HERNE THE HUNTER

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH

Herne the Hunter By William Harrison Ainsworth

I.

Of the Compact between Sir Thomas Wyat and Herne the Hunter.

On the day after his secret interview with Anne Boleyn, Sir Thomas Wyat received despatches from the king for the court of France.

"His majesty bade me tell you to make your preparations quickly, Sir Thomas," said the messenger who delivered the despatches; "he cares not how soon you set forth."

"The king's pleasure shall be obeyed," rejoined Wyat.

And the messenger retired.

Left alone, Wyat remained for some time in profound and melancholy thought. Heaving a deep sigh, he then arose, and paced the chamber with rapid strides.

"Yes, it is better thus," he ejaculated. "If I remain near her, I shall do some desperate deed. Better—far better—I should go. And yet to leave her with Henry—to know that he is ever near her—that he drinks in the music of her voice, and basks in the sunshine of her smile—while I am driven forth to darkness and despair—the thought is madness! I will not obey the hateful mandate! I will stay and defy him!"

As he uttered aloud this wild and unguarded speech, the arras screening the door was drawn aside, and gave admittance to Wolsey.

Wyat's gaze sunk before the penetrating glance fixed upon him by the Cardinal.

"I did not come to play the eavesdropper, Sir Thomas," said Wolsey; "but I have heard enough to place your life in my power. So you refuse to obey the king's injunctions. You refuse to proceed to Paris. You refuse to assist in bringing about the divorce, and prefer remaining here to brave your sovereign, and avenge yourself upon a fickle mistress. Ha?"

Wyat returned no answer.

"If such be your purpose," pursued Wolsey, after a pause, during which he intently scrutinised the knight's countenance, "I will assist you in it. Be ruled by me, and you shall have a deep and full revenge."

"Say on," rejoined Wyat, his eyes blazing with infernal fire, and his hand involuntarily clutching the handle of his dagger.

"If I read you aright," continued the cardinal, "you are arrived at that pitch of desperation when life itself becomes indifferent, and when but one object remains to be gained—"

"And that is vengeance!" interrupted Wyat fiercely. "Right, cardinal—right. I will have vengeance—terrible vengeance!"

"You shall. But I will not deceive you. You will purchase what you seek at the price of your own head."

"I care not," replied Wyat. "All sentiments of love and loyalty are swallowed up by jealousy and burning hate. Nothing but blood can allay the fever that consumes me. Show me how to slay him!"
"Him!" echoed the cardinal, in alarm and horror. "Wretch! would you kill your king? God forbid that I should counsel the injury of a hair of his head! I do not want you to play the assassin, Wyat," he added more calmly, "but the just avenger. Liberate the king from the thraldom of the capricious siren who enslaves him, and you will do a service to the whole country. A word from you—a letter—a token—will cast her from the king, and place her on the block. And what matter? The gory scaffold were better than Henry's bed."
"I cannot harm her," cried Wyat distractedly. "I love her still, devotedly as ever. She was in my power yesterday, and without your aid, cardinal, I could have wreaked my vengeance upon her, if I had been so minded."
"You were then in her chamber, as the king suspected?" cried Wolsey, with a look of exultation. "Trouble yourself no more, Sir Thomas. I will take the part of vengeance off your hands."
"My indiscretion will avail you little, cardinal," replied Wyat sternly. "A hasty word proves nothing. I will perish on the rack sooner than accuse Anne Boleyn. I am a desperate man, but not so desperate as you suppose me. A moment ago I might have been led on, by the murderous and traitorous impulse that prompted me, to lift my hand against the king, but I never could have injured her."
"You are a madman!" cried Wolsey impatiently, "and it is a waste of time to argue with you. I wish you good speed on your journey. On your return you will find Anne Boleyn Queen of England."
"And you disgraced," rejoined Wyat, as, with a malignant and vindictive look, the cardinal quitted the chamber.
Again left alone, Wyat fell into another fit of despondency from which he roused himself with difficulty, and went forth to visit the Earl of Surrey in the Round Tower.
Some delay occurred before he could obtain access to the earl. The halberdier stationed at the entrance to the keep near the Norman Tower refused to admit him without the order of the officer in command of the tower, and as the latter was not in the way at the moment, Wyat had to remain without till he made his appearance.
While thus detained, he beheld Anne Boleyn and her royal lover mount their steeds in the upper ward, and ride forth, with their attendants, on a hawking expedition. Anne Boleyn bore a beautiful falcon on her wrist—Wyat's own gift to her in happier days—and looked full of coquetry, animation, and delight—without the vestige of a cloud upon her brow, or a care on her countenance. With increased bitterness of heart, he turned from the sight, and shrouded himself beneath the gateway of the Norman Tower.
Soon after this, the officer appeared, and at once according Wyat permission to see the earl, preceded him up the long flight of stone steps communicating with the upper part

of the keep, and screened by an embattled and turreted structure, constituting a covered way to the Round Tower.

Arrived at the landing, the officer unlocked a door on the left, and ushered his companion into the prisoner's chamber.

Influenced by the circular shape of the structure in which it was situated, and of which it formed a segment, the farther part of this chamber was almost lost to view, and a number of cross-beams and wooden pillars added to its sombre and mysterious appearance. The walls were of enormous thickness, and a narrow loophole, terminating a deep embrasure, afforded but scanty light. Opposite the embrasure sat Surrey, at a small table covered with books and writing materials. A lute lay beside him on the floor, and there were several astrological and alchemical implements within reach.

So immersed was the youthful prisoner in study, that he was not aware, until a slight exclamation was uttered by Wyat, of the entrance of the latter. He then arose, and gave him welcome.

Nothing material passed between them as long as the officer remained in the chamber, but on his departure Surrey observed laughingly to his friend, "And how doth my fair cousin, the Lady Anne Boleyn?"

"She has just ridden forth with the king, to hawk in the park," replied Wyat moodily. "For myself, l am ordered on a mission to France, but I could not depart without entreating your forgiveness for the jeopardy in which I have placed you. Would I could take your place."

"Do not heed me," replied Surrey; "I am well content with what has happened. Virgil and Homer, Dante and Petrarch, are the companions of my confinement; and in good sooth, I am glad to be alone. Amid the distractions of the court I could find little leisure for the muse."

"Your situation is, in many respects, enviable, Surrey," replied Wyat. "Disturbed by no jealous doubts and fears, you can beguile the tedious hours in the cultivation of your poetical tastes, or in study. Still, I must needs reproach myself with being the cause of your imprisonment."

"I repeat, you have done me a service," rejoined the earl, "I would lay down my life for my fair cousin, Anne Boleyn, and I am glad to be able to prove the sincerity of my regard for you, Wyat. I applaud the king's judgment in sending you to France, and if you will be counselled by me, you will stay there long enough to forget her who now occasions you so much uneasiness."

"Will the Fair Geraldine be forgotten when the term of your imprisonment shall expire, my lord?" asked Wyat.

"Of a surety not," replied the earl.

"And yet, in less than two months I shall return from France," rejoined Wyat.

"Our cases are not alike," said Surrey. "The Lady Elizabeth Fitzgerald has plighted her troth to me."

"Anne Boleyn vowed eternal constancy to me," cried Wyat bitterly; "and you see how she kept her oath. The absent are always in danger; and few women are proof against ambition. Vanity—vanity is the rock they split upon. May you never experience from Richmond the wrong I have experienced from his father."
"I have no fear," replied Surrey.
As he spoke, there was a slight noise in that part of the chamber which was buried in darkness.
"Have we a listener here?" cried Wyat, grasping his sword.
"Not unless it be a four-legged one from the dungeons beneath," replied Surrey. "But you were speaking of Richmond. He visited me this morning, and came to relate the particulars of a mysterious adventure that occurred to him last night."
And the earl proceeded to detail what had befallen the duke in the forest.
"A marvellous story, truly!" said Wyat, pondering upon the relation. "I will seek out the demon huntsman myself."
Again a noise similar to that heard a moment before resounded from the lower part of the room. Wyat immediately flew thither, and drawing his sword, searched about with its point, but ineffectually.
"It could not be fancy," he said; "and yet nothing is to be found."
"I do not like jesting about Herne the Hunter," remarked Surrey, "after what I myself have seen. In your present frame of mind I advise you not to hazard an interview with the fiend. He has power over the desperate."
Wyat returned no answer. He seemed lost in gloomy thought, and soon afterwards took his leave.
On returning to his lodgings, he summoned his attendants, and ordered them to proceed to Kingston, adding that he would join them there early the next morning. One of them, an old serving-man, noticing the exceeding haggardness of his looks, endeavoured to persuade him to go with them; but Wyat, with a harshness totally unlike his customary manner, which was gracious and kindly in the extreme, peremptorily refused.
"You look very ill, Sir Thomas," said the old servant; "worse than I ever remember seeing you. Listen to my counsel, I beseech you. Plead ill health with the king in excuse of your mission to France, and retire for some months to recruit your strength and spirits at Allington."
"Tush, Adam Twisden! I am well enough," exclaimed Wyat impatiently. "Go and prepare my mails."
"My dear, dear master," cried old Adam, bending the knee before him, and pressing his hand to his lips; "something tells me that if I leave you now I shall never see you again. There is a paleness in your cheek, and a fire in your eye, such as I never before observed in you, or in mortal man. I tremble to say it, but you look like one possessed by the fiend. Forgive my boldness, sir. I speak from affection and duty. I was serving-man to your father, good Sir Henry Wyat, before you, and I love you as a son, while I honour

you as a master. I have heard that there are evil beings in the forest—nay, even within the castle—who lure men to perdition by promising to accomplish their wicked desires. I trust no such being has crossed your path."
"Make yourself easy, good Adam," replied Wyat; "no fiend has tempted me."
"Swear it, sir," cried the old man eagerly—"swear it by the Holy Trinity."
"By the Holy Trinity, I swear it," replied Wyat.
As the words were uttered, the door behind the arras was suddenly shut with violence.
"Curses on you, villain! you have left the door open," cried Wyat fiercely. "Our conversation has been overheard."
"I will soon see by whom," cried Adam, springing to his feet, and rushing towards the door, which opened upon a long corridor.
"Well!" cried Wyat, as Adam returned the next moment, with cheeks almost as white as his own—"was it the cardinal?"
"It was the devil, I believe!" replied the old man. "I could see no one."
"It would not require supernatural power to retreat into an adjoining chamber!" replied Wyat, affecting an incredulity he was far from feeling.
"Your worship's adjuration was strangely interrupted," cried the old man, crossing himself devoutly. "Saint Dunstan and Saint Christopher shield us from evil spirits!"
"A truce to your idle terrors, Adam," said Wyat. "Take these packets," he added, giving him Henry's despatches, "and guard them as you would your life. I am going on an expedition of some peril to-night, and do not choose to keep them about me. Bid the grooms have my steed in readiness an hour before midnight."
"I hope your worship is not about to ride into the forest at that hour?" said Adam, trembling. "I was told by the stout archer, whom the king dubbed Duke of Shoreditch, that he and the Duke of Richmond ventured thither last night, and that they saw a legion of demons mounted on coal-black horses, and amongst them Mark Fytton, the butcher, who was hanged a few days ago from the Curfew Tower by the king's order, and whose body so strangely disappeared. Do not go into the forest, dear Sir Thomas!"
"No more of this!" cried Wyat fiercely. "Do as I bid you, and if I join you not before noon to-morrow, proceed to Rochester, and there await my coming."
"I never expect to see you again, sir!" groaned the old man, as he took his leave.
The anxious concern evinced in his behalf by his old and trusty servant was not without effect on Sir Thomas Wyat, and made him hesitate in his design; but by-and-by another access of jealous rage came on, and overwhelmed all his better resolutions. He remained within his chamber to a late hour, and then issuing forth, proceeded to the terrace at the north of the castle, where he was challenged by a sentinel, but was suffered to pass on, on giving the watch-word.
The night was profoundly dark, and the whole of the glorious prospect commanded by the terrace shrouded from view. But Wyat's object in coming thither was to gaze, for the last time, at that part of the castle which enclosed Anne Boleyn, and knowing well the

situation of her apartments, he fixed his eyes upon the windows; but although numerous lights streamed from the adjoining corridor, all here was buried in obscurity.

Suddenly, however, the chamber was illumined, and he beheld Henry and Anne Boleyn enter it, preceded by a band of attendants bearing tapers. It needed not Wyat's jealousy-sharpened gaze to read, even at that distance, the king's enamoured looks, or Anne Boleyn's responsive glances. He saw that one of Henry's arms encircled her waist, while the other caressed her yielding hand. They paused. Henry bent forward, and Anne half averted her head, but not so much so as to prevent the king from imprinting a long and fervid kiss upon her lips.

Terrible was its effect upon Wyat. An adder's bite would have been less painful. His hands convulsively clutched together; his hair stood erect upon his head; a shiver ran through his frame; and he tottered back several paces. When he recovered, Henry had bidden good-night to the object of his love, and, having nearly gained the door, turned and waved a tender valediction to her. As soon as he was gone, Anne looked round with a smile of ineffable pride and pleasure at her attendants, but a cloud of curtains dropping over the window shrouded her from the sight of her wretched lover.

In a state of agitation wholly indescribable, Wyat staggered towards the edge of the terrace—it might be with the design of flinging himself from it—but when within a few yards of the low parapet wall defending its precipitous side, he perceived a tall dark figure standing directly in his path, and halted. Whether the object he beheld was human or not he could not determine, but it seemed of more than mortal stature. It was wrapped in a long black cloak, and wore a high conical cap on its head. Before Wyat could speak the figure addressed him.

"You desire to see Herne the Hunter," said the figure, in a deep, sepulchral tone. "Ride hence to the haunted beechtree near the marsh, at the farther side of the forest, and you will find him."

"You are Herne—I feel it," cried Wyat. "Why go into the forest? Speak now."

And he stepped forward with the intention of grasping the figure, but it eluded him, and, with a mocking laugh, melted into the darkness.

Wyat advanced to the edge of the terrace and looked over the parapet, but he could see nothing except the tops of the tall trees springing from the side of the moat. Flying to the sentinel, he inquired whether any one had passed him, but the man returned an angry denial.

Awestricken and agitated, Wyat quitted the terrace, and, seeking his steed, mounted him, and galloped into the forest.

"If he I have seen be not indeed the fiend, he will scarcely outstrip me in the race," he cried, as his steed bore him at a furious pace up the long avenue.

The gloom was here profound, being increased by the dense masses of foliage beneath which he was riding. By the time, however, that he reached the summit of Snow Hill the moon struggled through the clouds, and threw a wan glimmer over the leafy wilderness

around. The deep slumber of the woods was unbroken by any sound save that of the frenzied rider bursting through them.

Well acquainted with the forest, Wyat held on a direct course. His brain was on fire, and the fury of his career increased his fearful excitement. Heedless of all impediments, he pressed forward—now dashing beneath overhanging boughs at the risk of his neck—now skirting the edge of a glen where a false step might have proved fatal.

On—on he went, his frenzy increasing each moment.

At length he reached the woody height overlooking the marshy tract that formed the limit of his ride. Once more the moon had withdrawn her lustre, and a huge indistinct black mass alone pointed out the position of the haunted tree. Around it wheeled a large white owl, distinguishable by its ghostly plumage through the gloom, like a sea-bird in a storm, and hooting bodingly as it winged its mystic flight. No other sound was heard, nor living object seen.

While gazing into the dreary expanse beneath him, Wyat for the first time since starting experienced a sensation of doubt and dread; and the warning of his old and faithful attendant rushed upon his mind. He tried to recite a prayer, but the words died away on his lips—neither would his fingers fashion the symbol of a cross.

But even these admonitions did not restrain him. Springing from his foaming and panting steed, and taking the bridle in his hand, he descended the side of the acclivity. Ever and anon a rustling among the grass told him that a snake, with which description of reptile the spot abounded, was gliding away from him. His horse, which had hitherto been all fire and impetuosity, now began to manifest symptoms of alarm, quivered in every limb, snorted, and required to be dragged along forcibly.

When within a few paces of the tree, its enormous rifted trunk became fully revealed to him; but no one was beside it. Wyat then stood still, and cried in a loud, commanding tone, "Spirit, I summon thee!—appear!"

At these words a sound like a peal of thunder rolled over head, accompanied by screeches of discordant laughter. Other strange and unearthly noises were heard, and amidst the din a blue phosphoric light issued from the yawning crevice in the tree, while a tall, gaunt figure, crested with an antlered helm, sprang from it. At the same moment a swarm of horribly grotesque, swart objects, looking like imps, appeared amid the branches of the tree, and grinned and gesticulated at Wyat, whose courage remained unshaken during the fearful ordeal. Not so his steed. After rearing and plunging violently, the affrighted animal broke its hold and darted off into the swamp, where it floundered and was lost.

"You have called me, Sir Thomas Wyat," said the demon, in a sepulchral tone. "I am here. What would you?"

"My name being known to you, spirit of darkness, my errand should be also," replied Wyat boldly.

"Your errand is known to me," replied the demon. "You have lost a mistress, and would regain her?"

"I would give my soul to win her back from my kingly rival," cried Wyat.
"I accept your offer," rejoined the spirit. "Anne Boleyn shall be yours. Your hand upon the compact."
Wyat stretched forth his hand, and grasped that of the demon.
His fingers were compressed as if by a vice, and he felt himself dragged towards the tree, while a stifling and sulphurous vapour rose around him. A black veil fell over his head, and was rapidly twined around his brow in thick folds.
Amid yells of fiendish laughter he was then lifted from the ground, thrust into the hollow of the tree, and thence, as it seemed to him, conveyed into a deep subterranean cave.

Herne the Hunter By William Harrison Ainsworth

II.

In what manner Wolsey put his Scheme into Operation.

Foiled in his scheme of making Wyat the instrument of Anne Boleyn's overthrow, Wolsey determined to put into immediate operation the plan he had conceived of bringing forward a rival to her with the king. If a choice had been allowed him, he would have selected some high-born dame for the purpose; but as this was out of the question—and as, indeed, Henry had of late proved insensible to the attractions of all the beauties that crowded his court except Anne Boleyn—he trusted to the forester's fair granddaughter to accomplish his object. The source whence he had received intelligence of the king's admiration of Mabel Lyndwood was his jester, Patch—a shrewd varlet who, under the mask of folly, picked up many an important secret for his master, and was proportionately rewarded.

Before executing the scheme, it was necessary to ascertain whether the damsel's beauty was as extraordinary as it had been represented; and with this view, Wolsey mounted his mule one morning, and, accompanied by Patch and another attendant, rode towards the forest.

It was a bright and beautiful morning, and preoccupied as he was, the plotting cardinal could not be wholly insensible to the loveliness of the scene around him. Crossing Spring Hill, he paused at the head of a long glade, skirted on the right by noble beech-trees whose silver stems sparkled in the sun shine, and extending down to the thicket now called Cooke's Hill Wood. From this point, as from every other eminence on the northern side of the forest, a magnificent view of the castle was obtained.

The sight of the kingly pile, towering above its vassal woods, kindled high and ambitious thoughts in his breast.

"The lord of that proud structure has been for years swayed by me," he mused, "and shall the royal puppet be at last wrested from me by a woman's hand? Not if I can hold my own."

Roused by the reflection, he quickened his pace, and shaping his course towards Black Nest, reached in a short time the borders of a wide swamp lying between the great lake and another pool of water of less extent situated in the heart of the forest. This wild and dreary marsh, the haunt of the bittern and the plover, contrasted forcibly and disagreeably with the rich sylvan district he had just quitted.

"I should not like to cross this swamp at night," he observed to Patch, who rode close behind him.

"Nor I, your grace," replied the buffoon. "We might chance to be led by a will-o'-the-wisp to a watery grave."

"Such treacherous fires are not confined to these regions, knave," rejoined Wolsey. "Mankind are often lured, by delusive gleams of glory and power, into quagmires deep and pitfalls. Holy Virgin; what have we here?"

The exclamation was occasioned by a figure that suddenly emerged from the ground at a little distance on the right. Wolsey's mule swerved so much as almost to endanger his seat, and he called out in a loud angry tone to the author of the annoyance—"Who are you, knave? and what do you here?"

I am a keeper of the forest, an't please your grace, replied the other, doffing his cap, and disclosing harsh features which by no means recommended him to the cardinal, "and am named Morgan Fenwolf. I was crouching among the reeds to get a shot at a fat buck, when your approach called me to my feet."

"By St. Jude! this is the very fellow, your grace, who shot the hart-royal the other day," cried Patch.

"And so preserved the Lady Anne Boleyn," rejoined the cardinal. "Art sure of it, knave?"

"As sure as your grace is of canonisation," replied Patch. "That shot should have brought you a rich reward, friend—either from the king's highness or the Lady Anne," remarked Wolsey to the keeper.

"It has brought me nothing," rejoined Fenwolf sullenly.

"Hum!" exclaimed the cardinal. "Give the fellow a piece of gold, Patch."

"Methinks I should have better earned your grace's bounty if I had let the hart work his will," said Fenwolf, reluctantly receiving the coin.

"How, fellow?" cried the cardinal, knitting his brows.

"Nay, I mean no offence," replied Fenwolf; "but the rumour goes that your grace and the Lady Anne are not well affected towards each other."

"The rumour is false," rejoined the cardinal, "and you can now contradict it on your own experience. Harkee, sirrah! where lies Tristram Lyndwood's hut?"

Fenwolf looked somewhat surprised and confused by the question.

"It lies on the other side of yonder rising ground, about half a mile hence," he said. "But if your grace is seeking old Tristram, you will not find him. I parted with him, half-an-hour ago, on Hawk's Hill, and he was then on his way to the deer-pen at Bray Wood."

"If I see his granddaughter Mabel, it will suffice," rejoined the cardinal. "I am told she is a comely damsel. Is it so?"

"I am but an indifferent judge of beauty," replied Fenwolf moodily.

"Lead my mule across this swamp, thou senseless loon," said the cardinal, "and I will give thee my blessing."

With a very ill grace Fenwolf complied, and conducted Wolsey to the farther side of the marsh.

"If your grace pursues the path over the hill," he said, "and then strikes into the first opening on the right, it will bring you to the place you seek." And, without waiting for the promised blessing, he disappeared among the trees.

On reaching the top of the hill, Wolsey descried the hut through an opening in the trees at a few hundred yards' distance. It was pleasantly situated on the brink of the lake, at the point where its width was greatest, and where it was fed by a brook that flowed into it from a large pool of water near Sunninghill.

From the high ground where Wolsey now stood the view of the lake was beautiful. For nearly a mile its shining expanse was seen stretching out between banks of varied form, sometimes embayed, sometimes running out into little headlands, but everywhere clothed with timber almost to the water's edge. Wild fowl skimmed over its glassy surface, or dipped in search of its finny prey, and here and there a heron might be detected standing in some shallow nook, and feasting on the smaller fry. A flight of cawing rooks were settling upon the tall trees on the right bank, and the voices of the thrush, the blackbird, and other feathered songsters burst in redundant melody from the nearer groves.

A verdant path, partly beneath the trees, and partly on the side of the lake, led Wolsey to the forester's hut. Constructed of wood and clay, with a thatched roof, green with moss, and half overgrown with ivy, the little building was in admirable keeping with the surrounding scenery. Opposite the door, and opening upon the lake, stood a little boathouse, and beside it a few wooden steps, defended by a handrail, ran into the water. A few yards beyond the boathouse the brook before mentioned emptied its waters into the lake.

Gazing with much internal satisfaction at the hut, Wolsey bade Patch dismount, and ascertain whether Mabel was within. The buffoon obeyed, tried the door, and finding it fastened, knocked, but to no purpose.

After a pause of a few minutes, the cardinal was turning away in extreme disappointment, when a small skiff, rowed by a female hand, shot round an angle of the lake and swiftly approached them. A glance from Patch would have told Wolsey, had he required any such information, that this was the forester's granddaughter. Her beauty quite ravished him, and drew from him an exclamation of wonder and delight. Features regular, exquisitely moulded, and of a joyous expression, a skin dyed like a peach by the sun, but so as to improve rather than impair its hue; eyes bright, laughing, and blue as a summer sky; ripe, ruddy lips, and pearly teeth; and hair of a light and glossy brown, constituted the sum of her attractions. Her sylph-like figure was charmingly displayed by the graceful exercise on which she was engaged, and her small hands, seemingly scarcely able to grasp an oar, impelled the skiff forwards with marvellous velocity, and apparently without much exertion on her part.

Unabashed by the presence of the strangers, though Wolsey's attire could leave her in no doubt as to his high ecclesiastical dignity, she sprang ashore at the landing-place, and fastened her bark to the side of the boathouse.

"You are Mabel Lyndwood, I presume, fair maiden?" inquired the cardinal, in his blandest tones.

"Such is my name, your grace," she replied; "for your garb tells me I am addressing Cardinal Wolsey."
The cardinal graciously inclined his head.
"Chancing to ride in this part of the forest," he said, "and having heard of your beauty, I came to see whether the reality equalled the description, and I find it far transcends it."
Mabel blushed deeply, and cast down her eyes.
"Would that Henry could see her now!" thought the cardinal, "Anne Boleyn's reign were nigh at an end.—How long have you dwelt in this cottage, fair maid?" he added aloud.
"My grandsire, Tristram Lyndwood, has lived here fifty years and more," replied Mabel, "but I have only been its inmate within these few weeks. Before that time I lived at Chertsey, under the care of one of the lay sisters of the monastery there—Sister Anastasia."
"And your parents—where are they?" asked the cardinal curiously.
"Alas! your grace, I have none," replied Mabel with a sigh. "Tristram Lyndwood is my only living relative. He used to come over once a month to see me at Chertsey—and latterly, finding his dwelling lonely, for he lost the old dame who tended it for him, he brought me to dwell with him. Sister Anastasia was loth to part with me—and I was grieved to leave her—but I could not refuse my grandsire."
"Of a surety not," replied the cardinal musingly, and gazing hard at her. "And you know nothing of your parents?"
"Little beyond this," replied Mabel:—"My father was a keeper of the forest, and being unhappily gored by a stag, perished of the wound—for a hurt from a hart's horn, as your grace knows, is certain death; and my mother pined after him and speedily followed him to the grave. I was then placed by my grandsire with Sister Anastasia, as I have just related—and this is all my history."
"A simple yet a curious one," said Wolsey, still musing. "You are the fairest maid of low degree I ever beheld. You saw the king at the chase the other day, Mabel?"
"Truly, did I, your grace," she replied, her eyes brightening and her colour rising; "and a right noble king he is."
"And as gentle and winning as he is goodly to look upon," said Wolsey, smiling.
"Report says otherwise," rejoined Mabel.
"Report speaks falsely," cried Wolsey; "I know him well, and he is what I describe him."
"I am glad to hear it," replied Mabel; "and I must own I formed the same opinion myself—for the smile he threw upon me was one of the sweetest and kindliest I ever beheld."
"Since you confess so much, fair maiden," rejoined Wolsey, "I will be equally frank, and tell you it was from the king's own lips I heard of your beauty."
"Your grace!" she exclaimed.
"Well, well," said Wolsey, smiling, "if the king is bewitched, I cannot marvel at it. And now, good day, fair maiden; you will hear more of me."
"Your grace will not refuse me your blessing?" said Mabel.

"Assuredly not, my child," replied Wolsey, stretching his hands over her. "All good angels and saints bless you, and hold you in their keeping. Mark my words: a great destiny awaits you; but in all changes, rest assured you will find a friend in Cardinal Wolsey."

"Your grace overwhelms me with kindness," cried Mabel; "nor can I conceive how I have found an interest in your eyes—unless Sister Anastasia or Father Anslem, of Chertsey Abbey, may have mentioned me to you."

"You have found a more potent advocate with me than either Sister Anastasia or Father Anselm," replied Wolsey; "and now, farewell."

And turning the head of his mule, he rode slowly away.

On the same day there was a great banquet in the castle, and, as usual, Wolsey took his station on the right of the sovereign, while the papal legate occupied a place on the left. Watching a favourable opportunity, Wolsey observed to Henry that he had been riding that morning in the forest, and had seen the loveliest damsel that eyes ever fell upon.

"Ah! by our Lady! and who may she be?" asked the king curiously.

"She can boast little in regard to birth, being grandchild to an old forester," replied Wolsey; "but your majesty saw her at the hunting party the other day."

"Ah, now I bethink me of her," said Henry. "A comely damsel, in good sooth."

"I know not where her match is to be found," cried the cardinal. "Would your majesty had seen her skim over the lake in a fairy boat managed by herself, as I beheld her this morning. You would have taken her for a water-sprite, except that no water-sprite was half so beautiful."

"You speak in raptures, cardinal," cried Henry. "I must see this damsel again. Where does she dwell? I have heard, but it has slipped my memory."

"In a hut near the great lake," replied Wolsey. "There is some mystery attached to her birth, which I have not yet fathomed."

"Leave me to unriddle it," replied the king laughingly.

And he turned to talk on other subjects to Campeggio, but Wolsey felt satisfied that the device was successful. Nor was he mistaken. As Henry retired from the banquet, he motioned the Duke of Suffolk towards him, and said, in an undertone—"I shall go forth at dusk to-morrow even in disguise, and shall require your attendance."

"On a love affair?" asked the duke, in the same tone.

"Perchance," replied Henry; "but I will explain myself more fully anon."

This muttered colloquy was overheard by Patch, and faithfully reported by him to the cardinal.

Herne the Hunter By William Harrison Ainsworth

III.

Of the Visit of the Two Guildford Merchants to the Forester's Hut.

Tristam Lyndwood did not return home till late in the evening; and when informed of the cardinal's visit, he shook his head gravely.

"I am sorry we went to the hunting party," he observed. "Valentine Hagthorne said mischief would come of it, and I wish I had attended to his advice."

"I see no mischief in the matter, grandsire," cried Mabel. "On the contrary, I think I have met with excellent fortune. The good cardinal promises me a high destiny, and says the king himself noticed me."

"Would his regards had fallen anywhere than on you," rejoined Tristram. "But I warrant me you told the cardinal your history—all you know of it, at least."

"I did so," she replied; "nor did I know I was doing any harm."

"Answer no such inquiries in future," said Tristram angrily.

"But, grandfather, I could not refuse to answer the cardinal," she replied, in a deprecating voice.

"No more excuses, but attend to my injunctions," said Tristram. "Have you seen Morgan Fenwolf to-day?"

"No; and I care not if I never see him again," she replied pettishly.

"You dislike him strangely, Mab," rejoined her grandfather; "he is the best keeper in the forest, and makes no secret of his love for you."

"The very reason why I dislike him," she returned.

"By the same rule, if what the cardinal stated be true—though, trust me, he was but jesting—you ought to dislike the king. But get my supper. I have need of it, for I have fasted long."

Mabel hastened to obey, and set a mess of hot pottage and other viands before him. Little more conversation passed between them, for the old man was weary, and sought his couch early.

That night Mabel did nothing but dream of the king—of stately chambers, rich apparel, and countless attendants. She awoke, and finding herself in a lowly cottage, and without a single attendant, was, like other dreamers of imaginary splendour, greatly discontented.

The next morning her grandsire went again to Bray Wood, and she was left to muse upon the event of the previous day. While busied about some trifling occupation, the door suddenly opened, and Morgan Fenwolf entered the cottage. He was followed by a tall man, with a countenance of extreme paleness, but a noble and commanding figure.

There was something so striking in the appearance of the latter person, that it riveted the attention of Mabel. But no corresponding effect was produced on the stranger, for he scarcely bestowed a look upon her.

Morgan Fenwolf hastily asked whether her grandsire was at home, or near at hand, and being answered in the negative, appeared much disappointed. He then said that he must borrow the skiff for a short while, as he wished to visit some nets on the lake. Mabel readily assented, and the stranger quitted the house, while Fenwolf lingered to offer some attention to Mabel, which was so ill received that he was fain to hurry forth to the boathouse, where he embarked with his companion. As soon as the plash of oars announced their departure, Mabel went forth to watch them. The stranger, who was seated in the stern of the boat, for the first time fixed his large melancholy eyes full upon her, and did not withdraw his gaze till an angle of the lake hid him from view.

Marvelling who he could be, and reproaching herself for not questioning Fenwolf on the subject, Mabel resolved to repair the error when the skiff was brought back. But the opportunity did not speedily occur. Hours flew by, the shades of evening drew on, but neither Fenwolf nor the stranger returned.

Soon after dusk her grandfather came home. He did not express the least astonishment at Fenwolf's prolonged absence, but said that he was sure to be back in the course of the evening, and the skiff was not wanted.

"He will bring us a fine jack or a carp for dinner to-morrow, I'll warrant me," he said. "If he had returned in time we might have had fish for supper. No matter. I must make shift with the mutton pie and a rasher of bacon. Morgan did not mention the name of his companion, you say?"

"He did not," replied Mabel; "but I hope he will bring him with him. He is the goodliest gentleman I ever beheld."

"What! a goodlier gentleman than the king!" cried Tristram.

"Nay, they should not be compared," replied Mabel: "the one is stout and burly; the other slight, long-visaged, and pale, but handsome withal—very handsome."

"Well, I daresay I shall see him anon," said Tristram. "And now for supper, for I am as sharp-set as a wolf; and so is old Hubert," he added, glancing affectionately at the hound by which he was attended.

Mabel placed the better part of a huge pie before him, which the old forester attacked with great zeal. He then fell to work upon some slices of bacon toasted over the embers by his granddaughter, and having washed them down with a jug of mead, declared he had supped famously. While taking care of himself, he did not forget his hound. From time to time he threw him morsels of the pie, and when he had done he gave him a large platterful of bones.

"Old Hubert has served me faithfully nigh twenty years," he said, patting the hound's shaggy neck, "and must not be neglected."

Throwing a log of wood on the fire, he drew his chair into the ingle-nook, and disposed himself to slumber. Meanwhile, Mabel busied herself about her household concern, and

was singing a lulling melody to her grandfather, in a voice of exquisite sweetness, when a loud tap was heard at the door. Tristram roused himself from his doze, and old Hubert growled menacingly.

"Quiet, Hubert—quiet!" cried Tristram. "It cannot be Morgan Fenwolf," he added. "He would never knock thus. Come in, friend, whoever thou art."

At this invitation two persons darkened the doorway. The foremost was a man of bulky frame and burly demeanour. He was attired in a buff jerkin, over which he wore a loose great surcoat; had a flat velvet cap on his head; and carried a stout staff in his hand. His face was broad and handsome, though his features could scarcely be discerned in the doubtful light to which they were submitted. A reddish-coloured beard clothed his chin. His companion, who appeared a trifle the taller of the two, and equally robust, was wrapped in a cloak of dark green camlet.

"Give you good e'en, friend," said the foremost stranger to the forester. "We are belated travellers, on our way from Guildford to Windsor, and, seeing your cottage, have called to obtain some refreshment before we cross the great park. We do not ask you to bestow a meal upon us, but will gladly pay for the best your larder affords."

"You shall have it, and welcome, my masters," replied Tristram, "but I am afraid my humble fare will scarcely suit you."

"Fear nothing," replied the other; "we have good appetites, and are not over dainty. Beshrew me, friend," he added, regarding Mabel, "you have a comely daughter."

"She is my granddaughter, sir," replied Tristram.

"Well, your granddaughter, then," said the other; "by the mass, a lovely wench. We have none such in Guildford, and I doubt if the king hath such in Windsor Castle. What say you, Charles Brandon?"

"It were treason to agree with you, Harry La Roy," replied Brandon, laughing, "for they say the king visits with the halter all those who disparage the charms of the Lady Anne Boleyn. But, comparisons apart, this damsel is very fair."

"You will discompose her, my masters, if you praise her thus to her face," said Tristram somewhat testily. "Here, Mab, bring forth all my scanty larder affords, and put some rashers of bacon on the fire."

"Cold meat and bread will suffice for us," said Harry: "we will not trouble the damsel to play the cook."

With this Mabel, who appeared a good deal embarrassed by the presence of the strangers, spread a cloth of snow-white linen on the little table, and placed the remains of the pie and a large oven cake before them. The new-comers sate down, and ate heartily of the humble viands, he who had answered to the name of Harry frequently stopping in the course of his repast to compliment his fair attendant.

"By our Lady, I have never been so waited on before," he added, rising and removing his stool towards the fire, while his companion took up a position, with his back against the wall, near the fireplace. "And now, my pretty Mabel, have you never a cup of ale to wash down the pie?"

"I can offer you a draught of right good mead, master," said Tristram; "and that is the only liquor my cottage can furnish."
"Nothing can be better," replied Harry. "The mead, by all means."
While Mabel went to draw the liquor, Tristram fixed his eyes on Harry, whose features were now fully revealed by the light of the fire.
"Why do you look at me so hard, friend?" demanded Harry bluffly.
"I have seen some one very like you, master," replied Tristram, "and one whom it is no light honour to resemble."
"You mean the king," returned Harry, laughing. "You are not the first person who has thought me like him."
"You are vain of the likeness, I see, master," replied Tristram, joining in the laugh. "How say you, Mab?" he added to his granddaughter, who at that moment returned with a jug and a couple of drinking-horns. "Whom does this gentleman resemble?"
"No one," returned Mabel, without raising her eyes.
"No one," echoed Harry, chucking her under the chin. "Look me full in the face, and you will find out your mistake. Marry, if I were the royal Henry, instead of what I am, a plain Guildford merchant, I should prefer you to Anne Boleyn."
"Is that said in good sooth, sir?" asked Mabel, slightly raising her eyes, and instantly dropping them before the ardent gaze of the self-styled merchant.
"In good sooth and sober truth," replied Henry, rounding his arm and placing his hand on his lusty thigh in true royal fashion.
"Were you the royal Henry, I should not care for your preference," said Mabel more confidently. "My grandsire says the king changes his love as often as the moon changes—nay, oftener."
"God's death!—your grandsire is a false knave to say so! cried Harry.
"Heaven help us! you swear the king's oaths," said Mabel. "And wherefore not, sweetheart?" said Harry, checking himself. "It is enough to make one swear, and in a royal fashion too, to hear one's liege lord unjustly accused. I have ever heard the king styled a mirror of constancy. How say you, Charles Brandon?—can you not give him a good character?"
"Oh! an excellent character," said Brandon. "He is constancy itself—while the fit lasts," he added, aside.
"You hear what my friend says, sweetheart," observed Harry; "and I assure you he has the best opportunities of judging. But I'll be sworn you did not believe your grand-sire when he thus maligned the king."
"She contradicted me flatly," said Tristram. "But pour out the mead, girl; our guests are waiting for it."
While Mabel, in compliance with her grandsire's directions, filled the horn, the door of the cottage was noiselessly opened by Morgan Fenwolf, who stepped in, followed by Bawsey. He stared inquisitively at the strangers, but both were so much occupied by the damsel that he remained unnoticed. A sign from the old forester told him he had better

retire: jealous curiosity, however, detained him, and he tarried till Harry had received the cup from Mabel, and drained it to her health. He then drew back, closed the door softly, and joined a dark and mysterious figure, with hideous lineaments and an antlered helm upon its brows, lurking outside the cottage.

Meanwhile, a cup of mead having been offered to Brandon, he observed to his companion, "We must now be setting forth on our journey. Night is advancing, and we have five long miles to traverse across the great park."

"I would stay where I am," rejoined Harry, "and make a bench near the fire serve me in lieu of a couch, but that business requires our presence at the castle to-night. There is payment for our meal, friend," he added, giving a mark to Tristram, "and as we shall probably return to-morrow night, we will call and have another supper with you. Provide us a capon, and some fish from the lake."

"You pay as you swear, good sir, royally," replied Tristram. "You shall have a better supper to-morrow night."

"You have a dangerous journey before you, sir," said Mabel. "They say there are plunderers and evil spirits in the great park."

"I have no fear of any such, sweetheart," replied Harry. "I have a strong arm to defend myself, and so has my friend Charles Brandon. And as to evil spirits, a kiss from you will shield me from all ill."

And as he spoke, he drew her towards him, and clasping her in his arms, imprinted a score of rapid kisses on her lips.

"Hold! hold, master!" cried Tristram, rising angrily; "this may not be. 'Tis an arrant abuse of hospitality."

"Nay, be not offended, good friend," replied Harry, laughing. "I am on the look-out for a wife, and I know not but I may take your granddaughter with me to Guildford."

"She is not to be so lightly won," cried Tristram; "for though I am but a poor forester, I rate her as highly as the haughtiest noble can rate his child."

"And with reason," said Harry. "Good-night, sweet-heart! By my crown, Suffolk!" he exclaimed to his companion, as he quitted the cottage, "she is an angel, and shall be mine."

"Not if my arm serves me truly," muttered Fenwolf, who, with his mysterious companion, had stationed himself at the window of the hut.

"Do him no injury," returned the other; "he is only to be made captive-mark that. And now to apprise Sir Thomas Wyat. We must intercept them before they reach their horses."

Herne the Hunter By William Harrison Ainsworth

IV.

How Herne the Hunter showed the Earl of Surrey the Fair Geraldine in a Vision.

On the third day after Surrey's imprisonment in the keep, he was removed to the Norman Tower. The chamber allotted him was square, tolerably lofty, and had two narrow-pointed windows on either side, looking on the one hand into the upper quadrangle, and on the other into the middle ward. At the same time permission was accorded him to take exercise on the battlements of the Round Tower, or within the dry and grassy moat at its foot.

The Fair Geraldine, he was informed, had been sent to the royal palace at Greenwich; but her absence occasioned him little disquietude, because he knew, if she had remained at Windsor, he would not have been allowed to see her.

On the same day that Surrey was removed to the Norman Tower, the Duke of Richmond quitted the castle without assigning any motive for his departure, or even taking leave of his friend. At first some jealous mistrust that he might be gone to renew his suit to the Fair Geraldine troubled the earl; but he strongly combated the feeling, as calculated, if indulged, to destroy his tranquillity; and by fixing his thoughts sedulously on other subjects, he speedily succeeded in overcoming it.

On that night, while occupied in a translation of the Aeneid which he had commenced, he remained at his task till a late hour. The midnight bell had tolled, when, looking up, he was startled by perceiving a tall figure standing silent and motionless beside him.

Independently of the difficulty of accounting for its presence, the appearance of the figure was in itself sufficiently appalling. It was above the ordinary stature, and was enveloped in a long black cloak, while a tall, conical black cap, which added to its height, and increased the hideousness of its features, covered its head.

For a few minutes Surrey remained gazing at the figure in mute astonishment, during which it maintained the same motionless posture. At length he was able to murmur forth the interrogation, "Who art thou?"

"A friend," replied the figure, in a sepulchral tone.

"Are you a man or spirit?" demanded Surrey.

"It matters not—I am a friend," rejoined the figure.

"On what errand come you here?" asked Surrey.

"To serve you," replied the figure; "to liberate you. You shall go hence with me, if you choose."

"On what condition?" rejoined Surrey.

"We will speak of that when we are out of the castle, and on the green sod of the forest," returned the figure.
"You tempt in vain," cried Surrey. "I will not go with you. I recognise in you the demon hunter Herne." The figure laughed hollowly—so hollowly that Surrey's flesh crept upon his bones.
"You are right, lord of Surrey," he said; "I am Herne the Hunter. You must join me. Sir Thomas Wyat is already one of my band."
"You lie, false fiend!" rejoined Surrey. "Sir Thomas Wyat is in France."
"It is you who lie, lord of Surrey," replied Herne; "Sir Thomas Wyat is now in the great park. You shall see him in a few minutes, if you will come with me."
"I disbelieve you, tempter!" cried Surrey indignantly. "Wyat is too good a Christian, and too worthy a knight, to league with a demon."
Again Herne laughed bitterly.
"Sir Thomas Wyat told you he would seek me out," said the demon. "He did so, and gave himself to me for Anne Boleyn."
"But you have no power over her, demon?" cried Surrey, shuddering.
"You will learn whether I have or not, in due time," replied Herne. "Do you refuse to go with me?"
"I refuse to deliver myself to perdition," rejoined the earl.
"An idle fear," rejoined Herne. "I care not for your soul—you will destroy it without my aid. I have need of you. You shall be back again in this chamber before the officer visits it in the morning, and no one shall be aware of your absence. Come, or I will bear you hence."
"You dare not touch me," replied Surrey, placing his hand upon his breast; "I am armed with a holy relic."
"I know it," said Herne; "and I feel its power, or I would not have trifled with you thus long. But it cannot shield you from a rival. You believe the Fair Geraldine constant—ha?"
"I know her to be so," said Surrey.
A derisive laugh broke from Herne.
"Peace, mocking fiend!" cried Surrey furiously.
"I laugh to think how you are deceived," said Herne. "Would you behold your mistress now?—would you see how she conducts herself during your absence?"
"If you choose to try me, I will not oppose the attempt," replied Surrey; "but it will be futile."
"Remove the relic from your person," rejoined Herne. "Place it upon the table, within your grasp, and you shall see her."
Surrey hesitated; but he was not proof against the low mocking laugh of the demon.
"No harm can result from it," he cried at length, detaching the relic from his neck, and laying it on the table.
"Extinguish the light!" cried Herne, in a commanding voice.

Surrey instantly sprang to his feet, and dashed the lamp off the table. "Behold!" cried the demon.

And instantly a vision, representing the form and lineaments of the Fair Geraldine to the life, shone forth against the opposite wall of the chamber. At the feet of the visionary damsel knelt a shape resembling the Duke of Richmond. He was pressing the hand extended to him by the Fair Geraldine to his lips, and a smile of triumph irradiated his features.

"Such is man's friendship—such woman's constancy!" cried Herne. "Are you now satisfied?"

"I am, that you have deceived me, false spirit!" cried the earl. "I would not believe the Fair Geraldine inconstant, though all hell told me so."

A terrible laugh broke from the demon, and the vision faded away. All became perfect darkness, and for a few moments the earl remained silent. He then called to the demon, but receiving no answer, put forth his hand towards the spot where he had stood. He was gone.

Confounded, Surrey returned to the table, and searched for the relic, but, with a feeling of indescribable anguish and self-reproach, found that it had likewise disappeared.

Herne the Hunter By William Harrison Ainsworth

V.

What befell Sir Thomas Wyat in the Sandstone Cave—And how
he drank a maddening Potion.

THE cave in which Sir Thomas Wyat found himself, on the removal of the bandage from his eyes, was apparently—for it was only lighted by a single torch—of considerable width and extent, and hewn out of a bed of soft sandstone. The roof, which might be about ten feet high, was supported by the trunks of three large trees rudely fashioned into pillars. There were several narrow lateral passages within it, apparently communicating with other caverns; and at the farther end, which was almost buried in obscurity, there was a gleam seemingly occasioned by the reflection of the torchlight upon water. On the right hand stood a pile of huge stones, disposed somewhat in the form of a Druidical altar, on the top of which, as on a throne, sat the demon hunter, surrounded by his satellites—one of whom, horned and bearded like a satyr, had clambered the roughened sides of the central pillar, and held a torch over the captive's head.

Half-stifled by the noxious vapour he had inhaled, and blinded by the tightness of the bandage, it was some time before Wyat fully recovered his powers of sight and utterance.

"Why am I brought hither, false fiend?" he demanded at length.

"To join my band," replied the demon harshly and imperiously.

"Never!" rejoined Wyat. "I will have nought to do with you, except as regards our compact."

"What I require from you is part of our compact," rejoined the demon. "He who has once closed hands with Herne the Hunter cannot retreat. But I mean you fairly, and will not delude you with false expectation. What you seek cannot be accomplished on the instant. Ere three days Anne Boleyn shall be yours."

"Give me some proof that you are not deceiving me, spirit," said Wyat.

"Come, then!" replied Herne. So saying, he sprang from the stone, and, taking Wyat's hand, led him towards the lower end of the cave, which gradually declined till it reached the edge of a small but apparently deep pool of water, the level of which rose above the rock that formed its boundary.

"Remove the torch!" thundered the demon to those behind. "Now summon your false love, Sir Thomas Wyat," he added, as his orders were obeyed, and the light was taken into one of the side passages, so that its gleam no longer fell upon the water.

"Appear, Anne Boleyn!" cried Wyat.

Upon this a shadowy resemblance of her he had invoked flitted over the surface of the water, with hands outstretched towards him. So moved was Wyat by the vision, that he

would have flung himself into the pool to grasp it if he had not been forcibly detained by the demon. During the struggle the figure vanished, and all was buried in darkness.

"I have said she shall be yours," cried Herne; "but time is required for the accomplishment of my purpose. I have only power over her when evil is predominant in her heart. But such moments are not unfrequent," he added, with a bitter laugh. "And now to the chase. I promise you it will be a wilder and more exciting ride than you ever enjoyed in the king's company. To the chase!—to the chase, I say!"

Sounding a call upon his horn, the light instantly reappeared. All was stir and confusion amid the impish troop—and presently afterwards a number of coal-black horses, and hounds of the same hue, leashed in couples, were brought out of one of the side passages. Among the latter were two large sable hounds of Saint Hubert's breed, whom Herne summoned to his side by the names of Saturn and Dragon.

A slight noise, as of a blow dealt against a tree, was now heard overhead, and Herne, imposing silence on the group by a hasty gesture, assumed an attitude of fixed attention. The stroke was repeated a second time.

"It is our brother, Morgan Fenwolf," cried the demon.

Catching hold of a chain hanging from the roof, which Wyat had not hitherto noticed, he swung himself into a crevice above, and disappeared from view. During the absence of their leader the troop remained motionless and silent.

A few minutes afterwards Herne reappeared at the upper end of the cave. He was accompanied by Fenwolf, between whom and Wyat a slight glance of recognition passed. The order being given by the demon to mount, Wyat, after an instant's hesitation, seized the flowing mane of the horse nearest him—for it was furnished neither with saddle nor bridle-and vaulted upon its back. At the same moment Herne uttered a wild cry, and plunging into the pool, sunk within it. Wyat's steed followed, and swam swiftly forward beneath the water.

When Wyat rose to the surface, he found himself in the open lake, which was gleaming in the moonlight. Before him he beheld Herne clambering the bank, accompanied by his two favourite hounds, while a large white owl wheeled round his head, hooting loudly. Behind came the grisly cavalcade, with their hounds, swimming from beneath a bank covered by thick overhanging trees, which completely screened the secret entrance to the cave. Having no control over his steed, Wyat was obliged to surrender himself to its guidance, and was soon placed by the side of the demon hunter.

"Pledge me, Sir Thomas Wyat," said Herne, unslinging a gourd-shaped flask from his girdle, and offering it to him. "'Tis a rare wine, and will prevent you from suffering from your bath, as well as give you spirits for the chase."

Chilled to the bone by the immersion he had undergone, Wyat did not refuse the offer, but placing the flask to his lips took a deep draught from it. The demon uttered a low bitter laugh as he received back the flask, and he slung it to his girdle without tasting it.

The effect of the potion upon Wyat was extraordinary. The whole scene seemed to dance around him;-the impish figures in the lake, or upon its bank, assumed forms yet more

fantastic; the horses looked like monsters of the deep; the hounds like wolves and ferocious beasts; the branches of the trees writhed and shot forward like hissing serpents;—and though this effect speedily passed off, it left behind it a wild and maddening feeling of excitement.

"A noble hart is lying in yon glen," said Morgan Fenwolf, advancing towards his leader; "I tracked his slot thither this evening."

"Haste, and unharbour him," replied Herne, "and as soon as you rouse him, give the halloa." Fenwolf obeyed; and shortly afterwards a cry was heard from the glen.

"List halloa! list halloa!" cried Herne, "that's he! that's he! hyke! Saturn! hyke, Dragon—Away!—away, my merry men all."

Herne the Hunter By William Harrison Ainsworth

VI.

How Sir Thomas Wyat hunted with Herne.

Accompanied by Wyat, and followed by the whole cavalcade, Herne dashed into the glen, where Fenwolf awaited him. Threading the hollow, the troop descried the hart flying swiftly along a sweeping glade at some two hundred yards distance. The glade was passed—a woody knoll skirted—a valley traversed—and the hart plunged into a thick grove clothing the side of Hawk's Hill. But it offered him no secure retreat. Dragon and Saturn were close upon him, and behind them came Herne, crashing through the branches of the trees, and heedless of all impediments. By-and-by the thicket became more open, and they entered Cranbourne Chase. But the hart soon quitted it to return to the great park, and darted down a declivity skirted by a line of noble oaks. Here he was so hotly pressed by his fierce opponents, whose fangs he could almost feel within his haunches, that he suddenly stopped and stood at bay, receiving the foremost of his assailants, Saturn, on the points of his horns. But his defence, though gallant, was unavailing. In another instant Herne came up, and, dismounting, called off Dragon, who was about to take the place of his wounded companion. Drawing a knife from his girdle, the hunter threw himself on the ground, and, advancing on all fours towards the hart, could scarcely be distinguished himself from some denizen of the forest. As he approached the hart snorted and bellowed fiercely, and dashed its horns against him; but the blow was received by the hunter upon his own antlered helm, and at the same moment his knife was thrust to the hilt into the stag's throat, and it fell to the ground.

Springing to his feet, Herne whooped joyfully, placed his bugle to his lips, and blew the dead mot. He then shouted to Fenwolf to call away and couple the hounds, and, striking off the deer's right forefoot with his knife, presented it to Wyat. Several large leafy branches being gathered and laid upon the ground, the hart was placed upon them, and Herne commenced breaking him up, as the process of dismembering the deer is termed in the language of woodcraft. His first step was to cut off the animal's head, which he performed by a single blow with his heavy trenchant knife.

"Give the hounds the flesh," he said, delivering the trophy to Fenwolf; "but keep the antlers, for it is a great deer of head."

Placing the head on a hunting-pole, Fenwolf withdrew to an open space among the trees, and, halloing to the others, they immediately cast off the hounds, who rushed towards him, leaping and baying at the stag's head, which he alternately raised and lowered until they were sufficiently excited, when he threw it on the ground before them.

While this was going forward the rest of the band were occupied in various ways—some striking a light with flint and steel—some gathering together sticks and dried leaves to form a fire—others producing various strange-shaped cooking utensils—while others were assisting their leader in his butcherly task, which he executed with infinite skill and expedition.

As soon as the fire was kindled, Herne distributed certain portions of the venison among his followers, which were instantly thrown upon the embers to broil; while a few choice morsels were stewed in a pan with wine, and subsequently offered to the leader and Wyat.

This hasty repast concluded, the demon ordered the fire to be extinguished, and the quarters of the deer to be carried to the cave. He then mounted his steed, and, attended by Wyat and the rest of his troop, except those engaged in executing his orders, galloped towards Snow Hill, where he speedily succeeded in unharbouring another noble hart.

Away then went the whole party—stag, hounds, huntsmen, sweeping like a dark cloud down the hill, and crossing the wide moonlit glade, studded with noble trees, on the west of the great avenue.

For a while the hart held a course parallel with the avenue; he then dashed across it, threaded the intricate woods on the opposite side, tracked a long glen, and leaping the pales, entered the home park. It almost seemed as if he designed to seek shelter within the castle, for he made straight towards it, and was only diverted by Herne himself, who, shooting past him with incredible swiftness, turned him towards the lower part of the park.

Here the chase continued with unabated ardour, until, reaching the banks of the Thames, the hart plunged into it, and suffered himself to be carried noiselessly down the current. But Herne followed him along the banks, and when sufficiently near, dashed into the stream, and drove him again ashore.

Once more they flew across the home park—once more they leaped its pales—once more they entered the great park—but this time the stag took the direction of Englefield Green. He was not, however, allowed to break forth into the open country; but, driven again into the thick woods, he held on with wondrous speed till the lake appeared in view. In another instant he was swimming across it.

Before the eddies occasioned by the affrighted animal's plunge had described a wide ring, Herne had quitted his steed, and was cleaving with rapid strokes the waters of the lake. Finding escape impossible, the hart turned to meet him, and sought to strike him with his horns, but as in the case of his ill-fated brother of the wood, the blow was warded by the antlered helm of the swimmer. The next moment the clear water was dyed with blood, and Herne, catching the gasping animal by the head, guided his body to shore.

Again the process of breaking up the stag was gone through; and when Herne had concluded his task, he once more offered his gourd to Sir Thomas Wyat. Reckless of the

consequences, the knight placed the flask to his lips, and draining it to the last drop, fell from his horse insensible.

Herne the Hunter By William Harrison Ainsworth

VII

How Wyat beheld Mabel Lyndwood—And how he was rowed by
Morgan Fenwolf upon the Lake.

When perfect consciousness returned to him, Wyat found himself lying upon a pallet in what he first took to be the cell of an anchorite; but as the recollection of recent events arose more distinctly before him, he guessed it to be a chamber connected with the sandstone cave. A small lamp, placed in a recess, lighted the cell; and upon a footstool by his bed stood a jug of water, and a cup containing some drink in which herbs had evidently been infused. Well-nigh emptying the jug, for he felt parched with thirst, Wyat attired himself, took up the lamp, and walked into the main cavern. No one was there, nor could he obtain any answer to his calls. Evidences, however, were not wanting to prove that a feast had recently been held there. On one side were the scarcely extinguished embers of a large wood fire; and in the midst of the chamber was a rude table, covered with drinking-horns and wooden platters, as well as with the remains of three or four haunches of venison. While contemplating this scene Wyat heard footsteps in one of the lateral passages, and presently afterwards Morgan Fenwolf made his appearance.

"So you are come round at last, Sir Thomas," observed the keeper, in a slightly sarcastic tone.

"What has ailed me?" asked Wyat, in surprise.

"You have had a fever for three days," returned Fenwolf, "and have been raving like a madman."

"Three days!" muttered Wyat. "The false juggling fiend promised her to me on the third day."

"Fear not; Herne will be as good as his word," said Fenwolf. "But will you go forth with me? I am about to visit my nets. It is a fine day, and a row on the lake will do you good."

Wyat acquiesced, and followed Fenwolf, who returned along the passage. It grew narrower at the sides and lower in the roof as they advanced, until at last they were compelled to move forward on their hands and knees. For some space the passage, or rather hole (for it was nothing more) ran on a level. A steep and tortuous ascent then commenced, which brought them to an outlet concealed by a large stone.

Pushing it aside, Fenwolf crept forth, and immediately afterwards Wyat emerged into a grove, through which, on one side, the gleaming waters of the lake were discernible. The keeper's first business was to replace the stone, which was so screened by brambles and bushes that it could not, unless careful search were made, be detected.

Making his way through the trees to the side of the lake, Fenwolf marched along the greensward in the direction of Tristram Lyndwood's cottage. Wyat mechanically followed him; but he was so pre-occupied that he scarcely heeded the fair Mabel, nor was it till after his embarkation in the skiff with the keeper, when she came forth to look at them, that he was at all struck with her beauty. He then inquired her name from Fenwolf.

"She is called Mabel Lyndwood, and is an old forester's granddaughter," replied the other somewhat gruffly.

"And do you seek her love?" asked Wyat.

"Ay, and wherefore not?" asked Fenwolf, with a look of displeasure.

"Nay, I know not, friend," rejoined Wyat. "She is a comely damsel."

"What!—comelier than the Lady Anne?" demanded Fenwolf spitefully.

"I said not so," replied Wyat; "but she is very fair, and looks true-hearted."

Fenwolf glanced at him from under his brows; and plunging his oars into the water, soon carried him out of sight of the maiden.

It was high noon, and the day was one of resplendent loveliness. The lake sparkled in the sunshine, and as they shot past its tiny bays and woody headlands, new beauties were every moment revealed to them. But while the scene softened Wyat's feelings, it filled him with intolerable remorse, and so poignant did his emotions become, that he pressed his hands upon his eyes to shut out the lovely prospect. When he looked up again the scene was changed. The skiff had entered a narrow creek, arched over by huge trees, and looking as dark and gloomy as the rest of the lake was fair and smiling. It was closed in by a high overhanging bank, crested by two tall trees, whose tangled roots protruded through it like monstrous reptiles, while their branches cast a heavy shade over the deep, sluggish water.

"Why have you come here?" demanded Wyat, looking uneasily round the forbidding spot.

"You will discover anon," replied Fenwolf moodily.

"Go back into the sunshine, and take me to some pleasant bank—I will not land here," said Wyat sternly.

"Needs must when—I need not remind you of the proverb," rejoined Fenwolf, with a sneer.

"Give me the oars, thou malapert knave!" cried Wyat fiercely, "and I will put myself ashore."

"Keep quiet," said Fenwolf; "you must perforce abide our master's coming."

Wyat gazed at the keeper for a moment, as if with the intention of throwing him overboard; but abandoning the idea, he rose up in the boat, and caught at what he took to be a root of the tree above. To his surprise and alarm, it closed upon him with an iron grasp, and he felt himself dragged upwards, while the skiff, impelled by a sudden stroke from Morgan Fenwolf, shot from beneath him. All Wyat's efforts to disengage himself were vain, and a wild, demoniacal laugh, echoed by a chorus of voices, proclaimed him

in the power of Herne the Hunter. The next moment he was set on the top of the bank, while the demon greeted him with a mocking laugh.

"So you thought to escape me, Sir Thomas Wyatt," he cried, in a taunting tone; "but any such attempt will prove fruitless. The murderer may repent the blow when dealt; the thief may desire to restore the gold he has purloined; the barterer of his soul may rue his bargain; but they are Satan's, nevertheless. You are mine, and nothing can redeem you!"

"Woe is me that it should be so!" groaned Wyat.

"Lamentation is useless and unworthy of you," rejoined Herne scornfully. "Your wish will be speedily accomplished. This very night your kingly rival shall be placed in your hands."

"Ha!" exclaimed Wyat, the flame of jealousy again rising within his breast.

"You can make your own terms with him for the Lady Anne," pursued Herne. "His life will be at your disposal."

"Do you promise this?" cried Wyat.

"Ay," replied Herne. "Put yourself under the conduct of Fenwolf, and all shall happen as you desire. We shall meet again at night. I have other business on hand now. Meschines," he added to one of his attendants, "go with Sir Thomas to the skiff."

The personage who received the command, and who was wildly and fantastically habited, beckoned Wyat to follow him, and after many twistings and turnings brought them to the edge of the lake, where the skiff was lying, with Fenwolf reclining at full length upon its benches. He arose, however, quickly at the appearance of Meschines, and asked him for some provisions, which the latter promised to bring, and while Wyat got into the skiff he disappeared, but returned a few minutes afterwards with a basket, which he gave to the keeper.

Crossing the lake, Fenwolf then shaped his course towards a verdant bank enamelled with wild flowers, where he landed. The basket being opened, was found to contain a flask of wine and the better part of a venison pasty, of which Wyat, whose appetite was keen enough after his long fasting, ate heartily. He then stretched himself on the velvet sod, and dropped into a tranquil slumber which lasted to a late hour in the evening.

He was roused from it by a hand laid on his shoulder, while a deep voice thundered in his ear—"Up, up, Sir Thomas, and follow me, and I will place the king in your hands!"

Herne the Hunter By William Harrison Ainsworth

VIII.

How the King and the Duke of Suffolk were assailed by
Herne's Band—And what followed the Attack.

Henry and Suffolk, on leaving the forester's hut, took their way for a sort space along the side of the lake, and then turned into a path leading through the trees up the eminence on the left. The king was in a joyous mood, and made no attempt to conceal the passion with which the fair damsel had inspired him.

"I' faith!" he cried, "the cardinal has a quick eye for a pretty wench. I have heard that he loves one in secret, and I am therefore the more beholden to him for discovering Mabel to me."

"You forget, my liege, that it is his object to withdraw your regards from the Lady Anne Boleyn," remarked Suffolk.

"I care not what his motive may be, as long as the result is so satisfactory," returned Henry. "Confess now, Suffolk, you never beheld a figure so perfect, a complexion so blooming, or eyes so bright. As to her lips, by my soul, I never tasted such."

"And your majesty is not inexperienced in such matters," laughed Suffolk. "For my own part, I was as much struck by her grace as by her beauty, and can scarcely persuade myself she can be nothing more than a mere forester's grand-daughter."

"Wolsey told me there was a mystery about her birth," rejoined Henry; "but, pest on it; her beauty drove all recollection of the matter out of my head. I will go back, and question her now."

"Your majesty forgets that your absence from the castle will occasion surprise, if not alarm," said Suffolk. "The mystery will keep till to-morrow."

"Tut, tut!—I will return," said the king perversely. And Suffolk, knowing his wilfulness, and that all remonstrance would prove fruitless, retraced his steps with him. They had not proceeded far when they perceived a female figure at the bottom of the ascent, just where the path turned off on the margin of the lake.

"As I live, there she is!" exclaimed the king joyfully. "She has divined my wishes, and is come herself to tell me her history."

And he sprang forward, while Mabel advanced rapidly towards him.

They met half-way, and Henry would have caught her in his arms, but she avoided him, exclaiming, in a tone of confusion and alarm, "Thank Heaven, I have found you, sire!"

"Thank Heaven, too, sweetheart!" rejoined Henry. "I would not hide when you are the seeker. So you know me—ha?

"I knew you at first," replied Mabel confusedly. "I saw you at the great hunting party; and, once beheld, your majesty is not easily forgotten."

"Ha! by Saint George! you turn a compliment as soothly as the most practised dame at court," cried Henry, catching her hand.
"Beseech your majesty, release me!" returned Mabel, struggling to get free. "I did not follow you on the light errand you suppose, but to warn you of danger. Before you quitted my grandsire's cottage I told you this part of the forest was haunted by plunderers and evil beings, and apprehensive lest some mischance might befall you, I opened the window softly to look after you—"
"And you overheard me tell the Duke of Suffolk how much smitten I was with your beauty, ha?" interrupted the king, squeezing her hand—"and how resolved I was to make you mine—ha! sweetheart?"
"The words I heard were of very different import, my liege," rejoined Mabel. "You were menaced by miscreants, who purposed to waylay you before you could reach your steed."
"Let them come," replied Henry carelessly; "they shall pay for their villainy. How many were there?"
"Two, sire," answered Mabel; "but one of them was Herne, the weird hunter of the forest. He said he would summon his band to make you captive. What can your strong arm, even aided by that of the Duke of Suffolk, avail against numbers?"
"Captive! ha!" exclaimed the king. "Said the knave so?"
"He did, sire," replied Mabel; "and I knew it was Herne by his antlered helm."
"There is reason in what the damsel says, my liege," interposed Suffolk. "If possible, you had better avoid an encounter with the villains."
"My hands itch to give them a lesson," rejoined Henry. "But I will be ruled by you. God's death! I will return to-morrow, and hunt them down like so many wolves."
"Where are your horses, sire?" asked Mabel.
"Tied to a tree at the foot of the hill," replied Henry. "But I have attendants midway between this spot and Snow Hill."
"This way, then!" said Mabel, breaking from him, and darting into a narrow path among the trees.
Henry ran after her, but was not agile enough to overtake her. At length she stopped.
"If your majesty will pursue this path," she cried, "you will come to an open space amid the trees, when, if you will direct your course towards a large beech-tree on the opposite side, you will find another narrow path, which will take you where you desire to go."
"But I cannot go alone," cried Henry.
Mabel, however, slipped past him, and was out of sight in an instant.
Henry looked as if he meant to follow her, but Suffolk ventured to arrest him.
"Do not tarry here longer, my gracious liege," said the duke. "Danger is to be apprehended, and the sooner you rejoin your attendants the better. Return with them, if you please, but do not expose yourself further now."
Henry yielded, though reluctantly, and they walked on in silence. Ere long they arrived at the open space described by Mabel, and immediately perceived the large beech-tree,

behind which they found the path. By this time the moon had arisen, and as they emerged upon the marsh they easily discovered a track, though not broader than a sheep-walk, leading along its edge. As they hurried across it, Suffolk occasionally cast a furtive glance over his shoulder, but he saw nothing to alarm him. The whole tract of marshy land on the left was hidden from view by a silvery mist.

In a few minutes the king and his companion gained firmer ground, and ascending the gentle elevation on the other side of the marsh, made their way to a little knoll crowned by a huge oak, which commanded a fine view of the lake winding through the valley beyond. Henry, who was a few yards in advance of his companion, paused at a short distance from the free, and being somewhat over-heated, took off his cap to wipe his brow, laughingly observing—"In good truth, Suffolk, we must henceforth be rated as miserable faineants, to be scared from our path by a silly wench's tale of deerstealers and wild huntsmen. I am sorry I yielded to her entreaties. If Herne be still extant, he must be more than a century and a half old, for unless the legend is false, he flourished in the time of my predecessor, Richard the Second. I would I could see him!"

"Behold him, then!" cried a harsh voice from behind.

Turning at the sound, Henry perceived a tall dark figure of hideous physiognomy and strange attire, helmed with a huge pair of antlers, standing between him and the oak-tree. So sudden was the appearance of the figure, that in spite of himself the king slightly started.

"What art thou—ha?" he demanded.

"What I have said," replied the demon. "I am Herne the Hunter. Welcome to my domain, Harry of England. You are lord of the castle, but I am lord of the forest. Ha! ha!"

"I am lord both of the forest and the castle—yea, of all this broad land, false fiend!" cried the king, "and none shall dispute it with me. In the name of the most holy faith, of which I am the defender, I command thee to avoid my path. Get thee backwards, Satan!"

The demon laughed derisively.

"Harry of England, advance towards me, and you advance upon your peril," he rejoined.

"Avaunt, I say!" cried the king. "In the name of the blessed Trinity, and of all holy angels and saints, I strike!"

And he whirled the staff round his head. But ere the weapon could descend, a flash of dazzling fire encircled the demon, amidst which he vanished.

"Heaven protect us!" exclaimed Henry, appalled.

At this juncture the sound of a horn was heard, and a number of wild figures in fantastic garbs—some mounted on swarthy steeds, and accompanied by hounds, others on foot-issued from the adjoining covert, and hurried towards the spot occupied by the king.

"Aha!" exclaimed Henry—"more of the same sort. Hell, it would seem, has let loose her hosts; but I have no fear of them. Stand by me, Suffolk."

"To the death, sire," replied the duke, drawing his sword. By this time one of the foremost of the impish crew had reached the king, and commanded him to yield himself prisoner.
"Dost know whom thou askest to yield, dog?" cried Henry furiously.
"Yea," replied the other, "thou art the king!"
"Then down on thy knees, traitor!" roared Henry; "down all of ye, and sue for mercy."
"For mercy—ha! ha!" rejoined the other; "it is thy turn to sue for mercy, tyrant! We acknowledge no other ruler than Herne the Hunter."
"Then seek him in hell!" cried Henry, dealing the speaker a tremendous blow on the head with his staff, which brought him senseless to the ground.
The others immediately closed round him, and endeavoured to seize the king.
"Ha! dogs—ha! traitors!" vociferated Henry, plying his staff with great activity, and bringing down an assailant at each stroke; "do you dare to lay hands upon our sacred person? Back! back!"
The determined resistance offered by the king, supported as he was by Suffolk, paralysed his assailants, who seemed more bent upon securing his person than doing him injury. But Suffolk's attention was presently diverted by the attack of a fierce black hound, set upon him by a stout fellow in a bearded mask. After a hard struggle, and not before he had been severely bitten in the arm, the duke contrived to despatch his assailant.
"This to avenge poor Bawsey!" cried the man who had set on the hound, stabbing at Suffolk with his knife.
But the duke parried the blow, and, disarming his antagonist, forced him to the ground, and tearing off his mask, disclosed the features of Morgan Fenwolf.
Meanwhile, Henry had been placed in considerable jeopardy. Like Suffolk, he had slaughtered a hound, and, in aiming a blow at the villain who set it on, his foot slipped, and he lay at his mercy. The wretch raised his knife, and was in the act of striking when a sword was passed through his body. The blow was decisive; the king instantly arose, and the rest of his assailants-horse as well as foot—disheartened by what had occurred, beat a hasty retreat. Harry turned to look for his deliverer, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment and anger.
"Ah! God's death!" he cried, "can I believe my eyes? Is it you, Sir Thomas Wyat?"
"Ay," replied the other.
"What do you here? Ha!" demanded the king. "You should be in Paris."
"I have tarried for revenge," replied Wyat.
"Revenge!—ha!" cried Henry. "On whom?"
"On you," replied Wyat.
"What!" vociferated Henry, foaming with rage. "Is it you, traitor, who have devised this damnable plot?—is it you who would make your king a captive?—you who slay him? Have you leagued yourself with fiends?"

But Wyat made no answer; and though he lowered the point of his sword, he regarded the king sternly.
A female figure now rushed forward, and bending before the king, cried in an imploring voice—"Spare him, sire—spare him! He is no party to the attack. I was near him in yon wood, and he stirred not forth till he saw your life in danger. He then delivered you from the assassin."
"I did so because I reserved him for my own hand," said Wyat.
"You hear him confess his treason," cried Henry; "down on your knees, villain, or I will strike you to my feet."
"He has just saved your life, my liege," cried the supplicant. "Oh, spare him!"
"What make you here, Mabel?" cried Henry angrily. "I followed your majesty unseen," she replied, in some confusion, "and reached yon wood just as the attack commenced. I did not dare to advance farther."
"You should have gone home—gone home," rejoined the king. "Wyat," he continued, in a tone of stern reproach, "you were once a loyal subject. What means this change?"
"It means that you have robbed me of a mistress," replied Wyat; "and for this cause I have damned myself."
"Pardon him!-oh, pardon him, sire," cried Mabel.
"I cannot understand you, Wyat," said Henry, after a pause; "but I have myself suffered from the pangs of jealousy. You have saved my life, and I will spare yours."
"Sire!" cried Wyat.
"Suffolk," exclaimed Henry, looking towards the duke, who was holding Fenwolf by the throat, "shall I be justified in letting him go free?
"Strike!—strike!" cried a deep voice in Wyat's ear; "your rival is now in your power."
"Far be it from me to thwart your majesty's generous impulses," rejoined Suffolk. "It is true that Wyat has saved your life; and if he had been disposed to take it, you have this moment exposed yourself to him."
"Sir Thomas Wyat," said the king, turning to him, "you have my full and free pardon. Quit this forest instantly, and make your way to Paris. If you are found within it to-morrow you will be lodged in the Tower."
Wyat knelt down, and would have pressed Henry's hand to his lips, but the latter pushed him aside.
"No—no! Not now—on your return."
Thus rebuffed, Wyat strode away, and as he passed the tree he heard a voice exclaim, "You have escaped him, but think not to escape me!"
"And now, sweetheart," said Henry, turning to Mabel, "since you are so far on the way, you shall go with me to the castle."
"On no account, my liege," she returned; "my grandsire will wonder what has become of me. He must already be in great alarm."
"But I will send an attendant to quiet his fears," urged Henry.
"That would only serve to increase them," she rejoined. "Nay, I must go."

And breaking from him, she darted swiftly down the hill, and glanced across the marsh like a moonbeam.
"Plague on it!" cried Henry, "I have again forgotten to question her about her birth."
"Shall I despatch this knave, my liege?" cried Suffolk, pointing with his sword to Fenwolf.
"By no means," said the king; "something may be learnt from him. Hark thee, thou felon hound; if thou indeed servest the fiend, thou seest he deserts thee, as he does all who put faith in him."
"I see it," replied Fenwolf, who, finding resistance vain, had folded his hands doggedly upon his breast.
"Then confess thy evil practices," said the king.
"Give me my life, and I will," replied Fenwolf. And as he uttered the words, he caught sight of the dark figure of Herne, stationed at the side of the oak, with its right arm raised menacingly.
"What seest thou?" cried Henry, remarking his fixed gaze towards the tree, and glancing in that direction.
Fenwolf made no reply.
Henry went up to the tree, and walked round it, but he could see nothing.
"I will scour the forest to-morrow," he muttered, "and hang every knave I find within it who cannot give a good account of himself."
"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed a voice, which seemed to proceed from the branches of the tree.
Henry looked up, but no one was visible.
"God's death—derided!" he roared. "Man or devil, thou shalt feel my wrath."
"Ho! ho! ho!" again laughed the voice.
Stamping with rage, Henry swore a great oath, and smote the trunk of the tree with his sword.
"Your majesty will search in vain," said Suffolk; "it is clearly the fiend with whom you have to deal, and the aid of holy priests must be obtained to drive him from the forest."
"Ho! ho! ho!" again laughed the voice.
A party of horsemen now appeared in view. They proved to be the royal attendants, who had ridden forward in search of the king, and were instantly hailed by Henry and Suffolk. They were headed by Captain Bouchier, who at a sign from the king instantly dismounted.
"Give me your horse, Bouchier," said Henry, "and do you and half-a-dozen of your men remain on guard at this tree till I send a troop of arquebusiers to relieve you. When they arrive, station them near it, and let them remain here till I return in the morning. If any one appears, make him a prisoner."
"Your majesty's orders shall be faithfully obeyed," replied Bouchier.
Bound hand and foot, Fenwolf was thrown upon the back of a horse, and guarded by two halberdiers, who were prepared to strike him dead on the slightest movement. In this

way he was conveyed to the castle, and placed in the guard-chamber of the lower gate till further orders should be issued respecting him.

Herne the Hunter By William Harrison Ainsworth

IX.

Showing how Morgan Fenwolf escaped from the Garter Tower.

Half-an-hour afterwards Fenwolf was visited by the Duke of Suffolk and a canon of the college; and the guard-chamber being cleared, the duke enjoined him to make clear his bosom by confession.

"I hold it my duty to tell you, prisoner," said Suffolk, "that there is no hope of your life. The king's highness is determined to make a fearful example of you and all your companions in crime; but he does not seek to destroy your soul, and has therefore sent this holy man to you, with the desire that you may open your heart to him, and by confession and repentance save yourself from eternal perdition."

"Confession will profit me nothing," said Fenwolf moodily. "I cannot pray if I would."

"You cannot be so utterly lost, my son," rejoined the canon. "Hell may have woven her dark chains round you, but not so firmly but that the hand of Heaven can burst them."

"You waste time in seeking to persuade me," returned Fenwolf.

"You are not ignorant of the punishment inflicted upon those condemned for sorcery, my son?" demanded the canon.

"It is the stake, is it not?" replied Fenwolf

"Ay," replied the canon; "but even that fiery trial will fail to purge out your offences without penitence. My lord of Suffolk, this wretched man's condition demands special attention. It will profit the Church much to win his soul from the fiend. Let him, I pray you, be removed to the dungeon beneath the Garter Tower, where a priest shall visit him, and pray by his side till daybreak."

"It will be useless, father," said Fenwolf.

"I do not despair, my son," replied the canon; "and when I see you again in the morning I trust to find you in a better frame of mind."

The duke then gave directions to the guard to remove the prisoner, and after some further conference with the canon, returned to the royal apartments.

Meanwhile, the canon shaped his course towards the Horseshoe Cloisters, a range of buildings so designated from their form, and situated at the west end of St. George's Chapel, and he had scarcely entered them when he heard footsteps behind him, and turning at the sound, beheld a Franciscan friar, for so his habit of the coarsest grey cloth, tied with a cord round the waist, proclaimed him. The friar was very tall and gaunt, and his cowl was drawn over his face so as to conceal his features.

"What would you, brother?" inquired the canon, halting. "I have a request to make of you, reverend sir," replied the friar, with a lowly inclination of the head. "I have just arrived from Chertsey Abbey, whither I have been tarrying for the last three days, and

while conversing with the guard at the gate, I saw a prisoner brought into the castle charged with heinous offences, and amongst others, with dealings with the fiend."
"You have been rightly informed, brother," rejoined the canon.
"And have I also been rightly informed that you desire a priest to pass the night with him, reverend sir?" returned the friar. "If so, I would crave permission to undertake the office. Two souls, as deeply laden as that of this poor wretch, have been snatched from the jaws of Satan by my efforts, and I do not despair of success now."
"Since you are so confident, brother," said the canon, "I commit him readily to your hands. I was about to seek other aid, but your offer comes opportunely. With Heaven's help I doubt not you will achieve a victory over the evil one."
As the latter words were uttered a sudden pain seemed to seize the friar. Staggering slightly, he caught at the railing of the cloisters for support, but he instantly recovered himself.
"It is nothing, reverend sir," he said, seeing that the good canon regarded him anxiously. "Long vigils and fasting have made me liable to frequent attacks of giddiness, but they pass as quickly as they come. Will it please you to go with me, and direct the guard to admit me to the prisoner?"
The canon assented; and crossing the quadrangle, they returned to the gateway.
Meanwhile, the prisoner had been removed to the lower chamber of the Garter Tower. This fortification, one of the oldest in the castle, being coeval with the Curfew Tower, is now in a state of grievous neglect and ruin. Unroofed, unfloored, filled with rubbish, masked by the yard walls of the adjoining habitations, with one side entirely pulled down, and a great breach in front, it is solely owing to the solid and rock-like construction of its masonry that it is indebted for partial preservation. Still, notwithstanding its dilapidated condition, and that it is the mere shell of its former self, its appearance is highly picturesque. The walls are of prodigious thickness, and the deep embrasures within them are almost perfect; while a secret staircase may still be tracked partly round the building. Amid the rubbish choking up its lower chamber grows a young tree, green and flourishing-a type, it is to be hoped, of the restoration of the structure.
Conducted to a low vaulted chamber in this tower, the prisoner was cast upon its floor-for he was still hound hand and foot-and left alone and in darkness. But he was not destined to continue in this state long. The door of the dungeon opened, and the guard ushered in the tall Franciscan friar.
"What ho! dog of a prisoner," he cried, "here is a holy man come to pass the night with you in prayer."
"He may take his Ave Maries and Paternosters elsewhere-I want them not," replied Fenwolf moodily.
"You would prefer my bringing Herne the Hunter, no doubt," rejoined the guard, laughing at his own jest; "but this is a physician for your soul. The saints help you in your good work, father; you will have no easy task."

"Set down the light, my son," cried the friar harshly, "and leave us; my task will be easily accomplished."
Placing the lamp on the stone floor of the dungeon, the guard withdrew, and locked the door after him.
"Do you repent, my son?" demanded the friar, as soon as they were alone.
"Certes, I repent having put faith in a treacherous fiend, who has deserted me-but that is all," replied Fenwolf, with his face turned to the ground.
"Will you put faith in me, if I promise you deliverance?" demanded the friar.
"You promise more than you can perform, as most of your brethren do," rejoined the other.
"You will not say so if you look up," said the friar.
Fenwolf started at the words, which were pronounced in a different tone from that previously adopted by the speaker, and raised himself as far as his bonds would permit him. The friar had thrown hack his cowl, and disclosed features of appalling hideousness, lighted up by a diabolical grin.
"You here!" cried Fenwolf.
"You doubted me," rejoined Herne, "but I never desert a follower. Besides, I wish to show the royal Harry that my power is equal to his own."
"But how are we to get out of this dungeon?" asked Fenwolf, gazing round apprehensively.
"My way out will be easy enough," replied Herne; "but your escape is attended with more difficulty. You remember how we went to the vaulted chamber in the Curfew Tower on the night when Mark Fytton, the butcher, was confined within it?"
"I do," replied Fenwolf; "but I can think of nothing while I am tied thus."
Heme instantly drew forth a hunting-knife, and cutting Fenwolf's bonds asunder, the latter started to his feet.
"If that bull-headed butcher would have joined me, I would have liberated him as I am about to liberate you," pursued Herne. "But to return to the matter in hand. You recollect the secret passage we then tracked? There is just such another staircase in this tower."
And stepping to the farther side of the chamber, he touched a small knob in the wall, and a stone flew hack, disclosing an aperture just large enough to allow a man to pass through it.
"There is your road to freedom," he said, pointing to the hole. "Creep along that narrow passage, and it will bring you to a small loophole in the wall, not many feet from the ground. The loophole is guarded by a bar of iron, but it is moved by a spring in the upper part of the stone in which it appears to be mortised. This impediment removed, you will easily force your way through the loophole. Drop cautiously, for fear of the sentinels on the walls; then make your way to the forest, and if you 'scape the arquebusiers who are scouring it, conceal yourself in the sandstone cave below the beech-tree."
"And what of you?" asked Fenwoif.

"I have more to do here," replied Herne impatiently-"away!"
Thus dismissed, Fenwolf entered the aperture, which was instantly closed after him by Herne. Carefully following the instructions of his leader, the keeper passed through the loophole, let himself drop softly down, and keeping close to the walls of the tower till he heard the sentinels move off, darted swiftly across the street and made good his escape.
Meanwhile Herne drew the cowl over his head, and stepping to the door, knocked loudly against it.
"What would you, father?" cried the guard from without.
"Enter, my son, and you shall know," replied Herne.
The next moment the door was unlocked, and the guard advanced into the dungeon.
"Ha!" he exclaimed, snatching up the lamp and looking around, "where is the prisoner?"
"Gone," replied Herne.
"What! has the fiend flown away with him?" cried the man, in mixed astonishment and alarm.
"He has been set free by Herne the Hunter!" cried the demon. "Tell all who question thee so, and relate what thou now seest."
At the words a bright blue flame illumined the chamber, in the midst of which was seen the tall dark figure of Herne. His Franciscan's gown had dropped to his feet, and he appeared habited in his wild deer-skin garb. With a loud cry, the guard fell senseless on the ground.
A few minutes after this, as was subsequently ascertained, a tall Franciscan friar threaded the cloisters behind Saint George's Chapel, and giving the word to the sentinels, passed through the outer door communicating with the steep descent leading to the town.

Herne the Hunter By William Harrison Ainsworth

X.

How Herne the Hunter was himself hunted.

On the guard's recovery, information of what had occurred was immediately conveyed to the king, who had not yet retired to rest, but was sitting in his private chamber with the Dukes of Suffolk and Norfolk. The intelligence threw him into a great fury: he buffeted the guard, and ordered him to be locked up in the dungeon whence the prisoner had escaped; reprimanded the canon; directed the Duke of Suffolk, with a patrol, to make search in the neighbourhood of the castle for the fugitive and the friar; and bade the Duke of Norfolk get together a band of arquebusiers; and as soon as the latter were assembled, he put himself at their head and again rode into the forest.

The cavalcade had proceeded about a mile along the great avenue, when one of the arquebusiers rode up and said that he heard some distant sounds on the right. Commanding a halt, Henry listened for a moment, and, satisfied that the man was right, quitted the course he was pursuing, and dashed across the broad glade now traversed by the avenue called Queen Anne's Ride. As he advanced the rapid trampling of horses was heard, accompanied by shouts, and presently afterwards a troop of wild-looking horsemen in fantastic garbs was seen galloping down the hill, pursued by Bouchier and his followers. The king immediately shaped his course so as to intercept the flying party, and, being in some measure screened by the trees, he burst unexpectedly upon them at a turn of the road.

Henry called to the fugitives to surrender, but they refused, and, brandishing their long knives and spears, made a desperate resistance. But they were speedily surrounded and overpowered. Bouchier inquired from the king what should be done with the prisoners.

"Hang them all upon yon trees!" cried Henry, pointing to two sister oaks which stood near the scene of strife.

The terrible sentence was immediately carried into execution. Cords were produced, and in less than half-an-hour twenty breathless bodies were swinging from the branches of the two trees indicated by the king.

"This will serve to deter others from like offences," observed Henry, who had watched the whole proceedings with savage satisfaction. "And now, Bouchier, how came you to let the leader of these villains escape?"

"I did not know he had escaped, my liege," replied Bouchier, in astonishment.

"Yea, marry, but he has escaped," rejoined Henry; "and he has had the audacity to show himself in the castle within this hour, and the cunning, moreover, to set the prisoner free."

And he proceeded to relate what had occurred.

"This is strange indeed, my liege," replied Bouchier, at the close of the king's recital, "and to my thinking, is proof convincing that we have to do with a supernatural being."
"Supernatura!—pshaw!—banish the idle notion," rejoined Henry sternly. "We are all the dupes of some jugglery. The caitiff will doubtless return to the forest. Continue your search, therefore, for him throughout the night. If you catch him, I promise you a royal reward."
So saying, he rode back to the castle, somewhat appeased by the wholesale vengeance he had taken upon the offenders.
In obedience to the orders he had received, Bouchier, with his followers, continued riding about the forest during the whole night, but without finding anything to reward his search, until about dawn it occurred to him to return to the trees on which the bodies were suspended. As he approached them he fancied he beheld a horse standing beneath the nearest tree, and immediately ordered his followers to proceed as noiselessly as possible, and to keep under the cover of the wood. A nearer advance convinced him that his eyes had not deceived him. It was a swart, wild-looking horse that he beheld, with eyes that flamed like carbuncles, while a couple of bodies, evidently snatched from the branches, were laid across his back. A glance at the trees, too, showed Bouchier that they had been considerably lightened of their hideous spoil.
Seeing this, Bouchier dashed forward. Alarmed by the noise, the wild horse neighed loudly, and a dark figure instantly dropped from the tree upon its back, and proceeded to disencumber it of its load. But before this could be accomplished, a bolt from a cross-bow, shot by one of Bouchier's followers, pierced the animal's brain. Rearing aloft, it fell backwards in such manner as would have crushed an ordinary rider, but Herne slipped off uninjured, and with incredible swiftness darted among the trees. The others started in pursuit, and a chase commenced in which the demon huntsman had to sustain the part of the deer—nor could any deer have afforded better sport.
Away flew the pursued and pursuers over broad glade and through tangled glen, the woods resounding with their cries. Bouchier did not lose sight of the fugitive for a moment, and urged his men to push on; but, despite his alternate proffers and menaces, they gained but little on Herne, who, speeding towards the home park, cleared its high palings with a single bound.
Over went Bouchier and his followers, and they then descried him making his way to a large oak standing almost alone in the centre of a wide glade. An instant afterwards he reached the tree, shook his arm menacingly at his pursuers, and vanished.
The next moment Bouchier came up, flung himself from his panting steed, and, with his drawn sword in hand, forced himself through a rift in its side into the tree. There was a hollow within it large enough to allow a man to stand upright, and two funnel-like holes ran upwards into the branches. Finding nothing, Bouchier called for a hunting-spear, and thrust it as far as he could into the holes above. The point encountered no obstruction except such as was offered by the wood itself. He stamped upon the ground, and sounded it on all sides with the spear, but with no better success.

Issuing forth he next directed his attention to the upper part of the tree, which, while he was occupied inside, had been very carefully watched by his followers, and not content with viewing it from below, he clambered into the branches. But they had nothing to show except their own leafy covering.

The careful examination of the ground about the tree at length led to the discovery of a small hole among its roots, about half a dozen yards from the trunk, and though this hole seemed scarcely large enough to serve for an entrance to the burrow of a fox, Bouchier deemed it expedient to keep a careful watch over it.

His investigation completed, he dispatched a sergeant of the guard to the castle to acquaint the king with what had occurred.

Disturbed by the events of the night, Henry obtained little sleep, and at an early hour summoned an attendant, and demanded whether there were any tidings from the forest The attendant replied that a sergeant of the guard was without, sent by Captain Bouchier with a message for his majesty. The sergeant was immediately admitted to the royal presence, and on the close of his marvellous story the king, who had worked himself into a tremendous fury during its relation, roared out, "What! foiled again? ha! But he shall not escape, if I have to root up half the trees in the forest. Bouchier and his fellows must be bewitched. Harkye, knaves: get together a dozen of the best woodmen and yeomen in the castle—instantly, as you value your lives; bid them bring axe and saw, pick and spade. D'ye mark me? ha! Stay, I have not done. I must have fagots and straw, for I will burn this tree to the ground—burn it to a char. Summon the Dukes of Suffolk and Norfolk—the rascal archer I dubbed the Duke of Shoreditch and his mates—the keepers of the forest and their hounds—summon them quickly, and bid a band of the yeomen of the guard get ready." And he sprang from his couch.

The king's commands were executed with such alacrity, that by the time he was fully attired the whole of the persons he had ordered to be summoned were assembled. Putting himself at their head, he rode forth to the home park, and found Bouchier and his followers grouped around the tree.

"We are still at fault, my liege," said Bouchier.

"So I see, Sir," replied the king angrily. "Hew down the tree instantly, knaves," he added to the woodmen. "Fall to—fall to."

Ropes were then fastened to the head of the tree, and the welkin resounded with the rapid strokes of the hatchets. It was a task of some difficulty, but such zeal and energy were displayed by the woodmen that ere long the giant trunk lay prostrate on the ground. Its hollows were now fully exposed to view, but they were empty.

"Set fire to the accursed piece of timber!" roared the king, "and burn it to dust, and scatter it to the wind!"

At these orders two yeomen of the guard advanced, and throwing down a heap of fagots, straw, and other combustibles on the roots of the tree, soon kindled a fierce fire.

Meanwhile a couple of woodmen, stripped of their jerkins, and with their brawny arms bared to the shoulder, mounted on the trunk, and strove to split it asunder. Some of the

keepers likewise got into the branches, and peered into every crack and crevice, in the hope of making some discovery. Amongst the latter was Will Sommers, who had posted himself near a great arm of the tree, which he maintained when lopped off would be found to contain the demon.

Nor were other expedients neglected. A fierce hound had been sent into the hole near the roots of the tree by Gabriel Lapp, but after a short absence he returned howling and terrified, nor could all the efforts of Gabriel, seconded by a severe scourging with his heavy dog-whip, induce him to enter it again.

When the hound had come forth, a couple of yeomen advanced to enlarge the opening, while a third with a pick endeavoured to remove the root, which formed an impediment to their efforts.

"They may dig, but they'll never catch him," observed Shoreditch, who stood by, to his companions. "Hunting a spirit is not the same thing as training and raising a wolf, or earthing and digging out a badger."

"Not so loud, duke," said Islington; "his majesty may think thy jest irreverent."

"I have an arrow blessed by a priest," said Paddington, "which I shall let fly at the spirit if he appears."

"Here he is—here he is!" cried Will Sommers, as a great white horned owl, which had been concealed in some part of the tree, flew forth.

"It may be the demon in that form—shoot! shoot!" cried Shoreditch.

Paddington bent his bow. The arrow whistled through the air, and in another moment the owl fell fluttering to the ground completely transfixed; but it underwent no change, as was expected by the credulous archer.

Meanwhile the fire, being kept constantly supplied with fresh fagots, and stirred by the yeomen of the guard, burnt bravely. The lower part of the tree was already consumed, and the flames, roaring through the hollow within with a sound like that of a furnace, promised soon to reduce it to charcoal.

The mouth of the hole having now been widened, another keeper, who had brought forward a couple of lurchers, sent them into it; but in a few moments they returned, as the hound had done, howling and with scared looks. Without heeding their enraged master, they ran off, with their tails between their legs, towards the castle.

"I see how it is, Rufus," said Gabriel, patting his hound, who looked wistfully and half-reproachfully at him. "Thou wert not to blame, poor fellow! The best dog that ever was whelped cannot be expected to face the devil."

Though long ere this it had become the general opinion that it was useless to persevere further in the search, the king, with his characteristic obstinacy, would not give it up. In due time the whole of the trunk of the enormous tree was consumed, and its branches cast into the fire. The roots were rent from the ground, and a wide and deep trench digged around the spot. The course of the hole was traced for some distance, but it was never of any size, and was suddenly lost by the falling in of the earth.

At length, after five hours' close watching, Henry's patience was exhausted, and he ordered the pit to be filled up, and every crevice and fissure in the ground about to be carefully stopped.

"If we cannot unkennel the fox," he said, "we will at least earth him up.

"For all your care, gossip Henry," muttered Will Sommers, as he rode after his royal master to the castle, "the fox will work his way out."


Freeditorial