybreak : but he is not out of his dressing-room yet."

Laura ran up the steps into the vestibule to see her father, and to relieve his mind at once from all that she knew he was suffering on her account. She paused, however, for a moment at the top to see if Wilton followed; but he merely advanced a few steps, saying, "I will leave you to converse with your father; for, of course, I have much to do; and he will be glad to spend some time with you alone, and hear all that you have to tell him."

"But you will come back," said Lady Laura, holding out her hand to him: "you will not be away long."

"Until the evening, perhaps," said Wilton, pressing that fair hand in his own; "I may have many things to do, and the earl may also require my presence."

"Oh, but you must come to dinner—I insist," said Lady Laura. "You know I have a right to command now," she added, in a lower tone, "and therefore I will tell my father to expect you at dinner."

"I will come if I can," replied Wilton, "but—"

His sentence was interrupted, however, by the duke's voice at the top of the stairs, exclaiming, "Surely that is Laura's voice. Laura, Laura! My child, my dear child!" And the next moment Lady Laura, darting on, was in her father's arms.

Wilton Brown turned away, and, without waiting to press a third person upon a scene which should always be enacted between two alone, he got into the post-chaise, and bade the postillion drive him back into London, for it must be recollected that Beaufort House was out of the town. This was easily accomplished, as the reader may imagine; and, having dressed himself, and removed the traces of blood and travel from his face, he hastened to the house of Lord Byerdale, to give him an account of the success of his expedition.

The earl had not been long up, but he had already gone to his cabinet to write letters, and take his chocolate at the same time. On entering, Wilton, without any surprise, found Arden, the messenger, in the presence of the earl; for the man, knowing that the situation in which he stood was a somewhat perilous one, was, of course, anxious to make the best of his story before the young gentleman appeared. What did very much surprise Wilton, however, was the gracious and even affectionate manner in which the earl received him. He rose from his chair, advanced two or three

steps to meet him, and, shaking him warmly by the hand, exclaimed, "Welcome back, my dear Wilton. So you have been fully and gallantly successful, I find. But what is all this that Arden is telling me? He is making a terrible accusation against you here, of letting off Sir George Barkley, one of the most notorious Jacobites in Europe; a very dangerous person, indeed."

"My lord," replied Wilton, "Mr. Arden is repeating to you a falsehood which he devised last night. It is quite true, indeed, that, if he had not been a most notorious coward, and ran away at the first appearance of danger, there might have been a chance, though a very remote one, of our securing Sir George Barkley."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the earl: "then you did meet with him?"

"Among the persons whom I had to encounter," replied Wilton, "there was a gentleman whom they called Sir George, and who, from his height, his age, and a deep scar upon his cheek, I have no earthly doubt was Sir George Barkley: but he had been gone for an hour before this mighty brave gentleman, having collected forty or fifty people to keep his own head from harm, thought fit to come back and seek for me. The person who was with me when he did return was a tall, fine-looking young man of five or six-and-twenty."

"Indeed!" said the earl. "Who could that be?"

"He called himself Captain Churchill," replied Wilton. "I do not mean to say, my lord, that I believe such was his real name, for I do not: but I never saw Captain Churchill at all; and I never saw this gentleman till the moment when he came to my aid and rescued me, with the assistance of another, from the hands of as desperate a set of men as I ever met in my life, and who would certainly have murdered me had it not been for his arrival. I have a report to make to your lordship upon all Mr. Arden's proceedings, who, notwithstanding your most positive commands to obey me in all things, has refused to obey me in anything; and, by the delays he has occasioned, and the obstructions he has thrown in my way, very nearly prevented me from effecting the liberation of Lady Laura at all."

"Your lordship will believe what you choose," replied Arden, in a saucy tone. "All I mean to say is, I am sure that gentleman was not Captain Churchill, and

so you will find if you inquire. Whoever he was, Mr. Brown aided his escape, and prevented me from doing my duty."

"Your duty, sir, was to obey Mr. Brown," replied the earl, sternly: "for that I shall take care that you are punished; and, if it should prove that this gentleman was really Captain Churchill, you shall be dismissed from your office. You will attend here again at two o'clock, by which time I shall have written to Captain Churchill to know whether he was the person present or not. Now leave the room."

Arden slunk doggedly away, seeing that Wilton's star happened to be in the ascendant. Had he known how much it was so, however, having often heard the earl speak sharply and discourteously to the young gentleman, he would have been more surprised, even, than he was at the change which had taken place. The moment he was gone and the door closed, the earl again shook Wilton by the hand.

"You have accomplished your task most brilliantly, Wilton," he said, "and I shall take care that you reap the reward of your diligence and activity by any effort that depends upon me; but, from all that I have seen, and heard, and know, you are likely to obtain, from the very act itself, far higher recompenses than any that I could bestow. You are, indeed, a fortunate young man."

"I am fortunate in your lordship's approbation," replied Wilton, "but I see not why you should call me so in any other respect, except, indeed, in being so fortunate as to effect this young lady's liberation."

"In that very respect," replied the earl, with a look full of meaning. "Good heavens! my dear Wilton, are you blind? If you are so, I am not; and, at your age, certainly I should not have been blind to my own advantage. You think, perhaps, that, because Lady Laura has refused to marry Sherbrooke, and broken off the proposed alliance between our families, it would make me angry to find she had placed her affections anywhere else. But I tell you no, Wilton! Quite the contrary is the case. The discovery that she has done so at once banished all the anger and indignation that I felt. If, with a free heart, she had so decidedly refused my son, I should have considered it as little less than an insult to my whole family, and, in fact, did con-

sider it so, till Sherbrooke himself expressed his belief that she was, and had been for some time, attached to you. His words instantly recalled to my memory all that I had remarked before: how the colour came up into her cheek whenever you approached her; how her eye brightened at every word you said. That made the matter very different. I could not expect the poor young lady to sacrifice her first affection to please me: nor could I wish her, as you may well imagine, to marry Sherbrooke, loving you. This is the reason that makes me say that you are a most fortunate man; for the service that you have rendered her, the immense and important service, gives you such a claim upon her gratitude as to make it easy for her at once to avow her attachment. It gives you an enormous claim upon the duke, too; and I have one or two little holds upon that nobleman which he knows not of; by which, indeed, he might be not a little injured if I were a revengeful man, but which I shall only use for your best interests."

"But, my lord," replied Wilton, "you seem totally to forget my humble birth and station. How, situated as I am, could I dare to ask the duke for his daughter's hand, the only remaining child of such a house, the heiress of such immense wealth?"

"Fear not, fear not, Wilton," said the earl, laying his hand upon his arm. "Fear not: your blood is as good as the duke's own; your family older, and as noble."

"I have sometimes thought, my lord," replied Wilton, wishing to gain as much information as possible, "I have sometimes thought, in the utter ignorance wherein I have been left of my own history, that I am the son of one who has indeed been a father to me, Lord Sunbury; the natural son, I mean."

"Oh no!" cried the earl, with an air almost of indignation: "you are no relation of his whatsoever. I knew not who you were when you first came hither, but I have since discovered, and though at present I must not reveal anything farther to you, I tell you, without hesitation, to set your mind at ease; to pursue your suit towards Lady Laura, if you have really any regard for her, and to aspire to her hand. In a very few months more you shall know all."

Wilton cast down his eyes and mused.

"This is not a little strange," he said; "but I know I may place implicit reliance on your lordship's word, and proceed in a matter where, I own, my heart is deeply engaged, without the risk of calling upon myself a charge of gross presumption."

"You may, you may," answered the earl, eagerly; "and, if the duke should discover your mutual affection, and make any objection, merely refer him to me. But now let us hear more of your adventures of yesterday and last night."

Wilton would have been very well contented to muse for a few minutes over what the earl said. Although his experience of the world was not great, yet he had a sufficient portion of good sense to supply experience in a high degree. This good sense told him that a sudden and extraordinary change in the demeanour of any man, but more especially in that of a man both subtle and determined, was more or less to be suspected. He would fain, then, have obtained time to seek for the real motives and views of the Earl of Byerdale in the extraordinary fit of kindness and condescension which had seized upon him; for he could almost fancy that the earl was contriving his ruin, by engaging him in some rash endeavour to obtain the hand of Lady Laura.

Strong, however, in her love, he resolved to go on, to deal with her and with her father in all honour, and, supposing even that the earl was endeavouring to play him false, to try whether straightforward and upright honesty, guided by a clear head, a firm heart, and a well-prepared mind, might not win the game against subtlety and wordly cunning.

The earl marked him as he mused for a minute, but, saying nothing more upon the subject of his hopes, still pressed him to speak of the events of the preceding day. It was somewhat difficult for Wilton so to shape his words as not to mention Lord Sherbrooke, and not to involve himself in any such distinct account of the Jacobites and their proceedings as might lead to their arrest, and force him at some future period to become a witness against them. He succeeded tolerably well, however. He could not, and indeed he did not, think it right to conceal, that he was perfectly certain the men he met with were engaged in the most dark and dangerous designs. But he stated, at the same time, that such was merely the impression upon his mind, for that

no distinct avowal of their purposes had been made in his presence, so as to justify him in charging them with treason.

"Nevertheless, my lord," he added, "I think it highly and absolutely necessary for you to take the same measures as if you knew that a general insurrection was contemplated, for I feel perfectly certain that something of the kind is in agitation."

The earl smiled. "Now tell me, Wilton," he said, "among these worthy conspirators, did you see any one that was personally known to you?"

Wilton hesitated.

"Come, come, my young friend," said the earl, "you must speak out. We will not make an evidence of you, I promise you; and, indeed, both the king himself and all his ministers would be very glad that these persons should get beyond the sea, and relieve us of their troublesome presence, provided—mark me—provided, there does not exist the clearest and most distinct proof, not alone that they are conspiring to overthrow the present dynasty—for such conspiracies have been going on in every corner of the kingdom, and in the heart of every family, for the last ten years, so that we should only make them worse by meddling with them—but that these men are conspiring in a darker, a more dangerous, a more treasonable, or a more dishonourable manner than has ever been done before. I must explain this business to you, Wilton, and my views upon it. Politicians have adopted as a maxim, that a plot discovered and frustrated always strengthens the hands of the existing government; but this maxim is far too general, and, consequently, often proves false and dangerous in application. The conditions under which the discovery and frustration of a plot do really strengthen the hands of government are peculiar. There must be circumstances attending upon the whole transaction, which, when the plot is exposed, either destroy the means of future conspiracies formed upon the same basis, remove for ever the objects of the conspirators, or cause a great change in public feeling in regard to their views and motives. If the discovery be so general, the frustration so complete, and the punishment so severe as to raise the power and authority of the government in the eyes of the people, to awaken a wholesome fear in the disaffected, and to encourage and elevate the

well-disposed and the friends of the state, a very great object is certainly gained; and that which was intended to ruin a government or overthrow a dynasty, serves but to root it more firmly than before. There is another case, also, which is applicable at the present moment. If there be something in the nature and designs of the conspiracy, so odious in its means, its character, and its objects, as to enlist against the conspirators sensations of horror, indignation, and contempt, one gains from public feeling very much more by its exposure, than even by the power of fear over the disaffected, and the elevation of triumph on the part of the well-disposed. But in other circumstances, either when partial discoveries are made, when the success is not of the most absolute, general, and distinct kind, when the objects of the conspirators excite many sympathies, the errors they commit admit of easy palliation, the means they employ are noble, generous, and chivalrous, and the fate they undergo is likely to produce commiseration, the detection and crushing of them only tends to multiply and strengthen similar endeavours. With such conspiracies as these, no wise minister will ever meddle if he can help it; the more quiet the means he can adopt to frustrate them, the better; the less he exposes them and brings them into light, the greater will be his success; for they are like the Lernæan serpent, whose heads multiplied as they were smitten off; and it is far more easy to smother them privately than to smite them in public. This is the view I myself take of the matter; this is the view the king takes of it; and you may have remarked that there has been no attempt made for many years to investigate or punish plots here and there, although we have had the proofs that hundreds existed every year. In this instance, however, the matter is different. There is reason to believe that the present conspiracy is one of such a dark and horrible nature as instantly to excite the indignation of the whole people, to make all the better part of the Jacobites ashamed of the deeds of their friends, and to rouse up universal feelings of loyalty throughout the land. The fact is, the thing is already discovered. Information has long been tendered to the government by various persons implicated: but, acting upon the plan which we have generally pursued, such advances have been met coldly, till last night more distinct and definite informa-

tion was given by some one, who, instead of being actuated by motives of gain or of fear, as we suspected in all other cases, came forward, it seems, from personal feelings of gratitude towards the king himself. His majesty promised this person not to bring him forward in the business at all, and has refused to give up his name, even to me. But his conviction of the truth of all that was told was so strong, that the previous informer was sent for last night at one o'clock to the palace at Kensington, to which place I also had been summoned. The whole facts, the names, the designs of everybody concerned, were then completely discovered, and I have been busying myself ever since I rose in adopting the proper measures for arresting and punishing the persons directly implicated. Having explained to you these views, I must now put my question again. Did you see any one among these conspirators with whose person you were acquainted? I ask only for my own satisfaction, and on every account shall abstain from bringing your name forward in the slightest degree."

"There was only one person, my lord," replied Wilton, who had listened with deep interest to this long detail; "there was only one person, my lord, that I had ever knowingly seen before, and that was Sir John Fenwick."

"I signed a warrant for his arrest half an hour ago," rejoined the earl, "and there are two messengers seeking him at this moment. I think you said you saw Sir George Barkley."

"I cannot absolutely say that, my lord," replied Wilton; "but I certainly saw a gentleman whom I believed, and most firmly do still believe, to be him: he was a tall, thin, sinister-looking man, of a somewhat saturnine complexion, with a deep scar on his cheek."

"The same, the same," said the earl, "undoubtedly the same. Listen, if you know any of these names;" and he read from a list, "Sir William Parkyns, Captain Rookwood, Captain Lowick, Sir John Friend, Charnock, Cranburne, the Earl of Aylesbury—"

"The earl certainly was not there, my lord," replied Wilton; "for I know him well by sight; and I saw no one, I can assure you, whom I knew, but Sir John Fenwick."

"And this Plessis, at whose house you saw them?"

continued the earl; "did he seem to be taking a share in the business with them? He is an old friend of mine, this Master Plessis, and obtains for me some of the best information that I ever get from abroad. I do not know what I should do without Plessis. He is the most useful man in the world. We must let him off, at all events; but it will be no bad thing to have a rope round his neck either."

"I cannot say, my lord," replied Wilton, "that he took any part whatsoever in the business. In the matter of setting free Lady Laura, he showed himself more afraid of these good gentry than fond of them, and, after their arrival, he ran away and hid himself."

"And yet," said the earl, "he's a rank Jacobite too. But that does not signify. He's an excellent creature, and the greatest rogue in Christendom. All this chocolate comes from him; there's nothing like it in Europe. Won't you take some, Wilton? I forgot to ask if you had broken your fast." Wilton replied that he had not, and the earl made him sit down and follow his example of writing letters and taking his chocolate at the same time. One of the notes, however, which the earl himself wrote, attracted his secretary's attention in some degree; for, as soon as Lord Byerdale had concluded it, he rang the bell and gave it to a servant, saying, "Take that to Captain Churchill's lodgings. You know where he lives, just in Duke-street. Wait for an answer."

The man went away, and business proceeded. At the end of about an hour, however, the servant returned, saying, as an excuse for his long absence, that Captain Churchill was in bed when he reached his house, and that his valet had refused to wake him.

"When he did wake, however, my lord," added the man, "he said he would not detain me to write a note, as I had been kept so long already, but would wait upon your lordship at the hour you named."

Shortly after the return of the servant, the earl took up his papers and prepared to proceed to Whitehall. Before he went, however, he paused opposite to the table at which Wilton was writing, and looking at him for a moment with a smile, he said,

"You are surprised, Wilton, and have been puzzling yourself with the reason why I take so much more interest in you than I used to do. I will explain it all to

you, Wilton, in one word. I did not at first know who you were. I now do, as I have before hinted; and my conduct to one whom I believed to be a natural son of the Earl of Sunbury, and who was forced upon me somewhat against my own will, was, of course, very different from that which I show towards a young gentleman of high and noble family, not very distantly related to myself. Now are you satisfied?"

And with these words he left the room. Yet, strange to say, Wilton, though not a little surprised at what he heard, knew the Earl of Byerdale, and was *not* satisfied. But, at all events, the words which had passed set his mind at ease in regard to Laura. He now felt that he was committing no breach of confidence; that he was pursuing no presumptuous suit in seeking the object of his dearest and his brightest hopes; that, though fortune might still be adverse, and such wealth might never be his as to place him in a position equal, in that respect, to herself, yet he had every right and title to strive for her hand with the noblest of the land.

Wilton did not, indeed, entertain the vain thought that he brought with him a treasury of distinguished talents, high and noble feelings, a generous spirit, and a gallant heart—qualities which many a competitor, if not most, would want; he did not, indeed, so argue the matter with himself; but there was in his bosom the proud consciousness of deserving well, and the still more strengthening and imboldening confidence of loving well, truly, nobly, as Laura deserved to be loved.

Still, however, he was not satisfied with the sudden change in the Earl of Byerdale: there was something in it that roused suspicion; and he resolved to watch all that nobleman's proceedings steadily and keenly, and, if possible, never to be off his guard for a moment.

Before the time appointed for the return of Arden the messenger, the earl himself came home, bearing a smile of dark satisfaction on his countenance.

"Four or five of these gentry," he said, as he entered, "are already in custody, and one or two have been brought before the council. A man of the name of Cook, and another, seem well inclined to become approvers. If so, the matter will be easily managed. I find the rumour is spreading all over the town, with various additions and improvements, of course. I even hear that there were reports of it all yesterday, though

neither the king, nor I, nor any one else, knew aught of the matter then."

"Are any of the principals caught, my lord?" demanded Wilton. "I confess I believe that man Sir John Fenwick to be as great a villain as any upon earth; nor do I look upon him as a man of much courage, either."

"He is not caught," replied the earl; "but we have got one poor, foolish fellow, called Sir John Friend, who has shown himself a friend to anybody but himself," and he laughed at his own joke. "I rather suspect," he continued, "that there are a good many people not a little anxious for Fenwick's escape. With the exception of Sir George Barkley, he is, undoubtedly, the man of most importance among them. He is nearly connected, you know, with all the Howards, and was very intimate with your good friend the duke. He is well acquainted with Lord Aylesbury, too; and, I can tell you, there are a good many suspicions in that quarter. There is another noble lord, Lord Montgomery, implicated; and all these good folks are suspected," and he proceeded to read a list of some twenty or thirty names. "But there is no intention of dealing harshly," he added; "and a distinction will be made between the more culpable and the less. Pray, has Captain Churchill been here?"

"Not yet, that I have heard of, my lord," replied Wilton; "but I fairly tell your lordship, that I do not think he was the man I saw, though that was the name given."

The earl rang the bell which stood upon the table, and, when a servant appeared, demanded if Captain Churchill had been there.

The servant replied in the negative, but added that Mr. Arden was waiting. The earl ordered him to be sent in; and the messenger accordingly entered, bearing on his face an air of triumph and insolence which provoked Wilton's anger a good deal.

"Well, my lord," he said, not waiting for the Earl of Byerdale to speak, "I have got proof positive now, for I have been at Captain Churchill's lodgings, pumping his servants; and they tell me that he was very ill all yesterday, as, indeed, I knew he was, and in bed the greater part of the day."

"Indeed!" said the earl. "This is strange enough!

But as you say, Wilton, that you do not think it was really Captain Churchill, the name might be given merely as a *nom de guerre*, and the person giving it might be a very honest man too."

Before he could conclude, one of the servants announced that Captain Churchill waited without; and in a moment after he was admitted, presenting to Wilton's eyes a person not very unlike, in size and form, the Duke of Berwick, and somewhat resembling him in countenance, but several years older, and somewhat darker in complexion.

He entered with a gay and smiling air, and with a grace of carriage and demeanour which was common to himself and his brother, afterward the famous Duke of Marlborough.

"Why, my lord," he said, advancing towards Lord Byerdale and shaking him by the hand, "I am almost alarmed at your unexpected summons, especially after all the terrible doings which, I hear, have taken place. Why, they tell me that the gates of Newgate have never ceased turning upon their hinges all the morning, and that the Tower itself is full."

"Not quite so bad as that," replied the earl; "but I am sure, my dear captain, you have nothing to fear in such a matter."

"Not that I know of," answered Churchill; "and I would have come at once when you wrote, but, to say the truth, I was up late last night, and slept till nearly noon this morning. But, bless my soul!" he continued, turning towards Wilton—to that gentleman's utter surprise and astonishment—"is not this my good friend Mr. Wilton Brown, your lordship's secretary?" and, advancing a step or two, he shook Wilton heartily by the hand.

"How is the young lady?" he continued. "I hope you got quite safe to London with your fair charge?"

The countenance of Arden the messenger presented a ludicrous picture of disappointment and consternation. Wilton was certainly even more surprised than himself; but he did not suffer his face to betray any expression of wonder, though, it must be owned, he felt a strong inclination to laugh. He replied, however, calmly to Churchill's question,

"I thank you very much, sir: she got quite safe to London. At an early hour this morning I left her with her father."

"Then, Captain Churchill," said the earl, "you are neither more nor less than the person who rendered my young friend Wilton, here, such very good assistance last night?"

Churchill made a low and complimentary bow, replying, "Oh, my lord, you are too good! The assistance that I rendered him was little enough, I can assure you. His own gallantry and good conduct did much more than I could possibly do. But I hope and trust my good friend Arden, the messenger, there, is not waiting for me; for I can assure your lordship that, though I was upon a little frolic last night, which I might not very well like to have inquired into, it was certainly nothing of a Jacobitical nature, as you may well suppose, and as my good friend Mr. Brown, here, can testify."

"I do not in the slightest degree suspect you, Churchill," replied the earl. "The only point was to ascertain whether it was you or Sir George Barkley who was with my friend Wilton, here, last night; Arden, the messenger, who has behaved very ill throughout the whole business, positively swearing this morning that Wilton was accompanied along part of the road by Sir George Barkley, the well-known traitor, and that he, Wilton, my private secretary, connived at and aided his escape."

"I can assure your lordship," replied Churchill, in a perfectly grave tone, "on my honour as a gentleman, I have the most perfect certainty, and could prove, if necessary, that the charge is entirely and totally false; that Sir George Barkley did not accompany your young friend for a single step, and that he was only accompanied by a fair lady with very bright eyes, by another gentleman whom I understand to be a certain Captain Byerly—a very respectable man, only that he rides a little hard upon the king's highway—and by a person of perhaps less importance and repute, named Captain Churchill."

"That is quite satisfactory, my dear sir," replied the earl. "You hear, Mr. Arden. Be so good as to quit the room, and to remember that, from this moment, you are no longer a messenger of state."

Wilton could almost have found it in his heart to interpose, knowing all that he did know; but, when he recollected the whole course of the man's bad con-

duct, he felt that the retribution which had fallen upon him was but just, and he left the matter to take its course. Churchill then conversed for a few minutes with the earl in an under tone; and, as the business of the day seemed over, Wilton prepared to take his departure.

"Wait one moment, Mr. Brown," said Churchill; "and, if you are going my way, I will accompany you."

"You will not fail, my dear Wilton, I trust," said the earl, "to visit the young lady, and inquire after her health. Pray present my most devoted homage to her, and assure her that I have been most uneasy at her situation, and grieved for all that she must have undergone. I shall certainly wait upon her to-morrow. In the mean time," he added, in a lower tone, "do not entertain any apprehensions in regard to your situation. Go boldly forward, make sure of her heart, and all the rest will be rendered much more easy than you imagine. Nothing that I can do for you shall be wanting; and you have only to let me know when you have any engagement at Beaufort House, and I will find means to do without your attendance here. I beg your pardon, Captain Churchill; I only wished to give this young gentleman a word of good advice before he left me."

"And I only waited till he was ready, my lord," replied Churchill, "to take my leave of your lordship, wishing you full success in dealing with the nest of vagabonds you have got hold of."

Thus saying, he took his leave, and, quitting the house together with Wilton, put his arm through his, and walked on as familiarly as if they had been old acquaintances.

CHAPTER VIII.

It may be made a question of very great doubt, whether the faculty—and it is indisputably a faculty of the mind in its first freshness—the faculty of wondering at anything extraordinary, or out of the com-

mon course of our knowledge, is or is not productive of advantage as well as pleasure to us. But there can be no question whatsoever that very great advantages are attached to the power of our concealing our wonder. Nothing, indeed, should surprise us in life, for we are surrounded by daily miracles; nothing should surprise, because the combination of means in the hand of Almighty Power must be infinite; and to permit our wonder to appear at anything is but to confess ourselves inexperienced, or unobserving, or thoughtless; and yet, with all that, it is a very pleasant sensation.

Wilton Brown, from his commerce with the world, and especially from the somewhat hard lessons which he had received in the house of the Earl of Byerdale, had been taught, in communicating with persons unknown and indifferent to him, to put a strong restraint upon the expression of his feelings. On the present occasion, not having the slightest knowledge or conception of Captain Churchill's character, he walked on beside him, as their way seemed to lie together, without the slightest inquiry or expression of surprise in regard to what had taken place; and Captain Churchill was almost inclined to believe that his young companion was dull, apathetic, and insensible, although he had good reason to know the contrary. The silence, however, did somewhat annoy him; for he was not without a certain share of good-humoured vanity; and he thought, and thought justly, that he had acted his part to admiration. He resolved, therefore, to say nothing upon the subject either, as far as he could avoid it; and thus, strange to say, after the extraordinary scene which had taken place, the two people who had borne a part therein had got as far as the door of Captain Churchill's house, in Duke-street, without interchanging a word upon the subject. There, however, Wilton was about to take his leave; but Churchill stopped him, saying,

"Do me the favour of coming in for a moment or two, Mr. Brown. I have something which I wish to give you."

Wilton followed him up stairs, with merely some reply in the common course of civility; and Churchill, opening a cabinet in the drawing-room, took out a handsome diamond ring, saying, "I have received a commission this morning from a near relation of mine, who

considers that he owes his life to you, to beg your acceptance of this little token, to remember him by when you look upon it. He sent it to me by a messenger at the moment when he was embarking for France, together with a letter of instructions as to how he wished me to act in case of there being any question regarding the transactions of last night."

"I saw," replied Wilton, "that you must have got information some way; but, in whatever way you did get that information, you certainly played your part as admirably as it was possible to conceive. I fear I did not play mine quite so well, for I was taken by surprise."

"Oh, quite well enough, quite well enough," replied Captain Churchill. "To say the truth, my task was somewhat of a delicate one; for in these days one might easily involve one's self in imputations difficult to be got rid of again. My family have chosen our parts so strongly and decidedly, that my young relation did not venture to see me when he was in London: not, indeed, from any fear of my betraying him, for that, of course, was out of the question, but rather from the apprehension of committing me. He trusted me with this other matter, however, probably not knowing, first, that I was ill, and had been in bed all yesterday, and, next, that this diabolical plot for assassinating the king and admitting the enemy into the heart of the land has been discovered. The letter came about an hour after Lord Byerdale's, and just in time to save me from denying that I was out of my own house all yesterday. But you do not take the ring, Mr. Brown: pray accept it as a mere token of gratitude and esteem on the part of the duke. His esteem, I can assure you, is worth having."

"I doubt it not in the least, my dear sir," replied Wilton; "but yet I must beg to decline his gift: in the first place, because I am entitled to no gratitude, and in the next, because the duke must be considered as an enemy of the government I serve. He certainly saved my life; for I do not suppose the man who was in the act of firing at me would have missed his mark if his hand had not been knocked up. After that I could not, of course, suffer the duke to be arrested by my side, if I could help it, and, therefore, did what I could to assist him, but that was little."

Churchill endeavoured, by various arguments, to per-

suade his young companion to receive the ring: but Wilton would not suffer himself to be moved upon the subject; and had, at all events, the satisfaction of hearing Churchill himself acknowledge, as he was taking leave, "Well, after all, I believe you are right."

Their conference was not very long; for it may be easily imagined that one of the party, at least, was anxious to proceed on his way in another direction; and, leaving Captain Churchill as soon as he decently could, Wilton returned to his house, changed his dress, and entered one of those vehicles called hackney coaches, which, in the days of William III., were as rumbling and crazy, and even more slow than at present.

Before he reached Beaufort House, Wilton's patience was wellnigh exhausted; but, if we may tell the truth, there was one as impatient as himself. When they had arrived that morning at Beaufort House, Laura's thoughts had been divided. Her anxiety to see her father, to tell him she was safe, to give joy to the heart of one she loved with the fullest feelings of filial affection, had a strong share in all her sensations; but that was over, and her mind turned to Wilton again. In telling her father all that had occurred, in recounting everything that Wilton had done, in hearing from the duke himself all her lover's exertions and anxiety till he obtained some clew to the place where she was detained, vivid images were continually brought up before her mind of things that were most sweet to contemplate. When she retired to her own chamber, although she strove, at her father's request, to obtain sleep, those sweet but agitating images followed her still, and every word, and tone, and look of him she loved returned to her memory, and banished slumber altogether from her pillow.

On whatever part of his conduct memory rested, to the eyes of affection it seemed all that could be desired. If she thought of him standing boldly in the presence of superior numbers, calm, cool, unintimidated, decided; or if she recalled his conduct to the Duke of Berwick, generously risking all rather than not repay that nobleman's gallant interposition in his favour by similar efforts in his behalf; or if she recollected his behaviour to herself when alone under his care and guidance, the gentleness, the delicate forbearance, the consideration for all her feelings and for every point of her situation

which he had displayed—each part of his behaviour seemed to her partial eyes all that she could have dreamed of excellent and good, and each part stood out in bright apposition with the other; the gentle kindness contrasting strongly with the courageous determination; the generous and unhesitating protection of an upright and gallant enemy, seeming but the more bright from his calm and prudent bearing towards a body of low-minded and ill-designing traitors.

Thus, during the time that she remained alone, her thoughts were all sweet. Gratitude, it is true, might derive a great portion of its brightness from love: but Laura fancied that she had not said half enough in return for all that he had done in her behalf: she fancied that she had scarcely spoken her thanks sufficiently warmly, and she longed to see him again, to talk over all that had taken place, to assure him of her deep, deep gratitude, and, perhaps—though she did not acknowledge that purpose to her own heart—to assure him also still more fully of her unchanging affection. Laura had never felt, even in the least degree, what love was before. She was not one of the many who trifle away their heart's brightest affections piece by piece. She had given her love all at once, and the sensation was the more overpowering.

At length, then, as the hour approached when she supposed he might be likely to return, she rose and dressed herself, and perhaps that day she thought more of her beauty than she had ever done before in life; but it was not with any vain pleasure; for she thought of it only inasmuch as it might please another whom she loved. We can all surely remember how, when, in the days of childhood, we have had some present to give to a dear friend, we have looked at it, and considered it, and fancied it even more valuable and delightful than it really was, with the bright hope of its appearing so to the person for whom it was destined. Thus with her toilet, Laura let her maid take as much pains as she would; and when she saw in the glass as lovely a face and form as that instrument of vanity ever reflected, and could not help acknowledging that it was so, she smiled with a pleasure that she had never felt before, to think that beauty also was a part of the dowry of bright things which she was to bring to him she loved.

Though the maid was somewhat longer with her mis-

tress's toilet than usual, delaying it for a little, perhaps, with a view of obtaining farther information than Lady Laura was inclined to give her upon all the events of the two or three days preceding; yet Laura was down in the saloon some time before the dinner-hour, and she looked not a little anxiously for the coming of Wilton. She was not inclined to chide him for delay, for she knew that it would be no fault of his if he were not there early. The duke, not knowing that she had risen, had gone out; but he, too, had left her heart happy in the morning when they parted, by answering her, when she told him of the invitation she had given, with such encomiums of her deliverer, of his manner, of his character, of his person, and of his mind, that Laura was almost tempted into hopes more bright than the reality.

Notwithstanding all delays, Wilton did at length arrive, and that, too, before the duke returned, so that Laura had time to tell him how happy her father's praises of him had made her, and to insinuate hopes, though she did not venture absolutely to express them. Her words, and her manner, and her look, in consequence of all that had been passing in her mind during the morning, were more warm, more tender than they had ever been before; and who could blame Wilton, or say that he presumed, if he, too, gave way somewhat more to the warm and passionate love of his own heart than he had dared to venture during their preceding intercourse?

Laura did not blame him. She blushed, indeed, as he pressed her to his heart, though he was the man whom she loved best on earth; but yet, though she blushed, she felt no wrong; she felt, on the contrary, the same pure and endearing affection towards him that he felt for her, and knew that gentle pressure to be but an expression, on his part, of the same high, holy, and noble love, with which she could have clung to his bosom in any moment of danger, difficulty, or distress.

At length the duke made his appearance, and eagerly grasped Wilton's hand in both his own, thanking him a thousand and a thousand times for restoring to him his beloved child, and telling him that no words or deeds could ever express his gratitude. Indeed, so much more demonstrative was his whole demeanour than that of his daughter, that he blamed Laura for coldness in expressing what she felt only too warmly for words; and, until dinner was announced, he continued talking over

all that had occurred, and inquiring again and again into each particular.

As they went in to the dining-room, however, he made a sign to his daughter, whom he had cautioned before, and whispered to Wilton, "Of course, we must not talk of these things before the servants."

All that had passed placed Wilton now in a far different situation with the duke and his daughter from that in which he had ever stood before. His mind was perfectly at ease with them, and the relief had its natural effect on his conversation: all the treasures of his mind, all the high feelings of his heart, he knew might be displayed fearlessly. He did not, indeed, seek to bring those treasured feelings forward; he did not strive to shine, as it is called, for that striving must in itself always give a want of ease. But poor, indeed, must be the mind, dull and slow the imagination, which, out of the ordinary things of life—ay! even out of the everyday conversation of beings inferior to itself—does not naturally and easily derive immense, unfathomable currents of thought, combinations of fancy, feeling, and of reflection, which only want the license of the will to flow on and sparkle as they go. It is, that the will refuses that license when we are with those that we despise or dislike: it is, that we voluntarily shut the flood-gates, and will not allow the streams to rush forth. But with Wilton it was very, very different now: he was in the presence of one whose eye was sunshine to him, whose mind was of an equal tone with his own; and there was, besides, in his bosom that strong passion in its strongest form, which gives to everything it mingles with its own depth, and intensity, and power; which, like a mountain torrent suddenly poured into the bed of some summer rivulet, changes it at once in force, in speed, in depth; that passion which has made dumb men eloquent, and cowards brave.

Thus, though the conversation began with ordinary subjects, touched but upon matters of taste and amusement, and approached deeper feelings only as a deviation from its regular course, yet, at every turn it took. Wilton's mind displayed its richness and its power; till the duke, who had considerable taste and natural feeling, as well as high cultivation of mind, looked with surprise and admiration towards his daughter; and every now and then Laura herself, almost breathless with mingled

feelings of pleasure, pride, and affection, turned her eyes upon her father, and marked his sensations with a happy smile.

And yet it was all so natural, so easy, so unaffected, that one felt there was neither effort nor presumption. There was nothing of what the vulgar mass of common society call eloquence about it; but there was the eloquence which, by a single touch, wakes the sound that we desire to produce in the heart of another: which, by one bright, instantaneous flash, lights up, to the perception of every one around, each point that we wish them to behold. Eloquence consists not in many words, but in few words: the thoughts, the associations, the images may be many, but the acme of eloquence is in the rapidity of their expression.

Wilton, then, did not in any degree presume: he *discoursed* upon nothing; he did not even attempt to lead. The duke led the conversation, and he followed; but it was like that famous entry of the Roman emperor, where an eagle was seen hovering round and round his head: the royal bird followed, indeed, the monarch; but in his flight took ten times a wider scope: the people hailed with loud gratulations the approach of Cæsar, but in the attendant bird they recognised Jove. The duke, however, who had taste, as we have said, and feeling, and who, in regard to conversational powers, was not a vain man, was delighted with his guest, and laid himself out to lead Wilton on towards subjects on which he thought he would shine: but there was one very extraordinary thing in the history of that afternoon. There was not a servant in the hall—no, neither the laced and ribanded lackey lately hired in London, the old blue bottles from the country mansion, the stately butler and his understrapper of the cellaret, nor the duke's own French gentleman, who stood very close to his master's elbow during the whole of dinner-time—there was not one that did not clearly and perfectly perceive that their young lady was in love with her handsome deliverer, and did not comment upon it in their several spheres when they quitted the room. Every one felt positive that the matter was all arranged, and the wedding was soon to take place; and, to say the truth, so much had Wilton in general won upon their esteem by one means or another, that the only objection urged against him, in the various councils

which were held upon the subject, was, that his name was Brown; that he had not a *vis-à-vis*; and that he kept only two horses.

The two or three last sentences, it must be owned, are lamentable digressions; for we have not yet stated what the extraordinary thing was. It was not in the least degree extraordinary that the servants should all find out the secret of Laura's heart, for her eyes told it every time that she looked at Wilton; but it is very extraordinary, indeed, that her father should never find it out, when every one else that was present did. Is it that there is a magic haze which surrounds love, that can never be penetrated by the eyes of parents or guardians, till some particular allotted moment is arrived? I cannot tell; so, however, has it always proved, and so, in all probability, it ever will.

Such was the case with the duke at the present moment. Although there was every opportunity for his daughter and Wilton falling in love with each other; although there was every reasonable cause thereunto them moving—youth, and beauty, and warm hearts, and gratitude, and interesting situations: although there was every probability that time, place, and circumstance could afford: although there was every indication, sign, symptom, and appearance that it was absolutely the case at that very moment, yet the duke saw nothing of it, did not believe it existed, did not imagine that it was likely ever to exist, and was quite prepared to be astonished, surprised, and mortified at whatever period the fact, by the will of fate, should be forced upon his understanding.

Such was the state of all parties at the time when Laura rose from the table, and left her father and Wilton alone. Now the bad custom of men sitting together, and drinking immense and detrimental quantities of various kinds of wine, was at that time in its very acme; so much so, indeed, that there is more than one recorded instance in the years 1695 and 1696 of gentlemen—yes, reader, actually gentleman; that is to say, persons who had every advantage of birth, fortune, and education—killing themselves with intoxication, exactly in the manner which a noble but most unhappy bard of our own days has described, in

"The Irish peer
Who killed himself for love, with wine, last year."

On this subject, however, we shall not dwell, as we may be fated, perhaps, in the very beginning of the next chapter, to touch upon some of the other peculiar habits of those days.

Now neither Wilton nor the duke was at all addicted to the vice we have mentioned, and Wilton had certainly much stronger attractions in another room of that house than any that the duke's cellar could afford him. The duke, too, had small inclination usually to sit long at table ; but, on the present occasion, he had an object in detaining his young friend in the dining-room after Lady Laura had departed. Wilton's eyes saw him turn towards him several times while the servants were busy about the table, and had, indeed, even during dinner, remarked a certain sort of restlessness, which he attributed, and rightly, to an anxiety regarding the plots of the Jacobites, in which the peer had so nearly involved himself.

At length, when the room was cleared and the door closed, the duke drew round his chair towards the fire, begging his young friend to do the same, and, mingling the matter of alarm even with his invitation to the first glass of wine, "My dear Wilton," he said—"you must permit me to call you so, for I can now look upon you as little less than a son—I wish you to give me a fuller account of all this business than poor Laura can, for there is news current about the town to-day which somewhat alarms me, though I do not think there is any need of alarm either. But surely, Wilton, they could not bring me in as at all accessory to a plot which I would have nothing to do with."

"Oh no, my lord, I should think not," replied Wilton, without much consideration. "I know it is the wish of the government only to punish the chief offenders."

"Then you think it is really all discovered, as they say?" demanded the duke.

"I know it is," replied Wilton. "Several of the conspirators are already in custody, and warrants are issued, I understand, against the rest. As far as I can judge, two or three will turn king's evidence, and the rest will be executed."

"Good God!" exclaimed the duke. "I heard something of the business when I was out, but scarcely gave it credit. It seemed so suddenly discovered."

"I believe the government have had the clew in their hands for some time," replied Wilton, "but have only availed themselves of it lately."

"Have you heard any one named, Wilton?" demanded the duke again; "any of those who are taken, or any of those who are suspected?"

"Sir John Friend has been arrested this morning," replied Wilton; "a person named Cranburne, and another called Rookwood. I heard the names of those who are suspected, also, read over."

"Then I adjure you, my dear young friend," cried the duke, starting up and grasping his hand in great agitation, "I adjure you, by all the regard that exists between us, and all that you have done for me and my poor child, to tell me if my name was among the rest."

"No, it certainly was not," replied Wilton; and, as he spoke, the duke suffered himself to sink back into his chair again, with a long and relieved sigh.

The moment Wilton had uttered his reply, however, he recollected that there was one name in the list at which Lord Byerdale had hesitated; and he then feared that he might be leading the duke into error. Knowing, however, that Laura's father had been at but one of the meetings of the conspirators, and being perfectly sure that, startled and dismayed by what he had heard of their plans, he had instantly withdrawn from all association with them, he did not doubt that no serious danger could exist in his case, and therefore thought it unnecessary to agitate his mind by suggesting the doubt which had suddenly come into his own.

He knew, indeed, that any alarm which the duke might feel would but make Laura's father lean more entirely, day by day, upon him who, with the exception of the conspirators themselves, was the only person who possessed the dangerous secret which caused him so much agitation. But Wilton was not a man to consider his own interests in any such matter; and he determined, after a moment's consideration, to say nothing of the doubts which had just arisen. A pause had ensued, however; for the duke, busied with his own feelings, had suffered his thoughts to run back into the past; and, as is the case with every human being whose mind dwells upon the acts that are irrevocable, he found matter for sorrow and regret. After about five minutes' silence, during which they both continued to gaze

thoughtfully into the fire, the duke returned to the matter before them by saying,

"I wish to heavens, my dear young friend, I had taken your advice, and not gone to this meeting at all; or that you had given me a fuller intimation of what was intended."

"I could not, indeed, my lord," replied Wilton, "for I had no fuller knowledge myself; I only conveyed to you a message I had received."

The duke shook his head doubtingly. "Oh! Wilton! Wilton!" he said, "you are training for a statesman! You have much better information of all these things than you will suffer to appear. Did you not warn me of this before any one else knew anything of it? Did you not, in a very short time, find out where Laura was, when nobody else could?"

It was in vain that Wilton denied any superior knowledge. The duke had so completely made up his mind that his young friend had been in possession of all the secret information obtained by the ministers, and, indeed, of more and earlier information than they had possessed, that nothing would remove the impression from his mind; and when he at length rose, finding that Wilton would drink no more wine, he said,

"Well, Wilton, remember, I depend entirely upon you, with the fullest and most implicit confidence. No one possesses my secret but you and one or two of these men, who will have enough to do in thinking of themselves without implicating others, I trust. Most of those who were present, for the meeting was very large, did not know who I was, and the rest who did know, must know, also, very well, that I strenuously objected to their whole proceedings, and quitted them as soon as I discovered what were their real objects. A word said upon the subject, however, might ruin me; for rank and fortune in this world, Wilton, though they bear their own inconveniences with them, are always objects of envy to those who do not possess them; and malice as surely treads upon the steps of envy as night follows day. I trust to you, as I have said, entirely; and I trust to you even with the more confidence, because I find that you have been wise and prudent enough not even to communicate to Laura the fact of my having attended any of these meetings at all. While all this is taking place, however, my dear

Wilton—as, of course, the matter will be a very agitating one to me—when the trials come on (for fear any of the traitors should name me), let me see you frequently, constantly, every day, if you can, and bring me what tidings you can gain of all that passes.”

Wilton easily promised to do that which the duke desired, in this respect, at least, and they then joined her he loved, with whom he passed one of those calm, sweet evenings, the tranquil happiness of which admits of no description.

CHAPTER IX.

AMONG all the curious changes that have taken place in the world—by which expression I mean upon the world, for the great round ball on which we roll through space is the only part of the whole that remains but little altered—among all the changes, then, which have taken place in the world, moral, political, and social, there has been none more extraordinary, perhaps, than the rise, progress, extension, and dominion of that strong power called Decorum. I have heard it asserted by a very clever man, that there was nothing of the kind known in England before the commencement of the reign of George III., and that decorum was, in fact, a mere decent cloak to cover the nakedness of vice. I think he was mistaken: the word was known long before; and there has been at all times a feeling of decorum in the English nation which has shown itself in gradually rooting out from the ordinary commerce of society everything that is coarse in expression or doubtful in conduct. The natural tendency of this is to mark more strongly the limits of the realms of vice and virtue; and vice, as a matter of course, in order to obviate the detrimental effect which such a clear definition of her boundaries must produce, loses no opportunity of travelling over into the marches or debatable land which is left under the wardenship of decorum.

The name was not, perhaps, applied as now it is, in former years, but still the spirit existed, as may be seen by any one who takes up and reads the works of one

of our purest but coldest of writers, Addison, who, about the time of the peace which took place in the beginning of the eighteenth century, laments the loss of much of the delicacy (or, in other terms, decorum) of English society which was likely to ensue from a free intercourse with France. It must, indeed, be admitted, that at that period the reign of decorum had not made nearly so great a progress as it has at present. It was then a constitutional monarchy, where it is now a despotism, but was probably not a bit less powerful from being decidedly more free. People in those days did certainly speak of things that we now speak not of at all. They called things by their plain, straightforward names, for which we have since invented terms perhaps less definite and not more decent. But people of refined minds and tastes were refined then as now, and loved and cultivated all those amenities, graces, and proprieties which form not alone the greatest safeguards, but also the greatest charms of human existence. Perhaps the difference was more in the thoughts than in the expressions, and that the refined of those days bound themselves to think more purely in the first place, so that there was less need of guarding their words so strictly.

We shall not pause to investigate whether it was that greater purity of thought, or any other cause, which produced a far more extensive liberty of action, especially in the female part of society, than that which is admitted at present. It is certain, however, that it was so, and that there was something in virtue and innocence which in those days was a very strong safeguard against the attacks of scandal, calumny, and malice. In the present day, even the servants of virtue are found to be the absolute slaves of decorum; but in those days, so long as they obeyed the high commands of their rightful mistress, they had but little occasion to apprehend that the scourge of calumny, or the fear thereof, would drive them continually back into one narrow and beaten path.

It is, indeed, the greatest satire upon human nature which the world has ever produced, that acts perfectly innocent, high, and pure as God's holy light, cannot be permitted to persons even of tried virtue, simply because they would afford the opportunity of doing ill. It is, in fact, to say that no one is to be trusted; that there is nothing which keeps man or woman virtuous but want of opportunity. It is a terrible satire; it is more than

a satire; it is a foul libel, aimed by the vicious against those who are better than themselves.

Such things did not exist in the days whereof I write, or existed in a very, very small degree. It is true, from time to time, a woman's reputation might suffer falsely; but it was, in general, from her having approached very near the confines of evil, and the punishment that ensued, though perhaps even then disproportioned to the fault, had no tendency whatever to diminish the innocent liberty of others. We find, from all the writers who painted the manners of those days—Addison, Swift, Steele, and others—that a lady, especially an unmarried lady, feared no risk to her reputation in going hither or thither, either perfectly alone, or with any friend with whom she was known to be intimate. She might venture upon an excursion into the country, a party of pleasure, nay, a journey itself, in many instances, with any gentleman of honour and reputation, without either friends or enemies casting an imputation upon her character, or the world immediately giving her over to him in marriage.

It was left, indeed, to her own judgment whom she would choose for her companion, and the most innocent girl might have gone anywhere unproved with a man of known honour and virtue, who would have ruined her own character had she placed herself in the power of a Rochester or a Buckingham. These were rational boundaries; but perhaps the liberty of those days went somewhat beyond even that. In the early part of the eighteenth century many of the habits of the Continent were introduced into England at a time that Continental society was so corrupt as to require license instead of liberty, and, so far from attending to propriety, to give way to indecency itself. It became common, in the highest circles of society, for ladies, married and single alike, to dispense almost entirely with a female attendant, and, following that most indecent and beastly of all Continental habits, to permit all the offices of a waiting woman to be performed for them by men. The visits of male acquaintances were continually received in their bedrooms, and that, also, before they had risen in the morning. This, perhaps, was too much, though certainly far less indecent than the other most revolting of all immodest practices which I have just mentioned. Others, again, admitted no visitors farther than their

dressing-room, and thought themselves very scrupulous ; but there were others, and there must be at all times, who, with feelings of true modesty and perfect delicacy, hesitated not to use all proper and rational liberty, yet shrunk instinctively from the least coarseness of thought or language, and never yielded to aught that was immodest in custom or demeanour.

Of these was Lady Laura Gaveston ; and though she had no fear of becoming the talk of the town, or losing the slightest particle of a bright and pure reputation by treating one who had rendered her important services in all respects as she would a brother, by being seen with him often and often alone, by showing herself with him in public places, or by any other act of the kind that her heart prompted her to, she in no way gave in to the evil practices which the English had learned from their Continental neighbours, and, indeed, never thought or reasoned upon the subject, feeling that decency as well as morality is a matter of sentiment and not of custom.

The peculiar situation in which the duke and Wilton were placed towards each other, the duke's repeated entreaties that Wilton would see him every day if possible, the intimacy that had arisen from services rendered and received, produced that constant and continual intercourse which was necessary to the happiness of two people who loved as Wilton and Laura did. Not a day passed without their seeing each other ; scarcely a day passed without their being alone together, sometimes even for hours ; and every moment that they thus spent in each other's society increased their feelings of love and tenderness for each other, their hopes, their confidence, their esteem.

Not a secret of Laura's bosom was now concealed from him she loved, not a thought, not a feeling. She delighted to tell him all : with whatever subject her mind was employed, with whatever bright thing her fancy sported, Wilton was always made the sharer ; and it was the same with him. The course that their thoughts pursued was certainly not always alike, but they generally arrived at the same conclusions, she by a longer and softer way, he by a more rapid, vigorous, and direct one. It was like the passing of a hill by two different roads ; the one for the bold climber, over the steepest brow : the other for gentler steps, more easy, round the side.

In the mean time, the duke proceeded with his young friend even as he had commenced. He treated him as his most intimate and dearest confidant; he gradually went on to consult and trust him, not alone with regard to the immediate subject of his situation, as affected by the conspiracy, but upon a thousand other matters; and as Wilton's advice, clear-sighted and vigorous, was always judicious and generally successful, the duke, one of whose greatest weaknesses was the habit of putting his own judgment under the guidance of others, learned to lean upon his young companion, as he had at first done upon his wife, and then upon his daughter.

The various changes and events of the day, as they kept the duke's mind in a state of frequent suspense and anxiety, made him more often recur to Wilton than otherwise would have been the case. London was filled with rumours of every kind regarding the discovery of the plot and the persons implicated. The report of Lady Laura's having been carried off by the Jacobites, for the purpose of inducing her father to join in their schemes, spread far and wide, and filled Beaufort House, during the greater part of the morning, with a crowd of visitors, all anxious to hear the facts, and to retail them with what colouring they thought fit.

Some argued that, though the duke had always been thought somewhat of a Jacobite, at least he had now proved his adherence to the existing dynasty, beyond all manner of dispute, by what he and his daughter had suffered from their resistance to the Jacobites. Others, again, curled the malicious lip, and declared that the duke must have given the conspirators some encouragement, or they would never have ventured upon such deeds. All, however, to the duke himself, affected to look upon him and his family as marked by the enmity of the other faction: and he on his part, perhaps, did feel his importance in a little degree increased by the sort of notoriety which he had acquired.

If there was any pleasure in this—and when is not increased importance pleasurable!—it was speedily brought to an end as soon as the trials of the conspirators began, and intelligence of more and more traitors being arrested in different parts, and increased rumours of the number suspected or actually implicated reaching the ears of the duke. Persons who one day appeared perfectly free and stainless, were the next mark-

ed out as having a share in the conspiracy. Fear fell upon all men: the times of Titus Oates and his famous plot presented themselves to everybody's imagination, and the duke's head lay more and more uneasy on his pillow every night.

Sir John Fenwick, however, was not yet taken: Sir William Parkyns and Sir John Friend died with firmness and with honour, compromising no man. Sir George Barkley had escaped; the Earl of Aylesbury, though implicated by the testimony of several witnesses in the lesser offences of the conspiracy, was not arrested; and not a word had yet been spoken of the duke's name.

It was about this period, however, that Laura's father suddenly received a note from Lord Aylesbury to the following effect:

"Your grace and I being somewhat similarly situated in several respects, I think fit to give you intimation of my views at the present moment. While gentlemen and men of honour were the only individuals made to suffer in consequence of the late lamentable events, people, who knew themselves to be innocent of any bloody or treasonable designs, might feel themselves tolerably safe, even though they were well acquainted with some of the persons accused. I hear now, however, that there is a certain Rookwood, together with men named Cranburne, Lowick, Knightly, and others, some of them small gentry of no repute, and others merely vulgar and inferior persons, who are about to be brought to immediate trial: and I have it from a sure hand, that some of these persons, for the purpose of saving their own miserable lives, intend to charge men of much higher rank than themselves with crimes of which they never had any thought, simply because they were acquainted with some of the unfortunate gentlemen by whom these evil and foolish things were designed. Such being the case, and knowing myself to be somewhat obnoxious to many persons in power, I have determined to remove from London for the time, that my presence may not excite attention, and, perhaps, call upon my head an accusation which may be levelled at any other if I should not be here. I by no means purpose to quit the kingdom, and would rather, indeed, surrender myself, and endeavour to prove my innocence, even against the torrent of prejudice, and all the wild

and raging outcry which this business has produced, both in the Parliament and in the nation. At the same time, I think it best to inform you of these facts, as an old friend, well knowing that your grace has a house ready to receive you in Hampshire, within thirty-five miles of the city of London, in case your presence should be wanted, and about the same distance from the seacoast. I will beg your grace to read this, and then instantly burn it, believing that it comes with a very good intent from

"Your humble servant,

"AYLESBURY."

This letter once more excited all the apprehensions of the duke, who well knew that Lord Aylesbury would never have written such an epistle without intending to imply much more than he directly said.

His recourse was immediately to Wilton, who was engaged to dine with him on that day, together with a large party. As Wilton's engagements, however, were always made with a proviso, that his official duties under the Earl of Byerdale permitted his fulfilling them, the duke sent off a special messenger, with a note beseeching him not to fail. The dinner-hour, however, arrived; the various guests made their appearance; the cook began to fret, and to declare to his understrappers that the duke always spoiled the dinner; but Wilton had not yet come, and the duke was anxious, if but to obtain five words with him.

At length, however, the young gentleman arrived: and it was not a little to the surprise of all the guests, and to the indignation of some, that they saw who was the person for whom the meal had been delayed. Wilton, though always well dressed, and in any circumstances bearing the aspect of a gentleman, had evidently made his toilet hastily and imperfectly; and, notwithstanding the distance he had come, bore about his person distinct traces of heat and excitement.

"I have not failed to obey your summons, my lord," he said, following the duke into the opening of one of the windows, "though it was scarcely possible for me to do so. But I have much that I wish to say to you."

"And I to you," replied the duke; and he told him the contents of the letter he had received from Lord Aylesbury that morning.

"The earl says true, my lord," replied Wilton. "But I have this very day seen Cook myself—I mean Peter Cook, the person that it is supposed will be permitted to turn king's evidence. He did certainly slightly glance at your grace; but I believe that the orders of Lord Byerdale will prevent him from implicating any persons but those who were actually engaged in the worst designs of the conspirators."

"Had I not better go into the country at once?" demanded the duke, eagerly.

"Far from it, far from it, my lord," replied Wilton: "the way, of all others, I should think, to cause yourself to be arrested. On the contrary, if you would take my advice, you would immediately sit down and write a note to Lord Byerdale, saying that I had told you—for he did not forbid me to mention it—that Cook had made some allusion to you. Tell him that it was, and is your intention to go out of town in a few days, but that, knowing your own innocence of every design against the government, you will put off your journey, or even surrender yourself at the Tower, should he judge, from any information that he possesses, that even a shade of suspicion is likely to be cast upon you by any of the persons about to be tried. I will answer for the success, if your grace follows my advice. A bold step of this kind disarms suspicion. Lord Byerdale will, in all probability, intimate to Cook that nothing at all is to be said in regard to you, feeling sure that you are innocent of any great offence; whereas, if the charge were once brought forward, the set of low-minded villains concerned in this business might think it absolutely necessary to work it up into a serious affair, from which your grace would find a difficulty in extricating yourself."

"You are right, Wilton, you are right," replied the duke: "I see you are right, although I judged it hazardous at first. You shall see what confidence I have in you. I will write the letter directly;" and he turned away with him from the window.

Laura had watched the conference with some anxiety, and the duke's guests with some surprise; but when the duke ended by saying aloud, "I fear I must beg your pardon, ladies, for two minutes, but I must write a short note of immediate importance; Wilton, my dear young friend, be kind enough to order dinner,

and help Laura to entertain my friends here till I return, which will be before they have covered the table:" every one looked in the face of the other; and they all mentally said, "The matter is clearly settled, and the hand of this rich and beautiful heiress is promised to an unknown man of no rank whatever."

Knowing the feelings that were in his own heart, being quite sure of the interpretation that would be put upon the duke's words, and yet having some doubts still whether the duke himself had the slightest intention of giving them such a meaning, Wilton cast down his eyes and coloured slightly. But Laura, to whom those words were anything but painful—though she blushed a little too, which but confirmed the opinion of those who remarked it—could not restrain altogether the smile of pleasure that played upon her lips, as she turned her happy eyes for a moment to the countenance of the man she loved.

There was not an old lady or gentleman of high rank in the room, possessed of a marriageable son, who would not at that moment have willingly raised Wilton to the final elevation of Haman by the same process which that envious person underwent; and yet it is wonderful how courteous and cordial, and even affectionate, they all were towards the young gentleman whom, for the time, they mortally hated. Wilton felt himself awkwardly situated for the next few minutes, not choosing fully to assume the position in which the duke's words had placed him. He well knew that, if he did enact to the full the part of that nobleman's representative, every one would charge him with gross and shameful presumption, and would most likely talk of it, each in his separate circle, during the whole of the following day.

He was soon relieved, however, by the return of the duke, who had sent the letter, but who continued evidently anxious and thoughtful during the whole of dinner. Wilton was also a little disturbed, and showed himself rather silent and retiring than otherwise. But, before dinner was over—for such meals were long protracted in those days—one of the servants brought a note to the duke, who, begging pardon for so far violating all proprieties, opened, read it, and, while the cloud vanished from his countenance, placed it on the salver again, saying to the servant, "Take that to Mr. Brown."

The note was in the hand of Lord Byerdale, and to the following effect :

"MY DEAR LORD DUKE,

"Your grace's attachment to the government is far too well known to be affected by anything that such a person as Peter Cook could say. I permitted our dear young friend Wilton to tell you what the man had mentioned, more as a mark of our full confidence than anything else. But I doubt not that he will forbear to repeat the calumny in court; and, if he does, it will receive no attention. Go out of town, then, whenever you think fit, and to whatsoever place you please; feeling quite sure that in Wilton you have a strenuous advocate, and a sincere friend in

"Your grace's most humble and

"most obedient servant,

"BYERDALE."

CHAPTER X.

FOR nearly ten days after the events which we have recorded in the few preceding chapters, and while the principal part of the events were taking place of which we have just spoken, Lord Sherbrooke remained absent from London. Knowing the circumstances in which he was placed, Wilton felt anxious lest the delay of his return might attract the attention of Lord Byerdale, and lead him to suspect some evil. No suspicion, however, seemed to cross the mind of the earl, who was more accustomed than Wilton knew to find his son absent without knowing where he was or how employed.

At length, however, one morning Lord Sherbrooke made his appearance again, and Wilton saw that he was on perfect good terms with his father, who never quarrelled with his vices or interfered with his pursuits when there was any veil of decency thrown over the one, or the earl's own views were not openly opposed by the other.

When Wilton entered the room where the father and son were seated at breakfast, he found Lord Sher-

brooke descanting learnedly upon the fancy of damask tablecloths and napkins. He vowed that his father was behind all the world, especially the world of France; and that it was absolutely necessary, in order to make himself like other men of station and fashion, that he should have his coronet and cipher embroidered with gold in the corners, and his arms, in the same manner, made conspicuous in the centre.

"And pray, my good son," said Lord Byerdale to him, "as your intimacy with washerwomen is doubtless as great as your intimacy with embroiderers and sempstresses, pray tell me how these gilded napkins are to be washed?"

"Washed, my lord!" exclaimed Lord Sherbrooke, in a tone of horror. "Do you ever have your napkins washed? I did not know there was a statesman in Europe whose fingers were so clean as to leave his napkin in such a state that the stains could ever be taken out after he had once used it."

"I am afraid, my dear boy," replied Lord Byerdale, "that, if you had not—as many men of sharp wit do—confounded a figure with a reality, for the purpose of playing with both; and if there were, in truth, such a thing as a moral napkin, what you say would be very true. But, as far as I can judge, my dear Sherbrooke, yours would not bear washing any better than mine."

"It would be very presumptuous of me if it did, my dear father," replied Lord Sherbrooke; "and would argue that precept and example had done nothing for me. Come, Wilton," he added, "come in to my help, for here are father and son flinging so hard at each other, that I shall get my teeth dashed down my throat before I've done. Now tell me, did you ever see such a napkin as that in the house of a nobleman, a gentleman, or a man of taste; three states, by-the-way, seldom united in the same person?"

"Oh yes," replied Wilton, "often; and, to tell the truth, I think them in much better taste than if they were all covered with gold."

"Surely not for the fingers of a statesman," said Lord Sherbrooke. "However, I abominate them, and I will instantly sit down and write to a good friend of mine in France to smuggle me over a few dozens, as a present to my respectable parent."

"A present which he will have to pay for," replied

the earl, somewhat bitterly. "My dear Sherbrooke, your presents to other people cost your father so much one way, that I beg you will make none to him, and get him into the scrape the other way also."

"Do not be alarmed, my dear and most amiable parent," replied Lord Sherbrooke: "the sweet discussion which we had some time ago, in regard to debts and expenses, has had its effect: though it is a very stupid plan of a son ever to let his father see that what he says has any effect upon him at all; but I intend to contract my expenses."

"Intentions are very excellent things, my dear Sherbrooke," replied his father. "But I am afraid we generally treat them as gardeners do celery, cut them down as soon as they sprout above ground."

"I have let mine grow, my lord, already," replied Sherbrooke. "I last night gave an order for selling five of my horses, and now keep only two."

"And how many mistresses, Sherbrooke?" demanded his father.

"None, my lord," replied Sherbrooke.

Not a change came over Lord Byerdale's countenance; but, ringing the bell which stood before him on the table, he said to the servant, "Bring me the book marked 'Ephemeris' from my dressing-room, with a pen and ink. We will put that down," continued he; and, when the servant brought the book, he wrote for a moment, reading aloud as he did so, "Great annular eclipse of the sun—slight shock of an earthquake felt in Cardigan—Sherbrooke talks of contracting his expenses."

Wilton could not help smiling; but he believed and trusted, from all that he knew of Lord Sherbrooke's situation, that new motives, and nobler ones than those which had ever influenced him before, produced his present resolution, and would support him in it.

The business which he had to transact with the earl proved very brief; and, after it was over, he sought Lord Sherbrooke again, with feelings of real and deep interest in all that concerned him. He found the young nobleman seated with his feet on the fireplace, and a light book in his hand, sometimes letting it drop upon his knee and falling into a fit of thought, sometimes reading a few lines attentively, sometimes gazing upon the page, evidently without attending to its contents.

He suffered Wilton to be in the room several minutes

without speaking to him; and his friend, knowing the eccentricities that occasionally took possession of him, was about to quit the room and leave him, when he started up, threw the book into the midst of the fire, and said, "Where are you going, Wilton? I will walk with you."

They issued forth together into the streets, and, entering St. James's Park, took their way round by the head of the decoy towards the side of the river. While in the streets they both kept silence; but, as soon as they had passed the ever-moving crowds that swarm in the thoroughfares of the great metropolis, Wilton began the conversation by inquiring eagerly after his friend's wife.

"She is nearly well," replied Lord Sherbrooke, coldly; "out of all danger, at least. It is I that am sick, Wilton—sick at heart."

"I hope not cold at heart, Sherbrooke," replied Wilton, somewhat pained by the tone in which the other spoke. "I should think such a being as I saw with you might well warm you to constancy as well as love. I hope, Sherbrooke, those feelings I beheld excited in you have not, in this instance, evaporated as soon as in others."

Lord Sherbrooke turned and gazed in his friend's face for a moment intently, even sternly, and then replied, "Love her, Wilton? I love her better than anything in earth or in heaven! It is for her sake I am sad; and yet she is so noble, that why should I fear to bear what she will never shrink from."

"Nay, my dear Sherbrooke," replied Wilton. "The very resolution which I see you have taken, to shake yourself free of the trammels of your debts, ought to give you joy and confidence."

"Debts!" said Lord Sherbrooke; "debts! Do you think that it was debts I had in view when I ordered my horses to be sold, and my carriages to follow them, and kicked my Italian valet down stairs, and dismissed my mistresses, and got rid of half a dozen other blood-suckers? My debts had nothing to do with it. By heaven, Wilton, if it had been for nothing but that, I would have spent twenty thousand pounds more before the year was over; for, when one has a mind to enrage one's father, or go to jail, or anything of that kind, one had better do it for a large sum at once, in a gentlemanlike way. Oh no, I have other things in my head, Wilton, that you know nothing about."

"I will not try to press into your confidence, Sherbrooke," replied Wilton, "though I think in some things I have shown myself deserving of it. But I need hardly tell you, that if I can serve you, I am always most willing to do so, and you need but command me."

"Alas! my dear Wilton," replied Lord Sherbrooke, "this is a matter in which you can do nothing. It is like one man trying to lift Paul's church upon his back, and another coming up and offering to help him. If I did what was right, and according to the best prescribed practice, I should repay your kind wishes and offers by turning round and cutting your throat."

"Nay, nay, my dear Sherbrooke," replied Wilton; "you are in one of your misanthropical fits, and carry it even farther than ordinary. The world is bad enough, but not so bad as to present us with many instances of people cutting each other's throats as a reward for offers of service."

"You are very wise, Wilton," replied Lord Sherbrooke; "but, nevertheless, you will find out that at present I am right and you are wrong. However, let us talk of something else;" and he dashed off at once into a wild, gay strain of merriment, as unaccountable as the grave and gloomy tone with which he had entered into the conversation.

This morning's interview formed the type of Lord Sherbrooke's conduct during the whole time of his stay in town. Continual fluctuations, not only in his own spirits, but in his demeanour towards Wilton himself, evidently showed his friend that he was agitated internally by some great grief or terrible anxiety. Indeed, from time to time, his words suffered it to appear, though not, perhaps, in the same manner that the words of other men would have done in similar circumstances. The only thing in which he seemed to take pleasure was in attending the trials of the various conspirators; and, when any of them displayed any fear or want of firmness, he found therein a vast source of merriment; and would come home laughing to Wilton, and telling him how the beggarly wretch had showed his pale fright at the block and axe.

"That villain Knightly," he said one day, "who was as deep or deeper in the plot than any of the others, and surveyed the ground for the king's assassination, came into court the colour of an old woman's green

calamanco petticoat, gaping and trembling in every limb like a boar's head in aspic jelly; and Heaven knows that I, who stood looking and laughing at him, would have taken his place for a dollar."

The perfect conviction that some very serious cause existed for this despondency, induced Wilton to deviate from the line of conduct he had laid down for himself, and to urge Lord Sherbrooke at various times to make him acquainted with the particulars of his situation, and to give him the opportunity of assisting him, if possible. Lord Sherbrooke resisted pertinaciously. He sometimes answered his friend kindly and feelingly, sometimes sullenly, sometimes angrily. But he never yielded; and on one occasion he expressed himself so harshly and ungratefully, that Wilton turned round and left him in the Park. They were on horseback at the time; and Lord Sherbrooke rode on a little way, without taking the slightest notice of his companion's departure. He then suddenly turned his horse, however, and, galloping after him at full speed, he held out his hand to him, saying, "Wilton, you must either fight me or forgive me, for this state must not last five minutes."

Wilton took his hand, replying, "I forgive you, with all my heart, Sherbrooke; and let me once more explain, that my only view, my only wish, is to be of assistance to you. I see, Sherbrooke, that you are melancholy, wretched, anxious. I wish much to do anything that I can to relieve that state of mind; and, though I have no power, and very little interest, yet there do occasionally occur opportunities to me, which, as you have seen in the case of Lady Laura, afford me means of doing things which might not be expected from my situation."

"You can neither help me, nor relieve me, nor assist me in the least, Wilton," replied Lord Sherbrooke, "unless, indeed, you could entirely change beings with me; unless you become me, and I become you. But it cannot be; and I cannot even explain to you any part of my situation. Therefore ask me nothing more upon the subject, and only be contented that it is from no want of confidence in you that I hold my tongue."

"I hope and trust that it is not," replied Wilton; "but, now that we are speaking upon the subject, let me still say one word more. I can conceive, from various reasons, that you may not think fit to confide in

me. I am a man of your own age, with less wit, less experience, less knowledge of the world than you have—"

"You have more wit in your little finger, more knowledge of the world, and experience—Heaven knows how you got it—more common sense, ay, and uncommon sense too, than ever I shall have in my life," replied Lord Sherbrooke, hastily.

"But hear me, Sherbrooke, hear me," said Wilton: "whatever may be the cause, it does not suit you to take my advice and assistance. Now there is one person on whom you may fully rely; who will never betray your confidence, who will give you the very best advice, and I am sure will, if it be in his power, render you still more important assistance; I mean Lord Sunbury. He is now at Geneva, on his way home, waiting for passports from France. In his last letter he mentioned you with much interest, and desired me—"

"Good God!" cried Lord Sherbrooke, "that I should ever create any interest in anybody! However, Wilton, your suggestion is not a bad one. Perhaps you have pointed out the only man in Europe in whom I could confide with safety, strange as that may seem. But, in the first place, I must consult with others. Have you seen your friend Green lately?"

"Not since the night before all that business in Kent," replied Wilton. "I have sought to see him, but have never been able; and I begin to apprehend that he must have taken a part in this conspiracy different from that I imagined, and has absented himself on that account."

"Not he, not he," replied Lord Sherbrooke; "I saw him but two days ago. But who have we here, coming up on foot? One of the king's servants, it would seem, and with him that cowardly rascal, Arden. They are making towards us, Wilton, doubtless not recognising us. Suppose we take Master Arden and horsewhip him out of the Park."

"No, no," replied Wilton, "no such violent counsels for me, my dear Sherbrooke. The man is punished more than I wished already."

The two men directed their course at once towards Lord Sherbrooke and his companion; and, as they approached, the king's servant advanced before the other, and, with a respectful bow, addressed Wilton, saying,

"I have the king's commands, sir, to require your presence at Kensington immediately. I was even now about to seek you in St. James's Square, and then at Whitehall. But I presume Mr. Arden has informed me rightly, that you are that Mr. Brown who is private secretary to Lord Byerdale."

"The same, sir," replied Wilton. "Am I to present myself to his majesty in my riding-dress?"

"His majesty's commands were for your immediate attendance, sir," replied the servant: "the council must be over by this time, and then he expects you."

"Then I will lose no time," replied Wilton, "but ride to the palace at once."

"What can be the meaning of this, Wilton?" said Lord Sherbrooke, as he put his horse into a quick pace to keep up with that of his friend.

"On my word I cannot tell," replied Wilton. "I trust for no evil, though I know not that any good can be in store."

"Well, I will leave you at the palace gates," replied Lord Sherbrooke, "and ride about in the neighbourhood till I see you come out. I hope it will not be in custody."

"I trust not, indeed," replied Wilton. "I know of no good reason why it should be so: but in these days of suspicion, and, I must say, of guilt and treason also, no one can tell who may be the next person destined for abode in Newgate."

In such speculations the two young gentlemen continued till they reached the palace, where Lord Sherbrooke turned and left his friend; and Wilton, if the truth must be confessed, with an anxious and beating heart, applied to the porter for admittance.

The moment that his name was given, he was led by a page to a small waiting-room on the ground floor. The carriages which had surrounded the entrance seemed to indicate that the council was not yet over; but, in a few minutes after, the sound of many feet and of various people talking was heard in the neighbouring passage; and then came the roll of carriages, followed by a dead silence. To the mind of Wilton, the silence continued for an exceedingly long time; but at length a voice was heard, apparently at some distance, pronouncing a name indistinctly; but Wilton imagined that it sounded like his own name.

The next instant another voice took it up, and it was now distinctly, "Mr. Brown to the king!"

The door then opened, and a page appeared, saying, "Mr. Brown, the king commands your presence."

CHAPTER XI.

WILLIAM III. was seated in a small cabinet, with a table to his right hand, on which his elbow rested; an inkstand and paper were beside him; and on the other hand, a step behind, stood a gentleman of good mien, with his hand upon the back of the king's chair, in an attitude familiar, but not disrespectful. The harsh and somewhat coarse features of the monarch, which abstractedly seemed calculated to display strong passions, were in their habitual state of cold immobility; and Wilton, though he knew his person well, and had seen him often, could not derive from the king's face the slightest intimation of what was passing in his mind. There was no trace of anger, it is true; the brow was sufficiently contracted to appear thoughtful, but no more; and, at the same time, there was not one touch, even, of courteous affability to be seen in those rigid lines, to tell that the young gentleman had been sent for upon some pleasurable occasion. Dignity, to a certain extent, there must have been in his demeanour—that sort of dignity which is communicated to the body by great powers of mind and great decision of character—in fact, dignity divested of grace. Nobody could have taken him for a vulgar man, although his person, as far as mere lines and colouring go, might have been that of the lowest artisan; but, what is more, no one could see him, however simple might be his dress, without feeling that there sat a distinguished man of some kind.

Wilton had been accustomed too much and too long to mingle with the first people in the first country of the world, to suffer himself to be much affected by any of the external pomp and circumstance of courts, or even by the vague sensations of respect with which fancy invests royalty; but he could not help feeling, as he

entered the presence of William, that he was approaching a man of vast mind as well as vast power.

William looked at him quietly for several minutes, letting him approach within two steps, and gazing at him still, even after he had stopped, without uttering a single word. Wilton bowed, and then stood erect before the king, feeling a little embarrassed, it is true, but determined not to suffer his embarrassment to appear.

At length the king addressed him in a harsh tone of voice, saying, "Well, sir, what have you to say?"

"May it please your majesty," replied Wilton, "I do not know on what subject your majesty wishes me to speak. I met one of the royal servants in the Park, who commanded me to present myself here immediately, and I came hither accordingly, without waiting to inquire for what purpose."

"Oh! then you do not know," said the king; "I thought you did know, and, most likely, were prepared. But it is as well as it is. I doubt not you will answer me truly. Where were you on Friday, the 22d of February last?"

"I cannot exactly say where I was, sire," replied Wilton; "for during the greater part of that day I was continually changing my place. Having set out for a small town or village called High Halstow, in Kent, at an early hour in the day, I arrived there just before nightfall, and remained in that place or in the neighbourhood for several hours—indeed, till nearly or past midnight."

"Pray what was your business there?" demanded the king.

"I fear," replied Wilton, "I must trouble your majesty with some long details to enable you to understand the object of my going."

"Go on," was William's laconic reply; and the young gentleman proceeded to tell him, that, having been employed in recovering Lady Laura from those who had carried her off, he had learned, in the course of his inquiries in London, that she was likely to be heard of in that neighbourhood.

"I judged it likely to be so myself, sire," continued Wilton, "because I believed her to have been carried off by some persons belonging to a party of Jacobites who were known to be caballing against the govern-

ment, though to what extent was not then ascertained."

"And what made you judge," demanded the king, "that she had been carried off by these men?"

"Because, sire," replied Wilton, "the lady's father had been an acquaintance of Sir John Fenwick, one of the most notorious of the persons now implicated in the present foul plot against your majesty's life and crown. With him the Duke of Gaveston, I found, had quarrelled some time previously, and I suspected, though I had no proof thereof, that this quarrel had been occasioned by the duke strongly differing from Sir John Fenwick in his political views, and refusing to take any part in any designs against the government."

"I am glad to hear this of the duke, sir," replied the king. "Then it was out of revenge, you believe, that they carried away the young lady?"

"Rather out of a desire to have a hold upon the duke," replied Wilton. "I found afterward, your majesty, that their intention was to send the young lady to France; and I judged throughout that their design was to force the duke into an intrigue which they found he would not meddle with willingly."

William III., though he was himself of a very taciturn character, and not fond of loquacity in others, was yet fond of full explanations; always sitting in judgment, as it were, upon what was said to him, and passing sentence in his own breast. He now made Wilton go over again the particulars of Lady Laura's being taken away, though it was evident that he had heard all the facts before, and obliged him to enter into every minute detail which in any way affected the question.

When this was done, without any other comment than a look to the gentleman on his left hand, he fixed his eyes again upon Wilton, and asked, "Now where did you learn that these conspirators were likely to be found in Kent?"

"I heard it from a gentleman named Green," replied Wilton, "whom I met with at a tavern in St. James's-street."

"Green is a very common name," said the king.

"I do not believe that it is his real name," replied Wilton; "but what his real name is I do not know. I had not seen him often before; but he informed me of these facts, and I followed his advice and directions."

"That was rash," said the king. "You are sure you do not know his real name?"

"I cannot even guess it, sire," replied Wilton; and the king, after exchanging a mute glance with his attendant, went on: "Well, when you had discovered the place of meeting of these conspirators, and reached it, what happened then?"

"I did not go, may it please your majesty, to discover their place of meeting, but to discover the place where Lady Laura was detained; which, when I had done, aided by a person I had got to assist me—after Arden, formerly messenger of state, had fled from me in a most dastardly manner, in a casual rencounter with some people—smugglers, I believe—I made the master of the house and some other persons whom we found there set the Lady Laura at liberty. I informed her of the authority that her father had given me, and she was but too glad to accept the assistance of any friend with whom she was acquainted."

"So, so; stop!" said the king. "So, then, Arden was not with you at this time?"

"No, sire," replied Wilton; "he had run away an hour before."

"That was not like a brave man," said William.

"No, indeed, sire," replied Wilton, "nor like one of your majesty's friends; for it is your enemies that generally run away."

A faint smile came upon William's countenance, and he said, "Go on. What happened next?"

"Before we could make our escape from the house," replied Wilton, "we were stopped by a large party of men who entered; and, principally instigated by Sir John Fenwick, who was one of them, they opposed, in a violent manner, our departure."

Hitherto Wilton had been very careful of his speech, unwilling to compromise any one, and especially unwilling to mention the name of Lord Sherbrooke, the Lady Helen Oswald, or anybody else except the conspirators who had taken a part in the events of that night. Now, however, when he had to dwell principally upon the conduct of the conspirators and himself, he did so more boldly, and gave a full account of all that had been said and done till the entrance of the Duke of Berwick. He knew, or rather divined, from what had already passed, that this was, in reality, the

point to which the examination he underwent principally tended. But yet he spoke with more ease; for, notwithstanding the danger which existed at that moment in acknowledging any communication whatsoever with Jacobites, he well knew that the conduct of the Duke of Berwick himself only required to be truly reported to be admired by every noble and generous mind; and he felt conscious that, in his own behaviour, he had only acted as became an upright and an honourable heart. He detailed, then, particularly, the fact of his having seen one of his opponents in the act of pointing a pistol at him over the shoulder of their principal spokesman: he mentioned his having cocked his own pistol to fire in return, and he stated that, at the time, he felt perfectly sure his life was about to be made a sacrifice to apprehensions of discovery on the part of the conspirators; and he then related to the king how he had seen a stranger enter and strike up the muzzle of the pistol pointed at him, at the very moment the other was in the act of firing.

"The ball," he said, "passed through the window above my head; and, seeing that new assistance had come to my aid, I did not fire."

"Stay, stay," said the king. "Let me ask you a question or two first. Did you see, in the course of all this time, the person called Sir George Barkley among these conspirators?"

"I saw a person, sire," replied Wilton, "whom I believed at the time to be Sir George Barkley, and have every reason to believe so still."

"And this person who came to your assistance so opportunely was not the same?" demanded the king.

"Not the least like him, sire," replied Wilton. "He was a young gentleman of six or seven-and-twenty, I imagine, but certainly not more than thirty."

"What was his name?" demanded the king.

"The name he gave," replied Wilton, "was Captain Churchill."

"Go on," said William; and Wilton proceeded.

Avoiding all names as far as possible, he told, briefly but accurately, the severe and striking reprehension that the Duke of Berwick had bestowed upon Sir George Barkley and the rest of the conspirators: he dwelt upon the hatred he had displayed of the crime they were about to commit, and of the noble and upright tendency of

every word that he had spoken. William's eyes glistened slightly, and a glow came up in his pale cheek; but he made no comment till Wilton seemed inclined to stop. He then bade him again go on, and made him tell all that had happened till he and Lady Laura had quitted the house to make the best of their way to Halstow. He then said,

"Three questions. Why did you not give instant information of this conspiracy when you came to town?"

"May it please your majesty," replied Wilton, "I found, immediately on my arrival, that the conspiracy was discovered, and warrants issued against the conspirators. Nothing, therefore, remained for me to do but to explain to Lord Byerdale the facts, which I did."

"If your majesty remembers," said the gentleman on the king's left, mingling in the conversation for the first time, "Lord Byerdale said so."

"Secondly," said the king, "is it true that this gentleman who came to your assistance went with you, and under your protection, to the inn at Halstow, and thence, by your connivance, effected his escape?"

The king's brow was somewhat dark and ominous, and his tone stern as he pronounced these words: but Wilton could not evade the question so put without telling a lie, and he consequently replied at once, "Sire, he did."

"Now for the third question," said the king. "What was his real name?"

Wilton hesitated. He believed he had done right in every respect; that he had done what he was bound to do in honour; that he had done what was, in reality, the best for the king's own service; but yet he knew not, by any means, how this act might be looked upon. The minds of all men were excited, at that moment, to a pitch of indignation against the whole Jacobite faction, which made the slightest connivance with any of their practices, the slightest favour shown to any of their number, a high crime in the eyes of every one. But Wilton knew that he was, moreover, actually and absolutely punishable by law as a traitor for what he had done: what he was called upon to confess was, in the strict letter of the law, quite sufficient to send him to the Tower, and to bring his neck under the axe; for in treason all are principals, and he had aided and abetted

one marked as a traitor. But, nevertheless, though he hesitated for a moment whether he should speak at all, yet he had resolved to do so, and, of course, to do so truly, when the king, seeing him pause, and mistaking the motives, added,

"You had better tell the truth, sir. Captain Churchill has confessed that, though out of consideration for you he had admitted that he was present on the occasion, yet that, in reality, he had never quitted his house during the whole of the day in question."

"Sire," replied Wilton, looking him full in the face with a calm but not disrespectful air, "your majesty may have seen, by my answers hitherto, that whatever I do say will be the truth, plain and undisguised. I only hesitated whether I should not beg your majesty to excuse my answering at all, as you know, by the laws of England, no man can be forced to criminate himself; but as I acted in a manner that became a man of honour, and also in a manner which I believed at the time to be fitted to promote your majesty's interests, and to be, in every respect, such as you yourself could wish, I will answer the question, though perhaps my answer might, in some circumstances, be used against myself."

The slightest possible shade of displeasure had come over the king's countenance when Wilton expressed a doubt as to answering the question at all; but whether it was from his natural command over his features, the coldness of a phlegmatic constitution, or that he really was not seriously angry, the cloud upon his brow was certainly not a hundredth part so heavy as it would probably have been with any other sovereign in Europe. He contented himself, then, when Wilton had come to the end of the sentence, by merely saying, with evident marks of impatience and curiosity, "Go on. What was his real name?"

"The name, sire, by which he is generally known," replied Wilton, "is the Duke of Berwick."

For once the king was moved. He started in his chair, and, turning round, looked at the gentleman by his side, exclaiming, "It was not Drummond, then?"

"No, sire," replied Wilton; "although he never expressly stated his name to me, yet, from all that was said by every one around, I must admit that I knew perfectly it was the Duke of Berwick. But, sire, whoever

it was, he had saved my life : he had said not one word disrespectful to your majesty's person : he had reprobated, in the most severe and cutting terms, those conspirators, some of whom have already bowed the head to the sword of justice ; and he had stigmatized the acts they proposed to commit with scorn, contempt, and horror. All this he had done, in my presence, to ten or twelve armed men, whose conduct to myself, and schemes against you, showed them capable of any daring villany. These, sire, may be called my excuses for aiding a person, known to be an enemy of your crown, to escape from your dominions ; but, if I may so far presume to say it, there was a reason as well as an excuse which suggested itself to my mind at the time, and in which your majesty's interests were concerned."

The king had listened attentively : the frown had gone from his brow, and he had so far given a sign of approbation, as, when Wilton mentioned the conduct of the Duke of Berwick, to make a slight inclination of the head. When the young gentleman concluded, however, he paused in order to let him go on, always more willing that others should proceed than say a single word to bid them do so.

"What is your reason?" he said at last, finding that nothing was added.

"It was this, sire," replied Wilton : "that I knew the Duke of Berwick was connected with your majesty's own family ; that he was one person of high character and reputation among a vast number of low and infamous conspirators ; that he was perfectly innocent of the dark and horrible crimes of which they were guilty ; and yet, that he must be considered by the law of the land as a traitor even for setting his foot upon these shores ; and must be considered by the law and its ministers under the same punishment and condemnation as all those assassins and traitors who are now expiating their evil purposes on the scaffold. In these circumstances, sire, I judged that it would be much more agreeable to your majesty that he should escape than that he should be taken ; that you would be very much embarrassed, indeed, what to do with him if any indiscreet person were to stop him in his flight ; and that you would not disapprove of that conduct, the first motive of which, I openly confess, was gratitude towards the man who had saved my life."

"Sir, you did very right," said William, with scarcely a change of countenance. "You did very right, and I am much obliged to you."

At the same time he held out his hand. Wilton bent his knee and kissed it; and, as he rose, William added, "I don't know what I can do for you; but if, at any time, you want anything, let me know, for I think you have done well and judged well. My Lord of Portland, here, on application to him, will procure you audience of me."

With those few words, which, however, from William III., conveyed a very great deal of meaning, the king bowed his head to signify that Wilton's audience was over; and the young gentleman withdrew from his presence, very well satisfied with the termination of an affair which certainly, in some hands, might have ended in evil instead of good.

CHAPTER XII.

WILTON BROWN, on quitting the king, did not find Lord Sherbrooke where he expected; but, little doubting that he should have to encounter a full torrent of wrath from the Earl of Byerdale, on account of his having concealed the fact of the Duke of Berwick's visit to England, he set spurs to his horse to meet the storm at once, and proceeded as rapidly as possible to the earl's office at Whitehall. His expectations were destined to be disappointed, however. Lord Byerdale was all smiles, although, as yet, he knew nothing more than the simple fact that Captain Churchill had acknowledged his presence at a scene in which he had certainly played no part. His whole wrath seemed to turn upon Arden the messenger, against whom he vowed, and afterward executed, signal vengeance; prosecuting him for various acts of neglect in points of duty, and for some small peculations which the man had committed, till he reduced him to beggary and a miserable death.

He received Wilton, however, without a word of censure; listened to all that passed between him and the

king, appeared delighted with the result; and although, to tell the truth, Wilton had no excuse to offer for not having communicated the facts to him before, which he had abstained from doing simply from utter want of confidence in the earl, yet his lordship found an excuse himself, saying,

"I'm sure, Wilton, I am more obliged to you even than the king must be, for not implicating me in your secret at all. I should not have known how to act in the least. It would have placed me in the most embarrassing situation that it is possible to conceive; and, by taking the responsibility on yourself, you have spared me, and, as you see, done yourself no harm."

Wilton was puzzled; and, though he certainly was not a suspicious man, he could not help doubting the perfect sincerity of the noble lord. All his civility, all his kindness, which was so unlike his character in general, but made his secretary doubt the more, and the more firmly resolve to watch his conduct accurately.

A few days after the events which we have just related, the Duke of Gaveston and Lady Laura left Beaufort House for the earl's seat in Hampshire, which Lord Aylesbury had pointed out as the best suited to the occasion. It was painful for Wilton to part from Laura; but yet he could not divest his mind of the idea that Lord Byerdale did not mean altogether so kindly by the duke as he professed to do, and he was not sorry the latter nobleman, now that he could do so without giving the slightest handle to suspicion, should follow the advice of Lord Aylesbury.

By this time Wilton had become really attached to the duke; the kindness that nobleman had shown to him, the confidence he had placed in him, the leaning to his opinions which he had always displayed, would naturally have excited kindly and affectionate feelings in such a heart as Wilton's, even had the duke not been the father of her he loved best on earth. But, in the relative situation in which they now stood, he had gradually grown more and more attached to the old nobleman, and perhaps even the very weakness of his character made Wilton feel more like a son towards him.

To ensure, therefore, his absence from scenes of political strife, to guard against his meddling with transactions which he was unfitted to guide, was a great

satisfaction to Wilton, and a compensation for the loss of Laura's daily society. Another compensation, also, was found in a general invitation to come down, whenever it was possible, to Somersbury Court, and a pressing request that, at all events, he would spend the Sunday of every week at that place. In regard to all his affairs in London, and more especially to everything that concerned Sir John Fenwick and the conspiracy, the duke trusted implicitly to Wilton; and the constant correspondence which was thus likely to take place afforded him, also, the means of hearing continually of Laura.

He was not long without seeing her again, however; for it was evident that Lord Byerdale had determined to give his secretary every sort of opportunity of pursuing his suit with the daughter of the duke.

"Did you not tell me, Wilton," he said, one day, "that your good friend the Duke of Gaveston had invited you to come down and stay with him at Somersbury?"

"He has invited me repeatedly, my lord," replied Wilton, "and, in a letter I received yesterday, pressed his request again; but, seeing you so overwhelmed with business, I did not like to be absent for any length of time. I should have gone down, indeed, as I had promised, on Saturday last, to have come up on Monday morning again; but, if you remember, on Saturday you were occupied till nearly twelve at night with all this business of Cook."

"Who, by-the-way, you see, Wilton, has said nothing against your friend," said the earl.

"So I see, indeed, my lord," replied Wilton. "What will be done with the man?"

"Oh, we shall keep the matter over his head," said the earl, "and make use of him as an evidence. But to return to your visit to the duke: I can very well spare you for the next week, if you like to go down on Monday; and, now that I know your arrangements, will contrive that you shall always have your Saturday evenings and Monday mornings, so as to be able to go down and return on those days, till you become his grace's son-in-law, though I am afraid fair Lady Laura will think you but a cold lover."

Wilton smiled, well knowing that there was no such danger. The earl's offer, however, was too tempting

to be resisted, and accordingly he lost no time in bearing down, in person, to Somersbury Court, the happy intelligence that Cook, who was to be the conspirator most feared, it seemed, had said nothing at his trial to inculpate the duke.

His journey, as was not uncommon in those days, was performed on horseback, with a servant charged with his valise behind him, and it was late in the day before he reached Somersbury; but it was a bright evening in May; the world was all clad in young green; the calm rich purple of the sunset spread over the whole scene; and, as Wilton rode down a winding yellow road, amid rich woods and gentle slopes of land, into the fine old park that surrounded the mansion, he could see enough to show him that all the picturesque beauty, which was far more congenial to his heart and his feelings than even the finest works of art, was there in store for him on the morrow.

On his arrival, he found the duke delighted to receive him, though somewhat suffering from a slight attack of gout. He was more delighted still, however, when he heard the news his young friend brought; and when, after a few moments, Laura joined him and the duke, her eyes sparkled with double brightness, both from the feelings of her own heart at meeting again the man she loved best on earth, and from the pleasure that she saw on her father's countenance, which told her in a moment that all the news Wilton had brought was favourable.

The result to the duke, however, was not so satisfactory as it might have been. In the joy of his heart he gave way somewhat more to his appetite at supper than was prudent, ate all those things that Sir George Milington, his good physician, forbade him to eat, and drank two or three glasses of wine more than his usual portion. At the time all this seemed to do him no harm, and he spoke somewhat crossly to his own servant who reminded him of the physician's regulations. He even shook his finger playfully at Laura for her grave looks upon the occasion, and, during the rest of the evening, was as gay as could be. The consequence, however, was, that about a quarter of an hour after Wilton had descended to the breakfast room on the following morning, Laura came down alone.

"I am sorry to say, Wilton," she said, with a slight smile, "that my dear father has greatly increased his

pain by exceeding a little last night. He has scarcely slept at all, I find, and begs you will excuse him till dinner-time. He leaves me to entertain you, Wilton. Do you think I can do it?"

Wilton's answer was easily found; and Laura passed the whole morning with him alone.

Certainly neither of the two would have purchased the pleasure at the expense of the duke's suffering; but yet that pleasure of being alone together was, indeed, intense and bright. They were both very young, both fitted for high enjoyment, both loving as ardently and deeply as it is possible for human beings to love. Through the rich and beautiful woods of the park, over the sunny lawns and grassy savannas, where the wild deer nested in the tall fern, raising its dark eyes and antlered head to gaze above the feathery green at the passers by, Wilton and Laura wandered on, pouring forth the tale of affection into each other's hearts, gazing in each other's eyes, and seeming, through that clear window lighted up with life, to see into the deepest chambers of each other's bosom, and there behold a treasury of joy and mutual tenderness for years to come.

In the midst of that beautiful scene their love seemed in its proper place; everything appeared to harmonize with it; whereas, in the crowded city, all had jarred. Here the voices of the birds poured forth the sweetest harmony upon their ear as they went by; everything that the eye rested upon spoke softness, and peace, and beauty, and happy days; everything refreshed the sight and made the bosom expand; everything breathed of joy or imaged tranquillity.

The words, too, the words of affection, seemed more easily to find utterance; all the objects around suggested that imagery which passion, and tenderness, and imagination can revel in at ease; the fanciful clouds, as they flitted over the sky, the waving branches of the woods, the gay sparkling of the bright stream, the wide-extending prospect here and there, with the hills only appearing warmer and more glowing still as the eye traced them into the distance, all furnished to fancy some new means of shadowing forth bright hopes, and wishes, and purposes. Each was an enthusiastic admirer of nature; each had often and often stood, and pondered, and gazed, and admired scenes of similar

loveliness; each, too, had felt deep and ardent affection for the other in other places; and each had believed that nothing could exceed the joy that they experienced in their occasional solitary interviews; but neither had ever before known the same sensations of delight in the beautiful aspect of unrivalled nature, neither had tasted the joy which two hearts that love each other can feel in pouring forth their thoughts together in scenes that both are worthy to admire.

Nature had acquired tenfold charms to their eyes; and the secret of it was, that the spirit of love within their hearts pervaded and brightened it all. Love itself seemed to have gained an intensity and brightness in those scenes that it had never known before, because the great spirit of nature, the inspiring, the expanding genius of the scene, answered the spirit within their hearts, and seemed to witness and applaud their affection.

Oh how happily the hours went by in those sweet words and caresses, innocent but dear! oh how glad, how unlike the world's joys in general, were the feelings in each of those young hearts, while they wandered on alone, with none but love and nature for their companions on the way! On that first day, at least to Laura, the feeling was altogether overpowering; she might have had a faint and misty dream that such things could exist, but nothing more; but, now that she felt them, they seemed to absorb every other sensation for the time, to make her heart beat as it had never beat before, to cast her thoughts into strange but bright confusion, so that when she returned with Wilton, and found that her father had come down, she ran to her own room, to pause for a few moments, and to collect her ideas into some sort of order once more.

Day after day, during Wilton's stay, the same bright round of happy hours succeeded. During the whole of the first part of his sojourn the duke was unable to go out, and Wilton and Lady Laura were left very much alone. Wilton felt no hesitation in regard to his conduct. He could not believe, he scarcely even feared, that the duke was blind to the mutual love which existed between Laura and himself; and he only waited till his own fate was cleared up, to speak to her father upon the subject openly.

Thus passed his visit; and we could pause upon it

long, could paint many a scene of sunshiny happiness, warm, and soft, and beautiful, like the pictures of Claude de Lorraine; but we have other things to do, and scenes far less joyous to dwell upon. The time of his stay at length expired, and, of course, seemed all the more brief for being happy.

If the sojourn of Wilton at Somersbury Court had given pleasure to Laura, it gave scarcely less to the duke himself, though in a different way; and, when his young visiter was gone, he felt a want and a vacancy which made the days seem tedious. Thus, shortly after Wilton's arrival in town, he received a letter from the duke, begging him not to forget his promise of another speedy visit of longer duration, nor neglect the opportunity of each week's close to spend at least one day with him and Laura. The origin of these feelings towards his young friend was certainly to be traced to the somewhat forced confidence which he had been obliged to place in him in regard to Sir John Fenwick; but the feelings survived the cause; and during six weeks which followed, although Sir John Fenwick was universally supposed to have made his escape from England, and the duke felt himself quite safe, Wilton experienced no change of manner, but was greeted with gladness and smiles whenever he presented himself.

On every occasion, too, the Earl of Byerdale showed himself as kind as it was possible for him to be; and in one instance, in the middle of the year, spoke to him more seriously than usual in regard to his marriage with Lady Laura. The tone he took was considerate and thoughtful, and Wilton found that he could no longer give a vague reply upon the subject.

"I need not say to your lordship," he said, "how grateful I feel to you in this business; but I really can tell you no more than you see. I am received by the duke and Lady Laura, upon all occasions, with the greatest kindness and every testimony of regard. I am received, indeed, when no one else is received, and I have every reason to believe that the duke regards me almost as a son; but, of course, I cannot presume, so long as I can give no information of who I am, what is my family, what are the circumstances and history of my birth, to seek the duke's approbation to my marriage with his daughter. Fortuneless and portionless as

I must be, the proposal may seem presumptuous enough at any time ; and though the legend told us, my lord, 'to be bold, and bold, and everywhere be bold,' it told us also to 'be not too bold.'"

"You are right, you are right, Wilton," replied the earl. "But leave it to me: I myself will write to the duke upon the subject, and, doubt not, shall find means to satisfy him, though I cannot flatter you, Wilton—and I tell you so at once—I cannot flatter you with the idea of any unexpected wealth. Your blood is your only possession ; but that is enough. I will write myself in a few days."

"I trust, my lord, you will not do so immediately," replied Wilton. "You were kind enough to promise me explanations regarding my birth. Others have done so too." (The earl started.) "Lord Sunbury," continued Wilton, "promised me the same explanation, and to give me the papers which he possesses regarding me, even before the present period ; but he returns in September or October, and then they will of course be mine."

"Ha!" said the earl, musing. "Ha! does he? But why does he not send you over the papers? he is no farther off than Paris now; for I know he obtained a passport the other day, and promised to look into the negotiations which are going on for peace."

"I fancy, my lord," replied Wilton, "that, in the distracted state of both countries, he fears to send over the papers by any ordinary messenger."

"Oh, but from time to time there are council messengers," replied the earl. "There is not a *petit maître* in the whole land who does not contrive, notwithstanding the war, to get over his embroidery from France, nor any old lady to furnish herself with *bon-bons*."

"I suppose he thinks, too," replied Wilton, "that, as he is coming so soon, it is scarcely worth while, and perhaps the papers may need explanations from his own mouth."

"Ah! but the papers, the papers are the most important," replied the earl, thoughtfully. "In September or October does he come? Well, I will tell you all before that myself, Wilton. I thought I should have been able to do it ere now ; but there is one link in the chain incomplete, and, before I say anything, it must be rendered perfect. However, things are happening every day

which no one anticipates; and, though I do not expect the paper that I mentioned for a fortnight, it may come to-morrow, perhaps."

About ten days after this period, Wilton, as he went to the house of the Earl of Byerdale, remarked all those external signs and symptoms of agitation among the people, which may always be seen more or less by an observing eye when any event of importance takes place in a great city. They were, perhaps, more apparent than usual on the present occasion; for, in the short distance he had to go, he saw two hawkers of halfpenny sheets bawling down unintelligible tidings to maids in the areas, and two or three groups gathered together in the sunshiny morning at the corners of the streets.

When he reached the earl's house, he found him more excited than he usually suffered himself to be, and, holding up a letter, he exclaimed,

"Here's an account of this great event of the day, which, of course, you heard as you came here. This is a proof how things are brought about unexpectedly. Not a man in England, statesman or mechanic, could have imagined, for the last six weeks, that this dark, cold-blooded plotter, Sir John Fenwick, had failed to effect his escape."

"And has he not?" exclaimed Wilton, eagerly. "Is he in England? Has he been found?"

"He has not escaped," replied the earl, dryly. "He is in England; and he is at the present moment safe in Newgate. Some spies or other officers of the Duke of Shrewsbury discovered him lingering about in Kent and Sussex, and he has since been apprehended in attempting to escape into France."

"This is indeed great intelligence," replied Wilton. "I suppose there is no chance whatever of his being acquitted."

"None," answered the earl; "none whatever, if they manage the matter rightly, though he is more subtle than all the rest of the men put together. It seems likely that the whole business will fall upon me, and I shall see him in a few days; for he already talks of giving information against great persons on condition that his life be spared."

Wilton concealed any curiosity he might feel as well as he could, and went on with the usual occupations of

the day, not remarking as anything particular that the earl wrote a long and seemingly tedious letter, and gave it to one of the porters, with orders to send it off by a special messenger.

On going out afterward, he found that the tidings of Sir John Fenwick's arrest had spread over the whole town; and the rumour, agitation, and anxiety which had been caused by the plot, and had since subsided, was, for the time, revived with more activity than ever. As no one, however, was mentioned in any of the rumours but Sir John Fenwick himself, Wilton did not think it worth while to make the mind of the duke anxious upon the subject till he could obtain farther information; and he therefore refrained from writing, as it was now the middle of the week, and his visit was to be renewed on the Saturday following. A day passed by without the matter being any farther cleared up; but on the Friday, when Wilton visited the earl at his own house, he found him reading his letters with a very cloudy brow, which, however, grew brighter soon after he appeared.

Wilton found that some painful conversation must have taken place between the earl and his son; for Lord Sherbrooke was seated in the opposite chair with one of those listless and indifferent looks upon his countenance which he often assumed during grave discussions, to cover, perhaps, deeper matter within his own breast. The earl, though a little irritable, seemed not angry; and, after he had concluded the reading of his letters, he said, "I must answer all these tiresome epistles myself, Wilton: for the good people who wrote them have so contrived it, in order, I suppose, to spare you, and make me work myself. I shall not need your aid to-day, then; and, indeed, I do not see why you should not go down to Somersbury at once, if you like it; only be up at an early hour on Monday morning.—Sherbrooke, I wish you would take yourself away: it makes me angry to see you twisting that paper up into a thousand forms, like a mountebank at a fair."

"Dear papa," replied Lord Sherbrooke, in a childish tone, "you ought to give me something better to do, then. If you had taught me an honest trade, I should not have been so given to making penny whistles and cutting cockades out of foolscap paper. Nay, don't look so black, and mutter, 'Fool's cap paper, indeed!' between your teeth. I'll go, I'll go," and he accordingly quitted the room.

"Wilton," said the earl, as soon as his son was gone, "I have one word more to say to you. When you are down at Somersbury, lose not your opportunity; confer with the duke about your marriage at once. The political sky is darkening. No one can tell what another hour may bring. Now leave me."

Wilton obeyed, and passed through the anteroom into the hall. The moment he appeared there, however, Lord Sherbrooke darted out of the opposite room and caught him by the arm, almost overturning the fat porter in the way.

"Come hither, Wilton," he said, "come hither. I want to speak to you a moment. I want to show you a present that I've got for you."

Wilton followed him, and, to his surprise, found lying upon the table a pair of handsome spurs, which Lord Sherbrooke instantly put in his hand, saying, "There, Wilton, there. Use them to-night as you go to Somersbury; and, among other pretty things that you may have to say to the duke, you may tell him that Sir John Fenwick has accused him of high treason. My father is going to write to him this very night, to ask him civilly to come up to town to confer with him on business of importance. You yourself may be the bait to the trap, Wilton, for aught I know. So to your horse's back and away, and have all you plans settled with the duke before the post arrives to-morrow morning."

The earnestness of Sherbrooke's manner convinced his friend that what he said was serious and true, and, thanking him eagerly, he left him again and passed through the hall. Lord Byerdale was speaking at that moment to the porter; but he did not appear to notice Wilton, who passed on without pausing, sought his own lodgings with all speed, mounted his horse, and set out for Somersbury.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE world was in all its summer beauty, nature smiling with her brightest smiles, the glorious sunshine just departing from the sky, and glowing with double

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brightness in its dying hour, the woods still green and fresh, the blackbird tuning his evening song, and everything speaking peace and promising joy, as Wilton rode through the gates of Somersbury Park.

When he dismounted from his horse and rang the bell, his own servant took the tired beast and led it round towards the stable with the air of one who felt himself quite at home in the duke's house. But the attendant who opened the doors to him, and who was not the ordinary porter, bore a certain degree of sadness and gravity in his demeanour, which caused Wilton instantly to ask after the health of the duke and Lady Laura.

"My young lady is quite well, sir," replied the servant; "but the duke has had another bad fit of the gout in the beginning of the week, which has made him wonderfully cross," he added, lowering his voice, and giving a marked look in Wilton's face, which made the young gentleman feel that he intended his words as a sort of warning.

"I am afraid," thought Wilton, "what I have to tell him will not diminish his crossness."

But he said nothing aloud, and followed the servant towards the duke's own particular sitting-room. He found that nobleman alone, with his foot upon a stool. He had calculated, as he went thither, how he might best soften the tidings he had to bring; but the duke began the conversation himself, and in a manner which instantly put all other thoughts to flight, and, to say the truth, banished Sir John Fenwick and his whole concerns from his young companion's mind in a moment.

"So, sir, so," he began, using none of the friendly and familiar terms that he generally applied to Wilton, "so you have really had the goodness to come down here again."

"My lord duke," replied Wilton, "your invitation to me was not only so general, but so pressing, that, always having found you a man of sincerity and truth, I took it for granted that you wished to see me, or you would not have asked me."

"So I am, sir, so I am," replied the duke; "I am a man of sincerity and truth, and you shall find I am one, too. But, from your manner, I suppose my Lord of Byerdale has not told you the contents of my letter to him this morning."

"He never told me," replied Wilton, "that your grace had written to him at all; but, so far from even hinting that my visit could be disagreeable to you, he told me that, as he did not require my assistance, I had better come down here."

"He did? he did?" said the duke. "He is marvellous kind to send guests to my house whom he knows that I do not wish to see."

Wilton now began to divine the cause of the duke's present behaviour. It was evident that Lord Byerdale, without letting him know anything about it, had interfered to demand for him the hand of Lady Laura. How or in what terms he had done so, Wilton was somewhat anxious to ascertain; but he was so completely thunderstruck and surprised by his present reception, that he could scarcely play the difficult game in which he was engaged with anything like calmness or forethought.

"My lord," he replied, "it is probable that the Earl of Byerdale was more moved by kindness towards me than consideration for your grace. As you do not tell me what was the nature of your correspondence, I can but guess at Lord Byerdale's motives—"

"Which were, sir," interrupted the duke, "to give you a farther opportunity of engaging my daughter's affections against her father's wishes and consent. I suppose this was his object, at least."

"I should think not, my lord," replied Wilton, resolved not to yield his point so easily. "I should rather imagine that Lord Byerdale's view was to give me an opportunity, on the contrary, of pleading my own cause with the Duke of Gaveston; to give me an opportunity of recalling all those feelings of kindness, friendship, and generosity which the duke has constantly displayed towards me, and of urging him, by all those high feelings which I know he now possesses, not to crush an attachment which has grown up under his eyes, and been fostered by his kindness."

The duke was a little moved by Wilton's words and manner; but he had taken his resolution to make the present discussion between himself and Wilton final, and he seized instantly upon the latter words of his reply.

"Grown up under my eye, and fostered by my kindness!" he exclaimed. "You do not mean to say, sir,

I trust, that I gave you any encouragement in this mad pursuit? You do not mean to say that I saw and connived at your attachment to my daughter?"

Wilton might very well have said that he certainly did give such encouragement and opportunity that the result could scarcely have been, by any possibility, otherwise than that which it actually was. But he knew that to show him in fault would only irritate the duke more, and he was silent.

"Good God!" continued the peer, "such a thing never entered into my head. It was so preposterous, so insane, so out of all reasonable calculation, that I might just as well have been afraid of building my house under a hill, for fear the hill should walk out of its place and crush it. I could never have dreamed of or fancied such a thing, sir, as that you should forget the difference between my daughter, Lady Laura Gaveston, and yourself, and presume to seek the hand of one so much above you. It shows how kindness and condescension may be mistaken. Lord Byerdale, indeed, talks some vague nonsense about your having good blood in your veins; but what are your titles, sir? what is your rank? where are your estates? Show me your rent-rolls. I have never known anything of Mr. Wilton Brown but as the private secretary of the Earl of Byerdale—*his clerk* he called him to me one day—who has nothing but a good person, a good coat, and two or three hundred a year. Mr. Wilton Brown to be the suiter for the only child of one of the first peers in the land, the heiress of a hundred thousand per annum! My dear sir, the thing was too ridiculous to be thought of. If people had told me I should have my eyes picked out by a sparrow, I should have believed them as much," and he laughed aloud at his own joke, not with the laugh of merriment, but of anger and scorn.

Wilton felt cut to the heart, but still he recollected that it was Laura's father who spoke; and he was resolved that no provocation whatever should induce him to say one word which he himself might repent at an after period, or with which she might justly reproach him. He felt that from the duke he must bear what he would have borne from no other man on earth; that to the duke he must use a tone different from that which he would have employed to any other man. He paused a moment, both to let the duke's laugh subside, and the

first angry feelings of his own heart wear off: but he then answered,

"Perhaps, my lord, you attribute to me other feelings and greater presumption than I have in reality been actuated by. Will you allow me, before you utterly condemn me—will you allow me, I say, not to point out any cause why you should have seen, or known, or countenanced my attachment to your daughter, but merely to recall to your remembrance the circumstances in which I have been placed, and in which it was scarcely possible for me to resist those feelings of love and attachment which I will not attempt to disown, which I never will cast off, and which I will retain and cherish to the last hour of my life, whatever may be your grace's ultimate decision, whatever may be my fate, fortune, happiness, or misery in other respects?"

The duke was better pleased with Wilton's tone, and, to say the truth, though his resolution was in no degree shaken, yet the anger which he had called up, in order to drown every word of opposition, had by this time nearly exhausted itself.

"My ultimate decision!" said the duke; "sir, there is no decision to be made: the matter is decided. But go on, sir, go on; I am perfectly willing to hear. I am not so unreasonable as not to hear anything that you may wish to say, without giving you the slightest hope that I may be shaken by words: which cannot be. What is it you wish to say?"

"Merely this, your grace," replied Wilton. "The first time I had the honour of meeting your grace, I rendered yourself, and more particularly the Lady Laura, a slight service; a very slight one, it is true, but yet sufficient to make you think, yourself, that I was entitled to claim your after-acquaintance, and to justify your reproach for not coming to your box at the theatre. You must admit, then, certainly, that I did not press myself into the society of the Lady Laura."

"Oh, certainly not, certainly not," replied the duke: "I never accused you of that, sir. Your conduct, your external demeanour, has always been most correct. It is not of any presumption of manners that I accuse you."

"Well, my lord," continued Wilton, "it so happened that an accidental circumstance, not worth noticing now, induced your lordship to place much confidence in me, and to render me a familiar visiter at your house.

You, on one occasion, called me to your daughter your best friend, and I was more than once left in Lady Laura's society for a considerable period alone. Now, my lord, none can know better than yourself the charms of that society, or how much it is calculated to win and engage the heart of any one whose bosom was totally free, and had never beheld before a woman equal in the slightest degree to his ideas of perfection. I will confess, my lord, that I struggled very hard against the feelings which I found growing in my own bosom. At that time I struggled the more and with the firmer determination, because I had always entertained an erroneous impression with regard to my own birth; an impression which, had it continued, would have prevented my dreaming it possible that Lady Laura could ever be mine—"

"It is a pity that it did not continue," said the duke, dryly; but Wilton took no notice, and went on.

"At that time, however," he said, "I learned through the Earl of Byerdale that I had been in error in regard to my own situation; though the distance between your grace and myself might still be great, it was diminished; and you may easily imagine that such joyful tidings naturally carried hope and expectation to a higher pitch than perhaps was reasonable."

"To a very unreasonable pitch, it would seem, indeed, sir," answered the duke.

"It may be so, my lord," replied Wilton; "but the punishment upon myself is very severe. However, not even then—although I had the fairest prospects from the interest and promises of the Earl of Byerdale, and from the whole interest of the Earl of Sunbury, who has ever treated me as a son—although I might believe that a bright political career was open before me, and that I might perhaps raise myself to the highest stations in the state—not even then did I presume to think of Lady Laura with anything like immediate hopes. Just at this same period, however, the daring attempts to mix your grace with the plans of the conspirators by carrying off your daughter took place, and you were pleased to intrust to me the delicate and somewhat dangerous task of discovering the place to which she had been carried, and setting her free from the hands of the bold and infamous men who had obtained possession of her person. Now, my lord—feeling every inclination

to love her, I may indeed say loving her before—you can easily feel how much such an attachment must have been increased; how much every feeling of tenderness and affection must have been augmented by the interest, the powerful interest of that pursuit; how everything must have combined to confirm my love for her for ever, while all my thoughts were bent upon saving her and restoring her to your arms; while the whole feelings of my heart and energies of my mind were busy with her, and her fate alone. Then, my lord, when I came to defend her at the hazard of my life; when I came to contend for her with those who withheld her from you; when we had to pass together several hours of danger and apprehension, with her clinging to my arm, and with my arm only for her support and protection; and when, at length, all my efforts proved successful, and she was set free, was it wonderful, was it at all extraordinary, that I loved her, or that she felt some slight interest and regard for me? Since then, my lord, reflect on all that has taken place; how constantly we have been together; how she has been accustomed to treat me as the most intimate and dearest of her friends; how you yourself have said you looked upon me as your son—”

“But never in that sense, sir, never in that sense!” exclaimed the duke, glad to get at any word to cut short a detail which was telling somewhat strongly against him. “A son, sir, I said a son, not a son-in-law. But, however, to end the whole matter at once, Mr. Wilton Brown, I am very willing to acknowledge the various services you have rendered me, and which you have recapitulated somewhat at length, and to acknowledge that there might be a great many motives for falling in love with my daughter without my attributing to you any mercenary or ambitious motives. It is not that I blame you at all for falling in love with her; that was but a folly for which you must suffer your own punishment: but I do blame you very much, sir, for trying to make her fall in love with you, when you must have known perfectly well that her doing so would meet with the most decided disapprobation from her father, and that your marriage was altogether out of the question. I think that this very grave error might well cancel all obligations between us; but, nevertheless, I am very willing to recompense those services”—Wilton waved his hand indignantly—“to recompense those

services," continued the duke; "to testify my sense of them, in short, in any way you will point out."

"My lord, my lord," replied Wilton, "you surely must wish to give me more pain than that which I feel already. The services which I have rendered were freely rendered. They have been repaid already, not by your grace, but by my own heart and feelings. The only recompense I ever proposed to myself was to know that they were really serviceable and beneficial to those for whom they were done. I ask nothing of your grace but that which you will not grant. But the time will come, my lord—"

"Do not flatter yourself to your own disappointment!" interrupted the duke: "the time will never come when I shall change in this respect. I grant my daughter a veto, as I promised her poor dear mother I would, and she shall never marry a man she does not love; but I claim a veto too, Mr. Wilton Brown, and will not see her cast herself away, even though she should wish it. The matter, sir, is altogether at an end: it is out of the question, impossible, and it shall never be."

The duke rose from his chair as he spoke, and then went on in a cold tone: "I certainly expected that you might come to-morrow, sir, but not to-night, and I should have made in the morning such preparations as would have prevented any unpleasant meeting between my daughter and yourself in these circumstances. I must now give orders for her to keep her room, as I cannot consent to your meeting, and, of course, we must not treat you inhospitably; but you will understand that the circumstances prevent me from requesting you to protract your visit beyond an early hour to-morrow morning."

"Your grace, I believe, mistakes my character a good deal," replied Wilton: "I remain not an hour in a house where I am not welcome, and I shall beg instantly to take my leave, as Somersbury must not be my abode to-night."

His utterance was difficult, for his heart was too full to admit of his speaking freely, and it required a great effort to prevent his own feelings from bursting forth.

"But your horse must be tired," said the duke, feeling somewhat ashamed of the part he was acting.

"Not too tired, my lord," replied Wilton, "to bear

his master from a house where he is unwillingly received. Were it necessary, my lord, I would walk rather than force your grace to make any change in your domestic arrangements. You will permit me to tell the porter to call round my groom;" and, going out for a moment, he bade the porter, in a loud, clear voice, order his horses to be saddled again, and his groom to come round. He then returned to the chamber where the duke remained, and both continued silent and embarrassed. It was some time, indeed, before Wilton's orders could be obeyed, for his valise had been carried up to his usual apartments. At length, however, the horse was announced, and Wilton went towards the door.

"I now take my leave of you, my lord," he said, "and, in doing so, shall endeavour to bear with me all the bright memories of much kindness experienced at your hands, and forgetfulness of one night's unkindness, which I trust and believe I have deserved even less than I did your former goodness towards me. For yourself I shall ever retain feelings of the deepest regard and esteem; for your daughter, undying love and attachment."

The duke was somewhat moved and very much embarrassed; and whether from habit, embarrassment, or real feelings of regard, he held out his hand to Wilton as he parted. Wilton took it and pressed it in his own. A single bright drop rose in his eye, and feeling that if he remained another moment his self-command would give way, he left the duke and sprang upon his horse's back.

Two or three of the old servants were in the hall as he passed, witnessing, with evident marks of consternation and grief, his sudden departure from Somersbury. The duke's head groom kept his stirrup, and, to his surprise, he saw the old butler himself holding the rein.

As Wilton thanked him and took it, however, the man slipped a note into his hand, saying in a low voice, "From my young lady." Wilton clasped his fingers tight upon it, and, with one consolation at least, rode away from the house where he had known so much happiness.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE light was fading away as Wilton took his path through the thick trees of the park up towards the lodge at the gates; but, at the first opening where the last rays of the evening streamed through, he opened Laura's note, and found light enough to read it, though perhaps no other eyes than those of love could have accomplished half so much; and oh, what a joy and what a satisfaction it was to him when he did read it! though he found afterward that note had been written while the eyes were dropping fast with tears.

"Fear not, dear Wilton," it said: "I have only time to bid you not to fear. I am yours, ever yours; and whatever you may be told, never believe that I give even one thought to any other man.

"LAURA GAVESTON."

She signed her name at full, as if she felt that it was a solemn act; not exactly a pledge that would bind her in the least more than her own resolution had already bound her, but a pledge to Wilton's heart; a pledge to which, in after years, she could always refer, if at any time the hand of another man should be proposed to her.

She had wept while she had written it, but it had given her deep satisfaction to do that act; for she figured to herself the balm, the consolation, the support which it would be to him she loved best on earth—yes, best on earth; for, though she loved her father deeply, she loved Wilton more.

When the high command went forth, "Thou shalt leave all on earth and cleave unto thy husband or thy wife," the God that made the ordinance fashioned the human heart for its accomplishment. It would seem treating a high subject somewhat lightly, perhaps, to say that it may even be by the will of God that parents so very frequently behave ill or unkindly to their children in the matter of their marriage, in order to lessen the breaking of that great tie—in order that the scion may be stripped from the stem more easily. But it were well

if parents thought of the effect that they produce in their children's affection towards them by such conduct; for youth is tenacious of the memories of unkindness, and often retains the unpleasant impression that it makes when the prejudices that produced it have passed away.

However that might be, Laura loved Wilton, as we have said, best on earth; she had a duty to perform to him, and she had a duty to perform to her father, and she determined to perform them both; for she believed—and she was right—that no two duties are ever incompatible; the greater must swallow up the less; and to let it do so is a duty in itself; but in the present instance there were two duties which were perfectly compatible. She would never marry Wilton while her father opposed, but she would never marry any one else; for she felt that in her heart she was already wedded unto him.

The words that she wrote gave Wilton that assurance, and it was a bright and happy assurance to him: for, so long as there is nothing irrevocable in the future, the space which it affords gives room for hope to spread her wings; and though he might feel bitterly and deeply depressed by the conduct of the duke, and the stern determination which he had displayed, yet with love, with mutual love and firmness of heart on both sides, he thought that happiness might be indeed delayed, but was not permanently lost.

Meditating on these things, he rode on for about a couple of miles; but then suddenly recollected that in all the agitation of the moment, and the painful discussion he had undergone, he had totally forgotten to tell the duke either the arrest of Sir John Fenwick, or the tidings which he had heard more immediately affecting himself. He again checked his weary horse, and asked himself, "Shall I ride back?" But then he thought, "No, I will not. I will stop at the first farmhouse or inn that I may find, where I can get shelter for myself and food for my horse during the night, and thence I will write him the intelligence, take it how he will. I will not expose myself to fresh contumely by going back this night."

He accordingly rode on upon his way, full of sad and melancholy thoughts, and with the bright but unsubstantial hopes which Laura's letter had given him

fading away again rapidly under causes of despondency that were but too real. It was an hour in which gloom was triumphant over all other feelings; one of those hours when even the heart of youth seems to lose its elastic bound; when hope itself, like some faint light upon a dark night, makes the sombre colours of our fate look even blacker than before, and when we feel like mariners who see the day close upon them in the midst of a storm, as if the sun of happiness had sunk from view for ever. Such feelings and such thoughts absorbed him entirely as he rode along, and he marked not at all how far he went, though, from the natural impulse of humanity, he spared the tired horse which carried him, and proceeded at a slow pace.

About three miles from the duke's gates his servant rode up, saying, "I see a light there, sir. I should not wonder if that were the little inn of the village which one passes on the right."

"We had better keep our straightforward way," replied Wilton. "We cannot be very far from the Three Cups, which, though a poor place enough, may serve me for a night's lodging."

The man fell back again, and Wilton was proceeding slowly, when he perceived three men riding towards him at an easy pace. The night was clear and fine, and the hour was so early that he anticipated no evil, though he had come unarmed, expecting to reach Somersbury, as he did, before dark.

He rode on quietly, then, till he met them, when he was forced suddenly to stop, one of the three presenting a pistol at his breast, and exclaiming, "Stand! Who are you?"

"Is it my money you want, gentlemen?" demanded Wilton; "for if it be, there is but little of it: but as much as I have is at your service."

"I ask who you are?" replied the other. "I did not ask you for money. Are you a king's officer? And which king's?"

"I am no king's officer," replied Wilton, "but a true subject of King William."

"Pass on," replied the other man, dropping his pistol: "you are not the person we want."

Wilton rode forward very well contented to have escaped so easily; but he remarked that his servant was likewise stopped, and that the same questions were put

to him also. He, too, was allowed to pass, however, without any molestation, and for the next half mile they went on without any farther interruption. Then, however, they were met by a single horseman, riding at the same leisurely pace as the others; but he suffered Wilton to pass without speaking, and merely stopped the servant to ask, "Who is that gentleman?"

No sooner had the man given his name than the horseman turned round and rode after him, exclaiming, "Mr. Brown! Mr. Brown!"

Wilton checked his horse, and in a moment after, to his surprise, he found no other but the worthy Captain Byerly by his side.

"How do you do, Mr. Brown?" said the captain, as he came up. "I have but a moment to speak to you, for I have business on before; but I wanted to tell you, that, if you keep straight on for half a mile farther, and, taking the road to the right, where you will see a finger-post, go into a cottage—that cottage there where you can just see a light twinkling in the window over the moor—you will find some old friends of yours whom you and I saw together the last time we met, and another one, too, who will be glad enough to see you."

"Who do you mean?" demanded Wilton, somewhat anxiously.

"I mean the colonel," replied Captain Byerly.

"Indeed!" said Wilton. "I wish to see him very much."

"You will find him there, then," replied the other. "But he is sadly changed, poor fellow, sadly changed, indeed!"

"How so?" said Wilton. "Do you mean that he has been ill?"

"No, not exactly ill," answered Byerly, "and I don't well know what it is makes him so. At all events, I can't stop to talk about it at present; but if you go on you will see him, and hear more about it from himself. Good-night, Mr. Brown, good-night: those fellows will get too far ahead of me if I don't mind." And, thus saying, he rode on.

Wilton, for his part, proceeded on his way, musing over what had occurred. It seemed to him, indeed, not a little strange that a party of men, whose general business was hardly doubtful, should suffer him, without any knowledge of his person or any private motives for so

doing, to pass them quietly on his way, and he was led to imagine that they must have in view some very peculiar object to account for such conduct. That object, however, was evidently considered by themselves of very great importance, and to require extraordinary precautions; for, before Wilton reached the direction-post to which Byerly had referred, he passed two more horsemen, one of whom was singing as he came up, but stopped immediately on perceiving the wayfarer, and demanded, in a civil tone,

"Pray, sir, did you meet some gentlemen on before?"

"Yes," replied Wilton, "I did: three, and then one."

"Did they speak to you?" demanded the other.

"Yes," replied Wilton, "they asked me some questions."

"Oh, was that all?" said the man. "Good-night, sir;" and on the two rode.

At the finger-post Wilton turned from the highway; but for some time he was inclined to fancy, either that he had mistaken the direction, or that the light had been put out in the cottage window, for not the least glimmering ray could he now see. At length, on suddenly turning a belt of young planting, he found himself in front of a low but extensive and very pretty cottage, or rather, perhaps it might be called, two cottages joined together by a centre somewhat lower than themselves. It was more like a building of the present day than one of that epoch; and though the beautiful China rose, the sweetest ornament of our cottage doors at present, was not then known in this country, a rich spreading vine covered every part of the front with its luxuriant foliage. The light was still in the window, having only been hidden by the trees; and, throwing his rein to the groom, Wilton said,

"Perhaps we may find shelter here for the night; but I must first go in and see."

Thus saying, he advanced and rang the bell, the handle of which he found hanging down by the doorpost, and, after having waited a minute or two, he heard the sound of steps coming along the passage. The door was opened by a pretty, neat servant-girl, with a candle in her hand; but behind her stood a woman considerably advanced in life, bowed in the back, and with a stick in her hand, presenting so much altogether the same appearance which the Lady Helen Oswald had

thought fit to assume in her first interview with him, that, for an instant, Wilton doubted whether it was or was not herself. A second glance, however, at the old woman's face, showed the withering hand of time too strongly for him to doubt any farther.

The momentary suspense had made him gaze at the old woman intently, and she had certainly done the same with regard to him. There was an expression of wonder, of doubt, and yet of joy in her countenance, which he did not at all understand; and his surprise was still more increased when, upon his asking whether he could there obtain shelter during the night, the woman exclaimed, with a strong Irish accent, "Oh, that you shall, and welcome a thousand times!"

"But I have two horses and my groom here," replied Wilton.

"Oh, for the horses and the groom," replied the woman, "I fear me, boy, we can't take them in for ye; but he can go away up to the high road, and in half a mile he'll come to the Three Cups, where he will find good warm stabling enough."

"That will be the best way, I believe," replied Wilton; and, turning back to speak with the man for a moment, he gave him directions to go to the little public house, to put up the horses, to get some repose, and to be ready to return to London at four o'clock on the following morning.

As soon as he had so done he turned back again, and found the old lady with her head thrust into the doorway of a room on the right-hand side, saying in a loud tone, "It's himself, sure enough, though!"

The moment she had spoken he heard an exclamation, apparently in the voice of Lord Sherbrooke; and, following a sign from the girl who had opened the door, he went in, and found the room tenanted by four persons, who had been brought together in intimate association by one of the strangest of those strange combinations in which fate sometimes indulges.

Seated in a large armchair, with her cheek much paler than it had been before, but still extremely beautiful, was the lady whom we must now call Lady Sherbrooke. Her large dark eyes, full of light and lustre, though somewhat shaded by a languid fall of the upper eyelid, were turned towards the door as Wilton enter-

ed, and her fair, beautiful hand lay in that of her husband as he sat beside her.

On the opposite side of the room, with her fine face bearing very few traces of time's withering power, and her beautiful figure falling into a line of exquisitely easy grace, sat the Lady Helen, gazing on the other two, with her arm resting on a small worktable, and her cheek supported by her hand.

Cast with apparent listlessness into a chair, somewhat behind the Lady Helen Oswald, and shaded by her figure from the light upon the table, was the powerful form of our old acquaintance Green. But there was, in the whole attitude which he had assumed, an apathy, a weary sort of thoughtfulness, which struck Wilton very much the moment he beheld him. Green's eyes, indeed, were raised to mark the opening door, but still there was a gloomy want of interest in their glance, which was utterly unlike the quick and sparkling vivacity which had characterized them in former times.

The first who spoke was Lord Sherbrooke, who, still holding Caroline's hand in his, held out the other to his friend, saying, in a tone of some feeling, but, at the same time, of feeling decidedly melancholy, "This is a sight that will give you pleasure, Wilton."

"It is, indeed, my dear Sherbrooke," replied Wilton; "only I do wish that it had been rendered more pleasant still by seeing no remaining trace of illness in this lady's face."

"I am better, sir, much better," she said; "for my recovery has been certain and uninterrupted, though somewhat long. If I could but teach your friend to bear a little adversity as unrepining as I have borne sickness, we might be very happy. I am very glad, indeed, to see you, sir," she continued; "for you must know that this is my house that you are in;" and she smiled gayly as she spoke: "but, though I should always have been happy to welcome you as Sherbrooke's friend, yet I do so more gladly now, as it gives me the opportunity of thanking you for all the care and kindness that you showed me upon a late occasion."

Though Wilton had his heart too full of painful memories to speak cheerfully upon any subject, yet he said all that was courteous and all that was kind; and, as if it were to force himself to show an interest which he would more really have experienced at another mo-

ment, he added, "I often wished to know how the sad adventures of that night ended."

The lady coloured; but he instantly continued, "I mean, what was the result when the constables and other people visited the house. I knew that Sherbrooke's very name was sufficient to protect him and all in whom he had an interest, and therefore I took no steps in the matter; but I much wished to hear what followed after I had left the place, though, as Sherbrooke said nothing, I did not like to question him."

"You have questioned me on deeper subjects than that, Wilton," replied Lord Sherbrooke. "But the matter that you speak of was easily settled. The constables found no one in the house but Plessis, myself, these two ladies, and some humbler women. It so happened, however, that I was known to one of the men, who had been a coachman in my father's service, and had thriven till he had grown—into a baker of all earthly things. As to Plessis, no inquiries were made, as there was not a constable among them who had not an occasional advantage by his 'little commerce,' as he calls it; and the ladies, of course, passed unscathed, though the searching of the house, which, at the time, we could not rightly account for till Plessis afterward explained the whole, alarmed my poor Caroline, and, I think, did her no small harm. But look you, Wilton, there is your good friend and mine, on the other side of the room, rousing himself from his reverie to speak with you. Ay! and one who must have a share in your greetings also, though, with the unrivalled patience which has marked her life, she waits till all have done."

Wilton crossed over the room and spoke a few words to the Lady Helen Oswald; and then turning to Green, he held out his hand to him; but the greeting of the latter was still somewhat abstracted and gloomy.

"Ha! Wilton," he said. "What brought you hither this night, my good boy? You are on your way to Somersbury, I suppose?"

"No," replied Wilton, "I have just come thence."

"Indeed!" said Green. "Indeed! How happens that, I wonder? Did you meet any of my men? Indeed you must have met them if you came from Somersbury."

"I met several men on horseback," replied Wilton:

"one party of whom, three in number, stopped me, and asked me several questions."

"They offered no violence? They offered no violence?" repeated Green, eagerly.

"None," answered Wilton, "though I suppose, if I had not answered their questions satisfactorily, they would have done so, as they seemed very fit persons for such proceedings. But I was in hopes," he continued, "that all this had gone by with you, and that such dangerous adventures were no more thought of."

"I wish I had never thought of any still more dangerous," replied Green, "I should not have the faces looking at me that now disturb my sleep. But this is not my adventure," he continued, "but his—his sitting opposite there. I have nothing to do with it, but assisting him."

"Yes, indeed, my dear Wilton," replied Lord Sherbrooke, "the adventure is mine. All other trades failing, and having exhausted every other mad prank but that, I am taking a turn upon the king's highway, which has become far more fashionable nowadays than the Park, the puppet-show, or even Constitution Hill."

"Nay, nay, Henry!" exclaimed his wife, interrupting him, "I will not hear you malign yourself in that way. He is not taking a turn upon the king's highway, sir, for here he sits, bodily, I trust, beside his wife; and if the spirit have anything to do with the adventure that he talks of, the motive is a noble one, the object is not what he says."

"Hush, hush, Caroline," replied Lord Sherbrooke; "you will make Wilton believe, first, that I am sane; next, that I am virtuous; and, lastly, that I love any woman sufficiently to submit to her contradicting me; things which I have been labouring hard for months to make him think impossible."

"He knows, sir," said Green, interrupting him, "that you are generous and that you are kind, though he does not yet know to what extent."

"I believe he knows me better than any man now living," replied Lord Sherbrooke: "but it happens somewhat inopportunistically that he should be here to-night. Hark, colonel! There is even now the galloping of a horse round to the back of the house. Let you and I go into the other room, and see what booty our comrade has brought back."

He spoke with one of his gay but uncertain smiles, while Green's eyes sparkled with some of the brightness of former times as he listened eagerly, to make sure that Lord Sherbrooke's ear had not deceived him.

"You are right, you are right, sir," he said; "and then, I hear Byerly's voice speaking to the old woman."

But, before he could proceed to put Lord Sherbrooke's suggestion in execution, Byerly was in the room, holding up a large leathern bag, and exclaiming, "Here it is! here it is!"

"Alas!" said Caroline, "I fear, dangerously obtained."

"Not in the least, madam," replied Byerly: "if the man dies, let it be remarked, he dies of fright and nothing else; not a finger has been laid, in the way of violence, upon his person; but he would have given up anything to any one who asked him. We made him promise and vow that he would ride back to the town he came from; and, tying his feet under his horse's belly, we sent him off as hard as he could go. I, indeed, kept at a distance watching all, but the others gave me the bag as soon as it was obtained, and then scattered over the moor, every man his own way. I am back to London with all speed, and not a point of this will ever be known."

"Come hither, then, come hither, Byerly," said Green, leading him away: "we must see the contents of the bag, take what we want, and dispose of the rest. You had better come with me too, sir," he added, addressing Lord Sherbrooke; "for, as good Don Quixote would have said, 'The adventure is yours, and it is now happily achieved.'"

Thus saying, the three left the room together, and were absent for nearly half an hour.

CHAPTER XV.

It was evident to Wilton that, whatever was the enterprise in which Lord Sherbrooke and Green were engaged, it was one which, without absolutely wanting confidence in him, they were anxious to conceal from

his knowledge; and, to say truth, he was by no means sorry that such should be the case.

He knew Lord Sherbrooke too well to hope that any remonstrance would affect him, and he was therefore glad not to be made a partaker of any secret regarding transactions which he believed to be dangerous and yet could not prevent. In regard to Green, too, there were particular feelings in his bosom which made him anxious to avoid any farther knowledge of that most hazardous course of life in which he was evidently engaged; for he could not shut his eyes to what that course of life really was. Although, as we have already said, at that period the resource of the king's highway had been adopted by very different people from those who even ten or twenty years afterward trafficked thereon: though many a man of high education, gallant courage, and polished manners, ay, even of high birth, cast from his station by the changes and misfortunes of the day—like parts of a fine building thrown down by an earthquake, and turned to viler purposes—sought the midnight road as their only means of support: nay, though there were even some names afterward restored to the peerage which are supposed to have been well known among the august body of traffickers in powder and lead, yet Wilton could not but feel grieved that any one in whom he felt an interest should be tempted or driven to such an expedient, and, at all events, he thought that the less he knew upon the subject the better.

That, however, which struck him as the most strange, was to find two beings such as those who were now left alone with him, graceful, beautiful, gentle, high-toned in manners, distinguished in appearance, fitted to mingle with the highest society, and adorn the highest rank, cognizant of, if not taking part in, things so dangerous and reprehensible.

A momentary silence ensued when he was left alone with the two ladies, and the first words that he spoke evidently showed to the Lady Helen what was passing in Wilton's mind. She looked at him for a moment with a grave smile, and, after she had herself alluded more directly to the subject, he expressed plainly the regret that he felt at what he witnessed.

"I regret likewise, my dear boy," she said, "much that has gone before, nay, almost everything that has

taken place in the conduct of him you speak of for many years past. I regret it all deeply, and regret it far more than I do the present transaction. You will think it strange, but I see not well how this was to be avoided. Not that I believe," she added, thoughtfully, "that we ought to frustrate bad men by bad means; but nevertheless, Wilton, here was a very great and high object to be attained: utter destruction to all our hopes would have been the consequence of missing that object; and there was but one way of securing it. This is to be the last enterprise of the kind ever undertaken; and it was that very fact which made me so fearful; for I know how treacherously fate deals with us in regard to any rash or evil acts. How very often do we see that the last time—the very last time—men who have long gone on with impunity are to commit anything that is wrong, punishment and discovery overtake them, and vengeance steps in before reformation."

Wilton did not, of course, press the subject, as it was one in regard to which he would have been forced to converse on abstract principles, while the others spoke from particular knowledge. Nor was his mind attuned at that moment to much conversation of any kind, nor to any thoughts but those of his own grief.

The conversation, lingered then, till Green and Lord Sherbrooke returned. Captain Byerly was now no longer with them, and not another word was said of the transactions of that night. Green relapsed into gloomy silence, and very shortly after the two ladies retired to rest.

The moment they were gone, Lord Sherbrooke grasped Wilton's hand, saying, "What is the matter, Wilton? You are evidently ill at ease."

Wilton smiled.

"You give me none of your confidence, Sherbrooke," he said, "and yet you demand mine. However, I will tell you in one word what I might well have expected has occurred. An explanation has taken place between the duke and myself, and that bright vision has faded away."

"Indeed!" said Sherbrooke, thoughtfully. "Have you, too, met with a reverse, Wilton? I thought that you were one of the exempt; that everything was to smile upon you; that prosperity was to attend your footsteps even to the close of life. But fear not, fear not,

Wilton; this is only a momentary frown of the capricious goddess. She will smile again, and all be bright. It is not in your fate to be unfortunate."

"Nay, nay, Sherbrooke, this is cruel jesting," said Wilton. "Surely my lot is no very enviable one."

"It is one of those that mend, Wilton," replied Sherbrooke, sadly. "I live but to lose."

He spoke with a tone of deep and bitter melancholy; and Green, who had hitherto scarcely uttered a word, chimed in with feelings of as sad a kind; adding, as an observation upon what Lord Sherbrooke had said, "Who is there that lives past twenty that may not say the same? Who is there that does not live to lose? First goes by youth, down into that deep, deep sea, which gives us back none of all the treasures that it swallows up. Youth goes down, and innocence goes with it, and peace is then drowned too. Some sweet and happy feelings that belonged to youth, like the strong swimmers from some shipwrecked bark, struggle a while upon the surface, but are engulfed at last. Strength, vigour, powers of enjoyment, disappear one by one. Hope, buoyant hope, snatching at straws to keep herself afloat, sinks also in the end. Then life itself goes down, and the broad sea of events, which has just swallowed up another argosy, flows on, as if no such thing had been; and myriads cross and recross on the same voyage the spot where others perished scarce a day before. It is all loss, nothing but loss;" and he again fell into a fit of bitter musing.

"Come, Wilton," said Lord Sherbrooke, after a moment's thought, "I will show you a room where you can sleep. These are but melancholy subjects, and your fancies are grave enough already. They will be brighter soon; fear not, Wilton, they will be brighter soon."

"I know not what should brighten them," replied Wilton. "But I will willingly go and seek sleep for an hour or two, as I must depart by daylight to-morrow. In the mean while, Sherbrooke, I will ask you to let me write a brief note to the duke, and trust to you to send it as early as may be; for, to say the truth, in the bitter disappointment I have met with, and the harsh language which he used towards me, I forgot altogether to mention what you told me this morning."

The materials for writing were soon furnished, al-

though Lord Sherbrooke declared that, were he in Wilton's situation, he would let the proud peer take his own course, as he had shown himself so ungrateful for previous services.

Wilton, however, only replied, "He is Laura's father, Sherbrooke," and the note was accordingly written.

"It shall be delivered early," said Lord Sherbrooke, as soon as it was ready. "Give it to me, Wilton; and now let us go."

Ere he quitted the room, however, Wilton turned to Green, and held out his hand, saying, "I am grieved to see you so sad. Can I by no means aid you or give you comfort?"

Green grasped his hand eagerly and tightly in his own, and replied, "No, my boy, no; nothing can give me comfort. I have done that which calmly and deliberately I would do again to-morrow were I so called upon, and which yet, in doing it, has deprived my mind of peace. There may be yet one ray of comfort reach me, and it will reach me from you, Wilton; but it may be that you may wish to speak with me from time to time; if so, you will hear of me here, for I go no more to London. I have seen bloody heads and human quarters enow. Seek me here; and, if you want anything, ask me: for, though powerless to cure the bitterness of my own heart, I have more power to serve others than ever I had."

"I have tried more than once in vain to see you," replied Wilton; "not that I wanted anything, but that I was anxious to hear tidings of you, and to thank you for what you had already done. I will now, however, bid you good-night, and trust that time, at least, may prove an alleviation of your burdens as well as those of others."

Green shook his head with a look of utter despondency, and Wilton quitted him, seeing that farther words were vain. Lord Sherbrooke then conducted him to a small, neat room, and left him to lie down to rest, saying,

"I know not, Wilton, whether I can conquer my bad habits so much as to be up before you go. If not, I may not see you for many days, for I have leave of absence," he added, with one of his light laughs, "from my most honoured and respected parent. Should you need me, you will find me here; and I would fain have

you tell me if anything of import befalls you. I shall hear, however, I shall hear."

Thus saying, he left him, and at an early hour on the following day Wilton was on his way homeward. He reached London before the time at which it was usual for him to present himself at the house of Lord Byerdale; but when, after pulling off his riding-dress, he went thither, he found that the earl had already gone to Whitehall, and, consequently, he followed him to that place.

The statesman seemed not a little surprised to see him, and instantly questioned him in regard to his interview with the duke. That interview was soon told by Wilton, who loved not to dwell upon the particulars, and consequently related the whole as briefly as possible.

He told enough, however, to move the earl a good deal, but in a different manner from what might have been expected. Once or twice he coloured and frowned heavily, and then laughed loud and bitterly.

"His pride is almost more absurd than I had fancied, Wilton," he said at length; "but, to tell you the truth, I have in some degree foreseen all this, though not quite to this extent. If he had willingly consented to your marriage with his daughter, he might have saved himself, perhaps, some pain, for he must consent in the end, and it would not surprise me some day to see him suing you to the alliance that he now refuses you. His grace is certainly a very great and haughty peer, but, nevertheless, he may some day find you quite a fitting match for his daughter."

"I trust it may be so, my lord," replied Wilton; "but yet I see not very well how it can be so."

"You will see, you will see, Wilton," replied Lord Byerdale: "it matters not at present to talk of it. But now sit down and write me a letter to the lord lieutenant of Hampshire, telling him that I must beg he and the sheriff would take prompt measures for restoring peace and security in the county. Let him know that one of the government couriers was stopped and plundered on the road last night. - Luckily, the bag of despatches has been found upon the highway unopened, but still the act was a most daring one. The same sort of thing has been of frequent occurrence in that county: it is evident that a large troop of these gentry of the road make that part of the world their field, and we must put a stop to it."

Wilton sat down and did as he was bid, feeling, it is true, that he could give a good deal more information upon the subject than the earl possessed if he thought fit to do so. This, of course, he did not choose to do; and, after the letter to the lord lieutenant was written, the earl allowed him to depart, saying, "Our business is somewhat light to-day, Wilton; but do not be the least afraid on account of this fair lady. The duke's foolish pride will come down when he hears more."

Wilton departed in a meditative mood; for, notwithstanding every assurance given him, he could not but feel apprehensive, sad, and despondent. He might ask himself, indeed, for the earl's words naturally led to such a mistaken question, "Who, then, am I? Who is it they would have me believe myself, that so proud a man should seek the alliance which he now scorns, as soon as he knows who I am?" But there seemed to him a sort of mockery in the very idea, which made him cast it from him as a vain delusion.

Though freed from ordinary business, and at liberty to go where he liked, with a thousand refined tastes which he was accustomed to gratify in his own dwelling, yet Wilton felt not the slightest inclination to turn his steps homeward on the present occasion. Music he knew full well was by no means calculated to sooth his mind under the first effects of bitter disappointment. Had it been but the disappointment of seeing Laura at the time he expected to do so; had circumstances compelled him to be absent from her for a week or a month longer than he had expected; had the bright dreams which he always conjured up, of pleasant hours, and happy days, and warm smiles, and sweet words, when he proposed to go down to Somersbury, been left unrealized by the interposition of some unexpected event, the disappointment would certainly have been great; but, nevertheless, he might have then found a pleasure, a consolation in music, in singing the songs, in playing the airs of which Laura was fond; in calling up from memory the joys that were denied to hope, which can never so well be done, so powerfully, as by the magic voice of song.

But now all was uncertain: his heart was too full of despondency and grief to find relief by reawakening even the brightest memories of the past: he could not gaze upon the days gone by like the painter or the poet

looking upon some beautiful landscape; for his situation he felt to be that rather of some unhappy exile looking back upon a bright land that he loved, when quitting it, perhaps, never to return. Neither could books afford him relief; for his own sorrowful feelings were now too actively present to suffer him to rove with the gay imagination of others, or to meditate on abstracted subjects with the thoughtful and the grave.

To fly from the crowds that at that time thronged the streets; to seek solitary thought; to wander on changing his place continually; to suffer and give way to all the many strange and confused ideas and feelings of grief, and disappointment, and bitterness of heart, and burning indignation, at ill-merited scorn, and surprise, and curiosity, in regard to the hopes that were held out to him, and despairing rejection of those hopes, even while the voice of the never-dying prophetess of blessings was whispering in his heart that those very hopes might be true—was all that Wilton could do at that moment.

The country, however, was sooner reached in those days than it is at present; and, after leaving Whitehall, he was in a few minutes in the sweet fields, with their shady rows of tall elms, which lay to the westward of St. James's-street. Here he wandered on, musing, as we have said, for several hours, with his arms crossed upon his chest, and his eyes scanning the ground. At length he turned his steps homeward, thinking that it was a weakness thus to give way: but still, as he went, the same feelings and the same thoughts pursued him; and that black care which in the days of the Latin poet sat behind the horseman, was his companion also by the way.

On reaching his lodgings, the door was opened by the servant of the house, and he was passing on, but the girl stopped him, saying, "There is a lady, sir, up stairs, who has been waiting for you near an hour."

"A lady!" exclaimed Wilton, with no slight surprise; for, though such a visit in those days might have passed without scandal, he knew no one who was likely to call upon him, unless, indeed, it were the Lady Helen Oswald, whose interest in him seemed to be of such a kind as might well produce a visit upon any extraordinary occasion.

He mounted the stairs with a rapid step, however, for

he knew that it must be something out of the common course of events which had brought her, and, opening the door quickly, entered his small sitting-room. But what was his surprise to behold, seated on the opposite side of the room, and watching eagerly the door, none other but Lady Laura Gaveston herself.

Astonishment certainly was the first sensation, but joy was the second; and, advancing quickly to her, he took her in his arms, and held her to his heart, and kissed her cheek again and again. For several moments he asked no question. It was sufficient that she was there, pressed to his bosom, returning his affection, and, whatever might be the consequences, for the time, at least, he was happy. The joy that was in his countenance, the tenderness, the deep, devoted love of his whole manner, gave as much happiness to Laura herself as she was capable of receiving from anything at that moment.

Her thoughts, also, for a minute or two, were all given up to love and happiness; but it was evident from the tears on her cheeks that she had been weeping bitterly ever since she had been there; and the moment that he had recovered himself a little, Wilton led her back to her seat, and, placing himself beside her, still holding her hand, he said, "Dear, dear Laura, I fear that something very painful, I may say very terrible, has driven you to this step; but indeed, dear girl, you have not placed your confidence wrongly; and I shall value this dear hand only the more should your love for me have deprived you of that wealth which you have been taught to expect. I will labour for you, dear Laura, with redoubled energy, and I fear not to obtain such a competence as may make you happy, though I can never give you that affluence which you have a right to claim."

The tears had again run over Laura's cheek; but, as she returned the pressure of his hand, she replied,

"Thank you, dear Wilton, thank you; I know you would willingly do all for me, but you mistake, and, I think, cannot have heard what has happened."

Those words instantly guided Wilton's mind back to the right point, though for a moment thought hovered round it vaguely. He recollected all that Lord Sherbrooke had said with regard to Sir John Fenwick and the charge against the duke, and he replied, "I had mistaken, Laura, I had mistaken. But what has happened?"

I have been out wandering long in the fields, thinking of but one subject, and melancholy enough, dear girl."

"I know it, dear Wilton, oh, I know it," she replied, leaning her head upon his shoulder, "and I, too, have passed a wretched night thinking of you. Not that I feared all would not in the end go right, but I knew how miserable what had occurred would make you; and I knew how angrily my father sometimes speaks, how much more he says than he really means, and what pain he gives without intending it. The night was miserable enough, dear Wilton; but I knew not, indeed, how much more miserable the morning was to be. You have not heard, then, what has taken place?"

"I have heard nothing, dearest Laura," replied Wilton; "I have heard nothing of any consequence since I came to town: but I fear for your father, Laura; for I heard yesterday that some accusation had been brought against him by Sir John Fenwick; and though last night, in the agitation and pain of the moment, I forgot to tell him, I wrote a note and sent it early this morning."

"He got it before eight this morning," replied Laura, "and sent to call me down in haste. I found him partly angry, partly frightened, partly suspicious, and hesitating what to do. I besought him, Wilton, to fly with all speed. I pledged my word that Wilton, however ill-treated he might have been, and however he might feel that the services which he had rendered had been undervalued, would say nothing but that which was actually true, and actually necessary for the safety of those he loved."

"Surely," said Wilton, "he did not suspect me of falsifying the truth, to give myself greater importance in his eyes."

"Whatever were his suspicions, dear Wilton," replied Lady Laura, "they were too soon painfully removed; for he had scarcely given orders to have breakfast immediately, and the carriage prepared without loss of time, when two messengers arrived with a warrant for his committal to the Tower. They treated us with all kindness," continued Lady Laura, "waited till our preparations were made, permitted me to accompany him, and have promised that to-morrow or the day after—as soon, in short, as a proper order can be made for it—I shall be permitted to be with him, and have a room near his. But oh, Wilton, you cannot imagine how my fa-

ther's mind is overthrown. It seems, though I never knew it before, that he has really had some dealings with this Sir John Fenwick, and his whole reliance now appears to be upon you, Wilton."

"Oh, I trust, dearest Laura, that this charge will prove nothing," replied Wilton. "As far as I know, though he acted imprudently, there was not anything in the slightest degree criminal in his conduct. The days, I trust, are gone by when fictitious plots might be got up, and the blood of the innocent be sold for its weight of gold. It may have been judged necessary to secure his person, and yet there may not be the slightest probability of his being condemned or even tried."

"I do not know, Wilton," replied Lady Laura, sadly; "I do not know. He seems in very great terror and agitation. Are you sure he has told you all, Wilton?"

"On that subject, of course, I cannot be sure," replied Wilton. "But I do not feel at all sure, Laura, that this charge and this imprisonment may not have its origin in personal revenge. If so, perhaps we may frustrate the plotter, though we be weak and he is strong. Who was the warrant against your father signed by? Was it—"

"Not by Lord Byerdale," replied Laura, laying her hand upon his and gazing into his face, and thus showing Wilton that she instantly divined his suspicions. "It was by the Duke of Shrewsbury."

"That looks ill, dearest Laura," replied Wilton, thoughtfully. "The Duke of Shrewsbury is one above all suspicion; high, noble, independent, serving the state only for the love of his country, abhorring office and the task of governing, but wise and prudent, neither to be led by any art or trickery to do what is not just, nor even to entertain base suspicions of another without some very specious cause to give them credibility. This is strange, Laura, and I do not understand it. Did your father express a wish that you should see me, so that I may act openly in the business without offending him?"

"He not only told me to consult with you," replied Laura, "but he sent me direct from the Tower, in the chair which you saw standing at the door, desiring me not to go to Beaufort House till I had seen you; to beseech you to come to him immediately, in order that he might advise with and consult you upon his situa-

tion. Indeed, he seems to have no hope in any one but you."

Wilton mused for a minute or two.

"I do not think, my dear Laura," he said, "that the Earl of Byerdale knew anything of your father's arrest this morning when I saw him. I believe I must have done him wrong in my first suspicions. I will now, however, go to him at once, and endeavour to ascertain the precise nature of Sir John Fenwick's charge."

"Might it not be better," said Laura, anxiously, "to see my father first?"

"I must obtain an order of admission, dear Laura," replied Wilton. "What are the orders respecting your father's confinement I cannot tell, but I know that Sir John Fenwick is permitted to see no one but the ministers of the crown or somebody appointed by them. At all events, I think it will be better to converse with the earl and get the order at the same time. I will then hasten to your father with all speed, give him what comfort and consolation I can, and afterward come for a few minutes to Beaufort House to see my Laura, and tell her the result—that is to say, if I may."

"If you may! dear Wilton," said Lady Laura, casting herself upon his bosom. "If you could see my poor father now with all his pride subdued, you would not ask if you may."

"But we must lose no time, dear Laura," replied Wilton. "You shall go on to Beaufort House with all speed. But where are your servants? I saw none in the hall."

"Oh, I have none with me," replied Lady Laura: "there was but one with the carriage: the others were left with orders to follow quickly to town; and I am sure, in the agitation of the moment, neither my father nor I thought of servants at all."

"Nay, dear Laura," replied Wilton, "my own servant shall go with you, then; for, after having once lost my treasure and found it again, I will not trust you with two strange chairmen such a distance and alone."

This arrangement was soon made; and with a mind comforted and relieved, even from this short interview with him she loved, Lady Laura left him, and took her way to her solitary home.

CHAPTER XVI.

WILTON was sincerely pained and grieved for the duke; and the moment that he had seen Laura safely on her way towards Beaufort House, he hastened to seek the Earl of Byerdale, supposing that he had returned to his own dwelling, which was near at hand. He was still at Whitehall, however, and thither Wilton accordingly went. He was admitted immediately to the earl's presence, and found him with a number of written letters before him, folded up and ready for the departure of the courier. Not knowing that there was anything in the mere addresses of the letters that was not intended for him to see, Wilton suffered his eye to rest upon them for a moment. The earl hastily gathered them together, but not before Wilton had remarked that one of them was addressed to the Earl of Sunbury; and the very haste with which the statesman removed them from his sight naturally gave rise to a suspicion of something being wrong, though Wilton could form no definite idea of what was the motive for this concealment.

"Have you heard that the duke is arrested, Wilton?" was the earl's first question, before Wilton himself could speak.

"Yes, my lord," replied Wilton. "I have heard, and was somewhat surprised, as your lordship did not speak to me on the subject in the morning."

"I knew nothing about it," replied the earl, "except that I thought it likely. It was his Grace of Shrewsbury's doing, and I do not doubt that he was very right, for one cannot punish mean offenders and let high ones pass."

"Certainly not, my lord," replied Wilton; "but, from what I know of the duke, I should think that he was the last man on earth to do any treasonable act. I have come to ask your lordship's permission to visit him in the Tower, and to obtain an order to that effect; hoping, too, that you may tell me the particulars of the charge against him, for he is now very anxious to see me."

"Oh ho!" exclaimed the duke. "What! is his pride come down so soon? What! in one single day does he send for the man that he maltreated the night before? Such is human pride and human weakness. Well, well, Wilton, we will not mar your young fortunes. You shall have every opportunity, and, perhaps, may serve the duke; although I very much fear," he added, in a graver tone, "from the Duke of Shrewsbury having signed the warrant, that your good friend has been led much farther into these matters than you are aware of. Make out an order to see him, and I will sign it."

"But cannot I, my lord, obtain any information," said Wilton, as he wrote the order, "concerning the real charges against the duke?"

"I really am not aware of them," replied Lord Byerdale. "The business has not been done through this office. I have seen Fenwick, indeed, but he only spoke generally, and seemed inclined to accuse everybody indiscriminately. However, I will send to Lord Shrewsbury and ask all the particulars; but, by-the-way, Shrewsbury went out of town to-day. I must write to Vernon, his secretary, instead;" and, sitting down, he wrote and despatched a note to a neighbouring ministerial office. An answer was almost immediately returned, in the following terms:

"MY LORD,

"I have been honoured with your lordship's note, and beg to inform you that the charge against the Duke of Gaveston is for high treason, in having heard and connived at the projected assassination of the king in the beginning of this year, together with various other counts, such as that of levying war, holding treasonable correspondence with the enemy, and concealing the designs of traitors, &c. Your lordship's order will admit Mr. Brown immediately to the Tower, as no particular directions have been given in regard to keeping the duke a close prisoner. His Grace of Shrewsbury went out of town to Eyford at eleven this morning.

"I have the honour to be

"Your lordship's obedient servant," &c.

"There, Wilton," said the earl, putting over the note to his secretary, "there is all the information that I can

obtain on the subject; and here, take the order, and go and see your friend the duke. Tell him I will come and see him to-morrow, and give him what consolation you can; but yet do not act like a silly boy, and make too light of the business, for two reasons: first, because the matter is really serious; the good folks of London have an appetite for blood upon them just now, and will not be satisfied unless they see a head struck off every now and then; and next, because, if his lordship do escape the abbreviating process of Tower Hill, we shall have to bring down his pride still farther than it is, to make him give ready consent to your marriage with his daughter."

"I would rather win his consent by good services, my lord," replied Wilton, "than drive him to give it by any harsh means."

"Pshaw! you are a silly boy," replied the earl: "there is nothing so tiresome to a man of experience as the false generosity with which young men set out in the world. Here, when you have the opportunity in your power of inducing the duke easily to give his consent to that which is most for his own interests, for yours, and for everybody's, you would let it slip, remain miserable yourself, and see Laura made miserable too, from the mere idle fancy of not taking advantage of misfortunes which the duke has brought upon himself; but I will consent to no such idle folly, Wilton. I am determined to take care of your interests, if you do not take care of them for yourself; and I have a right to do so, as I believe I am your nearest living relation. And now, my good youth, mark my words, and remember that I am one who will keep them to the letter. The duke, I know, has so far committed himself as to be really criminal. How far his crime may be aggravated I do not know. If he have brought his own head to the block, I cannot help it, and then all matters will be clear, for Lady Laura will be free to do as she pleases; but, as his pardon for the offences he has really committed must pass through my hands, if it should be found that his errors are not of a very deep dye, I give you fair warning that he shall not set his foot beyond the doors of the Tower till Lady Laura is your bride. Say not a word, for my determination is taken, and he shall find me somewhat firmer in my purpose than he has shown himself towards you."

"I suppose your lordship means," replied Wilton, "till he has given his consent to the marriage. The duke is too honourable a man to revoke it when once it is granted."

"No, by Heaven!" answered Lord Byerdale: "she shall be yours, fully, irrevocably your wife, ere he sets his foot forth. There are such things, I tell you, Wilton, as quarrels about marriage settlements. I will have none of that. I will be a better friend to you than you would be to yourself. However, on second thoughts, say nothing about it to the duke. I will take it all upon myself, which will spare you pain. You shall see that the proposal will come from the duke himself."

Wilton smiled; and we cannot think that he was much to blame if there was some pleasure mingled in his feelings at the thought of soon and easily obtaining her he loved, even though he experienced repugnance to the means which the earl proposed to employ. He resolved, therefore, to let the matter take its course, feeling very sure that the result of the duke's present situation would be much affected, and his liberation greatly facilitated, by suffering the earl to manage the matter in his own way.

He took the order, then, and proceeded at once to the Tower, where, through walls, and palisades, and courts, he was led to that part of the building reserved for the confinement of state prisoners. There was nothing very formidable or very gloomy in the appearance of the rooms and corridors through which he passed; but the sentry at the gates, the locked doors, the turning of keys, announced that he was in a place from which ever-smiling liberty was excluded; and the very first aspect of the duke, when his young friend was admitted to the apartments assigned to that nobleman, showed how deeply he felt the loss of freedom. In the few hours that had passed since Wilton last saw him, he had turned very pale; and, though still slightly lame, he was walking up and down the room with hasty and irregular steps. The sound of the opening door made him start and turn round with a look of nervous apprehension; and, when he beheld the countenance that presented itself, his face, indeed, lighted up with a smile, but that smile was so mingled with an expression of melancholy and agitation, that it seemed as if he were about to burst into tears.

"This is very kind of you, indeed, Wilton!" he exclaimed, stretching out his hand towards him: "pray let us forget all that took place last night. Indeed, your kindness in coming now must make a very great difference in my feelings towards you: not only that, indeed, but your note, which reached me early this morning, and which had already made such a difference that I should certainly have sent for you to talk over all matters more calmly if this terrible misfortune had not happened to me."

Was the duke endeavouring to deceive Wilton? No, indeed, he was not! Though there can be scarcely a doubt that, had he not been very much brought down by fear and anxiety, he would not have sent for Wilton at all. The truth was, he had first deceived himself, and at that moment he firmly believed that he would have done everything that was kind and considerate towards Wilton and his daughter, even had he not been arrested.

"We will not think of any of these things, your grace," replied Wilton. "I need not tell you that I was both overjoyed to see Lady Laura, and terribly grieved to hear the cause of her coming. As soon as I had heard from her your grace's situation and wishes, I sent my servant to accompany her to Beaufort House."

"Ay," said the duke, interrupting him, "in the agitation of the moment, poor girl, I forgot to send any one with her: I kept my man here. But what then, Wilton, what then? You are always kind and considerate. What did you do then?"

"I went immediately to Lord Byerdale," replied Wilton, "who seemed just to have heard of your arrest. From him I obtained an order to see you; and he was kind enough also to write to his grace of Shrewsbury's secretary to know upon what charge you had been arrested."

"Ay, that is the point! that is the point!" exclaimed the duke, eagerly. "When we hear what is the charge, we can better judge what danger there is; in short, how one is situated altogether."

"Why, I grieve to say, my lord," replied Wilton, "that the charge is heavy."

"Good God!" exclaimed the duke, "what is it, Wilton, what is it? Do not keep me in suspense, but tell me quickly. What does the villain charge me with?"

He first spoke upon the subject to me, and he knows that I am as innocent as the child unborn."

"It would seem, your grace," replied Wilton, "that he levels charges at many persons most likely as innocent as you are; and that he wishes to save his own life by endangering the lives of other people. He charges you with neither more nor less than high treason, for having been cognizant of, if not consenting to, the plan of assassinating the king—"

"I never consented to such a thing!" exclaimed the duke, interrupting him. "I abhorred the very idea. I never heard of it—I—I—I never heard it distinctly proposed. Some one, indeed, said it would be better; but there was no distinct proposal of the kind; and I went away directly, saying that I would have no farther part in their counsels."

Wilton's countenance fell at hearing this admission; for he now, for the first time, saw how terrible was the situation in which the duke had placed himself. That nobleman then had, in fact, heard and had concealed the design against the king's life. The simple law of high treason, therefore, held him completely within its grasp. That law declared a person concealing treason to be as guilty as the actual deviser or perpetrator thereof, and doomed them to the same penalty. There was no hope, there was no resource, but in the clemency of the government; and the words used by Lord Byerdale rang in Wilton's ears, in regard to the bloody appetite of the times for executions. He turned very pale, then, and remained silent for a moment or two, while the duke clasped his hands and gazed in his face.

"For Heaven's sake, my lord," he said at length, "withhold such admissions from anybody else, for I fear very much a bad use might be made of it."

"I see that you think that the case goes ill with me," said the duke. "But I give you my word of honour, my dear Wilton, that, the moment I heard of the designs of these men, I left the place in indignation."

"It is necessary, my lord," replied Wilton, "that your grace should know how you stand; and I fear very much, that if this business can be proved at all, the best view of the case that can be taken will be, that you have committed misprision of treason, which may subject you to long imprisonment and forfeiture. If the government deals leniently with you, such may be

the case; but if the strict law be urged, I fear that your having gone to this meeting at all, and consented to designs against the government of the king, and afterward concealing the plans for introducing foreign forces, and for compassing the death of the king, must be considered by the peers as nothing short of paramount treason itself. Let me beseech you, therefore, my lord, to be most careful and guarded in your speech; to content yourself with simply denying all treasonable intentions, and to leave me, and any other friends whom you may think fit to employ, to endeavour, by using all extraordinary means, to save you even from the pain and risk of trial. Our greatest hope and the greatest security for you is the fact—which is so generally reported that I fancy it may be true—that Sir John Fenwick has charged a number of persons in the highest stations, and some even near to the king's person and counsels. It will be for every one's interest, therefore, to cast discredit upon all his accusations, and, among the rest, perhaps this also may fall to the ground."

"Could you not see him, Wilton, could you not see him?" demanded the duke, eagerly. "Perhaps he might be persuaded to mitigate his charge; to withdraw it; or to add some account of the abhorrence I expressed at the plans and purposes I heard."

"I see no way by which I could gain admittance, my lord," replied Wilton. "He is a close prisoner in Newgate. I know no one who is even acquainted with him; and I believe none but his wife and various members of the government are admitted to see him alone. However, I will do my best, my lord, and, if I can gain admission, I will."

The duke cast himself, in deep despondency, into a chair, and mused for several minutes without reply, seeing evidently from Wilton's words and manner that he thought his case a desperate one. After a moment, however, a momentary ray of hope crossed his countenance again.

"Cannot you see the Lady Mary Fenwick?" he said. "She could surely gain you admission to her husband. She is a distant relation of my own, too, for my grandfather married Lady Carlisle's aunt. Beseech her, Wilton, to gain you admittance; and try also, try by all means, to make her use her influence with her husband in my behalf. Perhaps at her entreaty he would mod-

ify the charge, or retract a part of it. It can do him no good, it may ruin me."

"I will do my best, my lord," replied Wilton; "and, in the mean time, my Lord of Byerdale desired me to tell your grace that he would visit you to-morrow. He comes, indeed, merely as a friend; but I would beg your grace to remember that he is also a minister of the crown, bound by his office to give intimation of everything affecting the welfare of the state."

"Oh, I will be careful, I will be careful!" replied the duke. "But can you think of nothing else, Wilton? Can we fall upon no means? Would to Heaven I had always taken your advice! I should not now be here. Should I ever escape, you will find me a different being, Wilton. I will not forget your kindness, nor be ungrateful for it;" and he fell into a somewhat sad and feeble commentary upon his own conduct, briefly expressing regret for what he had done, partly alleging excuses for it, but still evidently speaking under the overpowering influence of fear; while pride, that weakest and most enfeebling of all evil passions, gave him no support under affliction, no strength and vigour in the moment of danger. In his heart Wilton could not respect him; but still he had nourished in his bosom feelings of affectionate regard towards him: he knew that Laura's happiness was not to be separated from her father's safety, and he resolved once more to exert every energy of mind and body in the service of the duke.

For about half an hour more their conversation was protracted in the same strain, and then Wilton took his leave, telling the prisoner that he feared he should not be able to visit him on the following day. The duke pressed him much to do so; but when he heard that every spare moment of Wilton's time was to be devoted to his service, he readily agreed, for that object, to lose the consolation of seeing him.

According to his promise, Wilton sped as fast as possible to Beaufort House; and though the brief conversation which ensued between him and Laura was mingled with much that was sad, yet the very fact of being together, of pouring out every thought of the heart to each other, of consulting with each other upon the welfare of one who was now an object of the deepest interest to both, was in itself a happiness, to Wilton pow-

erful and intense; to Laura, sweet, soothing, and supporting. During the short time that Wilton stayed, the conversation turned entirely upon the duke. At that moment, and with but little cheering hope to give, Wilton could not mingle the subject of his own feelings with the sadder ones which brought him thither. Love, indeed, pervaded every word he spoke; love, indeed, gave its colouring to all his feelings and to all his thoughts; but that very love was of a kind which prevented him from making it the subject of discourse at such an hour as that. Nor was his visit long, for it was now dark; and after one whole day which he knew had been spent in anxiety, care, and fatigue, and after a night which he likewise knew had gone by in sorrow and anguish, he felt that Laura would require repose, and hoped, though but faintly, that she would obtain it.

He left her, then, in less than an hour, and took his way homeward, meditating over what might be done for the duke, but seeing no hope, no chance, but in the exertions of the Earl of Byerdale, or the merciful interposition of the Duke of Shrewsbury. He was not without hope that the earl would exert himself; though, when he asked his own mind the question, "Upon what motives and to what effect will the earl exert himself?" he was obliged to pause in doubt, ay, and in suspicion. He could not divest his own heart of a conviction that the earl was acting insincerely; that there was some object in view which it was impossible for him to divine; some purpose more than mere kindness to a relation whom he had never known or acknowledged for so many years of their mutual life.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was the ninth hour of the evening on the following day when a carriage stopped at the gates of Newgate, and a lady got out and entered the prison. It was by this time dark, for the year was already beginning to show a slight diminution in the length of the days; and there were few people just at that moment in the streets to remark that she left a male companion

behind her in the vehicle, who, with his arms crossed upon his chest and his eyes bent thoughtfully upon the other side of the carriage, remained buried in deep and seemingly gloomy meditation.

After the lapse of about ten minutes the lady returned, and said, "You may come; but the governor says your visit must not be long, and on no account must be mentioned."*

Wilton instantly stepped out of the carriage as Lady Mary Fenwick spoke, and followed her into the prison. A turnkey was in waiting with a light, and led them round the outer court, and through one or two dark and narrow passages to the cell in which Sir John Fenwick was confined. There was another turnkey waiting without; and Wilton, being admitted, found the wretched man whose crimes had brought him thither, and whose cowardly treachery was even then preparing to make his end disgraceful, sitting pale, haggard, and worn, with his elbow resting on the small table in the middle of the cell, and his anxious eye fixed upon that door from which he was never more to go forth but to trial, to shame, and to death.

Lady Mary Fenwick, his unfortunate wife, whose eager and strenuous exertions in her husband's behalf were sufficient to atone in some degree for the error of countenancing those calumnies by which he hoped to escape his well-deserved fate, accompanied, or, rather, followed Wilton into the cell; and as she did so, remarking the haggard glance with which Sir John regarded the visiter, she held up her finger with a meaning look, as if to entreat him to assume more calmness at least in his demeanour.

Sir John Fenwick made an effort to do so; and, with one of those painful smiles wherewith wretchedness often attempts to cover its own misery, he said, "Good-evening, Mr. Brown. This is a poor place for me to receive you in. I could have done better if you had honoured me by a visit in Northumberland."

"I grieve much, Sir John, to see you in it," replied Wilton, "and trust that you may be enabled to free yourself speedily."

* It is an undoubted historical fact, that more persons visited and conversed long with Fenwick in prison than the court was at all aware of.

A look of anguish came over Sir John Fenwick's countenance; but Wilton went on, saying, "When last we met, Sir John, it was not, perhaps, on the best of terms, and I certainly thought you treated me ill; but let all that be forgotten in the present circumstances."

"Do you mean," asked Sir John Fenwick, with a cynical look, "that we are both to forget it, or that I am to forget the whole business, and you to recollect it at my trial for the benefit of my accusers?"

"I meant for us both, of course, to forget it," replied Wilton; "or rather, I should say, I meant merely that we should forget all feelings of enmity; for to see you here deprives me of all such sensations towards you."

"Ay, sir," said Sir John Fenwick, eagerly. "But let us keep to the other point, if you please. Do you intend to forget our former meeting, or to give evidence in regard to it?"

Wilton paused and thought for a moment; and then a sudden idea struck him that that very interview to which Fenwick alluded might, perhaps, prove the means of making him modify his charge against the duke.

"I cannot, of course," he said, "promise you, Sir John Fenwick, not to give evidence against you if I am called upon, for you know that I can be compelled to do so; but I do not see that my evidence could do you the slightest harm in regard to your trial for treason, as I heard you utter no treasonable sentiments, and saw you perform no treasonable act."

"True, true!" cried Sir John Fenwick, gladly. "True, you can have nothing to say."

"So shall I tell any one who asks me," said Wilton. "I can give no pertinent evidence whatsoever, and therefore can easily keep out of the court; unless, indeed," he added, with particular emphasis, "the charges which you have brought against the Duke of Gaveston should compel me to come forward as one of his witnesses, especially as his trial is likely to take place before your own."

"But how can that affect me?" demanded Sir John Fenwick, looking sharply in his face. "How can the duke's trial have any effect upon mine?"

"Merely by bringing forward my evidence," replied Wilton.

"But how, why, wherefore?" said Sir John Fen-

wick, eagerly. "You have yourself admitted that you saw nothing, heard nothing at all treasonable; you cannot dally with a man whose life is in jeopardy. What evidence can you give with regard to the duke that can at all affect me?"

"Only in this way," answered Wilton. "The duke must be tried upon your accusation. He will call me to prove that you and he were at enmity together, and that, therefore, your charge is likely to be a calumny. He will also call me to prove that it was both my opinion and his, expressed to each other at the very time, that you carried off his daughter for the purpose of forcing him into a plot against the state, or, at all events, to prevent his revealing what he knew of your proceedings from the fear of some injury happening to his child. I shall then have to prove that I found her absolutely in your power; that you refused to give her up at my request; that you were at that time in company with, and acting in concert with, various persons, five or six of whom have since been executed; that from among you a shot was fired at me, showing that the duke's apprehensions regarding his daughter were well-founded; and I shall also have to declare, that, before the duke could have any assurance of his daughter's safety, the conspiracy was itself discovered, so that he had no time or opportunity to reveal the plot, unless at a period when his so doing might have endangered, perhaps, the life of Lady Laura. All this, my good sir, I shall have to prove, if the duke's trial is forced on. To sum the matter up, it must be shown upon that trial that you and the duke were at bitter enmity, and that, therefore, your charge is likely to be malicious; that you carried off his daughter as a sort of hostage; and that he was under reasonable apprehensions on her account in case he should tell what he knew of the conspiracy; that I found you associating intimately with all the condemned traitors the very day before the arrest of some of them, and that the duke did not recover his daughter by my means till the plot itself was discovered. Now you will judge, Sir John, how this may affect your own trial. I warn you of the matter, because I have a promise, a positive promise, that I shall not be brought forward to give evidence in this business without my own consent; but, once having proffered my testimony in favour of the duke, I cannot refuse it, should any link in

the chain of evidence be wanting against you which I can supply."

Sir John Fenwick had listened to every word that Wilton said in bitter silence; and when he had done, he gnashed his teeth one against the other, saying, with a look of hatred, "You should have been a lawyer, young sir, you should have been a lawyer. You have missed your vocation."

"Lawyers, Sir John Fenwick," replied Wilton, "are often, even against their own will, obliged to support falsehood; but I merely tell you the truth. You have brought a charge against the duke, as far as I can understand, of which he is virtually innocent, to all intents and purposes—"

"Who told you I had brought a charge against him at all?" demanded Sir John Fenwick. "Who told you what that charge was? It must be all guess-work upon your part. Depend upon it, if I have brought a charge at all, it is one that I can prove."

"I may have been mistaken," replied Wilton, "and I hope I am, Sir John. I hope that you have brought no charge, and that, if you have, it is not of the nature that I supposed; for, as I have shown you, it would be most unwise and imprudent of you so to do. You would not injure the duke in any other way than by a long imprisonment, and you would, in all probability, ensure your own condemnation, while you were uselessly attempting to do evil to another. At all events, Sir John, you must not take it ill of me that I point this out to you, and, if you will take the warning I have given, it may be of great benefit to you."

"How should I take it?" demanded Sir John Fenwick, still frowning upon him from under his bent brows. "What I have said, I have said, and I shall not go back from it. There may be other witnesses, too, against the duke that you know not of. What think you of Smith? What think you of Cook?"

"I know not, really," replied Wilton. "In fact, I know nothing upon the subject, except that the duke is virtually innocent of the crime with which you would charge him. You made him listen to designs which he abhorred; and, because he did not betray you, you charge him with participating in them. As for the witnesses Cook and Smith, I have heard from the Earl of Byerdale that neither the one nor the other has anything to say against the duke."

Sir John Fenwick had listened with a bitter smile to what Wilton said; but he replied almost fiercely, "You know nothing of what you are talking. Are you blind enough or foolish enough to fancy that the Earl of Byerdale is a friend of the duke?"

"I really do not know," replied Wilton, calmly. "I suppose he is neither very much his friend nor his enemy."

"And there, too, you are mistaken," answered Sir John Fenwick: "for an envoy, you know marvellous little of the sender's situation."

"I only know," replied Wilton, "thus much, which you yourself cannot deny, that to accuse the duke, so as to bring him to trial for this unfortunate affair, will be to produce your certain condemnation; to cut you off from all chance of hope."

Lady Mary Fenwick had hitherto stood silent a step or two behind Wilton; but now advancing a little, she said, "Indeed, Sir John, you had better think of it. It seems to me that what Mr. Brown says is reasonable, and that it would be much better so to state or modify your charge against the duke as not to hazard his life."

"Nonsense, Lady Mary!" exclaimed Fenwick; "neither you nor he know anything of what my charges are, or in what my hopes consist. My charge against the duke shall stand as I have given it; and you may tell him that it is not on my evidence alone he will be condemned; so that yours, young man, will not tend much to save him."

Wilton saw that it would be useless to urge the matter any farther at that moment, though, notwithstanding the perverse determination shown by the prisoner, he was not without hope that their conversation might ultimately produce some effect upon his mind.

"Well, Sir John," he said, "I will keep you no longer from conversation with your lady. I grieve for you on every account. I grieve to see you here, I grieve for the situation in which you have placed yourself, and I still more grieve to see you struggling to deliver yourself from that situation by means which *may produce* the destruction of others, and will certainly *produce* your own."

"I neither want your grief, nor care for it, sir," replied the prisoner. "Good-night, good-night."

Wilton then turned and left him; but Lady Mary

Fenwick accompanied the young gentleman into the passage, saying, in a low voice, "The Earl of Byerdale has seen him twice. You will do well to be upon your guard there."

"Thank you, lady, thank you," replied Wilton. "I am upon my guard, and am most grateful for what you have done."

Thus saying, he left her; and as it was too late, at that hour, to visit the prisoner in the Tower, he turned towards his own home; but, ere he reached it, he bethought him of seeking some farther information from the public reports of the day, which were only to be met with in their highest perfection in the several different resorts of wits and politicians which have become familiar to our minds in the writings of Steele and Addison. Will's and the Chocolate-house, and other places of the same kind, supplied, in a very great degree, the places of the Times, the Herald, the Globe, or the Courier; and though the Postman and several other papers gave a scanty share of information, yet the inner room of the St. James's Coffee-house might be considered as representing the leading article to the newspaper of the day.

To one or two of these houses, then, Wilton repaired, and found the whole town still busy with the arrest of Sir John Fenwick, and with the names of persons he was said to have accused. If the rumours were to be believed, he had brought charges of one kind or another against half the high nobility and statesmen of the land. The king's servants and most familiar friends, many who were still actually employed by him, and many who had aided to seat him on the throne, were all said to be accused of treasonable communications with the court of St. Germain; and Wilton had the satisfaction of thinking, that if there were, indeed, any safety in numbers, the Duke had that security at least.

When he had satisfied himself on this point, he returned to his own house, to meditate upon the best defence which could be set up for the noble prisoner. None, however, suggested itself better than that which he had sketched out in his conversation with Sir John Fenwick; and, without loss of time, he put it down in writing, in order to take the duke's opinion upon it. There was one flaw, indeed, in the chain which he could not but see, and which he feared might be used

by an enemy to the duke's disadvantage. He could prove that, after Lady Laura had been carried away, the duke had no opportunity whatever of disclosing the plot until it was already discovered; but, unfortunately, between the time of the meeting in Leadenhall-street and the period at which the conspirators so daringly bore off the lady from the terrace there had been a lapse of some time, during which her father might have made any communication to the government that he liked. There was a hope, however, that this might pass unremarked; and, at all events, what he proposed was the only defence that could be set up.

On the following morning, when he saw the Earl of Byerdale, he inquired if he had seen the duke; but found that such was not the case, business being the excuse for having failed in his promise. Wilton, however, proceeded to the Tower as soon as he was free, and found Laura now sharing the apartments assigned to her father, and striving to support and comfort him, but apparently in vain. The duke's mind was still in a terrible state of depression; and the want of all certain intelligence, the failure of the Earl of Byerdale's promise, and the absence of Wilton, had caused his anxiety apparently to increase rather than to diminish since the first day of his imprisonment.

We must not pause upon the various interviews which succeeded, and were painful enough. Wilton had little to tell that could give the duke any comfort. The determined adherence of Sir John Fenwick to his charge, the sort of indifference which the Earl of Byerdale displayed in regard to the prisoner's situation, neglecting to see him, though repeatedly promising to do so, all served to depress his spirits day by day, and to render him altogether insensible to the voice of comfort. Towards Wilton himself the earl resumed a portion of his reserve and gravity; and, though he still called him "My dear Wilton," and "My dear boy," when he addressed him, he spoke to him very little upon any subject except mere matters of business, and checked every approach to the topic on which Wilton would most willingly have entered.

On the seventh or eighth day of the duke's imprisonment, however, Lord Sherbrooke again appeared in town; but the earl employed Wilton constantly during the whole of that day; so much so, indeed, that his

secretary could not help believing that there was effort apparent in it, in order to prevent his holding any private communication with his friend. At length, however, he suffered him to return home, but not till nearly ten at night, by which time Lord Sherbrooke had left the house to go to some great entertainment.

Scarcely had Wilton passed the door, when he found some one take hold of his arm, and, to his surprise, found the young nobleman by his side.

"I have been watching for you eagerly, Wilton," he said, "for it seems to me that the game is going against you, and I see the faces of the cards."

"I am very anxious, indeed, about the duke, if such be your meaning, Sherbrooke," replied Wilton.

"And I am so also," answered Lord Sherbrooke. "What my father intends I do not well see; but I should think that to make the poor man lose his head on Tower Hill would be somewhat too severe a punishment, too bitter a revenge for Lady Laura refusing to wed so worshipful a person as I am."

"I hope and trust," replied Wilton, "that there is no chance of such a consummation."

"On my word I do not know," replied Lord Sherbrooke. "My father, when he is hungry for anything, has a great appetite; I don't think the duke's head would much more than dine him. However, take my advice; depend not upon him in the least; go to the Duke of Shrewsbury at once, if he be in town, and if not, to Vernon. Try to interest them in favour of the duke; see what you can allege in his favour. The king has just returned from Holland, you know, and any application made to him now may perhaps be received graciously. Have you anything that you can state in the duke's favour?"

Wilton recapitulated all that could be said to palliate the error which Laura's father had committed, and Lord Sherbrooke answered eagerly, "That is enough, surely that is enough. At least," he added, "it ought to be enough, and would be enough if there were no under-influence going on. At all events, Wilton, I would go decidedly to his grace of Shrewsbury or to Vernon, for I believe the duke is absent. Represent all these facts, and induce him to lay them before the king. This is the best and most straightforward course, and you will speedily learn more upon the subject. But

there is another thing which I have to tell you, though I put no great reliance upon the result being as effectual as we could wish. I was speaking a few nights ago with our friend the colonel upon the situation of the duke, and upon your anxiety regarding him, all of which I have heard from my good rascally valet, who, considering that he is one of the greatest scoundrels that ever was unhung, is a very honest fellow in his way, and finds out everything for me, Heaven knows how, and lets me know it truly. The colonel seemed to laugh at the idea of anything being done to the duke, saying, 'No, no, he is safe enough.' But, after a while, he added, 'If Wilton have any difficulty about the business, he had better speak to me : ' and then he fell into one of his long sullen fits of thought ; after which he said, ' Tell him to ride out hitherward on Saturday night next, just as it is turning dark ; I should like to speak with him about it. ' "

" I will not fail, " replied Wilton ; " for there is something about that man that interests, nay, attaches me, in spite of all I know and all I guess concerning his desperate habits. It is evident that he has had a high education, and possesses a noble heart ; in fact, that he was fitted for better things than the criminal and disgraceful course he has pursued. "

" Hush, hush ! " cried Lord Sherbrooke, laughing ; " speak more respectfully of the worthy colonel, I beg. You are not aware that he is a near relation of mine. "

Wilton started, and turned round as if he would have gazed in his companion's face, but the darkness of the night prevented him from well seeing what was passing there. As he recalled, however, his first interview with Green, his look, his manner, and the jesting tone in which he sometimes spoke, he could not but acknowledge that there was something in the whole resembling Lord Sherbrooke not a little, although Green was a much taller and more powerful man.

" This is strange enough, Sherbrooke, " he replied, " if you are not joking ; and, indeed, I think you are not, for there is a certain likeness between you and him, though more in the manner than in the person. "

" It is quite true, " replied Lord Sherbrooke ; " he is a near relation. But, however, in regard to the duke, I see not how he can help you, though he certainly does very wonderful things sometimes, which nobody expects or

can account for. I would hear all he has to say, then; but, at the same time, Wilton, I would not neglect the other business with Vernon, for you see the colonel names Saturday. This is Monday, and before that time the duke's head may be upon a pole for aught we know. They make short work with trials and executions in these days."

"I will not fail," answered Wilton, "I will not fail. In such a case as this it is scarcely possible to do too much, and very possible to do too little. I trust your father will not detain me the whole day to-morrow."

"Oh no!" replied Lord Sherbrooke: "I am going to remove the cause, Wilton. As soon as ever I arrived last night, I perceived that the earl was delicately working at some grand scheme regarding the duke, and I very soon perceived, too, that he was determined you and I should not have an opportunity of talking the matter over for fear we should spoil proceedings. I was obliged to watch my opportunity to-night with great nicety, but to-morrow I go back, that is to say, if my sweet Caroline is ready to go with me, for I am the most obedient and loving of husbands, as all reformed rakes are, you know, Wilton."

"But is the lady in town, and at your father's?" demanded Wilton, with surprise.

"She is in town, dearly beloved," replied Lord Sherbrooke, "but certainly not at my father's; and now, Wilton, ask me no more upon the subject, for, between you and me, I know little or nothing more myself. I know not what brings her into London; who she comes to see here, or who the note was from that called her so suddenly up to this great den of iniquity. It is a very horrible thing, Wilton, a very horrible thing, indeed," he continued in the same jesting tone, "that any woman should have secrets from her husband. I have heard many matrons say so, and I believe them from my whole heart; but I've heard the same matrons say that there should be perfect reciprocity, which, perhaps, might mean that the wife and the husband were to have no secrets from each other, which, I am afraid, in my case, would never do, so I am fain to let her have this secret of her own, especially as she promises to tell me what it is in a few days. Reciprocity is a fine thing, Wilton; but it is wonderful what a number of different sorts of reciprocity there are in this world. Look there.

Do you know there is something that puzzles me about that house?"

"Why, that is Lord Sunbury's," replied Wilton; "but there are lights up in the drawing-room apparently."

"Ay, that's one part of the story that puzzles me," said Lord Sherbrooke. "I think the old housekeeper must be giving a drum. My valet tells me that on Saturday morning last there was a hackney-coach stopped at that house, and two men went into it: one seemed a gentleman wrapped in a long cloak, the other looked like a valet, and stayed to get a number of packages out of the coach. Now I cannot suspect that same old housekeeper, who, as far as I recollect, is much like one of the daughters of Erebus and Nox, of carrying on an amorous correspondence with any gentleman; and it is somewhat strange that she should have lent the use of her master's house either for love or money. I should not wonder if the earl himself had come to London before his baggage."

"I should think not," replied Wilton, "I should certainly think not. I had a letter from him not long ago dated from Paris, and I think he certainly would have written to inform me if he had been coming."

"I am not so sure of that by any means, Wilton," replied his friend. "I can tell you that two or three things have happened to his good lordship lately, which, with all his kindness and benevolence, might make him wish to see two or three other people before he saw you. There is a report even now busy about town that he is corresponding from Paris privately and directly with the king, and that his arrival in England will be followed by a change of ministry, if he will consent to take office again, which seems to be very doubtful."

These tidings interested Wilton not a little; and perhaps he felt a curiosity to ascertain whether Lord Sherbrooke's suspicion was or was not correct. His mind, however, was too high and delicate to admit of his taking any steps for that purpose, and, after some more conversation on the same subject, he and his friend parted.

On the following morning Wilton had an opportunity of visiting the Duke of Shrewsbury's office, and found Mr. Vernon disengaged. To him he communicated all that he had to say in defence of the duke, and found Vernon mild in his manners and expressions, but natu-

rally cautious in either promising anything or in giving any information. He heard all that Wilton had to say, however, and assured him that he would lay the statement he made before the king on the ensuing morning, adding, that if he would call upon him in the course of the next day, he would tell him the result. He smiled when Wilton requested him to keep his visit and its object secret, and nodded his head, merely replying, "I understand."

On the following day Wilton did not fail to visit him again, and waited for nearly an hour till he was ready to receive him.

"I am sorry," said Vernon, when he did admit him, "that I cannot give you greater satisfaction, Mr. Brown; but the king's reply upon my application was, that he had already spoken to the Earl of Byerdale on the subject. However, it may be some comfort to you to know that his Grace of Shrewsbury takes an interest in the situation of the duke, and has himself written to the king upon the subject."

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was about the hour of noon, and the day was dull and oppressive. Though the apartments assigned to the duke were high up, and in themselves anything but gloomy, yet no cheering ray of sunshine had visited them, and the air, which was extremely warm, seemed loaded with vapour. The spirits of the prisoner were depressed in proportion; and, since the first hour of his imprisonment, he had never, perhaps, felt so much as at that moment all the leaden weight of dull captivity, the anguish of uncertainty, and the delay of hope, which, ever from the time of the prophet king down to the present day, has made the heart sick and the soul weary. It was in vain that his daughter, with the tenderest, the kindest, and the most assiduous care, strove to raise his expectations or support his resolution; it was in vain that she strove to wean his thoughts away from his own painful situation by music, or by reading, or by conversation. Grief, like the dull adder, stops its

car that it may not hear the song of the charmer; and while she sang to him or played to him, upon the lute, at that time an instrument still extremely common in England, or read to him from the books which she thought best calculated to attract his attention, she could see by the vacant eye that sometimes filled with tears, and the lips that from time to time murmured a word or two of impatience and complaint, that his thoughts were all still bent either upon the sad subject of his captivity, or upon the apprehension of what the future might bring.

At the hour of noon, then, the servant whom the duke had chosen to wait upon him, and who was freely admitted to the prison, as well as a maid to attend upon the Lady Laura, entered the apartment in which the duke sat, and announced that the Earl of Byerdale was in the antechamber. The duke started up with an expression of joy, ordering him to be admitted instantly; and the earl entered, assuming even an unusual parade of dignity in his step, and contriving to make his countenance look more than commonly severe and sneering, even though there was a marked smile upon it, as if he would imply that no slight pleasure attended his visit to the duke.

"My dear lord," he said, "I really have to apologize for not having waited upon you before, but it has been quite impossible. Since the king's return, I have been called upon daily to attend his majesty; besides having all the usual routine of my office to go through, otherwise I can assure your grace that I should have been with you long ago, as both duty and inclination would have prompted me to wait upon you. I am happy to see you so comfortably lodged here. I was afraid that, considering the circumstances, they might have judged it right to debar you of some indulgences; but my lord the governor is a good-hearted, kindly man. Lady Laura, how are you? I hope you are quite well. I grieve, indeed, to see you and your father in this place; but alas! I had no power to prevent it, and, indeed, I fear, I have very little power to serve you now."

"From your lordship's words," said the duke, after having habitually performed the civilities of the apartment, "from your lordship's words, I fear that you take a bad view of the case, and do not anticipate my speedy deliverance."

"Oh, you know," answered the earl, "that the trial must take place before we can at all judge what the king's mercy may incline him to do; but I fear, my lord, I fear that a strong prejudice prevails against your grace. The king, as well may be, is terribly indignant at all persons concerned with this plot."

"He may well be, indeed," said the duke; "for nothing ever made me more indignant than when I first heard of the purposed assassination and invasion myself. With that I had nothing on earth to do. I should have hoped that his majesty's indignation on other points would have subsided by this time, and that clemency would have resumed her sway towards those who may have acted imprudently, but not criminally."

"Not yet, not yet, I fear, my lord," replied the earl; "six months, or a year longer, indeed, would have made all the difference. If your grace had but taken the advice and warning given you by my wise and virtuous young friend, Wilton, and made your escape at once to Flanders or any neutral ground—I am sure I gave you opportunity enough."

"But, my lord," replied the duke, "Wilton never gave me any warning till the very morning that I was arrested. It is true, indeed," he added, recollecting the circumstances, "poor Wilton and I unfortunately had a little quarrel on the preceding night, and he left me very much offended, I believe, and hurt, as I dare say he told you, my lord."

"Oh, he told me nothing, your grace," replied Lord Byerdale. "Wilton, knowing my feelings on the subject, very wisely acted as he knew I should like, or, at least, *intended to act* as he knew I should like, without saying anything to me upon the subject. I might very well remain somewhat wilfully ignorant of what was going on, but I must not openly connive, you know. Then it was not really," he continued, "that your grace refused to go?"

"Oh, not in the least, not in the least!" replied the duke. "I received his note early on the next morning after he left me, and was consulting with my dear child here as to the necessary arrangements for going, when the messengers arrived."

"Most unfortunate, indeed," said the earl. "I had concluded, judging from your letter to me on the preceding day, that your grace that afternoon, notwith-

standing all I had said regarding the young gentleman's family, refused him the honour to which he aspired, and would not follow the advice he gave."

Lady Laura rose and moved towards one of the windows; and her father, with his colour a little heightened, and his manner somewhat agitated, replied, but in a low tone, "I did indeed refuse him Laura's hand, and, I am afraid, somewhat harshly and angrily; but I never refused to take his advice or warning."

"Ay, but the two subjects are so mingled up together," said the earl, "that the one may be considered to imply the other."

"I see not how, my lord, I see not how they are so mingled," said the duke.

"Ay, it may be difficult to explain," answered the earl, "and I cannot do it myself; but so it is. It might not be, indeed, too late now, if it were not for this unfortunate prejudice of yourself or Lady Laura against my young friend, who, I must say, has served you both well."

"How not too late, my lord?" demanded the duke, eagerly; "all prejudices may be removed, you know; and, if there were any prejudice, it was mine."

"Still it would be an obstacle," answered the earl; "and the whole matter would, of course, be rendered much more difficult now. There might be still more prejudices to be overcome at present. May I ask," he added, abruptly, "if you have still got the note which Wilton sent you?"

"No," answered the duke, "no. I destroyed it immediately, out of regard for his safety."

"It was a wise precaution," answered the earl, "but unnecessary in his case. He has friends who will manage to justify whatever he does of that kind. Humble as he is in all his deportment, he can do many things that I could not venture to do. I have heard the king himself say, in presence of one half of his council, that he is under great personal obligations to Wilton Brown."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the duke; "but may I request your lordship to inform me what it was you meant just now? You said it might not be yet too late."

"I fear, my lord, I must not talk to your grace on the subject," said the earl; "there might be conditions you would not comply with. You might not like even the idea of flying from prison at all."

"I do not see why, my lord," exclaimed the duke, "I really do not see why. But, pray, may I ask what are the conditions?"

"Nay, I make neither any suggestions nor conditions," replied the earl, who saw that the duke was fully worked up to the pitch he wished; "I only spoke of such a thing as escape being very possible, if Wilton chose to arrange it; and then, of course, the conditions he might require for his services struck my mind."

"Why as yet, my lord," answered the duke, "our noble young friend has not even named any condition as the price of his services."

"Perhaps, your grace," replied the earl, "he may have become wiser by experience. If I have understood you both right, his hopes were disappointed, and hopes which he imagined he entertained with great reason."

"No, my lord, no!" cried the duke. "He had no reason for entertaining such hopes. I cannot admit for a moment that I gave him any cause for such expectations."

"Nay, then, my lord duke," replied the earl, with an offended look, "if such be your view of a case which everybody in London sees differently, the more reason why Wilton should make sure of what ground he stands upon before he acts farther in this business. However, I have nothing to do with the affair farther than as his sincere friend, and as having the honour of being his distant relation, which, of course, makes me resolute in saying that I will not see his feelings sported with and his happiness destroyed. Therefore, your grace, as we sha'n't agree, I see, upon these matters, I will humbly take my leave of you." And he rose as if to depart.

"Nay, nay, my lord, you are too hasty," replied the duke. "I beseech you do not leave me in this way. I may in former instances have given Wilton hopes without intending it; but the matter is very much altered now, when he has done so much more for me in every way. I do not scruple at all to say that those objections are removed."

"Perhaps, my lord," said the earl, sitting down again, and speaking in a low voice, "we had better discuss the matter in private. Could I not speak to you apart for a moment or two? Suppose we go into the anteroom."

"Nay, nay," said the duke, "Laura will leave us. Go to your room, my love," he added, raising his voice; "I would fain have a few minutes' conversation with my noble friend alone."

"Very wrong of you, Lord Byerdale," she said, with a smile, as she walked towards the door, "to turn me out of the room in this way."

Lord Byerdale smiled, and bowed, and apologized, all with an air of courtier-like mockery. The moment she was gone, however, he turned to the duke, saying, "Now, my lord duke, we are alone, and I will beg your grace to give me your honour that no part of our present conversation transpires in any circumstances. I can then hold much more free communication with you. I can lay before you what is possible and what is probable, and you can choose whatever path you like."

"Most solemnly I pledge my honour," replied the duke, "and I can assure your lordship that I fully appreciate Mr. Brown's merits and his services to me. He has not only talents and genius, but a princely person and most distinguished manners; and I could not have the slightest objection, as soon as his birth is clearly ascertained or acknowledged—"

"My lord duke," replied the earl, interrupting him, "I fear your lordship is somewhat deceiving yourself as to your own situation and his. Wilton, I tell you, can easily find the means of effecting your escape from this prison, and can ensure your safe arrival in any Continental port you may think fit to name. I do not mean to say that I must not shut my eyes; but, for his sake and for yours, I am very willing to do so, if I see his happiness made sure thereby."

The duke's eyes sparkled with joy and hope, and the earl went on.

"Your situation, my lord, at the present moment, you see, is a very unfortunate one, or such a step would in no degree be advisable. But at this period, when the passions of the people and the indignation of the king are both excited to the highest pitch; when there is, as I may call it, an appetite for blood afloat; when the three witnesses Sir John Fenwick, Smith, and Cook, to say nothing of the corroborative evidence of Goodman, establish beyond doubt that you were accessorially, though perhaps not actively, guilty of high treason—at

this period, I say, there can be little doubt that, if you were brought to trial—that is, in the course of next week, as I have heard it rumoured—the result would be fatal, such, in short, as we should all deplore.”

The duke listened, with a face as white as a sheet, but only replied, in a tremulous tone, “But the escape, my lord! the escape!”

“Is quite possible and quite sure,” replied the earl. “I must shut my eyes, as I have said, and Wilton must act energetically; but I cannot either shut my eyes or suffer him to do so, except upon the following precise condition, which is, indeed, absolutely necessary to success. It is, that the Lady Laura, your daughter, be his wife before you set your foot from without these walls.”

“But, good Heavens, my lord!” exclaimed the duke, “how is that possible? I believe that Laura would do anything to save her father’s life; but she is not prepared for such a thing. Then the marriage must be celebrated with unbecoming haste. No, my lord, oh no! This is quite impossible. I am very willing to promise that I will give my consent to their marriage afterward; but, for their marriage to take place before we go, is quite impossible—especially while I am a prisoner in the Tower of London—quite impossible!”

“I am sorry your grace thinks so,” replied the earl, dryly; “for, under those circumstances, I fear that your escape from the Tower will be found impossible also.”

A momentary spirit of resistance was raised in the duke’s breast by feelings of indignation, and he tried for an instant to persuade himself that his case might not be so desperate as the earl depicted it; that, in some points of view, it might be better to remain and stand his trial, and the king’s mercy would very likely be obtained, even if he were condemned. But that spirit died away in a moment, and the more rapidly, because the Earl of Byerdale employed not the slightest argument to induce him to follow the plan proposed.

“My lord, this is a very painful case,” he said, “a very painful case indeed.”

“It is, duke,” replied the earl, “it is a painful case; a choice of difficulties which none can decide but yourself. Pray do not let anything that I can say affect

you. I thought it right, as an old friend, to lay before you a means of saving yourself; and no one can judge whether that means be too painful to you to be adopted, as no one can tell at what rate you value life. But you will remember, also, that forfeiture accompanies the sentence of death in matters of high treason, and that Lady Laura will therefore be left in a painful situation."

"Nay, my lord, nay," said the duke, "if it must come to that, of course I must consent to any terms, rather than sacrifice everything. But I did not think Wilton would have proposed such conditions to me."

"Nor does he, my lord," replied the earl: "he is totally ignorant of the whole matter. He has never, even, that I know of, contemplated your escape as possible. One word from me, however, whispered in his ear, will open his eyes in a minute. But, my lord, it must be upon the condition that I mention. Wilton's father-in-law may go forth from this prison before twelve to-morrow night, but no other prisoner within it shall, or indeed can."

"Well, my lord, well," replied the duke, somewhat impatiently, "I will throw no obstacle in the way. Laura and Wilton must settle it between them. But I do not see how the matter can be managed here in a prison."

"Oh, that is easily arranged," replied the earl; "nothing can be more easy. There is a chaplain to the Tower, you know. The place has its own privileges, likewise, and all the rest shall be done by me. Am I to understand your grace that you consider yourself pledged upon this subject?"

The duke thought for a moment, and the images of the trial by his peers, the block and the axe, came up before his sight, making the private marriage of his daughter with Wilton, and the escape to France or Flanders, appear bright in the comparison.

"Well, my lord, well," he said, "I not only pledge myself, but pledge myself willingly. I always liked Wilton, I always esteemed him highly; and I suppose he would have had Laura at last, if he did not have her now."

"I congratulate you on your approaching freedom, duke," said the earl; "and as to the rest, I have told you perfectly true in saying that it is not Wilton

who makes any conditions with you. He knows nothing of the matter, and is as eager to set you at liberty without any terms at all, as you could be yourself to obtain it. You had better, therefore, let me speak with him on the subject altogether. Should he come here before he sees me, only tell him that the marriage is to take place to-morrow evening; that it is all settled between you and me, and that, as to the means of setting you free, he must talk with me upon the subject. You must then furnish him with your consent to the immediate marriage, under your own hand. After that is done, he and I will arrange all the rest."

The duke acquiesced in all that was proposed to him, having once given his consent to the only step which was repugnant to him to take. Nay, more; that point being overcome, and his mind elevated by the hope of escape, he even went before Lord Byerdale in suggesting arrangements which would facilitate the whole business.

"I will tell Laura after you are gone, my lord," he said, "and her consent will be easily obtained, I am sure, both because I know she would do anything to save my life, and because I shrewdly believe—indeed, she has not scrupled to admit—that she loves this young man already. I will manage all that with her, and then I will leave her and Wilton, and Wilton and your lordship, to make all the rest of the arrangements."

"Do so, do so," said the earl, rising; "and I will not fail, my lord, as soon as you are safe, to use every influence in my power for the purpose of obtaining your pardon, which will be much more easily gained when you are beyond the power of the English law than while you are actually within its gripe."

The earl was now about to take his departure, and some more ceremonious words passed between him and the duke in regard to their leavetaking. Just as the earl had reached the door, however, a sudden apprehension seemed to seize the prisoner, who exclaimed, "Stay, my good lord, stay one moment more! Of course your lordship is upon honour with me, as I am with you? There is no possibility, no probability, of my escape being prevented after my daughter's hand is given?"

Nothing more mortified the Earl of Byerdale than to find that, notwithstanding all his skill, there was still a

something of insincerity penetrated through the veil he cast over his conduct, and made many persons, even the most easily deceived, doubtful of his professions and advances.

"I trust your grace does not suspect me of treachery," he said, in a sharp and offended tone.

"Not in the least, not in the least, my lord," replied the duke; "but I understood your lordship to say that my escape by the means proposed would be rendered quite certain, and I wish to ascertain whether I had not mistaken you."

"Not in the slightest degree, my lord duke," replied the earl. "I pledge you my honour, that, under the proposed arrangements, you shall be beyond the doors of this prison, and at perfect liberty, before the dawn of day on Monday morning. I pledge myself to you in every respect; and, if it be not so, I will be ready to take your place. Does this satisfy you?"

"Quite, quite," answered the duke. "I could desire nothing more." And the earl, with a formal bow, opened the door and left him.

CHAPTER XIX.

As soon as the Earl of Byerdale was gone, the duke called Laura from her room, and told her what had been proposed.

"Laura," he said, as he concluded, "you do not answer me: but I took upon me to reply at once, that you would be well pleased to lay aside pride and every other feeling of the kind, to save your father from this torturing suspense; to save, perhaps, his life itself."

Laura's cheeks had not regained their natural colour since the first words respecting such a sudden marriage were spoken to her. That her father had consented to her union with Wilton was, of course, most joyful; but the early period fixed for such an important, such an overwhelming change in her condition, was startling; and to think that Wilton could have made it the condition of his using all his exertions in her father's cause would have been painful, terrible, if she could have be-

lieved it. We must not, indeed, say that, even if it had been really so, she would have hesitated to give him her hand, not only for her father's sake, but because she loved him; because, as we have said before, she already looked upon herself as plighted to him beyond all recall. She would have tried to fancy that he had good motives which she did not know; she would have tried, in short, to find any palliation for such conduct; but still it would have been very painful to her; still it might, in a degree, have shaken her confidence in high and upright generosity of feeling; it might have made her doubt whether, in all respects, she had found a heart perfectly responsive to her own.

"My dear father," she replied, gazing tenderly upon him, and laying her two hands on his, with a faint smile, "what is there that I would not do for such objects as you mention, were it ten thousand times more than marrying the man I love best, even with such terrible suddenness? It is very sudden, indeed, I must say; and I do wonder that Wilton required it."

"Why, my dear Laura," replied the duke, "it was not exactly Wilton himself. It was Lord Byerdale took it all on his own shoulders: but, of course, Wilton prompted it; and, in such circumstances as these, I could not hesitate to consent."

Lady Laura looked down while her father spoke; and, when her first agitation was over, she could not but think that perhaps, considering her father's character, Wilton was right; and that the means he had taken, though apparently ungenerous, were the only ones to secure her own happiness and his, and her father's safety also. The next instant, however, as she recollected a thousand different traits in her lover's conduct, and combined those recollections with what her father said concerning Lord Byerdale, she became convinced that Wilton had not made such conditions, and that, rather than have made them, he would have risked everything, even if the duke were certain to deny him her hand the moment after his liberation.

"I do not think, my dear father," she replied, as this conviction came strong upon her, "I do not think that Wilton did prompt the Earl of Byerdale. I do not think he would make such conditions on any account."

"Well, it does not matter, my dear Laura," replied her father, whose mind was wholly taken up with his

own escape. "It comes to the same thing. The earl has made them, if Wilton has not, and I have pledged my word for your consent. But hark, Laura, I hear Wilton's step in the outer room. I will leave you two together to make all your arrangements, and to enter into every explanation," and he turned hurriedly towards the door which led to his bedroom.

Ere he reached it, however, he paused for a moment, with a sudden fear coming over him that Laura might by some means put an end to all the plans on which he founded his hopes of liberty.

"Laura," he said, "Laura, for Heaven's sake show no repugnance, my dear child. Remember, your father's safety depends upon it." And turning away, he entered his bedroom just as Wilton opened the opposite door.

Laura gazed upon her lover as he came in; and asked herself, while she marked that open and noble countenance, "Is it possible he could make any unworthy condition?"

Wilton's face was grave, and even sad, for he had again applied to Vernon, and received a still less satisfactory reply than before; but he was glad to find Laura alone, for this was the first time he had obtained any opportunity of seeing her in private since she had been permitted to join her father in the Tower. His greeting, then, was as tender and as affectionate as the circumstances in which they stood towards each other might warrant; but he did not forget, even then, that subject which he knew was of the deepest interest to her—her father's situation.

"Oh, dearest Laura," he said, "I have longed to speak with you for a few minutes alone, and yet, now that I have the opportunity, I have nothing but sad subjects to entertain you with."

His words confirmed Laura's confidence in his generosity. She saw clearly that he knew not what had been proposed by the earl; the very conviction gave her joy; and she replied, looking up playfully and affectionately in his face,

"I thought, Wilton, that you had come to measure my finger for the ring," and she held out her small fair hand towards him.

"Oh, would to Heaven, dear Laura," he answered, pressing the hand that she had given to his lips, "would

to Heaven that we had arrived at that point! But, Laura, you are smiling still. You have heard some good news: your father is pardoned: is it not so?"

"No, Wilton, no," she said, "not quite such good news as that. But still the news I have heard is good news; but it is odd enough, Wilton, that I should have to tell it to you; and yet I am glad that it is so."

She then detailed to him all that had occurred, as far as she had learned it from her father. Wilton listened with surprise and astonishment; but though, at the joyful tidings of the duke's consent, and at the prospect of her so soon becoming his irrevocably, he could not restrain his joy, but clasped her in rapture to his heart, yet there was a feeling of indignation, ay, and of doubt and suspicion also, in regard to Lord Byerdale's conduct and his purposes, which mingled strangely with his satisfaction.

"Although, dear Laura," he said, "although this is a blessed hope for ourselves, and also a blessed hope for your father, I cannot help saying that Lord Byerdale has acted very strangely in this business, and very ill. It may be out of regard for me, but it is a sort of regard I do not understand; and, were it not that I am sure my dear Laura has never for a moment doubted me, I should say that he, in some degree, compromised my honour, by making that consent a condition of your father's safety, which should only be granted to affection and esteem."

Laura coloured slightly to think that she *had* even doubted for an instant; but Wilton went on, relaxing the graver look that had come over his countenance, and saying, "We must not, however, my dear Laura, refuse to take the happiness that is offered to us, unless, indeed, you should think it very, very terrible to give me this dear hand so soon; and even then I think my Laura would overcome such feelings when they are to benefit her father."

"I do not feel it so terrible, Wilton," replied Lady Laura, "as I did ten minutes ago. If I thought that you had made the condition, it would seem so much more as if you were a stranger to me, that it might be terrible. But when I hear you speak as you do now, Wilton, I feel that I could trust myself with you anywhere; that I could go away with you at any moment, perfectly secure of my future happiness; and so I reply, Wilton, that I am not only willing, but very willing."

"We must lose no time, then, dear Laura," replied Wilton, "in making all our arrangements. I must now, indeed, have the measure of that small finger, and I must speed away to Lord Byerdale with all haste, in order to learn the means that are to be employed for your father's escape. I must inquire a little, too, into his motives, Laura, and add some reproaches for his having so compromised me."

"For Heaven's sake, do not! for Heaven's sake, do not!" cried Laura. "My father would never forgive me, if, in consequence of anything I had said, you and Lord Byerdale were to have any dispute upon the matter, and the business were to fail."

"Oh, fear not, fear not, Laura," replied Wilton, smiling at her eagerness; "there is no fear of any dispute."

"Nay, but promise me," she said; "promise me, Wilton."

"I do promise you, dear Laura," he replied, "that nothing on earth which depends upon me for your father's liberation or escape shall be wanting; and I promise you more, my beloved Laura, that I will not quarrel with the means, because my Laura's hand is to be mine at once."

"Well, Wilton," continued Laura, still fearing that something might make the scheme go wrong, "I trust to you, and only beg you to remember that, if this does not succeed, my father will never forgive either you or me."

Some farther conversation upon these subjects ensued, and all the arrangements of Laura and Wilton were made as far as it was possible. There were feelings in the mind of Wilton—that doubt of ultimate success, in fact, which we all feel when a prospect of bright and extraordinary happiness is suddenly presented to us, after many struggles with difficulties and dangers—which led him to linger and enjoy the present hour. But, after a time, as he heard the clock chime two, and knew that every moment was now of importance, he hastened away to seek the Earl of Byerdale, and hear farther what was to be done for the escape of the duke.

The earl was not at home, however, nor at his office, and Wilton occupied himself another hour in various preparations for the events that were likely to ensue. At the end of that time he returned to the Earl of Byerdale's house, and was immediately admitted.

"Well, Wilton!" exclaimed the earl, as soon as he saw him, with a cheerful smile, in which there was, nevertheless, something sarcastic; "have I not done well for you? I think this proud duke's stomach is brought down sufficiently."

"I am only grieved, my lord," replied Wilton, "that either the duke or Lady Laura should have cause to think that I made it a condition she should give me her hand before I aided in her father's escape. There seemed to me something degrading in such a course."

The earl's brow for a moment grew as dark as a thunder cloud; but it passed away in a sneer, and he contented himself with saying, "Are you so proud, also, my young sir? It matters not, however. What did the duke say to you? He showed no reluctance, I trust. We will bring his pride down farther, if he did."

"I did not see the duke, my lord," replied Wilton, a good deal mortified at the tone the earl assumed; "I only saw Lady Laura."

"And what said she?" demanded the earl. "Is she as proud as her father?"

"She showed no repugnance, my lord," replied Wilton, "to do what was necessary for her father's safety; and when she saw how much pained I was it should be thought that I would make such a condition with her, she only seemed apprehensive that such feelings might lead to any derangement of your lordship's plan."

"What?" said the earl. "You were very indignant, indeed, I suppose, and abused me heartily for doing the very thing that is to secure you happiness, rank, station, and independence. But she conquered, no doubt. You promised to concur in my terrible scheme. Is it not so, Wilton?"

"Yes, my lord, I did," replied Wilton.

"Upon my word, you are a pretty gentleman, to make ladies sue you thus," continued the earl, in a jeering tone. "I dare say she made you vow all sorts of things?"

"I pledged myself solemnly, my lord," replied Wilton, "to do all that depended upon me to forward your lordship's plan for the duke's escape, and she knows me too well to entertain a doubt of my keeping that promise to the letter."

"Not my plan, not my plan, Wilton," said the earl, in a more pleasant tone. "It must be your plan, my

young friend, for I might put my head in danger, remember. It is a different thing with you, who are not yet sworn of the privy council. I will take care, also, that no harm shall happen to you. The duke was talking of some valet that he has, whom he wishes to send out of the prison to-morrow night. Now what I propose, in order to facilitate all your arrangements with regard to Lady Laura, is to give you an order upon the governor of the Tower to suffer you and Lady Laura, and one man servant and one maid, to pass out any time to-morrow before twelve o'clock at night. I write a little note to the governor at the same time, telling him that, with the consent of all parties, you and Lady Laura are to be married privately in the Tower to-morrow evening by the chaplain, and I have provided you with all the necessary authorizations for the chaplain. You will find them there in that paper. My note will not at all surprise the governor, because it has been the common talk of the town for the last two months that you were going to be married to Lady Laura, and most likely the good governor has not heard of the duke's whims at Somersbury. The note will therefore only serve as a reason for your wishing to go out late at night, which is contrary to rules, you know. The governor will give orders about it to his subordinates, as he is going down to spend a day or two at Hampton Court, and testify his duty to the king. If, therefore, you go away with your attendants towards midnight, you will find nobody up who knows the duke, and a livery jacket and badge may cover whomsoever you like. A carriage can be waiting for you on Tower Hill, and a small brig called the Skimmer is lying with papers sealed and everything prepared a little below Greenwich. Now, Wilton," he added, "if this does not succeed in your hands, it is your fault. Do you agree to every part of this as I have laid it before you?"

"Most assuredly, my lord," replied Wilton, with eager gladness; "and I can easily show Laura now that there is a sufficient motive for our marriage taking place so rapidly and so secretly."

"I did not think of that," said the earl, much to Wilton's surprise. "However, I shall leave to you entirely the execution of this scheme, Wilton. You understand that my name is never to be mentioned, however; and I take it as a matter of honour, that, what-

ever be the result, you say not one word whatsoever to inculcate me."

"None, my lord, none, upon my honour!" replied Wilton.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Wilton?" demanded the earl. "If not, just be good enough to copy out that letter for me against my return, for the carriage is at the door, and I must go in haste to Kensington to see the king depart for Hampton Court. The papers are all there in that packet I have given you: the order, the note, the special license, and everything. Is there anything more?"

"Nothing, my lord. I thank you most sincerely," replied Wilton, sitting down to copy the letter; while the earl took up his hat and cane, and walked a step or two towards the door. The earl paused, however, before he reached it, and then turned again towards Wilton, gazing upon him with a cold, unpleasant sort of smile.

"By-the-way, Wilton," he said, "I promised to tell you part of your own history, but did not intend to do it for some little time. As we are likely, however, to be separated for a month or two by this marriage trip of yours, there is one thing that I may as well tell you. But you must, in the first place, promise me, upon your honour as a gentleman, and by all you hold most sacred, not to reveal one word thereof to any one till the safety of the duke is quite secured. Do you promise me in that solemn manner?"

"I do, indeed, my lord," replied Wilton, "and feel most sincerely grateful to your lordship for relieving my mind on the subject at once."

"Well then, Wilton," continued the earl, "you may recollect I said to the duke that there was as ancient and good blood in your veins as in his own or in mine. Now, Wilton, my uncle, the last Earl of Byerdale, had two other nephews besides myself, and you are the son of one of them, who, espousing the cause of the late King James, was killed at the battle of the Boyne, and all he had confiscated. Little enough it was. You are his son, I say, Wilton. Do you hear? His natural son, by a very pretty lady called Miss Harriet Oswald! But, upon my honour, I must go, or I shall miss the king."

And, turning round with an air of perfect coolness

and composure, the earl quitted the room, leaving Wilton thunderstruck and overwhelmed with grief.

CHAPTER XX.

THE whole of the earl's dark scheme was cleared up to Wilton's eyes in a moment; and the secret of his own fate was only given to him in conjunction with an insight into that black and base transaction, of which he had been made an unwitting tool.

Horrible, most horrible to himself was the disappointment of all his hopes. The bright dreams that he had entertained, the visions of gay things which he had suffered the enchanter imagination to call forth from the former obscurity of his fate, were all dispelled by the words that he had just heard spoken, and everything dark, and painful, and agonizing was spread out around him in its stead. He was as one who, having fallen asleep in a desert, has dreamed sweet dreams, and then suddenly wakes with the rising sun, to find nothing but arid desolation around him.

Thus, painful indeed would have been his feelings if he had only to contemplate his situation in reference to himself alone; but when he recollected how his position bore upon the duke and Laura, the thought thereof almost drove him mad. The deceit which had been practised upon him had taught him to entertain hopes and to pursue objects which he never would have dreamed of had it not been for that deceit. It had made him throw open his heart to the strongest of all affections; it had made him give himself up entirely to ardent and passionate love, from which he would have fled as from his bane, had he known what was now told to him. He had been made, also, the instrument of basely deceiving others. He knew that the duke would never have heard of such a thing as his marriage with Lady Laura; he knew that in all probability he would never have admitted him into any extraordinary intimacy with his family, if he had not firmly believed that he was anything but that which he was now proved to be. He did not know, but he doubted much whether Laura,

knowing her father's feelings upon such a subject, would ever have thought of him otherwise than as an ordinary acquaintance. He knew not, he could not tell, whether she herself might not upon that subject entertain the same feelings as the duke. But what would be their sensations, what their astonishment, what their indignation, when they found that they had been so basely deceived, when they found that he had been apparently a sharer in such deceit! Would they ever believe that he had acted unwittingly, when the whole transaction was evidently to the advantage of none but himself, when he was to reap the whole of the solid benefit, and the Earl of Byerdale had only to indulge a revengeful caprice? Would anybody believe it? he asked himself; and, clasping his hands together, he stood overpowered by the feeling of having lost all hope in his own fate, of having lost her he loved for ever, and, perhaps, of having lost also her love and esteem, and the honourable name which he had hitherto borne.

For a few minutes he thus remained, as it were, utterly confounded, with no thought but the mere consciousness of so many evils, and with the cold, sneering tone of the Earl of Byerdale still ringing in his ears, announcing to him plainly that the treacherous statesman enjoyed the wound which he had inflicted upon him, almost as much as the humiliation to which he had doomed the duke.

Wilton's mind, however, as we have endeavoured to show throughout this book, was not of a character to succumb under a sense of any evils that affected him. All the painful feelings that assailed him might, it is true, remain indelibly impressed upon his mind for long years. It was not that the effect wore out, it was only that the mind gained strength and bore the burden that was cast upon it; and thus, in the present instance, he shook off, in a very short space of time, the thought of his sorrows themselves, to consider more clearly how he should act under them.

But new difficulties presented themselves with this consideration. He had solemnly pledged himself not to reveal what the earl had told him till the duke was placed in safety. He had pledged himself to Laura to throw no obstacle whatever in the way of her father's escape by the means which the earl had proposed. Neither was there a way of evading any part of the

plan as the earl had arranged it. Otherwise he would undoubtedly have endeavoured to postpone the marriage till after the duke was free, and then, having placed his own honour beyond all question, to tell Laura and her father the whole truth. But as the earl had taken care to inform the governor of the Tower that he was to go out with Lady Laura and the attendants after his private marriage to her, there could be no pretence for his staying in the Tower after the usual hour, and making use of the earl's order, if the marriage did not take place.

He saw that the wily politician had entangled him on all sides. He saw that he had left him scarcely a possibility of escape. He had either to commit an action which he felt would be dishonourable in the highest degree towards Laura, or to break the solemn pledge that he had made, and, at the same time, leave himself still under the imputation of dishonour; for he had nothing else to propose to Laura or her father but her instant marriage with himself, notwithstanding the circumstances of his birth, or the imminent risk of her father's total ruin.

"She may think," he said to himself, "and the duke certainly will think, that I have never told this fact till the very last moment, when I have so entangled her that there was no receding. Thus I shall violate my word to the earl, which his baseness, perhaps, would justify me in doing, but shall yet derive scarcely any benefit either to the duke, or Laura, or myself."

It was all agony; and, clasping his hands together once more, he remained gazing upon the ground in absolute despair. Which way, he asked himself, could he turn for help or advice? His mind rested for a moment on Lord Sunbury. There were many strong reasons to believe that he was in London, but incognito; but, as Wilton thus thought, he recollected his pledge not to mention either the plans the earl had laid out, or the facts concerning his own birth which had been told him. And again he was at sea; but the next moment came the thought of Lord Sherbrooke and his strange acquaintance Green: he recollected that on that very night he was to meet the colonel; he recollected that the very object of that meeting was to be the duke; he remembered that Green's words had been, "to apply to him in any difficulty, for he had more power to do

him a service than ever ;" he recollected that the very person he was to see possessed some knowledge of his own history ; and hope, out of these materials, however incoherent, strange, and unpromising they might be, contrived to elicit at least one ray of light.

"I will meet him," he thought, "I will meet him, and will do the best that I can when I do see him. I must not allude to what I have heard ; but he may have power that I do not know of ; he may even aid me in some other plan for the duke's escape. I will set out as soon as it is dusk."

As he thus thought, he turned towards the door, nearly forgetting the letter which the earl had given him to copy ; but his eye chanced to fall upon it as he passed, and saying aloud, "This man shall not see how he has shaken me," he sat down, and copied it clearly and accurately. He then left the house, went home, ordered his horse, and made preparations for his journey. The sun was just touching the horizon as he put his foot in the stirrup, and he rode forward at a quick pace on the road towards Somersbury.

It was a beautiful clear evening, and many people were abroad ; but for the first six miles he saw nobody but strangers, all hurrying to their several destinations for the night, travellers wending their way into the great metropolis, and carts carrying to its devouring maw the food for the next day. Between the sixth and seventh milestone, however, where the moon was just seen raising her yellow horn beside the village spire, he beheld a man, mounted upon a powerful horse, riding towards him, who, by his military aspect, broad shoulders, powerful frame, and erect seat upon his horse, he recognised, while still at some distance, as Green.

"Ah Wilton, my boy," cried the colonel, as he rode up, "I am glad to see you. You are not behind your time, but there is an impatience upon me now that made me set off early. I am glad I did, for I have not been on my horse's back for a fortnight ; and there is something in poor Barbary's motion that gives me back a part of my former lightness of heart."

"I wish to Heaven that you could get it all back," replied Wilton. "But, I fear, when it is lost it is not to be regained ; I feel that it is so but too bitterly at this moment."

"What, you !" exclaimed the colonel. "What is the

matter, Wilton? What have you done? for a man never loses his lightness of heart for ever but by his own act."

"I think," said Wilton, "from what I have heard you say, that you can feel for my situation when I tell you that, by the entanglements of one I do not scruple to call a most accursed villain, I can neither go on with honour in the course that is before me, nor retreat without dishonour; and, even if I could do either, there would still be absolute and perpetual misery for me in life."

"Who is the villain?" demanded Green, abruptly.

"The Earl of Byerdale," replied Wilton.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Green, aloud. "He is a cursed villain; he always was, and ever will be. But we will frustrate the Earl of Byerdale, Wilton. I tell you that, with my right hand on his collar, the Earl of Byerdale is no more than a lackey."

"But you cannot frustrate him," replied Wilton, "so as to relieve me, unless you can find means to set the Duke of Gaveston at liberty; and even then—But it matters not. I can bear unhappiness, but not dishonour."

"Set the duke at liberty!" said Green, thoughtfully. "He ought to have been at liberty already. He has committed no crime, but only folly. He has been stupid, not wicked; and besides, I had heard—but that may be a mistake. Let us ride on, Wilton," he continued, turning his horse; "and, as we go, tell me all that has happened."

"Alas!" replied Wilton, riding on beside him, "that is of all things which I cannot and must not do. If I could speak, if I could open my mouth to any one on the subject, one half of my difficulties, one half of my grief, would be relieved at once. But that I am pledged and bound not to do, in a manner which leaves me no relief, which affords me no means of escape."

"Well, then, Wilton," said his companion, "I know there are situations in which, to aid a friend at all, we must aid him upon his own showing, and without inquiry. We must do what he asks us to do without explanation, or sacrifice his service to our pride. Such shall not be the case with me. I will do what I can to serve you, even to the last, altogether without explanation. Let me ask you, however, one or two questions."

"I will answer them, if I can," replied Wilton. "But

remember always there is much that I am pledged not to reveal at present."

"They will be very easily answered, my boy," replied Green. "Have you seen the Earl of Sunbury?"

"I have not," replied Wilton, "though I believe he is in England. To him I should have applied, certainly, if I had been able to explain to him, in any degree, my situation."

"He is in England," replied Green: "I saw him two days ago; but I leave him to smart for a time under the consequences of an imprudence he has committed. In the next place, I have but the one general question to put: What can I do for you?"

"I know not, indeed," replied Wilton, "though I sought you with a vague hope that you might be able to do something. But the only thing that could in any degree relieve me would be, either to effect the escape of the duke from the Tower—"

"That is impossible!" said Green, "utterly impossible! What was the alternative?"

"To obtain from the king a warrant for his liberation," said Wilton, in a despairing tone, "which is impossible also; for how can I expect you to do what neither Vernon nor the Duke of Shrewsbury has been able to accomplish? The king's only answer to all applications is, that he has spoken to the Earl of Byerdale; and in the Earl of Byerdale we have no hope. So that is out of the question."

"Not so much as you imagine, Wilton," replied Green. "I will do it if it is to be done, though I would fain have avoided the act which I must now perform. Come to me on Monday, Wilton, here upon this road where we now ride, and I think I will put the order in your hand."

"Alas!" replied Wilton, "Monday will not do. The liberation must be before to-morrow night to answer the intended purpose. I have lately thought to do the bold, and perhaps the rash, act of going to the king myself; telling him all I know, and beseeching him to set the duke at liberty. He even told me once that I had done him good service, and that he would favour me. But, alas! kings forget such words as soon as spoken."

"He has a long memory, this William," replied Green; "but you shall go with me, Wilton. If it must be to-morrow, to-morrow it shall be. Meet me then at

twelve o'clock exactly, at the little inn by the water called the Swan, near Kingston Bridge. I will be there waiting for you. It is a likely hour to find the king after he comes from chapel: but I will apply before hand both in your name and in mine; for I heard some time ago, from Harry Sherbrooke, that you had won such praises from William as he seldom bestows on any one."

"At twelve to-morrow!" said Wilton, thoughtfully. "I was to have been at the Tower at twelve to-morrow. But it matters not. That engagement I at least may break without losing my honour or wounding her heart. But tell me, tell me, Green, is there any hope, is there any chance of our being successful?"

"There is great hope, there is great chance," replied Green. "I will not, indeed, say that it is by any means sure; for what is there we can rely upon on earth? Have I not seen everything break down beneath me like mere reeds, and shall I now put my faith in any man? But still, Wilton, I will ask this thing. I will see William of Orange—I may call him king at once—for king he is in fact; and far more kingly in his courage and his nature than the weak man who never will wear the crown of these realms again. We will both urge our petition to the throne; and even if he have forgotten the last words that he said to me, those which you have to speak, perhaps, may prove sufficient. He is not a cruel or a bloody-minded man; and I do believe he forgets his enmities more easily than he does his friendships. If we could have said the same of the race of Stuart, the crown of England would never have rested on the brow of the Prince of Orange. I thought to have led you to other scenes and other conferences to-night," he added; "but this matter changes all, and we will now part. I will to my task, and prepare the way for to-morrow. You to yours; but fail not, Wilton, fail not. Be rather before than after the hour."

"I will not fail," replied Wilton; and, after this short conference, he turned his rein and rode back to London.

As he went, he meditated on the hopes which his conference with Green had raised up again; but the brightness of those hopes faded away beneath the light of thought. Yet, though such was the case, the determination remained, and grew firmer and stronger, perhaps from the want of any very great expectation. He

determined to appeal to the king, as the last act in his power, to do so firmly and resolutely; and if the king refused his petition, and gave him no reason to hope, to apply, as the next greatest favour, for a memorandum in writing of his having so appealed, in order that he might prove to Laura and her father that he had done all in his power to give the duke an opportunity of rejecting that means of escape which could only be obtained by uniting his daughter to one from whom, in any other circumstances, he would have withheld her.

"It is strange," he said to himself, "it is strange and sad, that I can scarcely move a step in any way without the risk of dishonour; and that the only means to avoid it requires every exertion to deprive myself of peace, and happiness, and love for ever."

Thus he thought as he went along; and imagination pictured his next parting from her he loved, and all that was to follow it; the grief that she would suffer as well as himself; the long, dreary lapse of sad and cheerless hours that was to fill up the remainder of existence for him, with all happy hopes at an end, and fortune, station, love, gone away like visions of the night.

Early on the ensuing morning he despatched a note to the Tower, telling Laura that business affecting her father's safety would keep him away from her at the hour he had promised to visit her. He would be with her, he said, at all events, before nightfall; and he added every term of love and affection that his heart suggested; but, at the same time, he could not prevent a tone of sadness spreading through his letter, which communicated to Laura a fear lest her father's hopes of escape should be frustrated.

By eleven o'clock Wilton was at the door of the small inn named for the meeting; and two handsome horses which were standing there, held by a servant, announced that Green had arrived before him. On going in, he found his strange friend far more splendidly dressed than he had ever seen him, apparently waiting for his coming. His fine person told to much advantage; his upright carriage and somewhat proud and stern demeanour, the grave and thoughtful look of his eye, all gave him the appearance of one of high mind and high station, accustomed to action and command. A certain sort of gay and dissipated look, which he had previously borne, was altogether gone: within the last

few months he had become paler and thinner, and his countenance had assumed an air of gloom which did not even leave it when he laughed.

As Wilton now advanced towards him, he could not but feel that there was something dignified and imposing in his aspect; and yet it caused him a strange sensation to think that he was going into the king's presence in company with a man whom he had actually first met upon the king's highway.

"I am glad you have come early, Wilton," said Green. "The king returns from the chapel at a quarter past twelve, and expects us to be in waiting at that hour, when he will see us. This is no slight favour, I find, Wilton," he added, "for the palace is full of courtiers, all eager and pressing for royal attention. Let us go immediately, then, and ride slowly up to the palace."

They mounted their horses accordingly, and rode on, speaking a few words from time to time, but not, indeed, absolutely conversing, for both were far too thoughtful, and too much impressed with the importance of the act they were about to perform, to leave the tongue free and unfettered.

On their arrival at the palace they found that the king had not yet returned from the chapel; but, on being asked whether they came by appointment or not, and giving their names, they were admitted into a waiting-room where two or three other people were already assembled. The moments passed slowly, and it seemed as if the king would never return.

At length, however, a distant flourish of drums and trumpets was heard together with the sounds of many people passing to and fro in the courts and passages. Buzzing conversation, manifold footfalls, gay laughter, announced that the morning service was over, and the congregation of the royal chapel dispersed.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN the royal closet, at the palace of Hampton Court, stood King William III., leaning against a gilt railing placed round some ornamental objects near one of the

windows. The famous Lord-keeper Somers stood beside him, while at a little distance behind appeared Keppel, Lord Albemarle, and before him a tall, fine-looking man, somewhat past the middle age, slight, but dignified in his person, and with an air of ease and grace in his whole position and demeanour which bespoke long familiarity with courts. William gazed at him with a smile, and heard him speak evidently with pleasure.

"Well, my lord," he said, "I am very glad of the news you give me. With the assistance of yourself and my lord-keeper here, together with that of our good friend the Duke of Shrewsbury, I doubt not now my affairs will go well. I am happy to see your health so well restored, my lord; for you know my friendship for you well enough to be aware that I was seriously afflicted at your illness, for your own sake, as well as because it deprived me of the counsel and assistance of one who, as I thought he would, has proved himself the only person, sufficiently loved by all men, to reconcile the breaches between some of my best friends."

"Most grateful I am, sir," replied the Earl of Sunbury to this unusually long speech, "that Heaven has made me an instrument for that purpose; and I can never sufficiently express my gratitude for your not being angry at my long absence from your majesty's service. The arrangements thus being made, sire, I will humbly take my leave, begging your majesty not to forget the interests of my young friend according to your gracious promise."

"I will not forget, I will not forget," replied the king. "When do you publicly announce your return, my lord?"

"I think it would be better not, sire," replied the earl, "till after we have notified the arrangements to the three gentlemen who retire."

The king smiled. "That can be done to-morrow, my lord," he said; "and I cannot but say, that the sooner it is done the better, for my service has already suffered."

"That disagreeable task will of course fall on my lord-keeper," said Lord Sunbury, looking to Somers with a smile.

"I shall do it without ceremony, my lord," replied Lord Somers. "It will be a mere matter of form; and, if we could have found a position suitable to my Lord

Wharton, I should say that we have constructed the most harmonious administration that I have seen since the glorious revolution."

The king's brow grew somewhat dark at the name of Lord Wharton; and the Earl of Sunbury, making a sign to the lord-keeper to avoid that topic, took his leave of the king, saying, "I think I have your majesty's permission to retire through your private apartments."

As he was opening a door a little to the king's right hand, however, he was met by the Earl of Portland, who greeted him with a well-pleased smile, and then passed on towards the king, of whom Lord Somers was taking leave at the same moment.

"May it please your majesty," said the Earl of Portland, as soon as the Lords Sunbury and Somers had departed, "the young gentleman whom you were once pleased to see concerning the Duke of Berwick's coming to England is now here, together with another gentleman calling himself Green, whom your majesty also, I understand—"

"Yes, yes," said the king, "I will see him. I promised to see him."

"You told me also, sire," replied Lord Portland, "if ever this other gentleman applied, you would also see him. Mr. Wilton Brown, I mean."

"I will see him too," said the king. "I will see them together. Let them be called, Bentinck."

Lord Portland went to the door and gave the necessary orders, and in a moment or two after, Wilton and his companion stood in the presence of the king.

As they entered, Lord Albemarle said a few words to William in a low tone, to which William replied, "No, no, I will tell you if it be necessary. Now, gentlemen," he said, "I understood, from a note received this morning by my Lord of Albemarle, that you request an audience together, which, as I had promised to each separately, I have given. Is your business the same, or different?"

"It is the same, sire," replied Green at once. "But I will beg this young gentleman to urge what he has to say in the first place."

The king nodded his head to Wilton to proceed; adding, "I have but little time this morning, and you may be brief; for if your business be what I think, it has

been opened to me by a friend of yours, and you will hear more from me or him on Tuesday."

"If your majesty refers to the Duke of Shrewsbury," said Wilton, "I have not the honour of his acquaintance; but he promised, I know, to urge upon your majesty's clemency the case of the Duke of Gaveston, in regard to which I have now ventured to approach you."

"We are mistaking each other," said the king. "I thought you meant something else. What about the duke?"

"When your majesty was last pleased to receive me," replied Wilton, "I had the honour of recounting to you how I had been employed by his grace to set free his daughter, who had been carried away by Sir John Fenwick and other Jacobites. I explained to your majesty, at that time, that this daring act had been committed by those Jacobites in consequence of a quarrel between the duke and Sir John Fenwick, which quarrel was occasioned by the duke indignantly refusing to take part in the infamous conspiracy against your majesty. Since then Sir John Fenwick has been arrested, and has charged the duke with being a party to that conspiracy. He has done this entirely and evidently out of revenge, and, as far as my testimony goes, I can distinctly show your majesty that, after his daughter was carried away, the duke had no opportunity whatsoever of revealing what he knew of the conspiracy, without endangering her safety, till after the whole was discovered; for, on the morning of her return to town after being set free, the warrants against the conspirators were already issued."

"You told me all this before, I think," said the king, with somewhat of a heavy brow and impatient air. "Where is the duke now?"

"He is in the Tower, sire," replied Wilton, "a prisoner of state, upon this charge of Sir John Fenwick's, and I am bold to approach your majesty to beseech you to take his case into consideration."

The king's brow had by this time grown very dark; and, turning to Lord Portland, he said, "This is another, you see, Bentinck."

"I beseech your majesty," continued Wilton, as soon as the king paused, "I beseech you to hear my petition, and to grant it. It is a case in which I am deeply in-

terested. You were pleased to say that I had conducted myself well; you were pleased to promise me your gracious favour; and I beseech you now to extend it to me so far as, at my petition, to show clemency to a nobleman who, perhaps, may have acted foolishly in suffering his ears to be guilty of hearing some evil designs against you, but who testified throughout the most indignant horror at the purposes of these conspirators, who has been punished severely already by the temporary loss of his child, by the most terrible anxiety about her, and by long imprisonment in the Tower, where he now lies, withering under a sense of your majesty's displeasure. Let me entreat your majesty to grant me this petition;" and, advancing a step, Wilton knelt at the king's feet.

"Why, I thought, young gentleman," replied William, "that before this time you were married to the pretty heiress."

"Oh no, sire," replied Wilton, with a sad smile; "that is entirely out of the question. Such a report got abroad in the world, but I have neither station, fortune, rank, nor any other advantage to entitle me to such a hope."

"And you, colonel," said the king, turning towards Green, "is this the object of your coming also?"

"It is, sire," answered Green, advancing. "But first of all permit me to do an act that I have never done before, and, kissing your majesty's hand, to acknowledge that I feel you are and will be King of England. May I add more, that you are worthy of being so."

The king was evidently pleased and struck. "I am glad to see," he answered, holding out his hand to Green, "that we have reclaimed one Jacobite."

"Sire," answered Green, kissing the king's hand, but without rising, "my affections are not easily changed, and may remain with another house; but it were folly to deny any longer your sovereignty, and," he added, the moment after, "it would be treachery henceforth to do anything against it. And now, sire," he continued, "let me urge most earnestly this young gentleman's petition, and let it be at my suit that the duke's liberation is granted. Wilton here may have many petitions yet to present to your majesty on his own account. I shall never have any; and as your majesty told me to claim a boon at your hands, and promised to grant me anything that was not unreasonable, I beseech

you to grant me, as not an unreasonable request, the full pardon and liberation of a man who this young gentleman, and I, and Sir John Fenwick, and, I think, your majesty too, well know would as soon have attempted anything against your majesty's life as he would have sacrificed his own. This is the boon I crave, this is the petition I have to present, and I hope and trust that you will grant my request."

"And have you nothing else, colonel, to demand on your own account?" said the king, gravely.

"Nothing, sire," replied Green: "I make this my only request."

"What?" said the king, after giving a glance as playful, perhaps, as any glance could be upon the countenance of William III. "Is this the only request? I have seen in English history, since it became my duty to study it, a number of precedents of general pardons, granted under the great seal, by monarchs my predecessors, to certain of their subjects who have done some good service, for all crimes, misdemeanours, felonies, *et cætera*, committed in times previous. Now, sir, from a few things I have heard, it has struck me that such a patent would be not at all inexpedient in your own case, and I expected you to ask it."

"I have not, and I do not ask it, sire," replied Green, in the same grave tone with which he had previously spoken. "I may have done many things that are wrong, sire, but I have neither injured, insulted, nor offended any one whom I knew to be a true subject of the prince I considered my lawful king. Possessing still his commission, I believed myself at liberty to levy, upon those who were avowedly his enemies, the rents of that property whereof they had deprived me fighting in his cause. Sire, I may have been wrong in my view, and I believe I have been so. I speak not in my own justification, therefore. My head is at your feet if you choose to take it: death has no terrors for me; life has no charms. I stay as long as God wills it: when he calls me hence, it matters little what way I take my departure. My request, sire, is for the liberation of the duke, who, believe me, is perfectly innocent; and I earnestly entreat your majesty not to keep him longer within the walls of a prison, which, to the heart of an Englishman, is worse than death itself."

"I am sufficiently an Englishman to feel that," re-

plied the king. "Your own free pardon for all offences up to this time we give, or rather promise you, should it be needed, without your asking it. Mark the king's words, gentlemen. In regard to the liberation of the duke, demanded of us, as you have demanded it—that is, as the only request of a person who has rendered us most important service, and to whom we have pledged our word to concede some boon, we would grant it also, but—"

"Oh, sire!" exclaimed Green, "let your clemency blot out that *but*."

"Hear me, hear me," said the king, relapsing into his usual tone; "I would willingly grant you the duke's liberation as the boon which you require, and which I promised, but that I granted the order for his liberation some four days ago, not even demanding bail for his appearance, but perfectly satisfied of his innocence. I ordered, also, such steps to be taken that a *nolle prosequi* might be entered, so as to put his mind fully at rest. I told the Earl of Byerdale, the day before yesterday, that I had done this at the request of the Duke of Shrewsbury; and I bade him take the warrant, which, signed by myself and countersigned by Mr. Secretary Trumbull, was then lying in the hands of the clerk. It is either in the clerk's hands still or in those of Lord Byerdale. But that lord has committed a most grievous offence in suffering any of my subjects to remain in a prison when the order was signed for their liberation."

"May it please your majesty," said Keppel, stepping forward, "I questioned the clerk this morning as I passed, knowing what your majesty had done, and hearing, to my surprise, from my Lord Pembroke that the duke was still in prison. The clerk tells me that he had still the warrant, Lord Byerdale seeming to have forgotten it entirely."

"He has forgotten too many things," said the king; "and yet his memory is good when he pleases. Fetch me the warrant, Arnold. Colonel, I grant this warrant, you see, not to you. You must think of some other boon at another time. Young gentleman, I have been requested, by a true friend of yours and mine, to hear your petition upon various points, and to do something for you. I can hear no more petitions to-day, however, but perhaps you may find a kinder ear to listen to you; and as to doing anything for you," he con-

tinued, as he saw Keppel return with a paper in his hand, "as to doing anything for you, the best thing I can do is to send you to the Tower. There, take the warrant, and either get into a boat or on your horse's back, and bear the good tidings to the duke yourself."

As he spoke the king gave the paper into Wilton's hands, and turned partly round to the Earl of Portland with a smile; then looked round again calmly, and, by a grave inclination of the head, signified to Wilton and his companion that their audience was at an end.

As soon as they were in the lobby, Green grasped his young friend's hand eagerly in his own, demanding, "Now, Wilton, are you happy?"

"Most miserable!" replied Wilton. "This paper is, indeed, the greatest relief to me, because it puts me beyond all chance of dishonour. No one can impute to me now that I have done wrong, or violated my word even by a breath; but still I am most unhappy, and the very act that I am going to do seals my unhappiness."

"Such things may well be," replied Green; "I know it from bitter experience. But how it can be so, Wilton, in your case, I cannot tell."

Wilton shook his head sorrowfully. "I cannot stay to explain all now," he said, "for I must hasten to the duke, and not leave his mind in doubt and fear for a moment. But, in going thither, I go to see her I love for the last time. The metropolis will henceforth be hateful to me, and I shall fly from it as speedily as possible. I feel that I cannot live in it after that hope is at an end. I shall apply for a commission in the army, and seek what fate may send me in some more active life; but, before I go, probably this very night, if you will give me shelter, I will seek you and the Lady Helen, to both of whom I have much, very much to say. I shall find you at Lord Sherbrooke's cottage, where I last saw you? There I will explain everything. And now, farewell."

Thus saying, he shook Green's hand, mounted his horse, and, at a very rapid pace, spurred on towards London by all the shortest roads that he could discover.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE duke's dinner in the Tower was over. He had been much agitated all day, and Laura had been much agitated also, but she had concealed her emotions, in order not to increase those of her father. It was, as we have said, Sunday, and the service of the church had occupied some part of that long day's passing; but the rest had gone by very slowly, especially as the only two events which occurred to break or diversify the time told that there were other persons busy without, in matters regarding which neither Laura nor her father could take the slightest part, but which affected the future fate of both in the highest degree. Those two incidents were the arrival of Wilton's note, which we have already mentioned, and a visit from the chaplain of the Tower, to tell the duke and Lady Laura that he had received directions and the proper authorization (few of those things were needed, indeed, in those days) to perform the ceremony of marriage between her and Wilton at any hour that she chose to name. A considerable time passed after this visit, and yet Wilton did not appear. The duke began to look towards Laura with anxious eyes, and once he said, "I hope, Laura, you neither did nor said anything yesterday to make Wilton act coldly or unwillingly in this business."

"Indeed, my dear father, I did not," replied Lady Laura, "and he promised me firmly to do everything in his power. Something has detained him; but, depend upon it, there is no cause either to fear or to doubt."

Such assurances, for a time, seemed to sooth the duke, and put his mind more at ease; but, as time passed, and still Wilton did not appear, his anxiety returned again; he would gaze out of the window; he would cast himself into a chair with a deep sigh; and, though he said nothing more, Laura was bitterly grieved on his account, and began to share his anxiety for the result.

At length a distant door was heard to open; then came the sound of the well-known step in the anteroom, making Laura's heart beat and the duke smile; but there was nothing joyful in the tread of that step: it

was slow and thoughtful ; and, after the hand was placed upon the lock of the door, there was still a pause, which, though in reality very brief, seemed long to the prisoner and his daughter. At length, however, the door opened, and Wilton himself entered the room. There came a smile, too, upon his lip, but Laura could not but see that smile was a very sad one.

"We have been waiting for you most anxiously, my dear Wilton," said the duke ; "we have fancied all manner of things, all sorts of obstacles ; for I well knew that nothing but matters of absolute necessity would keep you from the side of your dear bride at this moment."

"But you still look sad, Wilton," said Lady Laura, holding out her hand to him. "Let us hear, Wilton, let us hear all at once, dear Wilton. Has anything happened to derange our plans or prevent my father's escape ?"

Wilton kissed her hand affectionately, replying, "Fear not on that account, dear Laura, fear not on that account. Your father is no longer a prisoner. My lord duke, there is the warrant for your liberation, signed by the king's own hand, and properly countersigned."

The duke clasped his hands together, and looked up to heaven with eyes full of thankfulness, and Laura's joy also burst forth in tears. But she saw that Wilton remained sad and cold ; and mistaking the cause, she turned quickly towards her father, saying, "Oh, my dear father, in this moment of joy, make him who has given us so much happiness happy also. Tell him, tell him, my dear father, that you will not, that you cannot think of refusing him your child after all that he has done for us."

"No, no, Laura," cried the duke : "you shall be his—"

But Wilton interrupted him ; and, throwing his arms round Lady Laura, pressed her for a moment to his heart, took one long, ardent kiss, and then, turning to the duke, said, "Pardon me, my lord duke ! It is the last ! Nay, do not interrupt me, for I have a task to perform which requires all the firmness I can find to accomplish it. On seeing Lord Byerdale yesterday, he told me of the whole arrangements which he had made with you, and of the plan for your escape ; he showed me that, according to the note which he had written to the governor of the Tower concerning the marriage

between your daughter and myself, your escape could not be effected till the ceremony had taken place, as it was assigned as the cause for our leaving the Tower so late at night. He made me pledge myself not to disclose his part in this scheme to any one; and he then said that he would tell me the secret of my birth, if I would plight my honour not to reveal it till after your safety was secure. I pledged myself, and he told me all. I now found, my lord, that you and I had both been most shamefully deceived; deceived for the purpose, I do believe, of revenging on you and Lady Laura her former rejection of Lord Sherbrooke, by driving her to marry a person altogether inferior to herself in station. You will see that he had placed me in the most difficult of all positions. If I carried out his plan of escape, I knowingly made use of his deceit to gain for myself the greatest earthly happiness. If I revealed to you what he told me, I broke my pledged word, and, at the same time, gave you no choice, but either unwillingly to give me your daughter's hand, or to remain, and risk the chance of longer imprisonment and trial. If I held off and disappointed you in your escape, I again broke my word to Lady Laura. You may conceive the agony of my mind during last night. There was but one hope of my being able to escape dishonour, though it was a very slight one. I determined to go to the king himself. I engaged a gentleman to go with me who has some influence, and this morning we presented ourselves at Hampton Court. His majesty was graciously pleased to receive us; he treated me with all kindness, and gave me the warrant for your liberation to bring hither. That warrant was already signed; for the Duke of Shrewsbury had kept his word with me, and applied for it earnestly and successfully. The Earl of Byerdale knew that it was prepared, so that he was quite safe in permitting your escape. I have now nothing farther to do, my lord, than to wish you joy of your liberation, and to bid you adieu for ever."

"Stay, stay!" said the duke, much moved. "Let me hear more, Wilton."

But Wilton had already turned to Laura and taken her hand.

"Oh, Laura," he said, "if I have been deceived into making you unhappy as well as myself, forgive me. You know, you well know, that I would give every

earthly good to obtain this dear hand ; that I would sacrifice anything on earth for that object but honour, truth, and integrity. Laura, I feel you can never be mine ; try to forget what has been ; while I seek in distant lands, not forgetfulness, if it come not accompanied by death, but the occupation of the battle-field, and the hope of a speedy and not inglorious termination to suffering. Farewell : once more, farewell !"

"Stay, stay !" said the duke ; "stay, Wilton ! What was it the earl told you ? He said that you had as good blood in your veins as his own. He said you were even related to himself. What did he tell you ?"

The blood mounted into Wilton's cheek. "He told me, my lord," he said, "that I was the natural son of his cousin." And, feeling that he could bear no more, he turned abruptly and quitted the apartment.

As he did so, Lady Laura sank at her father's feet, and clasped his knees. "Oh, my father," she said, "do not, do not make me miserable for ever. Think of your child's happiness before any considerations of pride ; think of the noble conduct of him who has just left us ; and ask yourself if I can cease to love him while I have life."

"Never, Laura, never !" said the duke, sternly. "Had it been anything else but that, I might have yielded ; but it cannot be ! Never, my child, never ! So urge me not ! I would rather see you in your grave."

Those rash and shameful words, which the basest and most unholy pride has too often in this world wrung from a parent's lip towards a child, had been scarcely uttered by the duke, when he felt his daughter's arms relax their hold of his knees, her weight press heavily upon him, and the next instant she lay senseless on the ground.

For an instant the consciousness of the unchristian words he had uttered smote his heart with fear ; fear lest the retributive hand of Heaven should have punished his pride, even in the moment of offence, by taking away the child whose happiness he was preparing to sacrifice, and of whose death he had made light.

He called loudly for help, and his servant and Lady Laura's maid were soon in the room. They raised her head with cushions ; they brought water ; they called for farther assistance ; and though it soon became evident that Laura had only fainted, it was long before the

slightest symptom of returning consciousness appeared. The duke, the servants, and some attendants of the governor of the Tower were still gathered round her, and her eyes were just opening and looking faintly up, when another person was suddenly added to the group, and a mild, fine-toned voice said, in the ear of the duke,

"Good God! my lord duke, what has happened? Had you not better send for Millington or Garth?"

"She is better, she is better," said the duke, rising; "she is coming to herself again. Good Heaven! my Lord of Sunbury, is it you? This is an unexpected pleasure."

"I cannot say," replied Lord Sunbury, "that it is an unexpected pleasure to me, my lord; for, though I would rather see your grace in any other place, and heard this morning at Hampton Court that the order for your liberation was signed, yet I heard just now that you were still in the Tower; and, to say the truth, I expected to find my young friend Wilton with you. Let us attend to the lady, however," he added, seeing that his allusion to Wilton made the duke turn a little red, and divining, perhaps, that Lady Laura's illness was in some way connected with the absence of his young friend; "she is growing better."

And, kindly kneeling down beside her, he took her hand in his, saying in a tender and paternal tone, "I hope you are better, my dear young lady. Nay, nay," he added, in a lower voice, "be comforted; all will go well, depend upon it: you are better now; you are better, I see." And then perceiving that, only having seen him once before, Lady Laura did not recollect him, he added his own name, saying, "Lord Sunbury, my dear, the father, by love and by adoption, of a dear friend of yours."

The allusion to Wilton immediately produced its effect upon Lady Laura, and she burst into tears; but, seeing Lord Sunbury about to rise, she clung to his hand, saying, "Do not leave me, do not leave me. I shall be better in a minute. I will send him a message by you."

"I will not, indeed, leave you," said Lord Sunbury; "but I think we do not need all these people present just now. Your father, and I, and your woman will be enough."

According to his suggestion the room was cleared,

the windows were all thrown open, and in about half an hour Lady Laura had sufficiently recovered herself to sit up and speak with ease. Lord Sunbury had avoided returning to the subject of Wilton till he fancied that she could bear it, knowing that it might be more painful to her even to hear him conversing with her father upon such a topic, than to take part in the discussion herself. At length, however, he said,

"Now this fair lady is tolerably well again, let me ask your grace where I can find my young friend Wilton Brown. I was told at his lodgings that he had come on with all speed to the Tower, merely getting a fresh horse as he passed."

"He was here not long ago, my lord," replied the duke, coldly. "He was kind enough to bring me from Hampton Court the warrant for my enlargement. He went away in some haste and in some sorrow, not from anything I said, my lord, but from what his own good sense showed him must be the consequence of some discoveries which he had made regarding his own birth. I must say he has in the business behaved most honourably, and, at the same time, most sensibly; and anything on earth that I can reasonably do to testify my gratitude to him for all the services he has rendered to me and mine, I will willingly do it, should it cost me one half of my estates."

Lady Laura had covered her eyes with her hands, but the tears trickled through her fingers in spite of all she could do to restrain them. Lord Sunbury, too, was a good deal agitated, and showed it more than might have been expected in a man so calm and deliberate as himself. He even rose from his chair, and walked twice across the room before he replied.

"My lord duke," he said at length, "from what you say, I fear that both Wilton and your grace have acted hastily; and I am pained at it the more, because I believe that I myself am in some degree the cause of all the misery that he now feels, and of all the grief which I can clearly see is in the breast of this dear young lady. I have done Wilton wrong, my lord, by a want of proper precaution and care, most unintentionally and unknowingly; but still I have done him wrong which I fear may be irreparable. I must see, and endeavour, as far as it is in my power, to remedy what has gone amiss; but, whether I can or whether I cannot do so,

I have determined to atone for my fault in the only way that it is possible. The last heir in my family entail is lately dead: my estates are at my own disposal. I have notified to the king this day that I have adopted Wilton Brown as my son and heir; and his majesty has been graciously pleased to promise that a patent shall pass under the great seal, conveying to him my titles and honours at my death. This is all that I know with certainty can be done at present; but there may be more done hereafter, in regard to which I will not enter at present; and oh! my lord," he continued, seeing the duke cast down his eyes in cold silence, "for my sake, for Wilton's sake, for this young lady's sake, at all events, suspend your decision till we can see farther in this matter."

The duke raised his eyes to his daughter's face, and yielded, though but in a faint degree, to her imploring look.

"I will suspend my decision, my lord, at your request," he replied, "if it will give you any pleasure. But Laura knows my opinion, and—"

"Nay, nay," said the earl, "we will say no more upon the subject, then, at present, my lord. But, as your grace has the order for your liberation, and there can be no great pleasure in staying in this place, your grace and Lady Laura will get into my carriage, which is now in the court; and, while your servants clear your apartments and proceed to make preparations at Beaufort House, I trust you will take your supper at my poor dwelling. There I may have an opportunity, my lord," he added, turning with a graceful bow to the duke, "of telling you, who are a politician, some great political changes that are taking place; though I fear, that, as I expect no guests of any kind, and have hitherto preserved a strict incognito, I shall have no way of entertaining this fair lady for the evening."

Laura shook her head with a melancholy air, but made no reply. The duke, however, was taken with the bait of political news, and accepted the invitation, merely saying, "I take it for granted, my lord, that Mr. Brown is not at your house."

"As far as I know," replied Lord Sunbury, "he is not aware of my being in England. I came to seek him here, wishing to tell him various matters; but up to this time I have neither written to him, nor heard

from him since I have been in this country. And now, my lord," he continued, taking up the warrant from the table, "you had better let me go and speak with the governor's deputy here concerning this paper, and in five minutes I will be back, to conduct you at liberty to my house."

Thus saying, he left them; and Lady Laura, certainly calmed and comforted by his kindly manner, and the hopeful tone in which he spoke, prepared with pleasure to go with him. Her father mentioned Wilton's name no more, but gave some orders to his servant, and, by the time they were ready to go, Lord Sunbury had returned with the lieutenant of the governor, announcing that the gates of the Tower were open to the duke. The earl then offered his hand to the fair girl, and led her down to his carriage, saying in a low tone as they went, "Fear not, my dear young lady. We shall find means to soften your father in time."

After a long and tedious drive through the dull streets of London, the carriage of the Earl of Sunbury stopped at the door of his house in St. James's Square. None of his servants appeared yet in livery, and the man who opened the door was his own valet. He seemed not a little astonished at the sight of a lady and gentleman with his master; and the earl was as much surprised to hear loud voices from the large dining-room on his left hand.

The duke and Lady Laura, however, entered, and were passing on; but the valet, as soon as he had closed the door, advanced and whispered a few words to the earl.

The earl questioned him again in the same tone, put his hand for a moment to his forehead, and then said, addressing the duke, "There are some persons up stairs, my lord duke, that we would rather you did not see at this moment. I will speak to them for an instant, and be down with you directly, if you will go into the dining-room. You will there, I understand, find Lord Byerdale and his son, the latter of whom, it seems, has come hither for my support and advice, and has been followed by his father."

"But, my lord, my lord," said the duke, "after Lord Byerdale's conduct to myself—"

"Enter into no dispute with him till I come, my dear duke," said the earl; "I will be with you in one min-

ute; and his Lordship of Byerdale will have quite sufficient to settle with me, to give occupation to his thoughts for the rest of the evening. You may chance to see triumphant villany rebuked; I did want to escape the matter; but, since he has presumed to come into my house, I must take the task upon myself."

The tone in which he spoke, and the expectation of what was to follow, fixed the duke's determination at once; and, drawing the arm of Lady Laura within his own, he followed the servant, who now threw open the door to which Lord Sunbury pointed, and entered the dining-room, while the earl himself ascended the stairs.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SCENE curious but yet painful presented itself to the eyes of Lady Laura and her father on entering the dining-room of Lord Sunbury's house. On the side of the room opposite to the door stood Lord Sherbrooke, with his arms folded on his chest, his brow contracted, his teeth firmly shut, his lips drawn close, and every feature but the bright and flashing eye betokening a strong and vigorous struggle to command the passions which were busy in his bosom. Seated at the table, on which the young nobleman had laid down his sword, was his beautiful wife, with her eyes buried in her hands, and no part of her face to be seen but a portion of the cheek as pale as ashes, and the small, delicate ear glowing like fire. The sun was far to the westward, and, streaming in across the open space of the square, poured through the window upon her beautiful form, which, even under the pressure of deep grief, fell naturally into lines of the most perfect grace.

But the same evening light poured across also, and streamed full upon the face and form of the Earl of Byerdale, who seemed to have totally forgotten, in excess of rage, the calm command over himself which he usually exercised even in moments of the greatest excitement. His lip was quivering, his brow was contracted, his eye was rolling with strong passion, his hand was clinched; and, at the moment that Laura and the duke

went round the table from the door towards the side of the room on which were Lord Sherbrooke and his wife, the earl was shaking his clinched hand at his son, accompanying by that gesture of wrath the most terrible denunciations upon his head.

"Yes, sir, yes!" he exclaimed. "I tell you, my curse is upon you! I divorce myself from your mother's memory! I cast you off, and abandon you for ever! Think not that I will have pity upon you when I see your open-mouthed creditors swallowing you up living, and dooming you to a prison for life. May an eternal curse fall upon me if I ever relieve you with a shilling even to buy you bread! See if the man in whose house you have sought shelter; see if this Earl of Sunbury, with whom, doubtless, you have been plotting your father's destruction; see if this undermining politician, this diplomatic mole, will give you means to pay your debts, or furnish you with bread to feed yourself and your pretty companion there! No, sir, no! Lead forth, to the beggary to which you have brought her, the beggarly offspring of that runagate Jacobite! Lead her forth, and, with a train of babies at your heels, sing French ballads in the streets to gain yourself subsistence. You thought that I had no clew to your proceedings. I fancied she was your mistress, and that mattered little, for it is the only thing fitted for the beggarly exile's daughter. But, since she is your wife, look to it to provide for her yourself!"

He must have heard somebody enter the room, but he turned not the least in that direction, carried away by the awful whirlwind of his fury. He was even still going on, without looking round; but it was a woman's voice, the voice of a gentle, but noble-hearted woman that stopped him.

Lady Laura, the moment she entered the room, recognised, in the bending form of her who sat weeping and trembling at the table, one who had been kind to her in danger and in terror, and the first impulse was to go to her support. But when she heard the insulting and gross words of the Earl of Byerdale, her spirit rose, her heart swelled with indignation, and with courage which she might not have possessed in her own case, she turned full upon him, exclaiming,

"For shame, Earl of Byerdale! For shame! This to a woman in a woman's presence! If you have forgot-

ten that you are a gentleman, have you forgotten that you are a man?" And, going quickly forward, she threw her arm round the neck of the weeping girl, exclaiming, "Look up, dear Caroline; look up, sweet lady! You are not without support! A friend is near you!"

Lady Sherbrooke looked up, saw who it was, and instantly cast herself upon her bosom.

The Earl of Byerdale turned his eyes from Laura to the duke, evidently confounded and surprised, and put his hand upon his brow as if to collect his thoughts. The next minute, however, he said, with a sneering air, "Ha, pretty lady, is that you? Ha, my lord duke, have you escaped from the Tower? You are somewhat early in your proceedings! Why, it wants half an hour of night! But doubtless the impatient bridegroom was eager to have all complete, and I have now to congratulate my Lady Laura Brown upon her father's sudden enfranchisement, and her marriage with my dear cousin's natural child. Ma'am, I am your most obedient, humble servant. Duke, I congratulate you upon the noble alliance you have formed. You come well, you come happily, to witness me curse that base and degenerate boy. But it is a pity you did not bring the happy bridegroom, Mr. Brown, that we might have two fine specimens of noble alliances in one room."

"You are mistaken, sir," said the duke, furiously; "you are mistaken, sir. Your villany is discovered; your base treachery has been told by a man who was too honourable to take advantage of it, even for his own happiness."

"Then, my lord duke," replied the Earl of Byerdale, "he is as great a liar in this instance as you have proved yourself a fool in every one; for he plighted me his word not to reveal anything till your safety was secure."

"It is you, sir, are the liar!" replied the duke, forgetting everything in his anger, which was now raised to the highest pitch. "It is you, sir, who are the liar, as you have been the knave throughout, and may now prove to be the fool too!"

"Hush, hush!" exclaimed the voice of Lord Sherbrooke, raised to a loud tone. "Remember, my lord duke, that he is still my father!"

"Sir!" exclaimed the earl, turning first upon his son, "I am your father no longer! For you, duke, I see

how the matter has gone with this vile and treacherous knave whom I have fostered! But, as sure as I am Earl of Byerdale—”

“You are so no longer!” said a voice beside him; and, at the same moment, a strong, muscular hand was laid upon his shoulder, with a grasp that he could not shake off.

The earl turned fiercely round and laid his hand upon his sword; but his eyes lighted instantly on the fine, stern countenance of Colonel Green, who, keeping his grasp firmly upon the shoulder of the other, bent his dark eyes full upon his face.

The whole countenance and appearance of him whom we have called the Earl of Byerdale became like a withered flower. The colour forsook his cheeks and his lips: he grew pale, he grew livid; his proud head sunk, his knees bent, he trembled in every limb; and when Green at length pushed him from him, saying in a loud tone and with a stern brow, “Get thee from me, Harry Sherbrooke!” he sank into a chair, unable to speak, or move, or support himself.

In the mean time his son had cast his eyes upon the ground, and remained looking downward with a look of pain, but not surprise; while treading close upon the steps of Colonel Green appeared Wilton Brown, with the Lady Helen Oswald clinging to rather than leaning on his arm, and the Earl of Sunbury on her right hand.

Those who were most surprised in the room were certainly the duke and Lady Laura, for they had been suddenly made witnesses to a strange scene without having any key to the feelings, the motives, or the actions of the performers therein; and the duke gazed with quite sufficient wonder upon all he saw to drown and overcome all feelings of anger at beholding Wilton so unexpectedly in the house of the Earl of Sunbury.

For a moment or two after the stern gesture of Green, there was silence, as if every one else were too much afraid or too much surprised to speak; and he also continued for a short space gazing sternly upon the man before him, as if his mind laboured with all that he had to say. It was not, however, to the person whom his presence seemed entirely to have blasted that he next addressed himself.

“My Lord of Sunbury,” he said, “you see this man before me, and you also mark how terrible to him is

this sudden meeting with one whom he has deemed long dead. When last we met, I left him on the shores of Ireland after the battle of the Boyne, in which I took part and he did not. The ship in which I was supposed to have sailed was wrecked at sea, and every soul therein perished. But I had marked this man's eagerness to make me quit my native land, in which I had great duties to perform, and I never went to the vessel, in which, if I had gone, I should have met a watery grave. During the time that has since passed, he has enjoyed wealth that belonged not to him, a title to which he had no claim. He has raised himself to power and to station, and he has abused his power and disgraced his station, till his king is weary of him, and his country can endure him no longer. In the mean while, I have waited my time; I have watched all his movements; I have heard of all the inquiries he has set on foot to prove my death, and all the investigations he instituted, when he found that the boy who was with me had been set on shore again. I have given him full scope and license to act as he chose; but I have come at length to wrest from him that which is not his, and to strip him of a rank to which he has no claim. Have you anything to say, Harry Sherbrooke?" he continued, fixing his eye upon him. "Have you anything to say against that which I advance?"

While he had been speaking, the other had evidently been making a struggle to resume his composure and command over himself, and he now gazed upon him with a fierce and vindictive look, but without attempting to rise.

"I will not deny, Lennard Sherbrooke," he replied, "that I know you; I will not even deny that I know you to be Earl of Byerdale. But I know you also to be a proclaimed traitor and outlaw, having borne arms against the lawful sovereign of these realms, subjected by just decree to forfeiture and attainder; and I call upon every one here present to aid me in arresting you, and you to surrender yourself, to take your trial according to law!"

"Weak man, give over!" replied the colonel. "All your schemes are frustrated, all your base designs are vain. You writhe under my heel like a crushed adder; but, serpent, I tell you, you bite upon a file. First, for myself, I am not a proclaimed traitor; but, pleading the

king's full pardon for everything in which I may have offended, I claim all that is my own, my rights, my privileges, my long-forgotten name, even to the small pittance of inheritance which, in your vast accessions of property, you did not even scruple to grasp at, and which has certainly mightily recovered itself under your careful and parsimonious hand. But, nevertheless, though I claim all that is my own, I claim neither the title nor the estates of Byerdale. Wilton, my boy, stand forward, and let any one who ever saw or knew your gallant and noble father, and your mother, who is now a saint in heaven, say if they do not see in you a blended image of the two."

"He was his natural child! he was his natural child!" cried Henry Sherbrooke, starting up from his seat. "I ascertained it beyond a doubt! I have proof! I have proof!"

"Again, false man? Again?" said Lennard Sherbrooke. "Cannot shame keep you silent! You have no proof! You can have no proof! You found no proof of the marriage—granted; because care was taken that you should not. But I have proof sufficient, sir. This lady, whom I must call in this land Mistress Helen Oswald, though the late king bestowed upon her father and herself a rank higher than that to which she now lays claim, was present at the private marriage of her sister to my brother, by a Protestant clergyman, before Sir Harry Oswald ever quitted England. There is also the woman servant, who was present likewise, still living and ready to be produced; and, if more is wanting, here is the certificate of the clergyman himself, signed in due form, together with my brother's solemn attestation of his marriage, given before he went to the fatal battle in which he fell. To possess yourself of these papers, of the existence of which you yourself must have entertained some suspicions, you used unjustifiable arts towards this noble Earl of Sunbury, which were specious enough even to deceive his wisdom; but I obtained information of the facts, and frustrated your devices."

"Ay," said Harry Sherbrooke, "through my worthy son, who, beyond all question, used his leisure hours in reading, privately, his father's letters and despatches, for the great purpose of making that father a beggar!"

"I call Heaven to witness!" exclaimed the young

gentleman, clasping his hands together eagerly. But Lord Sunbury interposed.

"No, sir," he said, "your son needed no such arts to learn that fact, at least; for, even before I sent over the papers to you which you demanded, I wrote to your son, telling him the facts, in order to guard against their misapplication. Unfortunate circumstances prevented his receiving my letter in time to answer me, which would have stopped me from sending them. He communicated the fact, however, to Colonel Sherbrooke, and the result has been their preservation."

The unfortunate man was about to speak again; but Lord Sunbury waved his hand mildly, saying, "Indeed, my good sir, it would be better to utter no more of such words as we have already heard from you. Should you be inclined to contest rights and claims which do not admit of a doubt, it must be in another place, and not here. You will remember, however, that, were you even to succeed in shaking the legitimacy of my young friend, the Earl of Byerdale here present, which cannot by any possibility be done, you would but convey the title and estates to his uncle Colonel Sherbrooke, to whose consummate prudence in favour of his nephew it is now owing that these estates, having been suffered to rest for so many years in your hands, no forfeiture has taken place, which must have been the case if he had claimed them for his nephew before this period. Whatever be the result, you lose them altogether. But I am happy that it is in my power," he added, advancing towards him whom we have hitherto called Earl of Byerdale, "to say that this reverse will not sink your family in point of fortune so much as might be imagined. That, sir, is spared to you, by your son's marriage with this young lady."

Caroline started up eagerly from the table, gazing with wild and joyful eyes in the face of Lord Sunbury, and exclaiming, "Have you, have you accomplished it?"

"Yes, my dear young lady, I have," replied Lord Sunbury. "The king, in consideration of the old friendship which subsisted between your father and himself in youthful days, before political strifes divided them, has granted that the estate yet unappropriated shall be restored to you on two conditions, one of which is already fulfilled—your marriage with an English Protestant gentleman; and the other which doubtless you will

fulfil, residence in this country, and obedience to the laws. He told me to inform you that he was not a man to strip the orphan. You will thus have competence, happy, liberal competence."

Her husband pressed Caroline to his bosom for a moment. But he then walked round the table, approached his father, and kissed his hand, saying, in a low voice, "My lord, let a repentant son be at least happy in sharing all with his father."

For once in his life his father was overcome, and, bending down his head upon his son's neck, he wept.

Lord Sunbury gazed around him for a moment; but then, turning to Lady Helen Oswald, he said, "I have much to say to you, but it must be in private. Nevertheless, even now, let me say that your motives have been explained to me; that I understand them; that she who could sacrifice her heart's best affections to a parent in exile, in poverty, in sickness, and in sorrow, has a greater claim than ever upon the heart of every noble man. You have, of old, deeper claims on mine; and by the ring upon this finger, by the state of solitude in which my life has been passed, you may judge that those claims have not been forgotten. Helen?" he added, taking her hand in his.

The Lady Helen turned her head away, with a cheek that was glowing deeply; but her hand was not withdrawn, and the fingers clasped upon those of Lord Sunbury.

The earl smiled brightly. "And now, my lord duke," he said, "I besought your lordship about an hour ago to suspend your decision upon a point of great importance. Did I do right?"

"My lord," answered the duke, gayly, "I hope I am not too quick this time; but my decision is already made. Wilton, my dear boy, take her, take her; I give her to you with my whole heart."

March, 1840.

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The publishers take the liberty to subjoin a few of the communications relative to the published volumes of the series, which they have received from gentlemen of high classical reputation in different parts of the country.

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