

JACK SHEPPARD
VOLUME I
BY
WILLIAM
HARRISON
AINSWORTH

Jack Sheppard Volume I by William Harrison Ainsworth

JONATHAN WILD

CHAPTER I The Widow and her Child

On the night of Friday, the th of November, , and at the hour of eleven, the door of a miserable habitation, situated in an obscure quarter of the Borough of Southwark, known as the Old Mint, was opened; and a man, with a lantern in his hand, appeared at the threshold. This person, whose age might be about forty, was attired in a brown double-breasted frieze coat, with very wide skirts, and a very narrow collar; a light drugget waistcoat, with pockets reaching to the knees; black plush breeches; grey worsted hose; and shoes with round toes, wooden heels, and high quarters, fastened by small silver buckles. He wore a three-cornered hat, a sandy-coloured scratch wig, and had a thick woollen wrapper folded round his throat. His clothes had evidently seen some service, and were plentifully begrimed with the dust of the workshop. Still he had a decent look, and decidedly the air of one well-to-do in the world. In stature, he was short and stumpy; in person, corpulent; and in countenance, sleek, snub-nosed, and demure.

Immediately behind this individual, came a pale, poverty-stricken woman, whose forlorn aspect contrasted strongly with his plump and comfortable physiognomy. She was dressed in a tattered black stuff gown, discoloured by various stains, and intended, it would seem, from the remnants of rusty crape with which it was here and there tricked out, to represent the garb of widowhood, and held in her arms a sleeping infant, swathed in the folds of a linsey-woolsey shawl.

Notwithstanding her emaciation, her features still retained something of a pleasing expression, and might have been termed beautiful, had it not been for that repulsive freshness of lip denoting the habitual dram-drinker; a freshness in her case rendered the more shocking from the almost livid hue of the rest of her complexion. She could not be more than twenty; and though want and other suffering had done the work of time, had wasted her frame, and robbed her cheek of its bloom and roundness, they had not extinguished the lustre of her eyes, nor thinned her raven hair. Checking an ominous cough, that, ever and anon, convulsed her lungs, the poor woman addressed a few parting words to her companion, who lingered at the doorway as if he had something on his mind, which he did not very well know how to communicate.

"Well, good night, Mr. Wood," said she, in the deep, hoarse accents of consumption; "and may God Almighty bless and reward you for your kindness! You were always the

best of masters to my poor husband; and now you've proved the best of friends to his widow and orphan boy."

"Poh! poh! say no more about it," rejoined the man hastily. "I've done no more than my duty, Mrs. Sheppard, and neither deserve nor desire your thanks. 'Whoso giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord;' that's my comfort. And such slight relief as I can afford should have been offered earlier, if I'd known where you'd taken refuge after your unfortunate husband's—"

"Execution, you would say, Sir," added Mrs. Sheppard, with a deep sigh, perceiving that her benefactor hesitated to pronounce the word. "You show more consideration to the feelings of a hempen widow, than there is any need to show. I'm used to insult as I am to misfortune, and am grown callous to both; but I'm not used to compassion, and know not how to take it. My heart would speak if it could, for it is very full. There was a time, long, long ago, when the tears would have rushed to my eyes unbidden at the bare mention of generosity like yours, Mr. Wood; but they never come now. I have never wept since that day."

"And I trust you will never have occasion to weep again, my poor soul," replied Wood, setting down his lantern, and brushing a few drops from his eyes, "unless it be tears of joy. Pshaw!" added he, making an effort to subdue his emotion, "I can't leave you in this way. I must stay a minute longer, if only to see you smile."

So saying, he re-entered the house, closed the door, and, followed by the widow, proceeded to the fire-place, where a handful of chips, apparently just lighted, crackled within the rusty grate.

The room in which this interview took place had a sordid and miserable look. Rotten, and covered with a thick coat of dirt, the boards of the floor presented a very insecure footing; the bare walls were scored all over with grotesque designs, the chief of which represented the punishment of Nebuchadnezzar. The rest were hieroglyphic characters, executed in red chalk and charcoal. The ceiling had, in many places, given way; the laths had been removed; and, where any plaster remained, it was either mapped and blistered with damps, or festooned with dusty cobwebs. Over an old crazy bedstead was thrown a squalid, patchwork counterpane; and upon the counterpane lay a black hood and scarf, a pair of bodice of the cumbrous form in vogue at the beginning of the last century, and some other articles of female attire. On a small shelf near the foot of the bed stood a couple of empty phials, a cracked ewer and basin, a brown jug without a handle, a small tin coffee-pot without a spout, a saucer of rouge, a fragment of looking-glass, and a flask, labelled "Rosa Solis." Broken pipes littered the floor, if that can be said to be littered, which, in the first instance, was a mass of squalor and filth.

Over the chimney-piece was pasted a handbill, purporting to be "The last Dying Speech and Confession of TOM SHEPPARD, the Notorious Housebreaker, who suffered at Tyburn on the th of February, ." This placard was adorned with a rude wood-cut, representing the unhappy malefactor at the place of execution. On one side of the handbill a print of the reigning sovereign, Anne, had been pinned over the portrait of William the Third, whose aquiline nose, keen eyes, and luxuriant wig, were just visible above the diadem of the queen. On the other a wretched engraving of the Chevalier de Saint George, or, as he was styled in the label attached to the portrait, James the Third, raised a suspicion that the inmate of the house was not altogether free from some tincture of Jacobitism.

Beneath these prints, a cluster of hobnails, driven into the wall, formed certain letters, which, if properly deciphered, produced the words, "Paul Groves, cobbler;" and under the name, traced in charcoal, appeared the following record of the poor fellow's fate, "Hung himself in this room for love of drink;" accompanied by a graphic sketch of the unhappy suicide dangling from a beam. A farthing candle, stuck in a bottle neck, shed its feeble light upon the table, which, owing to the provident kindness of Mr. Wood, was much better furnished with eatables than might have been expected, and boasted a loaf, a knuckle of ham, a meat-pie, and a flask of wine.

"You've but a sorry lodging, Mrs. Sheppard," said Wood, glancing round the chamber, as he expanded his palms before the scanty flame.

"It's wretched enough, indeed, Sir," rejoined the widow; "but, poor as it is, it's better than the cold stones and open streets."

"Of course—of course," returned Wood, hastily; "anything's better than that. But take a drop of wine," urged he, filling a drinking-horn and presenting it to her; "it's choice canary, and'll do you good. And now, come and sit by me, my dear, and let's have a little quiet chat together. When things are at the worst, they'll mend. Take my word for it, your troubles are over."

"I hope they are, Sir," answered Mrs. Sheppard, with a faint smile and a doubtful shake of the head, as Wood drew her to a seat beside him, "for I've had my full share of misery. But I don't look for peace on this side the grave."

"Nonsense!" cried Wood; "while there's life there's hope. Never be down-hearted. Besides," added he, opening the shawl in which the infant was wrapped, and throwing the light of the candle full upon its sickly, but placid features, "it's sinful to repine while

you've a child like this to comfort you. Lord help him! he's the very image of his father. Like carpenter, like chips."

"That likeness is the chief cause of my misery," replied the widow, shuddering. "Were it not for that, he would indeed be a blessing and a comfort to me. He never cries nor frets, as children generally do, but lies at my bosom, or on my knee, as quiet and as gentle as you see him now. But, when I look upon his innocent face, and see how like he is to his father,—when I think of that father's shameful ending, and recollect how free from guilt he once was,—at such times, Mr. Wood, despair will come over me; and, dear as this babe is to me, far dearer than my own wretched life, which I would lay down for him any minute, I have prayed to Heaven to remove him, rather than he should grow up to be a man, and be exposed to his father's temptations—rather than he should live as wickedly and die as disgracefully as his father. And, when I have seen him pining away before my eyes, getting thinner and thinner every day, I have sometimes thought my prayers were heard."

"Marriage and hanging go by destiny," observed Wood, after a pause; "but I trust your child is reserved for a better fate than either, Mrs. Sheppard."

The latter part of this speech was delivered with so much significance of manner, that a bystander might have inferred that Mr. Wood was not particularly fortunate in his own matrimonial connections.

"Goodness only knows what he's reserved for," rejoined the widow in a desponding tone; "but if Mynheer Van Galgebok, whom I met last night at the Cross Shovels, spoke the truth, little Jack will never die in his bed."

"Save us!" exclaimed Wood. "And who is this Van Gal—Gal—what's his outlandish name?"

"Van Galgebok," replied the widow. "He's the famous Dutch conjuror who foretold King William's accident and death, last February but one, a month before either event happened, and gave out that another prince over the water would soon enjoy his own again; for which he was committed to Newgate, and whipped at the cart's tail. He went by another name then,—Rykhart Scherprechter I think he called himself. His fellow-prisoners nicknamed him the gallows-provider, from a habit he had of picking out all those who were destined to the gibbet. He was never known to err, and was as much dreaded as the jail-fever in consequence. He singled out my poor husband from a crowd of other felons; and you know how right he was in that case, Sir."

"Ay, marry," replied Wood, with a look that seemed to say that he did not think it required any surprising skill in the art of divination to predict the doom of the individual in question; but whatever opinion he might entertain, he contented himself with inquiring into the grounds of the conjuror's evil augury respecting the infant. "What did the old fellow judge from, eh, Joan?" asked he.

"From a black mole under the child's right ear, shaped like a coffin, which is a bad sign; and a deep line just above the middle of the left thumb, meeting round about in the form of a noose, which is a worse," replied Mrs. Sheppard. "To be sure, it's not surprising the poor little thing should be so marked; for, when I lay in the women-felons' ward in Newgate, where he first saw the light, or at least such light as ever finds entrance into that gloomy place, I had nothing, whether sleeping or waking, but halters, and gibbets, and coffins, and such like horrible visions, for ever dancing round me! And then, you know, Sir—but, perhaps, you don't know that little Jack was born, a month before his time, on the very day his poor father suffered."

"Lord bless us!" ejaculated Wood, "how shocking! No, I did not know that."

"You may see the marks on the child yourself, if you choose, Sir," urged the widow.

"See the devil!—not I," cried Wood impatiently. "I didn't think you'd been so easily fooled, Joan."

"Fooled or not," returned Mrs. Sheppard mysteriously, "old Van told me one thing which has come true already."

"What's that?" asked Wood with some curiosity.

"He said, by way of comfort, I suppose, after the fright he gave me at first, that the child would find a friend within twenty-four hours, who would stand by him through life."

"A friend is not so soon gained as lost," replied Wood; "but how has the prediction been fulfilled, Joan, eh?"

"I thought you would have guessed, Sir," replied the widow, timidly. "I'm sure little Jack has but one friend beside myself, in the world, and that's more than I would have ventured to say for him yesterday. However, I've not told you all; for old Van did say something about the child saving his new-found friend's life at the time of meeting; but how that's to happen, I'm sure I can't guess."

"Nor any one else in his senses," rejoined Wood, with a laugh. "It's not very likely that a babby of nine months old will save my life, if I'm to be his friend, as you seem to say, Mrs. Sheppard. But I've not promised to stand by him yet; nor will I, unless he turns out an honest lad,—mind that. Of all crafts,—and it was the only craft his poor father, who, to do him justice, was one of the best workmen that ever handled a saw or drove a nail, could never understand,—of all crafts, I say, to be an honest man is the master-craft. As long as your son observes that precept I'll befriend him, but no longer."

"I don't desire it, Sir," replied Mrs. Sheppard, meekly.

"There's an old proverb," continued Wood, rising and walking towards the fire, "which says,—'Put another man's child in your bosom, and he'll creep out at your elbow.' But I don't value that, because I think it applies to one who marries a widow with encumbrances; and that's not my case, you know."

"Well, Sir," gasped Mrs. Sheppard.

"Well, my dear, I've a proposal to make in regard to this babby of yours, which may, or may not, be agreeable. All I can say is, it's well meant; and I may add, I'd have made it five minutes ago, if you'd given me the opportunity."

"Pray come to the point, Sir," said Mrs. Sheppard, somewhat alarmed by this preamble.

"I am coming to the point, Joan. The more haste, the worse speed—better the feet slip than the tongue. However, to cut a long matter short, my proposal's this:—I've taken a fancy to your bantling, and, as I've no son of my own, if it meets with your concurrence and that of Mrs. Wood, (for I never do anything without consulting my better half,) I'll take the boy, educate him, and bring him up to my own business of a carpenter."

The poor widow hung her head, and pressed her child closer to her breast.

"Well, Joan," said the benevolent mechanic, after he had looked at her steadfastly for a few moments, "what say you?—silence gives consent, eh?"

Mrs. Sheppard made an effort to speak, but her voice was choked by emotion.

"Shall I take the babby home with me!" persisted Wood, in a tone between jest and earnest.

"I cannot part with him," replied the widow, bursting into tears; "indeed, indeed, I cannot."

"So I've found out the way to move her," thought the carpenter; "those tears will do her some good, at all events. Not part with him!" added he aloud. "Why you wouldn't stand in the way of his good fortune surely? I'll be a second father to him, I tell you. Remember what the conjuror said."

"I do remember it, Sir," replied Mrs. Sheppard, "and am most grateful for your offer. But I dare not accept it."

"Dare not!" echoed the carpenter; "I don't understand you, Joan."

"I mean to say, Sir," answered Mrs. Sheppard in a troubled voice, "that if I lost my child, I should lose all I have left in the world. I have neither father, mother, brother, sister, nor husband—I have only him."

"If I ask you to part with him, my good woman, it's to better his condition, I suppose, ain't it?" rejoined Wood angrily; for, though he had no serious intention of carrying his proposal into effect, he was rather offended at having it declined. "It's not an offer," continued he, "that I'm likely to make, or you're likely to receive every day in the year."

And muttering some remarks, which we do not care to repeat, reflecting upon the consistency of the sex, he was preparing once more to depart, when Mrs. Sheppard stopped him.

"Give me till to-morrow," implored she, "and if I can bring myself to part with him, you shall have him without another word."

"Take time to consider of it," replied Wood sulkily, "there's no hurry."

"Don't be angry with me, Sir," cried the widow, sobbing bitterly, "pray don't. I know I am undeserving of your bounty; but if I were to tell you what hardships I have undergone—to what frightful extremities I have been reduced—and to what infamy I have submitted, to earn a scanty subsistence for this child's sake,—if you could feel what it is to stand alone in the world as I do, bereft of all who have ever loved me, and shunned by all who have ever known me, except the worthless and the wretched,—if you knew (and Heaven grant you may be spared the knowledge!) how much affliction sharpens love, and how much more dear to me my child has become for every sacrifice I have made for him,—if you were told all this, you would, I am sure, pity rather than reproach me, because I cannot at once consent to a separation, which I feel would break my heart. But give me till to-morrow—only till to-morrow—I may be able to part with him then."

The worthy carpenter was now far more angry with himself than he had previously been with Mrs. Sheppard; and, as soon as he could command his feelings, which were considerably excited by the mention of her distresses, he squeezed her hand warmly, bestowed a hearty execration upon his own inhumanity, and swore he would neither separate her from her child, nor suffer any one else to separate them.

"Plague on't!" added he: "I never meant to take your babby from you. But I'd a mind to try whether you really loved him as much as you pretended. I was to blame to carry the matter so far. However, confession of a fault makes half amends for it. A time may come when this little chap will need my aid, and, depend upon it, he shall never want a friend in Owen Wood."

As he said this, the carpenter patted the cheek of the little object of his benevolent professions, and, in so doing, unintentionally aroused him from his slumbers. Opening a pair of large black eyes, the child fixed them for an instant upon Wood, and then, alarmed by the light, uttered a low and melancholy cry, which, however, was speedily stilled by the caresses of his mother, towards whom he extended his tiny arms, as if imploring protection.

"I don't think he would leave me, even if I could part with him," observed Mrs. Sheppard, smiling through her tears.

"I don't think he would," acquiesced the carpenter. "No friend like the mother, for the babby knows no other."

"And that's true," rejoined Mrs. Sheppard; "for if I had not been a mother, I would not have survived the day on which I became a widow."

"You mustn't think of that, Mrs. Sheppard," said Wood in a soothing tone.

"I can't help thinking of it, Sir," answered the widow. "I can never get poor Tom's last look out of my head, as he stood in the Stone-Hall at Newgate, after his irons had been knocked off, unless I manage to stupify myself somehow. The dismal tolling of St. Sepulchre's bell is for ever ringing in my ears—oh!"

"If that's the case," observed Wood, "I'm surprised you should like to have such a frightful picture constantly in view as that over the chimney-piece."

"I'd good reasons for placing it there, Sir; but don't question me about them now, or you'll drive me mad," returned Mrs. Sheppard wildly.

"Well, well, we'll say no more about it," replied Wood; "and, by way of changing the subject, let me advise you on no account to fly to strong waters for consolation, Joan. One nail drives out another, it's true; but the worst nail you can employ is a coffin-nail. Gin Lane's the nearest road to the churchyard."

"It may be; but if it shortens the distance and lightens the journey, I care not," retorted the widow, who seemed by this reproach to be roused into sudden eloquence. "To those who, like me, have never been able to get out of the dark and dreary paths of life, the grave is indeed a refuge, and the sooner they reach it the better. The spirit I drink may be poison,—it may kill me,—perhaps it is killing me:—but so would hunger, cold, misery,—so would my own thoughts. I should have gone mad without it. Gin is the poor man's friend,—his sole set-off against the rich man's luxury. It comforts him when he is most forlorn. It may be treacherous, it may lay up a store of future woe; but it insures present happiness, and that is sufficient. When I have traversed the streets a houseless wanderer, driven with curses from every door where I have solicited alms, and with blows from every gateway where I have sought shelter,—when I have crept into some deserted building, and stretched my wearied limbs upon a bulk, in the vain hope of repose,—or, worse than all, when, frenzied with want, I have yielded to horrible temptation, and earned a meal in the only way I could earn one,—when I have felt, at times like these, my heart sink within me, I have drank of this drink, and have at once forgotten my cares, my poverty, my guilt. Old thoughts, old feelings, old faces, and old scenes have returned to me, and I have fancied myself happy,—as happy as I am now." And she burst into a wild hysterical laugh.

"Poor creature!" ejaculated Wood. "Do you call this frantic glee happiness?"

"It's all the happiness I have known for years," returned the widow, becoming suddenly calm, "and it's short-lived enough, as you perceive. I tell you what, Mr. Wood," added she in a hollow voice, and with a ghastly look, "gin may bring ruin; but as long as poverty, vice, and ill-usage exist, it will be drunk."

"God forbid!" exclaimed Wood, fervently; and, as if afraid of prolonging the interview, he added, with some precipitation, "But I must be going: I've stayed here too long already. You shall hear from me to-morrow."

"Stay!" said Mrs. Sheppard, again arresting his departure. "I've just recollected that my husband left a key with me, which he charged me to give you when I could find an opportunity."

"A key!" exclaimed Wood eagerly. "I lost a very valuable one some time ago. What's it like, Joan?"

"It's a small key, with curiously-fashioned wards."

"It's mine, I'll be sworn," rejoined Wood. "Well, who'd have thought of finding it in this unexpected way!"

"Don't be too sure till you see it," said the widow. "Shall I fetch it for you, Sir?"

"By all means."

"I must trouble you to hold the child, then, for a minute, while I run up to the garret, where I've hidden it for safety," said Mrs. Sheppard. "I think I may trust him with you, Sir," added she, taking up the candle.

"Don't leave him, if you're at all fearful, my dear," replied Wood, receiving the little burthen with a laugh. "Poor thing!" muttered he, as the widow departed on her errand, "she's seen better days and better circumstances than she'll ever see again, I'm sure. Strange, I could never learn her history. Tom Sheppard was always a close file, and would never tell whom he married. Of this I'm certain, however, she was much too good for him, and was never meant to be a journeyman carpenter's wife, still less what is she now. Her heart's in the right place, at all events; and, since that's the case, the rest may perhaps come round,—that is, if she gets through her present illness. A dry cough's the trumpeter of death. If that's true, she's not long for this world. As to this little fellow, in spite of the Dutchman, who, in my opinion, is more of a Jacobite than a conjurer, and more of a knave than either, he shall never mount a horse foaled by an acorn, if I can help it."

The course of the carpenter's meditations was here interrupted by a loud note of lamentation from the child, who, disturbed by the transfer, and not receiving the gentle solace to which he was ordinarily accustomed, raised his voice to the utmost, and exerted his feeble strength to escape. For a few moments Mr. Wood dandled his little charge to and fro, after the most approved nursery fashion, essaying at the same time the soothing influence of an infantine melody proper to the occasion; but, failing in his design, he soon lost all patience, and being, as we have before hinted, rather irritable, though extremely well-meaning, he lifted the unhappy bantling in the air, and shook him with so much good will, that he had well-nigh silenced him most effectually. A brief calm succeeded. But with returning breath came returning vociferations; and the carpenter, with a faint hope of lessening the clamour by change of scene, took up his lantern, opened the door, and walked out.

Jack Sheppard Volume I by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER II.

The Old Mint.

Mrs. Sheppard's habitation terminated a row of old ruinous buildings, called Wheeler's Rents; a dirty thoroughfare, part street, and part lane, running from Mint Street, through a variety of turnings, and along the brink of a deep kennel, skirted by a number of petty and neglected gardens in the direction of Saint George's Fields. The neighbouring houses were tenanted by the lowest order of insolvent traders, thieves, mendicants, and other worthless and nefarious characters, who fled thither to escape from their creditors, or to avoid the punishment due to their different offenses; for we may observe that the Old Mint, although it had been divested of some of its privileges as a sanctuary by a recent statute passed in the reign of William the Third, still presented a safe asylum to the debtor, and even continued to do so until the middle of the reign of George the First, when the crying nature of the evil called loudly for a remedy, and another and more sweeping enactment entirely took away its immunities. In consequence of the encouragement thus offered to dishonesty, and the security afforded to crime, this quarter of the Borough of Southwark was accounted (at the period of our narrative) the grand receptacle of the superfluous villainy of the metropolis. Infested by every description of vagabond and miscreant, it was, perhaps, a few degrees worse than the rookery near Saint Giles's and the desperate neighbourhood of Saffron Hill in our own time. And yet, on the very site of the sordid tenements and squalid courts we have mentioned, where the felon openly made his dwelling, and the fraudulent debtor laughed the object of his knavery to scorn—on this spot, not two centuries ago, stood the princely residence of Charles Brandon, the chivalrous Duke of Suffolk, whose stout heart was a well of honour, and whose memory breathes of loyalty and valour. Suffolk House, as Brandon's palace was denominated, was subsequently converted into a mint by his royal brother-in-law, Henry the Eighth; and, after its demolition, and the removal of the place of coinage to the Tower, the name was still continued to the district in which it had been situated.

Old and dilapidated, the widow's domicile looked the very picture of desolation and misery. Nothing more forlorn could be conceived. The roof was partially untiled; the chimneys were tottering; the side-walls bulged, and were supported by a piece of timber propped against the opposite house; the glass in most of the windows was broken, and its place supplied with paper; while, in some cases, the very frames of the windows had been destroyed, and the apertures were left free to the airs of heaven. On the groundfloor the shutters were closed, or, to speak more correctly, altogether nailed up,

and presented a very singular appearance, being patched all over with the soles of old shoes, rusty hobnails, and bits of iron hoops, the ingenious device of the former occupant of the apartment, Paul Groves, the cobbler, to whom we have before alluded.

It was owing to the untimely end of this poor fellow that Mrs. Sheppard was enabled to take possession of the premises. In a fit of despondency, superinduced by drunkenness, he made away with himself; and when the body was discovered, after a lapse of some months, such was the impression produced by the spectacle—such the alarm occasioned by the crazy state of the building, and, above all, by the terror inspired by strange and unearthly noises heard during the night, which were, of course, attributed to the spirit of the suicide, that the place speedily enjoyed the reputation of being haunted, and was, consequently, entirely abandoned. In this state Mrs. Sheppard found it; and, as no one opposed her, she at once took up her abode there; nor was she long in discovering that the dreaded sounds proceeded from the nocturnal gambols of a legion of rats.

A narrow entry, formed by two low walls, communicated with the main thoroughfare; and in this passage, under the cover of a penthouse, stood Wood, with his little burthen, to whom we shall now return.

As Mrs. Sheppard did not make her appearance quite so soon as he expected, the carpenter became a little fidgetty, and, having succeeded in tranquillizing the child, he thought proper to walk so far down the entry as would enable him to reconnoitre the upper windows of the house. A light was visible in the garret, feebly struggling through the damp atmosphere, for the night was raw and overcast. This light did not remain stationary, but could be seen at one moment glimmering through the rents in the roof, and at another shining through the cracks in the wall, or the broken panes of the casement. Wood was unable to discover the figure of the widow, but he recognised her dry, hacking cough, and was about to call her down, if she could not find the key, as he imagined must be the case, when a loud noise was heard, as though a chest, or some weighty substance, had fallen upon the floor.

Before Wood had time to inquire into the cause of this sound, his attention was diverted by a man, who rushed past the entry with the swiftness of desperation. This individual apparently met with some impediment to his further progress; for he had not proceeded many steps when he turned suddenly about, and darted up the passage in which Wood stood.

Uttering a few inarticulate ejaculations,—for he was completely out of breath,—the fugitive placed a bundle in the arms of the carpenter, and, regardless of the consternation he excited in the breast of that personage, who was almost stupified with astonishment, he began to divest himself of a heavy horseman's cloak, which he threw

over Wood's shoulder, and, drawing his sword, seemed to listen intently for the approach of his pursuers.

The appearance of the new-comer was extremely prepossessing; and, after his trepidation had a little subsided, Wood began to regard him with some degree of interest. Evidently in the flower of his age, he was scarcely less remarkable for symmetry of person than for comeliness of feature; and, though his attire was plain and unpretending, it was such as could be worn only by one belonging to the higher ranks of society. His figure was tall and commanding, and the expression of his countenance (though somewhat disturbed by his recent exertion) was resolute and stern.

At this juncture, a cry burst from the child, who, nearly smothered by the weight imposed upon him, only recovered the use of his lungs as Wood altered the position of the bundle. The stranger turned his head at the sound.

"By Heaven!" cried he in a tone of surprise, "you have an infant there?"

"To be sure I have," replied Wood, angrily; for, finding that the intentions of the stranger were pacific, so far as he was concerned, he thought he might safely venture on a slight display of spirit. "It's very well you haven't crushed the poor little thing to death with this confounded clothes'-bag. But some people have no consideration."

"That child may be the means of saving me," muttered the stranger, as if struck by a new idea: "I shall gain time by the expedient. Do you live here?"

"Not exactly," answered the carpenter.

"No matter. The door is open, so it is needless to ask leave to enter. Ha!" exclaimed the stranger, as shouts and other vociferations resounded at no great distance along the thoroughfare, "not a moment is to be lost. Give me that precious charge," he added, snatching the bundle from Wood. "If I escape, I will reward you. Your name?"

"Owen Wood," replied the carpenter; "I've no reason to be ashamed of it. And now, a fair exchange, Sir. Yours?"

The stranger hesitated. The shouts drew nearer, and lights were seen flashing ruddily against the sides and gables of the neighbouring houses.

"My name is Darrell," said the fugitive hastily. "But, if you are discovered, answer no questions, as you value your life. Wrap yourself in my cloak, and keep it. Remember! not a word!"

So saying, he huddled the mantle over Wood's shoulders, dashed the lantern to the ground, and extinguished the light. A moment afterwards, the door was closed and bolted, and the carpenter found himself alone.

"Mercy on us!" cried he, as a thrill of apprehension ran through his frame. "The Dutchman was right, after all."

This exclamation had scarcely escaped him, when the discharge of a pistol was heard, and a bullet whizzed past his ears.

"I have him!" cried a voice in triumph.

A man, then, rushed up the entry, and, seizing the unlucky carpenter by the collar, presented a drawn sword to his throat. This person was speedily followed by half a dozen others, some of whom carried flambeaux.

"Mur—der!" roared Wood, struggling to free himself from his assailant, by whom he was half strangled.

"Damnation!" exclaimed one of the leaders of the party in a furious tone, snatching a torch from an attendant, and throwing its light full upon the face of the carpenter; "this is not the villain, Sir Cecil."

"So I find, Rowland," replied the other, in accents of deep disappointment, and at the same time relinquishing his grasp. "I could have sworn I saw him enter this passage. And how comes his cloak on this knave's shoulders?"

"It is his cloak, of a surety," returned Rowland "Harkye, sirrah," continued he, haughtily interrogating Wood; "where is the person from whom you received this mantle?"

"Throttling a man isn't the way to make him answer questions," replied the carpenter, doggedly. "You'll get nothing out of me, I can promise you, unless you show a little more civility."

"We waste time with this fellow," interposed Sir Cecil, "and may lose the object of our quest, who, beyond doubt, has taken refuge in this building. Let us search it."

Just then, the infant began to sob piteously.

"Hist!" cried Rowland, arresting his comrade. "Do you hear that! We are not wholly at fault. The dog-fox cannot be far off, since the cub is found."

With these words, he tore the mantle from Wood's back, and, perceiving the child, endeavoured to seize it. In this attempt he was, however, foiled by the agility of the carpenter, who managed to retreat to the door, against which he placed his back, kicking the boards vigorously with his heel.

"Joan! Joan!" vociferated he, "open the door, for God's sake, or I shall be murdered, and so will your babby! Open the door quickly, I say."

"Knock him on the head," thundered Sir Cecil, "or we shall have the watch upon us."

"No fear of that," rejoined Rowland: "such vermin never dare to show themselves in this privileged district. All we have to apprehend is a rescue."

The hint was not lost upon Wood. He tried to raise an outcry, but his throat was again forcibly gripped by Rowland.

"Another such attempt," said the latter, "and you are a dead man. Yield up the babe, and I pledge my word you shall remain unmolested."

"I will yield it to no one but its mother," answered Wood.

"Sdeath! do you trifle with me, sirrah?" cried Rowland fiercely. "Give me the child, or—"

As he spoke the door was thrown open, and Mrs. Sheppard staggered forward. She looked paler than ever; but her countenance, though bewildered, did not exhibit the alarm which might naturally have been anticipated from the strange and perplexing scene presented to her view.

"Take it," cried Wood, holding the infant towards her; "take it, and fly."

Mrs. Sheppard put out her arms mechanically. But before the child could be committed to her care, it was wrested from the carpenter by Rowland.

"These people are all in league with him," cried the latter. "But don't wait for me, Sir Cecil. Enter the house with your men. I'll dispose of the brat."

This injunction was instantly obeyed. The knight and his followers crossed the threshold, leaving one of the torch-bearers behind them.

"Davies," said Rowland, delivering the babe, with a meaning look, to his attendant.

"I understand, Sir," replied Davies, drawing a little aside. And, setting down the link, he proceeded deliberately to untie his cravat.

"My God! will you see your child strangled before your eyes, and not so much as scream for help?" said Wood, staring at the widow with a look of surprise and horror. "Woman, your wits are fled!"

And so it seemed; for all the answer she could make was to murmur distractedly, "I can't find the key."

"Devil take the key!" ejaculated Wood. "They're about to murder your child—your child, I tell you! Do you comprehend what I say, Joan?"

"I've hurt my head," replied Mrs. Sheppard, pressing her hand to her temples.

And then, for the first time, Wood noticed a small stream of blood coursing slowly down her cheek.

At this moment, Davies, who had completed his preparations, extinguished the torch.

"It's all over," groaned Wood, "and perhaps it's as well her senses are gone. However, I'll make a last effort to save the poor little creature, if it costs me my life."

And, with this generous resolve, he shouted at the top of his voice, "Arrest! arrest! help! help!" seconding the words with a shrill and peculiar cry, well known at the time to the inhabitants of the quarter in which it was uttered.

In reply to this summons a horn was instantly blown at the corner of the street.

"Arrest!" vociferated Wood. "Mint! Mint!"

"Death and hell!" cried Rowland, making a furious pass at the carpenter, who fortunately avoided the thrust in the darkness; "will nothing silence you?"

"Help!" ejaculated Wood, renewing his cries. "Arrest!"

"Jigger closed!" shouted a hoarse voice in reply. "All's bowman, my covey. Fear nothing. We'll be upon the ban-dogs before they can shake their trotters!"

And the alarm was sounded more loudly than ever.

Another horn now resounded from the further extremity of the thoroughfare; this was answered by a third; and presently a fourth, and more remote blast, took up the note of alarm. The whole neighbourhood was disturbed. A garrison called to arms at dead of night on the sudden approach of the enemy, could not have been more expeditiously, or effectually aroused. Rattles were sprung; lanterns lighted, and hoisted at the end of poles; windows thrown open; doors unbarred; and, as if by magic, the street was instantaneously filled with a crowd of persons of both sexes, armed with such weapons as came most readily to hand, and dressed in such garments as could be most easily slipped on. Hurrying in the direction of the supposed arrest, they encouraged each other with shouts, and threatened the offending parties with their vengeance.

Regardless as the gentry of the Mint usually were (for, indeed, they had become habituated from their frequent occurrence to such scenes,) of any outrages committed in their streets; deaf, as they had been, to the recent scuffle before Mrs. Sheppard's door, they were always sufficiently on the alert to maintain their privileges, and to assist each other against the attacks of their common enemy—the sheriff's officer. It was only by the adoption of such a course (especially since the late act of suppression, to which we have alluded,) that the inviolability of the asylum could be preserved. Incursions were often made upon its territories by the functionaries of the law; sometimes attended with success, but more frequently with discomfiture; and it rarely happened, unless by stratagem or bribery, that (in the language of the gentlemen of the short staff) an important caption could be effected. In order to guard against accidents or surprises, watchmen, or scouts, (as they were styled,) were stationed at the three main outlets of the sanctuary ready to give the signal in the manner just described: bars were erected, which, in case of emergency; could be immediately stretched across the streets: doors were attached to the alleys; and were never opened without due precautions; gates were affixed to the courts, wickets to the gates, and bolts to the wickets. The back windows of the houses (where any such existed) were strongly barricaded, and kept constantly shut; and the fortress was, furthermore, defended by high walls and deep ditches in those quarters where it appeared most exposed. There was also a Maze, (the name is still retained in the district,) into which the debtor could run, and through the intricacies of which it was impossible for an officer to follow him, without a clue. Whoever chose to incur the risk of so doing might enter the Mint at any hour; but no one was suffered to depart without giving a satisfactory account of himself, or producing a pass from the Master. In short, every contrivance that ingenuity could devise was resorted to by this horde of reprobates to secure themselves from danger or molestation. Whitefriars had lost its privileges; Salisbury Court and the Savoy no longer offered places of refuge to the

debtor; and it was, therefore, doubly requisite that the Island of Bermuda (as the Mint was termed by its occupants) should uphold its rights, as long as it was able to do so.

Mr. Wood, meantime, had not remained idle. Aware that not a moment was to be lost, if he meant to render any effectual assistance to the child, he ceased shouting, and defending himself in the best way he could from the attacks of Rowland, by whom he was closely pressed, forced his way, in spite of all opposition, to Davies, and dealt him a blow on the head with such good will that, had it not been for the intervention of the wall, the ruffian must have been prostrated. Before he could recover from the stunning effects of the blow, Wood possessed himself of the child: and, untying the noose which had been slipped round its throat, had the satisfaction of hearing it cry lustily.

At this juncture, Sir Cecil and his followers appeared at the threshold.

"He has escaped!" exclaimed the knight; "we have searched every corner of the house without finding a trace of him."

"Back!" cried Rowland. "Don't you hear those shouts? Yon fellow's clamour has brought the whole horde of jail-birds and cut-throats that infest this place about our ears. We shall be torn in pieces if we are discovered. Davies!" he added, calling to the attendant, who was menacing Wood with a severe retaliation, "don't heed him; but, if you value a whole skin, come into the house, and bring that woman with you. She may afford us some necessary information."

Davies reluctantly complied. And, dragging Mrs. Sheppard, who made no resistance, along with him, entered the house, the door of which was instantly shut and barricaded.

A moment afterwards, the street was illumined by a blaze of torchlight, and a tumultuous uproar, mixed with the clashing of weapons, and the braying of horns, announced the arrival of the first detachment of Minters.

Mr. Wood rushed instantly to meet them.

"Hurrah!" shouted he, waving his hat triumphantly over his head. "Saved!"

"Ay, ay, it's all bob, my covey! You're safe enough, that's certain!" responded the Minters, baying, yelping, leaping, and howling around him like a pack of hounds when the huntsman is beating cover; "but, where are the lurchers?"

"Who?" asked Wood.

"The traps!" responded a bystander.

"The shoulder-clappers!" added a lady, who, in her anxiety to join the party, had unintentionally substituted her husband's nether habiliments for her own petticoats.

"The ban-dogs!" thundered a tall man, whose stature and former avocations had procured him the nickname of "The long drover of the Borough market." "Where are they?"

"Ay, where are they?" chorussed the mob, flourishing their various weapons, and flashing their torches in the air; "we'll starve 'em out."

Mr. Wood trembled. He felt he had raised a storm which it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to allay. He knew not what to say, or what to do; and his confusion was increased by the threatening gestures and furious looks of the ruffians in his immediate vicinity.

"I don't understand you, gentlemen," stammered he, at length.

"What does he say?" roared the long drover.

"He says he don't understand flash," replied the lady in gentleman's attire.

"Cease your confounded clutter!" said a young man, whose swarthy visage, seen in the torchlight, struck Wood as being that of a Mulatto. "You frighten the cull out of his senses. It's plain he don't understand our lingo; as, how should he? Take pattern by me;" and as he said this he strode up to the carpenter, and, slapping him on the shoulder, propounded the following questions, accompanying each interrogation with a formidable contortion of countenance. "Curse you! Where are the bailiffs? Rot you! have you lost your tongue? Devil seize you! you could bawl loud enough a moment ago!"

"Silence, Blueskin!" interposed an authoritative voice, immediately behind the ruffian. "Let me have a word with the cull!"

"Ay! ay!" cried several of the bystanders, "let Jonathan kimbaw the cove. He's got the gift of the gab."

The crowd accordingly drew aside, and the individual, in whose behalf the movement had been made immediately stepped forward. He was a young man of about two-and-twenty, who, without having anything remarkable either in dress or appearance, was yet a noticeable person, if only for the indescribable expression of cunning pervading his

countenance. His eyes were small and grey; as far apart and as sly-looking as those of a fox. A physiognomist, indeed, would have likened him to that crafty animal, and it must be owned the general formation of his features favoured such a comparison. The nose was long and sharp, the chin pointed, the forehead broad and flat, and connected, without any intervening hollow, with the eyelid; the teeth when displayed, seemed to reach from ear to ear. Then his beard was of a reddish hue, and his complexion warm and sanguine. Those who had seen him slumbering, averred that he slept with his eyes open. But this might be merely a figurative mode of describing his customary vigilance. Certain it was, that the slightest sound aroused him. This astute personage was somewhat under the middle size, but fairly proportioned, inclining rather to strength than symmetry, and abounding more in muscle than in flesh.

It would seem, from the attention which he evidently bestowed upon the hidden and complex machinery of the grand system of villany at work around him, that his chief object in taking up his quarters in the Mint, must have been to obtain some private information respecting the habits and practices of its inhabitants, to be turned to account hereafter.

Advancing towards Wood, Jonathan fixed his keen gray eyes upon him, and demanded, in a stern tone whether the persons who had taken refuge in the adjoining house, were bailiffs.

"Not that I know of," replied the carpenter, who had in some degree recovered his confidence.

"Then I presume you've not been arrested?"

"I have not," answered Wood firmly.

"I guessed as much. Perhaps you'll next inform us why you have occasioned this disturbance."

"Because this child's life was threatened by the persons you have mentioned," rejoined Wood.

"An excellent reason, i' faith!" exclaimed Blueskin, with a roar of surprise and indignation, which was echoed by the whole assemblage. "And so we're to be summoned from our beds and snug firesides, because a kid happens to squall, eh? By the soul of my grandmother, but this is too good!"

"Do you intend to claim the privileges of the Mint?" said Jonathan, calmly pursuing his interrogations amid the uproar. "Is your person in danger?"

"Not from my creditors," replied Wood, significantly.

"Will he post the cole? Will he come down with the dues? Ask him that?" cried Blueskin.

"You hear," pursued Jonathan; "my friend desires to know if you are willing to pay your footing as a member of the ancient and respectable fraternity of debtors?"

"I owe no man a farthing, and my name shall never appear in any such rascally list," replied Wood angrily. "I don't see why I should be obliged to pay for doing my duty. I tell you this child would have been strangled. The noose was at its throat when I called for help. I knew it was in vain to cry 'murder!' in the Mint, so I had recourse to stratagem."

"Well, Sir, I must say you deserve some credit for your ingenuity, at all events," replied Jonathan, repressing a smile; "but, before you put out your foot so far, it would have been quite as prudent to consider how you were to draw it back again. For my own part, I don't see in what way it is to be accomplished, except by the payment of our customary fees. Do not imagine you can at one moment avail yourself of our excellent regulations (with which you seem sufficiently well acquainted), and the next break them with impunity. If you assume the character of a debtor for your own convenience, you must be content to maintain it for ours. If you have not been arrested, we have been disturbed; and it is but just and reasonable you should pay for occasioning such disturbance. By your own showing you are in easy circumstances,—for it is only natural to presume that a man who owes nothing must be in a condition to pay liberally,—and you cannot therefore feel the loss of such a trifle as ten guineas."

However illogical and inconclusive these arguments might appear to Mr. Wood, and however he might dissent from the latter proposition, he did not deem it expedient to make any reply; and the orator proceeded with his harangue amid the general applause of the assemblage.

"I am perhaps exceeding my authority in demanding so slight a sum," continued Jonathan, modestly, "and the Master of the Mint may not be disposed to let you off so lightly. He will be here in a moment or so, and you will then learn his determination. In the mean time, let me advise you as a friend not to irritate him by a refusal, which would be as useless as vexatious. He has a very summary mode of dealing with refractory persons, I assure you. My best endeavours shall be used to bring you off, on the easy terms I have mentioned."

"Do you call ten guineas easy terms?" cried Wood, with a look of dismay. "Why, I should expect to purchase the entire freehold of the Mint for less money."

"Many a man has been glad to pay double the amount to get his head from under the Mint pump," observed Blueskin, gruffly.

"Let the gentleman take his own course," said Jonathan, mildly. "I should be sorry to persuade him to do anything his calmer judgment might disapprove."

"Exactly my sentiments," rejoined Blueskin. "I wouldn't force him for the world: but if he don't tip the stivers, may I be cursed if he don't get a taste of the aqua pompaginis. Let's have a look at the kinchen that ought to have been throttled," added he, snatching the child from Wood. "My stars! here's a pretty lullaby-cheat to make a fuss about—ho! ho!"

"Deal with me as you think proper, gentlemen," exclaimed Wood; "but, for mercy's sake don't harm the child! Let it be taken to its mother."

"And who is its mother?" asked Jonathan, in an eager whisper. "Tell me frankly, and speak under your breath. Your own safety—the child's safety—depends upon your candour."

While Mr. Wood underwent this examination, Blueskin felt a small and trembling hand placed upon his own, and, turning at the summons, beheld a young female, whose features were partially concealed by a loo, or half mask, standing beside him. Coarse as were the ruffian's notions of feminine beauty, he could not be insensible to the surpassing loveliness of the fair creature, who had thus solicited his attention. Her figure was, in some measure, hidden by a large scarf, and a deep hood drawn over the head contributed to her disguise; still it was evident, from her lofty bearing, that she had nothing in common, except an interest in their proceedings, with the crew by whom she was surrounded.

Whence she came,—who she was,—and what she wanted,—were questions which naturally suggested themselves to Blueskin, and he was about to seek for some explanation, when his curiosity was checked by a gesture of silence from the lady.

"Hush!" said she, in a low, but agitated voice; "would you earn this purse?"

"I've no objection," replied Blueskin, in a tone intended to be gentle, but which sounded like the murmuring whine of a playful bear. "How much is there in it!"

"It contains gold," replied the lady; "but I will add this ring."

"What am I to do to earn it?" asked Blueskin, with a disgusting leer,— "cut a throat—or throw myself at your feet—eh, my dear?"

"Give me that child," returned the lady, with difficulty overcoming the loathing inspired by the ruffian's familiarity.

"Oh! I see!" replied Blueskin, winking significantly, "Come nearer, or they'll observe us. Don't be afraid—I won't hurt you. I'm always agreeable to the women, bless their kind hearts! Now! slip the purse into my hand. Bravo!—the best cly-faker of 'em all couldn't have done it better. And now for the fawney—the ring I mean. I'm no great judge of these articles, Ma'am; but I trust to your honour not to palm off paste upon me."

"It is a diamond," said the lady, in an agony of distress,— "the child!"

"A diamond! Here, take the kid," cried Blueskin, slipping the infant adroitly under her scarf. "And so this is a diamond," added he, contemplating the brilliant from the hollow of his hand: "it does sparkle almost as brightly as your ogles. By the by, my dear, I forgot to ask your name—perhaps you'll oblige me with it now? Hell and the devil!—gone!"

He looked around in vain. The lady had disappeared.

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CHAPTER III.

The Master of the Mint.

Jonathan, meanwhile, having ascertained the parentage of the child from Wood, proceeded to question him in an under tone, as to the probable motives of the attempt upon its life; and, though he failed in obtaining any information on this point, he had little difficulty in eliciting such particulars of the mysterious transaction as have already been recounted. When the carpenter concluded his recital, Jonathan was for a moment lost in reflection.

"Devilish strange!" thought he, chuckling to himself; "queer business! Capital trick of the cull in the cloak to make another person's brat stand the brunt for his own—capital! ha! ha! Won't do, though. He must be a sly fox to get out of the Mint without my knowledge. I've a shrewd guess where he's taken refuge; but I'll ferret him out. These bloods will pay well for his capture; if not, he'll pay well to get out of their hands; so I'm safe either way—ha! ha! Blueskin," he added aloud, and motioning that worthy, "follow me."

Upon which, he set off in the direction of the entry. His progress, however, was checked by loud acclamations, announcing the arrival of the Master of the Mint and his train.

Baptist Kettleby (for so was the Master named) was a "goodly portly man, and a corpulent," whose fair round paunch bespoke the affection he entertained for good liquor and good living. He had a quick, shrewd, merry eye, and a look in which duplicity was agreeably veiled by good humour. It was easy to discover that he was a knave, but equally easy to perceive that he was a pleasant fellow; a combination of qualities by no means of rare occurrence. So far as regards his attire, Baptist was not seen to advantage. No great lover of state or state costume at any time, he was generally, towards the close of an evening, completely in dishabille, and in this condition he now presented himself to his subjects. His shirt was unfastened, his vest unbuttoned, his hose ungartered; his feet were stuck into a pair of pantoufles, his arms into a greasy flannel dressing-gown, his head into a thrum-cap, the cap into a tie-periwig, and the wig into a gold-edged hat. A white apron was tied round his waist, and into the apron was thrust a short thick truncheon, which looked very much like a rolling-pin.

The Master of the Mint was accompanied by another gentleman almost as portly as himself, and quite as deliberate in his movements. The costume of this personage was

somewhat singular, and might have passed for a masquerading habit, had not the imperturbable gravity of his demeanour forbidden any such supposition. It consisted of a close jerkin of brown frieze, ornamented with a triple row of brass buttons; loose Dutch slops, made very wide in the seat and very tight at the knees; red stockings with black clocks, and a fur cap. The owner of this dress had a broad weather-beaten face, small twinkling eyes, and a bushy, grizzled beard. Though he walked by the side of the governor, he seldom exchanged a word with him, but appeared wholly absorbed in the contemplations inspired by a broadbowled Dutch pipe.

Behind the illustrious personages just described marched a troop of stalwart fellows, with white badges in their hats, quarterstaves, oaken cudgels, and links in their hands. These were the Master's body-guard.

Advancing towards the Master, and claiming an audience, which was instantly granted, Jonathan, without much circumlocution, related the sum of the strange story he had just learnt from Wood, omitting nothing except a few trifling particulars, which he thought it politic to keep back; and, with this view, he said not a word of there being any probability of capturing the fugitive, but, on the contrary, roundly asserted that his informant had witnessed that person's escape.

The Master listened, with becoming attention, to the narrative, and, at its conclusion, shook his head gravely, applied his thumb to the side of his nose, and, twirling his fingers significantly, winked at his phlegmatic companion. The gentleman appealed to shook his head in reply, coughed as only a Dutchman can cough, and raising his hand from the bowl of his pipe, went through precisely the same mysterious ceremonial as the Master.

Putting his own construction upon this mute interchange of opinions, Jonathan ventured to observe, that it certainly was a very perplexing case, but that he thought something might be made of it, and, if left to him, he would undertake to manage the matter to the Master's entire satisfaction.

"Ja, ja, Muntmeester," said the Dutchman, removing the pipe from his mouth, and speaking in a deep and guttural voice, "leave the affair to Johannes. He'll settle it bravely. And let ush go back to our brandewyn, and hollandsche genever. Dese ere not schouts, as you faind, but jonkers on a vrolyk; and if dey'd chanced to keel de vrow Sheppard's pet lamb, dey'd have done her a servish, by shaving it from dat unpleasant complaint, de hempen fever, with which its laatter days are threatened, and of which its poor vader died. Myn Got! haanging runs in some families, Muntmeester. It's hereditary, like de jig, vat you call it—gout—haw! haw!"

"If the child is destined to the gibbet, Van Galgebrok," replied the Master, joining in the laugh, "it'll never be choked by a footman's cravat, that's certain; but, in regard to going back empty-handed," continued he, altering his tone, and assuming a dignified air, "it's quite out of the question. With Baptist Kettleby, to engage in a matter is to go through with it. Besides, this is an affair which no one but myself can settle. Common offences may be decided upon by deputy; but outrages perpetrated by men of rank, as these appear to be, must be judged by the Master of the Mint in person. These are the decrees of the Island of Bermuda, and I will never suffer its excellent laws to be violated. Gentlemen of the Mint," added he, pointing with his truncheon towards Mrs. Sheppard's house, "forward!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the mob, and the whole phalanx was put in motion in that direction. At the same moment a martial flourish, proceeding from cow's horns, tin canisters filled with stones, bladders and cat-gut, with other sprightly, instruments, was struck up, and, enlivened by this harmonious accompaniment, the troop reached its destination in the best possible spirits for an encounter.

"Let us in," said the Master, rapping his truncheon authoritatively against the boards, "or we'll force an entrance."

But as no answer was returned to the summons, though it was again, and more peremptorily, repeated, Baptist seized a mallet from a bystander and burst open the door. Followed by Van Galgebrok and others of his retinue, he then rushed into the room, where Rowland, Sir Cecil, and their attendants, stood with drawn swords prepared to receive them.

"Beat down their blades," cried the Master; "no bloodshed."

"Beat out their brains, you mean," rejoined Blueskin with a tremendous imprecation; "no half measures now, Master."

"Hadn't you better hold a moment's parley with the gentlemen before proceeding to extremities?" suggested Jonathan.

"Agreed," responded the Master. "Surely," he added, staring at Rowland, "either I'm greatly mistaken, or it is—"

"You are not mistaken, Baptist," returned Rowland with a gesture of silence; "it is your old friend. I'm glad to recognise you."

"And I'm glad your worship's recognition doesn't come too late," observed the Master. "But why didn't you make yourself known at once?"

"I'd forgotten the office you hold in the Mint, Baptist," replied Rowland. "But clear the room of this rabble, if you have sufficient authority over them. I would speak with you."

"There's but one way of clearing it, your worship," said the Master, archly.

"I understand," replied Rowland. "Give them what you please. I'll repay you."

"It's all right, pals," cried Baptist, in a loud tone; "the gentlemen and I have settled matters. No more scuffling."

"What's the meaning of all this?" demanded Sir Cecil. "How have you contrived to still these troubled waters?"

"I've chanced upon an old ally in the Master of the Mint," answered Rowland. "We may trust him," he added in a whisper; "he is a staunch friend of the good cause."

"Blueskin, clear the room," cried the Master; "these gentlemen would be private. They've paid for their lodging. Where's Jonathan?"

Inquiries were instantly made after that individual, but he was nowhere to be found.

"Strange!" observed the Master; "I thought he'd been at my elbow all this time. But it don't much matter—though he's a devilish shrewd fellow, and might have helped me out of a difficulty, had any occurred. Hark ye, Blueskin," continued he, addressing that personage, who, in obedience to his commands, had, with great promptitude, driven out the rabble, and again secured the door, "a word in your ear. What female entered the house with us?"

"Blood and thunder!" exclaimed Blueskin, afraid, if he admitted having seen the lady, of being compelled to divide the plunder he had obtained from her among his companions, "how should I know? D'ye suppose I'm always thinking of the petticoats? I observed no female; but if any one did join the assault, it must have been either Amazonian Kate, or Fighting Moll."

"The woman I mean did not join the assault," rejoined the Master, "but rather seemed to shun observation; and, from the hasty glimpse I caught of her, she appeared to have a child in her arms."

"Then, most probably, it was the widow Sheppard," answered Blueskin, sulkily.

"Right," said the Master, "I didn't think of her. And now I've another job for you."

"Propose it," returned Blueskin, inclining his head.

"Square accounts with the rascal who got up the sham arrest; and, if he don't tip the cole without more ado, give him a taste of the pump, that's all."

"He shall go through the whole course," replied Blueskin, with a ferocious grin, "unless he comes down to the last grig. We'll lather him with mud, shave him with a rusty razor, and drench him with aqua pompaginis. Master, your humble servant.—Gentlemen, your most obsequious trout."

Having effected his object, which was to get rid of Blueskin, Baptist turned to Rowland and Sir Cecil, who had watched his proceedings with much impatience, and remarked, "Now, gentlemen, the coast's clear; we've nothing to interrupt us. I'm entirely at your service."

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CHAPTER IV.

The Roof and the Window.

Leaving them to pursue their conference, we shall follow the footsteps of Jonathan, who, as the Master surmised, and, as we have intimated, had unquestionably entered the house. But at the beginning of the affray, when he thought every one was too much occupied with his own concerns to remark his absence, he slipped out of the room, not for the purpose of avoiding the engagement (for cowardice was not one of his failings), but because he had another object in view. Creeping stealthily up stairs, unmasking a dark lantern, and glancing into each room as he passed, he was startled in one of them by the appearance of Mrs. Sheppard, who seemed to be crouching upon the floor. Satisfied, however, that she did not notice him, Jonathan glided away as noiselessly as he came, and ascended another short flight of stairs leading to the garret. As he crossed this chamber, his foot struck against something on the floor, which nearly threw him down, and stooping to examine the object, he found it was a key. "Never throw away a chance," thought Jonathan. "Who knows but this key may open a golden lock one of these days?" And, picking it up, he thrust it into his pocket.

Arrived beneath an aperture in the broken roof, he was preparing to pass through it, when he observed a little heap of tiles upon the floor, which appeared to have been recently dislodged. "He has passed this way," cried Jonathan, exultingly; "I have him safe enough." He then closed the lantern, mounted without much difficulty upon the roof, and proceeded cautiously along the tiles.

The night was now profoundly dark. Jonathan had to feel his way. A single false step might have precipitated him into the street; or, if he had trodden upon an unsound part of the roof, he must have fallen through it. He had nothing to guide him; for though the torches were blazing ruddily below, their gleam fell only on the side of the building. The venturous climber gazed for a moment at the assemblage beneath, to ascertain that he was not discovered; and, having satisfied himself in this particular, he stepped out more boldly. On gaining a stack of chimneys at the back of the house, he came to a pause, and again unmasked his lantern. Nothing, however, could be discerned, except the crumbling brickwork. "Confusion!" ejaculated Jonathan: "can he have escaped? No. The walls are too high, and the windows too stoutly barricaded in this quarter, to admit such a supposition. He can't be far off. I shall find him yet. Ah! I have it," he added, after a moment's deliberation; "he's there, I'll be sworn." And, once more enveloping himself in darkness, he pursued his course.

He had now reached the adjoining house, and, scaling the roof, approached another building, which seemed to be, at least, one story loftier than its neighbours. Apparently, Jonathan was well acquainted with the premises; for, feeling about in the dark, he speedily discovered a ladder, up the steps of which he hurried. Drawing a pistol, and unclosing his lantern with the quickness of thought, he then burst through an open trap-door into a small loft.

The light fell upon the fugitive, who stood before him in an attitude of defence, with the child in his arms.

"Aha!" exclaimed Jonathan, acting upon the information he had obtained from Wood; "I have found you at last. Your servant, Mr. Darrell."

"Who are you!" demanded the fugitive, sternly.

"A friend," replied Jonathan, uncocking the pistol, and placing it in his pocket.

"How do I know you are a friend?" asked Darrell.

"What should I do here alone if I were an enemy? But, come, don't let us waste time in bandying words, when we might employ it so much more profitably. Your life, and that of your child, are in my power. What will you give me to save you from your pursuers?"

"Can you do so?" asked the other, doubtfully.

"I can, and will. Now, the reward?"

"I have but an ill-furnished purse. But if I escape, my gratitude—"

"Pshaw!" interrupted Jonathan, scornfully. "Your gratitude will vanish with your danger. Pay fools with promises. I must have something in hand."

"You shall have all I have about me," replied Darrell.

"Well—well," grumbled Jonathan, "I suppose I must be content. An ill-lined purse is a poor recompense for the risk I have run. However, come along. I needn't tell you to tread carefully. You know the danger of this breakneck road as well as I do. The light would betray us." So saying, he closed the lantern.

"Harkye, Sir," rejoined Darrell; "one word before I move. I know not who you are; and, as I cannot discern your face, I may be doing you an injustice. But there is something in your voice that makes me distrust you. If you attempt to play the traitor, you will do so at the hazard of your life."

"I have already hazarded my life in this attempt to save you," returned Jonathan boldly, and with apparent frankness; "this ought to be sufficient answer to your doubts. Your pursuers are below. What was to hinder me, if I had been so inclined, from directing them to your retreat?"

"Enough," replied Darrell. "Lead on!"

Followed by Darrell, Jonathan retraced his dangerous path. As he approached the gable of Mrs. Sheppard's house, loud yells and vociferations reached his ears; and, looking downwards, he perceived a great stir amid the mob. The cause of this uproar was soon manifest. Blueskin and the Minters were dragging Wood to the pump. The unfortunate carpenter struggled violently, but ineffectually. His hat was placed upon one pole, his wig on another. His shouts for help were answered by roars of mockery and laughter. He continued alternately to be tossed in the air, or rolled in the kennel until he was borne out of sight. The spectacle seemed to afford as much amusement to Jonathan as to the actors engaged in it. He could not contain his satisfaction, but chuckled, and rubbed his hands with delight.

"By Heaven!" cried Darrell, "it is the poor fellow whom I placed in such jeopardy a short time ago. I am the cause of his ill-usage."

"To be sure you are," replied Jonathan, laughing. "But, what of that? It'll be a lesson to him in future, and will show him the folly of doing a good-natured action!"

But perceiving that his companion did not relish his pleasantry and fearing that his sympathy for the carpenter's situation might betray him into some act of imprudence, Jonathan, without further remark, and by way of putting an end to the discussion, let himself drop through the roof. His example was followed by Darrell. But, though the latter was somewhat embarrassed by his burthen, he peremptorily declined Jonathan's offer of assistance. Both, however, having safely landed, they cautiously crossed the room, and passed down the first flight of steps in silence. At this moment, a door was opened below; lights gleamed on the walls; and the figures of Rowland and Sir Cecil were distinguished at the foot of the stairs.

Darrell stopped, and drew his sword.

"You have betrayed me," said he, in a deep whisper, to his companion; "but you shall reap the reward of your treachery."

"Be still!" returned Jonathan, in the same under tone, and with great self-possession: "I can yet save you. And see!" he added, as the figures drew back, and the lights disappeared; "it's a false alarm. They have retired. However, not a moment is to be lost. Give me your hand."

He then hurried Darrell down another short flight of steps, and entered a small chamber at the back of the house. Closing the door, Jonathan next produced his lantern, and, hastening towards the window, undrew a bolt by which it was fastened. A stout wooden shutter, opening inwardly, being removed, disclosed a grating of iron bars. This obstacle, which appeared to preclude the possibility of egress in that quarter, was speedily got rid of. Withdrawing another bolt, and unhooking a chain suspended from the top of the casement, Jonathan pushed the iron framework outwards. The bars dropped noiselessly and slowly down, till the chain tightened at the staple.

"You are free," said he, "that grating forms a ladder, by which you may descend in safety. I learned the trick of the place from one Paul Groves, who used to live here, and who contrived the machine. He used to call it his fire-escape—ha! ha! I've often used the ladder for my own convenience, but I never expected to turn it to such good account. And now, Sir, have I kept faith with you?"

"You have," replied Darrell. "Here is my purse; and I trust you will let me know to whom I am indebted for this important service."

"It matters not who I am," replied Jonathan, taking the money. "As I said before, I have little reliance upon professions of gratitude."

"I know not how it is," sighed Darrell, "but I feel an unaccountable misgiving at quitting this place. Something tells me I am rushing on greater danger."

"You know best," replied Jonathan, sneeringly; "but if I were in your place I would take the chance of a future and uncertain risk to avoid a present and certain peril."

"You are right," replied Darrell; "the weakness is past. Which is the nearest way to the river?"

"Why, it's an awkward road to direct you," returned Jonathan. "But if you turn to the right when you reach the ground, and keep close to the Mint wall, you'll speedily arrive at White Cross Street; White Cross Street, if you turn again to the right, will bring you

into Queen Street; Queen Street, bearing to the left, will conduct you to Deadman's Place; and Deadman's Place to the water-side, not fifty yards from Saint Saviour's stairs, where you're sure to get a boat."

"The very point I aim at," said Darrell as he passed through the outlet.

"Stay!" said Jonathan, aiding his descent; "you had better take my lantern. It may be useful to you. Perhaps you'll give me in return some token, by which I may remind you of this occurrence, in case we meet again. Your glove will suffice."

"There it is;" replied the other, tossing him the glove. "Are you sure these bars touch the ground?"

"They come within a yard of it," answered Jonathan.

"Safe!" shouted Darrell, as he effected a secure landing. "Good night!"

"So," muttered Jonathan, "having started the hare, I'll now unleash the hounds."

With this praiseworthy determination, he was hastening down stairs, with the utmost rapidity, when he encountered a female, whom he took, in the darkness, to be Mrs. Sheppard. The person caught hold of his arm, and, in spite of his efforts to disengage himself, detained him.

"Where is he?" asked she, in an agitated whisper. "I heard his voice; but I saw them on the stairs, and durst not approach him, for fear of giving the alarm."

"If you mean the fugitive, Darrell, he has escaped through the back window," replied Jonathan.

"Thank Heaven!" she gasped.

"Well, you women are forgiving creatures, I must say," observed Jonathan, sarcastically. "You thank Heaven for the escape of the man who did his best to get your child's neck twisted."

"What do you mean?" asked the female, in astonishment.

"I mean what I say," replied Jonathan. "Perhaps you don't know that this Darrell so contrived matters, that your child should be mistaken for his own; by which means it

had a narrow escape from a tight cravat, I can assure you. However, the scheme answered well enough, for Darrell has got off with his own brat."

"Then this is not my child?" exclaimed she, with increased astonishment.

"If you have a child there, it certainly is not," answered Jonathan, a little surprised; "for I left your brat in the charge of Blueskin, who is still among the crowd in the street, unless, as is not unlikely, he's gone to see your other friend disciplined at the pump."

"Merciful providence!" exclaimed the female. "Whose child can this be?"

"How the devil should I know!" replied Jonathan gruffly. "I suppose it didn't drop through the ceiling, did it? Are you quite sure it's flesh and blood?" asked he, playfully pinching its arm till it cried out with pain.

"My child! my child!" exclaimed Mrs. Sheppard, rushing from the adjoining room. "Where is it?"

"Are you the mother of this child?" inquired the person who had first spoken, addressing Mrs. Sheppard.

"I am—I am!" cried the widow, snatching the babe, and pressing it to her breast with rapturous delight "God be thanked, I have found it!"

"We have both good reason to be grateful," added the lady, with great emotion.

"Sblood!" cried Jonathan, who had listened to the foregoing conversation with angry wonder, "I've been nicely done here. Fool that I was to part with my lantern! But I'll soon set myself straight. What ho! lights! lights!"

And, shouting as he went, he flung himself down stairs.

"Where shall I fly?" exclaimed the lady, bewildered with terror. "They will kill me, if they find me, as they would have killed my husband and child. Oh God! my limbs fail me."

"Make an effort, Madam," cried Mrs. Sheppard, as a storm of furious voices resounded from below, and torches were seen mounting the stairs; "they are coming!—they are coming!—fly!—to the roof! to the roof."

"No," cried the lady, "this room—I recollect—it has a back window."

"It is shut," said Mrs. Sheppard.

"It is open," replied the lady, rushing towards it, and springing through the outlet.

"Where is she?" thundered Jonathan, who at this moment reached Mrs. Sheppard.

"She has flown up stairs," replied the widow.

"You lie, hussy!" replied Jonathan, rudely pushing her aside, as she vainly endeavoured to oppose his entrance into the room; "she is here. Hist!" cried he, as a scream was heard from without. "By G—! she has missed her footing."

There was a momentary and terrible silence, broken only by a few feeble groans.

Sir Cecil, who with Rowland and some others had entered the room rushed to the window with a torch.

He held down the light, and a moment afterwards beckoned, with a blanched cheek, to Rowland.

"Your sister is dead," said he, in a deep whisper.

"Her blood be upon her own head, then," replied Rowland, sternly. "Why came she here?"

"She could not resist the hand of fate which drew her hither," replied Sir Cecil, mournfully.

"Descend and take charge of the body," said Rowland, conquering his emotion by a great effort, "I will join you in a moment. This accident rather confirms than checks my purpose. The stain upon our family is only half effaced: I have sworn the death of the villain and his bastard, and I will keep my oath. Now, Sir," he added, turning to Jonathan, as Sir Cecil and his followers obeyed his injunctions, "you say you know the road which the person whom we seek has taken?"

"I do," replied Jonathan. "But I give no information gratis!"

"Speak, then," said Rowland, placing money in his hand.

"You'll find him at St. Saviours's stairs," answered Jonathan. "He's about to cross the river. You'd better lose no time. He has got five minutes' start of you. But I sent him the longest way about."

The words were scarcely pronounced, when Rowland disappeared.

"And now to see the end of it," said Jonathan, shortly afterwards passing through the window. "Good night, Master."

Three persons only were left in the room. These were the Master of the Mint, Van Galgebrok, and Mrs. Sheppard.

"A bad business this, Van," observed Baptist, with a prolonged shake of the head.

"Ja, ja, Muntmeester," said the Hollander, shaking his head in reply;—"very bad—very."

"But then they're staunch supporters of our friend over the water," continued Baptist, winking significantly; "so we must e'en hush it up in the best way we can."

"Ja," answered Van Galgebrok. "But—sapperment!—I wish they hadn't broken my pipe."

"JONATHAN WILD promises well," observed the Master, after a pause: "he'll become a great man. Mind, I, Baptist Kettleby, say so."

"He'll be hanged nevertheless," replied the Hollander, giving his collar an ugly jerk. "Mind, I, Rykhart Van Galgebrok predict it. And now let's go back to the Shovels, and finish our brandewyn and bier, Muntmeester."

"Alas!" cried Mrs. Sheppard, relieved by their departure, and giving way to a passionate flood of tears; "were it not for my child, I should wish to be in the place of that unfortunate lady."

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CHAPTER V.

The Denunciation.

For a short space, Mrs. Sheppard remained dissolved in tears. She then dried her eyes, and laying her child gently upon the floor, knelt down beside him. "Open my heart, Father of Mercy!" she murmured, in a humble tone, and with downcast looks, "and make me sensible of the error of my ways. I have sinned deeply; but I have been sorely tried. Spare me yet a little while, Father! not for my own sake, but for the sake of this poor babe." Her utterance was here choked by sobs. "But if it is thy will to take me from him," she continued, as soon as her emotion permitted her,— "if he must be left an orphan amid strangers, implant, I beseech thee, a mother's feelings in some other bosom, and raise up a friend, who shall be to him what I would have been. Let him not bear the weight of my punishment. Spare him!—pity me!"

With this she arose, and, taking up the infant, was about to proceed down stairs, when she was alarmed by hearing the street-door opened, and the sound of heavy footsteps entering the house.

"Halloa, widow!" shouted a rough voice from below, "where the devil are you?"

Mrs. Sheppard returned no answer.

"I've got something to say to you," continued the speaker, rather less harshly; "something to your advantage; so come out o' your hiding-place, and let's have some supper, for I'm infernally hungry.—D'ye hear?"

Still the widow remained silent.

"Well, if you won't come, I shall help myself, and that's unsociable," pursued the speaker, evidently, from the noise he made, suiting the action to the word. "Devilish nice ham you've got here!—capital pie!—and, as I live, a flask of excellent canary. You're in luck to-night, widow. Here's your health in a bumper, and wishing you a better husband than your first. It'll be your own fault if you don't soon get another and a proper young man into the bargain. Here's his health likewise. What! mum still. You're the first widow I ever heard of who could withstand that lure. I'll try the effect of a jolly stave." And he struck up the following ballad:—

SAINT GILES'S BOWL.[A]

Transcribers Note: These versions of the music are included with this file:

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I.

Where Saint Giles' church stands, once a lazar-house stood;
And, chain'd to its gates, was a vessel of wood;
A broad-bottom'd bowl, from which all the fine fellows,
Who pass'd by that spot, on their way to the gallows,
Might tipple strong beer,
Their spirits to cheer,
And drown in a sea of good liquor all fear!
For nothing the transit to Tyburn beguiles
So well as a draught from the Bowl of Saint Giles!

II.

By many a highwayman many a draught
Of nutty-brown ale at Saint Giles's was quaft,
Until the old lazar-house chanced to fall down,
And the broad-bottom'd bowl was removed to the Crown.
Where the robber may cheer
His spirit with beer,
And drown in a sea of good liquor all fear!
For nothing the transit to Tyburn beguiles
So well as a draught from the Bowl of Saint Giles!

III.

There MULSACK and SWIFTNECK, both prigs from their birth,
OLD MOB and TOM COX took their last draught on earth:
There RANDAL, and SHORTER, and WHITNEY pulled up,
And jolly JACK JOYCE drank his finishing cup!
For a can of ale calms,
A highwayman's qualms,
And makes him sing blithely his dolorous psalms
And nothing the transit to Tyburn beguiles
So well as a draught from the Bowl of Saint Giles!

"Singing's dry work," observed the stranger, pausing to take a pull at the bottle. "And now, widow," he continued, "attend to the next verse, for it consarns a friend o' yours."

IV.

When gallant TOM SHEPPARD to Tyburn was led,—
"Stop the cart at the Crown—stop a moment," he said.
He was offered the Bowl, but he left it and smiled,
Crying, "Keep it till call'd for by JONATHAN WILD!
"The rascal one day,
"Will pass by this way,
"And drink a full measure to moisten his clay!
"And never will Bowl of Saint Giles have beguiled
"Such a thorough-paced scoundrel as JONATHAN WILD!"

V.

Should it e'er be my lot to ride backwards that way,
At the door of the Crown I will certainly stay;
I'll summon the landlord—I'll call for the Bowl,
And drink a deep draught to the health of my soul!
Whatever may hap,
I'll taste of the tap,
To keep up my spirits when brought to the crap!
For nothing the transit to Tyburn beguiles
So well as a draught from the Bowl of St. Giles!
"Devil seize the woman!" growled the singer, as he brought his ditty to a close; "will nothing tempt her out? Widow Sheppard, I say," he added, rising, "don't be afraid. It's only a gentleman come to offer you his hand. 'He that woos a maid',—fol-de-rol—(hiccupping).—I'll soon find you out."

Mrs. Sheppard, whose distress at the consumption of the provisions had been somewhat allayed by the anticipation of the intruder's departure after he had satisfied his appetite, was now terrified in the extreme by seeing a light approach, and hearing footsteps on the stairs. Her first impulse was to fly to the window; and she was about to pass through it, at the risk of sharing the fate of the unfortunate lady, when her arm was grasped by some one in the act of ascending the ladder from without. Uttering a faint scream, she sank backwards, and would have fallen, if it had not been for the interposition of Blueskin, who, at that moment, staggered into the room with a candle in one hand, and the bottle in the other.

"Oh, you're here, are you?" said the ruffian, with an exulting laugh: "I've been looking for you everywhere."

"Let me go," implored Mrs. Sheppard,—"pray let me go. You hurt the child. Don't you hear how you've made it cry?"

"Throttle the kid!" rejoined Blueskin, fiercely. "If you don't stop its squalling, I will. I hate children. And, if I'd my own way, I'd drown 'em all like a litter o' puppies."

Well knowing the savage temper of the person she had to deal with, and how likely he was to put his threat into execution, Mrs. Sheppard did not dare to return any answer; but, disengaging herself from his embrace, endeavoured meekly to comply with his request.

"And now, widow," continued the ruffian, setting down the candle, and applying his lips to the bottle neck as he flung his heavy frame upon a bench, "I've a piece o' good news for you."

"Good news will be news to me. What is it?"

"Guess," rejoined Blueskin, attempting to throw a gallant expression into his forbidding countenance.

Mrs. Sheppard trembled violently; and though she understood his meaning too well, she answered,—"I can't guess."

"Well, then," returned the ruffian, "to put you out o' suspense, as the topsman remarked to poor Tom Sheppard, afore he turned him off, I'm come to make you an honourable proposal o' marriage. You won't refuse me, I'm sure; so no more need be said about the matter. To-morrow, we'll go to the Fleet and get spliced. Don't shake so. What I said about your brat was all stuff. I didn't mean it. It's my way when I'm ruffled. I shall take to him as nat'ral as if he were my own flesh and blood afore long.—I'll give him the edication of a prig,—teach him the use of his forks betimes,—and make him, in the end, as clever a cracksman as his father."

"Never!" shrieked Mrs. Sheppard; "never! never!"

"Halloa! what's this?" demanded Blueskin, springing to his feet. "Do you mean to say that if I support your kid, I shan't bring him up how I please—eh?"

"Don't question me, but leave me," replied the widow wildly; "you had better."

"Leave you!" echoed the ruffian, with a contemptuous laugh; "—not just yet."

"I am not unprotected," rejoined the poor woman; "there's some one at the window. Help! help!"

But her cries were unheeded. And Blueskin, who, for a moment, had looked round distrustfully, concluding it was a feint, now laughed louder than ever.

"It won't do, widow," said he, drawing near her, while she shrank from his approach, "so you may spare your breath. Come, come, be reasonable, and listen to me. Your kid has already brought me good luck, and may bring me still more if his education's attended to. This purse," he added, chinking it in the air, "and this ring, were given me for him just now by the lady, who made a false step on leaving your house. If I'd been in the way, instead of Jonathan Wild, that accident wouldn't have happened."

As he said this, a slight noise was heard without.

"What's that?" ejaculated the ruffian, glancing uneasily towards the window. "Who's there?—Pshaw! it's only the wind."

"It's Jonathan Wild," returned the widow, endeavouring to alarm him. "I told you I was not unprotected."

"He protect you," retorted Blueskin, maliciously; "you haven't a worse enemy on the face of the earth than Jonathan Wild. If you'd read your husband's dying speech, you'd know that he laid his death at Jonathan's door,—and with reason too, as I can testify."

"Man!" screamed Mrs. Sheppard, with a vehemence that shook even the hardened wretch beside her, "begone, and tempt me not."

"What should I tempt you to?" asked Blueskin, in surprise.

"To—to—no matter what," returned the widow distractedly. "Go—go!"

"I see what you mean," rejoined Blueskin, tossing a large case-knife, which he took from his pocket, in the air, and catching it dexterously by the haft as it fell; "you owe Jonathan a grudge;—so do I. He hanged your first husband. Just speak the word," he added, drawing the knife significantly across his throat, "and I'll put it out of his power to do the same by your second. But d—n him! let's talk o' something more agreeable. Look at this ring;—it's a diamond, and worth a mint o' money. It shall be your wedding ring. Look at it, I say. The lady's name's engraved inside, but so small I can scarcely read it. A-L-I-V-A—Aliva—T-R-E-N—Trencher that's it. Aliva Trencher."

"Aliva Trenchard!" exclaimed Mrs. Sheppard, hastily; "is that the name?"

"Ay, ay, now I look again it is Trenchard. How came you to know it? Have you heard the name before?"

"I think I have—long, long ago, when I was a child," replied Mrs. Sheppard, passing her hand across her brow; "but my memory is gone—quite gone. Where can I have heard it!"

"Devil knows," rejoined Blueskin. "Let it pass. The ring's yours, and you're mine. Here, put it on your finger."

Mrs. Sheppard snatched back her hand from his grasp, and exerted all her force to repel his advances.

"Set down the kid," roared Blueskin, savagely.

"Mercy!" screamed Mrs. Sheppard, struggling to escape, and holding the infant at arm's length; "have mercy on this helpless innocent!"

And the child, alarmed by the strife, added its feeble cries to its mother's shrieks.

"Set it down, I tell you," thundered Blueskin, "or I shall do it a mischief."

"Never!" cried Mrs. Sheppard.

Uttering a terrible imprecation, Blueskin placed the knife between his teeth, and endeavoured to seize the poor woman by the throat. In the struggle her cap fell off. The ruffian caught hold of her hair, and held her fast. The chamber rang with her shrieks. But her cries, instead of moving her assailant's compassion, only added to his fury. Planting his knee against her side, he pulled her towards him with one hand, while with the other he sought his knife. The child was now within reach; and, in another moment, he would have executed his deadly purpose, if an arm from behind had not felled him to the ground.

When Mrs. Sheppard, who had been stricken down by the blow that prostrated her assailant, looked up, she perceived Jonathan Wild kneeling beside the body of Blueskin. He was holding the ring to the light, and narrowly examining the inscription.

"Trenchard," he muttered; "Aliva Trenchard—they were right, then, as to the name. Well, if she survives the accident—as the blood, who styles himself Sir Cecil, fancies she may do—this ring will make my fortune by leading to the discovery of the chief parties concerned in this strange affair."

"Is the poor lady alive?" asked Mrs. Sheppard, eagerly.

"Sblood!" exclaimed Jonathan, hastily thrusting the ring into his vest, and taking up a heavy horseman's pistol with which he had felled Blueskin,— "I thought you'd been senseless."

"Is she alive?" repeated the widow.

"What's that to you?" demanded Jonathan, gruffly.

"Oh, nothing—nothing," returned Mrs. Sheppard. "But pray tell me if her husband has escaped?"

"Her husband!" echoed Jonathan scornfully. "A husband has little to fear from his wife's kinsfolk. Her lover, Darrell, has embarked upon the Thames, where, if he's not capsized by the squall, (for it's blowing like the devil,) he stands a good chance of getting his throat cut by his pursuers—ha! ha! I tracked 'em to the banks of the river, and should have followed to see it out, if the watermen hadn't refused to take me. However, as things have turned up, it's fortunate that I came back."

"It is, indeed," replied Mrs. Sheppard; "most fortunate for me."

"For you!" exclaimed Jonathan; "don't flatter yourself that I'm thinking of you. Blueskin might have butchered you and your brat before I'd have lifted a finger to prevent him, if it hadn't suited my purposes to do so, and he hadn't incurred my displeasure. I never forgive an injury. Your husband could have told you that."

"How had he offended you?" inquired the widow.

"I'll tell you," answered Jonathan, sternly. "He thwarted my schemes twice. The first time, I overlooked the offence; but the second time, when I had planned to break open the house of his master, the fellow who visited you to-night,—Wood, the carpenter of Wych Street,—he betrayed me. I told him I would bring him to the gallows, and I was as good as my word."

"You were so," replied Mrs. Sheppard; "and for that wicked deed you will one day be brought to the gallows yourself."

"Not before I have conducted your child thither," retorted Jonathan, with a withering look.

"Ah!" ejaculated Mrs. Sheppard, paralysed by the threat.

"If that sickly brat lives to be a man," continued Jonathan, rising, "I'll hang him upon the same tree as his father."

"Pity!" shrieked the widow.

"I'll be his evil genius!" vociferated Jonathan, who seemed to enjoy her torture.

"Begone, wretch!" cried the mother, stung beyond endurance by his taunts; "or I will drive you hence with my curses."

"Curse on, and welcome," jeered Wild.

Mrs. Sheppard raised her hand, and the malediction trembled upon her tongue. But ere the words could find utterance, her maternal tenderness overcame her indignation; and, sinking upon her knees, she extended her arms over her child.

"A mother's prayers—a mother's blessings," she cried, with the fervour almost of inspiration, "will avail against a fiend's malice."

"We shall see," rejoined Jonathan, turning carelessly upon his heel.

And, as he quitted the room, the poor widow fell with her face upon the floor.

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CHAPTER VI.

The Storm.

As soon as he was liberated by his persecutors, Mr. Wood set off at full speed from the Mint, and, hurrying he scarce knew whither (for there was such a continual buzzing in his ears and dancing in his eyes, as almost to take away the power of reflection), he held on at a brisk pace till his strength completely failed him.

On regaining his breath, he began to consider whither chance had led him; and, rubbing his eyes to clear his sight, he perceived a sombre pile, with a lofty tower and broad roof, immediately in front of him. This structure at once satisfied him as to where he stood. He knew it to be St. Saviour's Church. As he looked up at the massive tower, the clock tolled forth the hour of midnight. The solemn strokes were immediately answered by a multitude of chimes, sounding across the Thames, amongst which the deep note of Saint Paul's was plainly distinguishable. A feeling of inexplicable awe crept over the carpenter as the sounds died away. He trembled, not from any superstitious dread, but from an undefined sense of approaching danger. The peculiar appearance of the sky was not without some influence in awakening these terrors. Over one of the pinnacles of the tower a speck of pallid light marked the position of the moon, then newly born and newly risen. It was still profoundly dark; but the wind, which had begun to blow with some violence, chased the clouds rapidly across the heavens, and dispersed the vapours hanging nearer the earth. Sometimes the moon was totally eclipsed; at others, it shed a wan and ghastly glimmer over the masses rolling in the firmament. Not a star could be discerned, but, in their stead, streaks of lurid radiance, whence proceeding it was impossible to determine, shot ever and anon athwart the dusky vault, and added to the ominous and threatening appearance of the night.

Alarmed by these prognostications of a storm, and feeling too much exhausted from his late severe treatment to proceed further on foot, Wood endeavoured to find a tavern where he might warm and otherwise refresh himself. With this view he struck off into a narrow street on the left, and soon entered a small alehouse, over the door of which hung the sign of the "Welsh Trumpeter."

"Let me have a glass of brandy," said he, addressing the host.

"Too late, master," replied the landlord of the Trumpeter, in a surly tone, for he did not much like the appearance of his customer; "just shut up shop."

"Zounds! David Pugh, don't you know your old friend and countryman?" exclaimed the carpenter.

"Ah! Owen Wood, is it you?" cried David in astonishment. "What the devil makes you out so late? And what has happened to you, man, eh?—you seem in a queer plight."

"Give me the brandy, and I'll tell you," replied Wood.

"Here, wife—hostess—fetch me that bottle from the second shelf in the corner cupboard.—There, Mr. Wood," cried David, pouring out a glass of the spirit, and offering it to the carpenter, "that'll warm the cockles of your heart. Don't be afraid, man,—off with it. It's right Nantz. I keep it for my own drinking," he added in a lower tone.

Mr. Wood having disposed of the brandy, and pronounced himself much better, hurried close to the fire-side, and informed his friend in a few words of the inhospitable treatment he had experienced from the gentlemen of the Mint; whereupon Mr. Pugh, who, as well as the carpenter, was a descendant of Cadwallader, waxed extremely wrath; gave utterance to a number of fierce-sounding imprecations in the Welsh tongue; and was just beginning to express the greatest anxiety to catch some of the rascals at the Trumpeter, when Mr. Wood cut him short by stating his intention of crossing the river as soon as possible in order to avoid the storm.

"A storm!" exclaimed the landlord. "Gadzooks! I thought something was coming on; for when I looked at the weather-glass an hour ago, it had sunk lower than I ever remember it."

"We shall have a durty night on it, to a sartinty, landlord," observed an old one-eyed sailor, who sat smoking his pipe by the fire-side. "The glass never sinks in that way, d'ye see, without a hurricane follerin', I've knowed it often do so in the West Injees. Moreover, a souple o' porpusses came up with the tide this mornin', and ha' bin flounderin' about i' the Thames abuv Lunnun Bridge all day long; and them say-monsters, you know, always proves sure fore runners of a gale."

"Then the sooner I'm off the better," cried Wood; "what's to pay, David?"

"Don't affront me, Owen, by asking such a question," returned the landlord; "hadn't you better stop and finish the bottle?"

"Not a drop more," replied Wood. "Enough's as good as a feast. Good night!"

"Well, if you won't be persuaded, and must have a boat, Owen," observed the landlord, "there's a waterman asleep on that bench will help you to as tidy a craft as any on the Thames. Halloa, Ben!" cried he, shaking a broad-backed fellow, equipped in a short-skirted doublet, and having a badge upon his arm,— "scullers wanted."

"Holloa! my hearty!" cried Ben, starting to his feet.

"This gentleman wants a pair of oars," said the landlord.

"Where to, master?" asked Ben, touching his woollen cap.

"Arundel Stairs," replied Wood, "the nearest point to Wych Street."

"Come along, master," said the waterman.

"Hark 'ee, Ben," said the old sailor, knocking the ashes from his pipe upon the hob; "you may try, but dash my timbers if you'll ever cross the Thames to-night."

"And why not, old saltwater?" inquired Ben, turning a quid in his mouth.

"'Cos there's a gale a-getting up as'll perwent you, young freshwater," replied the tar.

"It must look sharp then, or I shall give it the slip," laughed Ben: "the gale never yet blowed as could perwent my crossing the Thames. The weather's been foul enough for the last fortnight, but I've never turned my back upon it."

"May be not," replied the old sailor, drily; "but you'll find it too stiff for you to-night, anyhow. Howsomdever, if you should reach t'other side, take an old feller's advice, and don't be foolhardy enough to venter back again."

"I tell 'ee what, saltwater," said Ben, "I'll lay you my fare—and that'll be two shillin'—I'm back in an hour."

"Done!" cried the old sailor. "But vere'll be the use o' vinnin'? you von't live to pay me."

"Never fear," replied Ben, gravely; "dead or alive I'll pay you, if I lose. There's my thumb upon it. Come along, master."

"I tell 'ee what, landlord," observed the old sailor, quietly replenishing his pipe from a huge pewter tobacco-box, as the waterman and Wood quitted the house, "you've said good-b'ye to your friend."

"Odd's me! do you think so?" cried the host of the Trumpeter. "I'll run and bring him back. He's a Welshman, and I wouldn't for a trifle that any accident befel him."

"Never mind," said the old sailor, taking up a piece of blazing coal with the tongs, and applying it to his pipe; "let 'em try. They'll be back soon enough—or not at all."

Mr. Wood and the waterman, meanwhile, proceeded in the direction of St. Saviour's Stairs. Casting a hasty glance at the old and ruinous prison belonging to the liberty of the Bishop of Winchester (whose palace formerly adjoined the river), called the Clink, which gave its name to the street, along which he walked: and noticing, with some uneasiness, the melancholy manner in which the wind whistled through its barred casements, the carpenter followed his companion down an opening to the right, and presently arrived at the water-side.

Moored to the steps, several wherries were dancing in the rushing current, as if impatient of restraint. Into one of these the waterman jumped, and, having assisted Mr. Wood to a seat within it, immediately pushed from land. Ben had scarcely adjusted his oars, when the gleam of a lantern was seen moving towards the bank. A shout was heard at a little distance, and, the next moment, a person rushed with breathless haste to the stair-head.

"Boat there!" cried a voice, which Mr. Wood fancied he recognised.

"You'll find a waterman asleep under his tilt in one of them ere craft, if you look about, Sir," replied Ben, backing water as he spoke.

"Can't you take me with you?" urged the voice; "I'll make it well worth your while. I've a child here whom I wish to convey across the water without loss of time."

"A child!" thought Wood; it must be the fugitive Darrell. "Hold hard," cried he, addressing the waterman; "I'll give the gentleman a lift."

"Impossible, master," rejoined Ben; "the tide's running down like a mill-sluice, and the wind's right in our teeth. Old saltwater was right. We shall have a reg'lar squall afore we gets across. D'ye hear how the wanes creaks on old Winchester House? We shall have a touch on it ourselves presently. But I shall lose my wager if I stay a moment longer—so here goes." Upon which, he plunged his oars deeply into the stream, and the bark shot from the strand.

Mr. Wood's anxiety respecting the fugitive was speedily relieved by hearing another waterman busy himself in preparation for starting; and, shortly after, the dip of a second pair of oars sounded upon the river.

"Curse me, if I don't think all the world means to cross the Thames this fine night," observed Ben. "One'd think it rained fares, as well as blowed great guns. Why, there's another party on the stair-head inquiring arter scullers; and, by the mass! they appear in a greater hurry than any on us."

His attention being thus drawn to the bank, the carpenter beheld three figures, one of whom bore a torch, leap into a wherry of a larger size than the others, which immediately put off from shore. Manned by a couple of watermen, who rowed with great swiftness, this wherry dashed through the current in the track of the fugitive, of whom it was evidently in pursuit, and upon whom it perceptibly gained. Mr. Wood strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of the flying skiff. But he could only discern a black and shapeless mass, floating upon the water at a little distance, which, to his bewildered fancy, appeared absolutely standing still. To the practised eye of the waterman matters wore a very different air. He perceived clearly enough, that the chase was moving quickly; and he was also aware, from the increased rapidity with which the oars were urged, that every exertion was made on board to get out of the reach of her pursuers. At one moment, it seemed as if the flying bark was about to put to shore. But this plan (probably from its danger) was instantly abandoned; not, however, before her momentary hesitation had been taken advantage of by her pursuers, who, redoubling their efforts at this juncture, materially lessened the distance between them.

Ben watched these manoeuvres with great interest, and strained every sinew in his frame to keep ahead of the other boats.

"Them's catchpoles, I s'pose, Sir, arter the gemman with a writ?" he observed.

"Something worse, I fear," Wood replied.

"Why, you don't think as how they're crimps, do you?" Ben inquired.

"I don't know what I think," Wood answered sulkily; and he bent his eyes upon the water, as if he wished to avert his attention forcibly from the scene.

There is something that inspires a feeling of inexpressible melancholy in sailing on a dark night upon the Thames. The sounds that reach the ear, and the objects that meet the eye, are all calculated to awaken a train of sad and serious contemplation. The ripple of the water against the boat, as its keel cleaves through the stream—the darkling

current hurrying by—the indistinctly-seen craft, of all forms and all sizes, hovering around, and making their way in ghost-like silence, or warning each other of their approach by cries, that, heard from afar, have something doleful in their note—the solemn shadows cast by the bridges—the deeper gloom of the echoing arches—the lights glimmering from the banks—the red reflection thrown upon the waves by a fire kindled on some stationary barge—the tall and fantastic shapes of the houses, as discerned through the obscurity;—these, and other sights and sounds of the same character, give a sombre colour to the thoughts of one who may choose to indulge in meditation at such a time and in such a place.

But it was otherwise with the carpenter. This was no night for the indulgence of dreamy musing. It was a night of storm and terror, which promised each moment to become more stormy and more terrible. Not a bark could be discerned on the river, except those already mentioned. The darkness was almost palpable; and the wind which, hitherto, had been blowing in gusts, was suddenly lulled. It was a dead calm. But this calm was more awful than the previous roaring of the blast.

Amid this portentous hush, the report of a pistol reached the carpenter's ears; and, raising his head at the sound, he beheld a sight which filled him with fresh apprehensions.

By the light of a torch borne at the stern of the hostile wherry, he saw that the pursuers had approached within a short distance of the object of their quest. The shot had taken effect upon the waterman who rowed the chase. He had abandoned his oars, and the boat was drifting with the stream towards the enemy. Escape was now impossible. Darrell stood erect in the bark, with his drawn sword in hand, prepared to repel the attack of his assailants, who, in their turn, seemed to await with impatience the moment which should deliver him into their power.

They had not to tarry long. In another instant, the collision took place. The watermen, who manned the larger wherry, immediately shipped their oars, grappled with the drifting skiff, and held it fast. Wood, then, beheld two persons, one of whom he recognised as Rowland, spring on board the chase. A fierce struggle ensued. There was a shrill cry, instantly succeeded by a deep splash.

"Put about, waterman, for God's sake!" cried Wood, whose humanity got the better of every personal consideration; "some one is overboard. Give way, and let us render what assistance we can to the poor wretch."

"It's all over with him by this time, master," replied Ben, turning the head of his boat, and rowing swiftly towards the scene of strife; "but d—n him, he was the chap as hit poor Bill Thomson just now, and I don't much care if he should be food for fishes."

As Ben spoke, they drew near the opposing parties. The contest was now carried on between Rowland and Darrell. The latter had delivered himself from one of his assailants, the attendant, Davies. Hurling over the sides of the skiff, the ruffian speedily found a watery grave. It was a spring-tide at half ebb; and the current, which was running fast and furiously, bore him instantly away. While the strife raged between the principals, the watermen in the larger wherry were occupied in stemming the force of the torrent, and endeavouring to keep the boats, they had lashed together, stationary. Owing to this circumstance, Mr. Wood's boat, impelled alike by oar and tide, shot past the mark at which it aimed; and before it could be again brought about, the struggle had terminated. For a few minutes, Darrell seemed to have the advantage in the conflict. Neither combatant could use his sword; and in strength the fugitive was evidently superior to his antagonist. The boat rocked violently with the struggle. Had it not been lashed to the adjoining wherry, it must have been upset, and have precipitated the opponents into the water. Rowland felt himself sinking beneath the powerful grasp of his enemy. He called to the other attendant, who held the torch. Understanding the appeal, the man snatched his master's sword from his grasp, and passed it through Darrell's body. The next moment, a heavy plunge told that the fugitive had been consigned to the waves.

Darrell, however, rose again instantly; and though mortally wounded, made a desperate effort to regain the boat.

"My child!" he groaned faintly.

"Well reminded," answered Rowland, who had witnessed his struggles with a smile of gratified vengeance; "I had forgotten the accursed imp in this confusion. Take it," he cried, lifting the babe from the bottom of the boat, and flinging it towards its unfortunate father.

The child fell within a short distance of Darrell, who, hearing the splash, struck out in that direction, and caught it before it sank. At this juncture, the sound of oars reached his ears, and he perceived Mr. Wood's boat bearing up towards him.

"Here he is, waterman," exclaimed the benevolent carpenter. "I see him!—row for your life!"

"That's the way to miss him, master," replied Ben coolly. "We must keep still. The tide'll bring him to us fast enough."

Ben judged correctly. Borne along by the current, Darrell was instantly at the boat's side.

"Seize this oar," vociferated the waterman.

"First take the child," cried Darrell, holding up the infant, and clinging to the oar with a dying effort.

"Give it me," returned the carpenter; "all's safe. Now lend me your own hand."

"My strength fails me," gasped the fugitive. "I cannot climb the boat. Take my child to—it is—oh God!—I am sinking—take it—take it!"

"Where?" shouted Wood.

Darrell attempted to reply. But he could only utter an inarticulate exclamation. The next moment his grasp relaxed, and he sank to rise no more.

Rowland, meantime, alarmed by the voices, snatched a torch from his attendant, and holding it over the side of the wherry, witnessed the incident just described.

"Confusion!" cried he; "there is another boat in our wake. They have rescued the child. Loose the wherry, and stand to your oars—quick—quick!"

These commands were promptly obeyed. The boat was set free, and the men resumed their seats. Rowland's purposes were, however, defeated in a manner as unexpected as appalling.

During the foregoing occurrences a dead calm prevailed. But as Rowland sprang to the helm, and gave the signal for pursuit, a roar like a volley of ordnance was heard aloft, and the wind again burst its bondage. A moment before, the surface of the stream was black as ink. It was now whitening, hissing, and seething like an enormous cauldron. The blast once more swept over the agitated river: whirled off the sheets of foam, scattered them far and wide in rain-drops, and left the raging torrent blacker than before. The gale had become a hurricane: that hurricane was the most terrible that ever laid waste our city. Destruction everywhere marked its course. Steeples toppled, and towers reeled beneath its fury. Trees were torn up by the roots; many houses were levelled to the ground; others were unroofed; the leads on the churches were ripped off, and "shrivelled up like scrolls of parchment." Nothing on land or water was spared by

the remorseless gale. Most of the vessels lying in the river were driven from their moorings, dashed tumultuously against each other, or blown ashore. All was darkness, horror, confusion, ruin. Men fled from their tottering habitations, and returned to them scared by greater dangers. The end of the world seemed at hand.

At this time of universal havoc and despair,—when all London quaked at the voice of the storm,—the carpenter, who was exposed to its utmost fury, fared better than might have been anticipated. The boat in which he rode was not upset. Fortunately, her course had been shifted immediately after the rescue of the child; and, in consequence of this movement, she received the first shock of the hurricane, which blew from the southwest, upon her stern. Her head dipped deeply into the current, and she narrowly escaped being swamped. Righting, however, instantly afterwards, she scudded with the greatest rapidity over the boiling waves, to whose mercy she was now entirely abandoned. On this fresh outburst of the storm, Wood threw himself instinctively into the bottom of the boat, and clasping the little orphan to his breast, endeavoured to prepare himself to meet his fate.

While he was thus occupied, he felt a rough grasp upon his arm, and presently afterwards Ben's lips approached close to his ear. The waterman sheltered his mouth with his hand while he spoke, or his voice would have been carried away by the violence of the blast.

"It's all up, master," groaned Ben, "nothin' short of a merracle can save us. The boat's sure to run foul o' the bridge; and if she 'scapes stavin' above, she'll be swamped to a sartainty below. There'll be a fall of above twelve foot o' water, and think o' that on a night as 'ud blow a whole fleet to the devil."

Mr. Wood did think of it, and groaned aloud.

"Heaven help us!" he exclaimed; "we were mad to neglect the old sailor's advice."

"That's what troubles me," rejoined Ben. "I tell 'ee what, master, if you're more fortunate nor I am, and get ashore, give old saltwater your fare. I pledged my thumb that, dead or alive, I'd pay the wager if I lost; and I should like to be as good as my word."

"I will—I will," replied Wood hastily. "Was that thunder?" he faltered, as a terrible clap was heard overhead.

"No; it's only a fresh gale," Ben returned: "hark! now it comes."

"Lord have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!" ejaculated Wood, as a fearful gust dashed the water over the side of the boat, deluging him with spray.

The hurricane had now reached its climax. The blast shrieked, as if exulting in its wrathful mission. Stunning and continuous, the din seemed almost to take away the power of hearing. He, who had faced the gale, would have been instantly stifled. Piercing through every crevice in the clothes, it, in some cases, tore them from the wearer's limbs, or from his grasp. It penetrated the skin; benumbed the flesh; paralysed the faculties. The intense darkness added to the terror of the storm. The destroying angel hurried by, shrouded in his gloomiest apparel. None saw, though all felt, his presence, and heard the thunder of his voice. Imagination, coloured by the obscurity, peopled the air with phantoms. Ten thousand steeds appeared to be trampling aloft, charged with the work of devastation. Awful shapes seemed to flit by, borne on the wings of the tempest, animating and directing its fury. The actual danger was lost sight of in these wild apprehensions; and many timorous beings were scared beyond reason's verge by the excess of their fears.

This had well nigh been the case with the carpenter. He was roused from the stupor of despair into which he had sunk by the voice of Ben, who roared in his ear, "The bridge!—the bridge!"

Jack Sheppard Volume I by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VII.

Old London Bridge.

London, at the period of this history, boasted only a single bridge. But that bridge was more remarkable than any the metropolis now possesses. Covered with houses, from one end to the other, this reverend and picturesque structure presented the appearance of a street across the Thames. It was as if Grace-church Street, with all its shops, its magazines, and ceaseless throng of passengers, were stretched from the Middlesex to the Surrey shore. The houses were older, the shops gloomier, and the thoroughfare narrower, it is true; but the bustle, the crowd, the street-like air was the same. Then the bridge had arched gateways, bristling with spikes, and garnished (as all ancient gateways ought to be) with the heads of traitors. In olden days it boasted a chapel, dedicated to Saint Thomas; beneath which there was a crypt curiously constructed amid the arches, where "was sepultured Peter the Chaplain of Colechurch, who began the Stone Bridge at London:" and it still boasted an edifice (though now in rather a tumbledown condition) which had once vied with a palace,—we mean Nonesuch House. The other buildings stood close together in rows; and so valuable was every inch of room accounted, that, in many cases, cellars, and even habitable apartments, were constructed in the solid masonry of the piers.

Old London Bridge (the grandsire of the present erection) was supported on nineteen arches, each of which

Would a Rialto make for depth and height!

The arches stood upon enormous piers; the piers on starlings, or jetties, built far out into the river to break the force of the tide.

Roused by Ben's warning, the carpenter looked up and could just perceive the dusky outline of the bridge looming through the darkness, and rendered indistinctly visible by the many lights that twinkled from the windows of the lofty houses. As he gazed at these lights, they suddenly seemed to disappear, and a tremendous shock was felt throughout the frame of the boat. Wood started to his feet. He found that the skiff had been dashed against one of the buttresses of the bridge.

"Jump!" cried Ben, in a voice of thunder.

Wood obeyed. His fears supplied him with unwonted vigour. Though the starling was more than two feet above the level of the water, he alighted with his little charge—which he had never for an instant quitted—in safety upon it. Poor Ben was not so fortunate. Just as he was preparing to follow, the wherry containing Rowland and his men, which had drifted in their wake, was dashed against his boat. The violence of the collision nearly threw him backwards, and caused him to swerve as he sprang. His foot touched the rounded edge of the starling, and glanced off, precipitating him into the water. As he fell, he caught at the projecting masonry. But the stone was slippery; and the tide, which here began to feel the influence of the fall, was running with frightful velocity. He could not make good his hold. But, uttering a loud cry, he was swept away by the headlong torrent.

Mr. Wood heard the cry. But his own situation was too perilous to admit of his rendering any assistance to the ill-fated waterman. He fancied, indeed, that he beheld a figure spring upon the starling at the moment when the boats came in contact; but, as he could perceive no one near him, he concluded he must have been mistaken.

In order to make Mr. Wood's present position, and subsequent proceedings fully intelligible, it may be necessary to give some notion of the shape and structure of the platform on which he had taken refuge. It has been said, that the pier of each arch, or lock of Old London Bridge, was defended from the force of the tide by a huge projecting spur called a starling. These starlings varied in width, according to the bulk of the pier they surrounded. But they were all pretty nearly of the same length, and built somewhat after the model of a boat, having extremities as sharp and pointed as the keel of a canoe. Cased and ribbed with stone, and braced with horizontal beams of timber, the piles, which formed the foundation of these jetties, had resisted the strong encroachments of the current for centuries. Some of them are now buried at the bottom of the Thames. The starling, on which the carpenter stood, was the fourth from the Surrey shore. It might be three yards in width, and a few more in length; but it was covered with ooze and slime, and the waves continually broke over it. The transverse spars before mentioned were as slippery as ice; and the hollows between them were filled ankle-deep with water.

The carpenter threw himself flat upon the starling to avoid the fury of the wind. But in this posture he fared worse than ever. If he ran less risk of being blown over, he stood a much greater chance of being washed off, or stifled. As he lay on his back, he fancied himself gradually slipping off the platform. Springing to his feet in an ecstasy of terror, he stumbled, and had well nigh realized his worst apprehensions. He, next, tried to clamber up the flying buttresses and soffits of the pier, in the hope of reaching some of the windows and other apertures with which, as a man-of-war is studded with port-holes, the sides of the bridge were pierced. But this wild scheme was speedily

abandoned; and, nerved by despair, the carpenter resolved to hazard an attempt, from the execution, almost from the contemplation, of which he had hitherto shrunk. This was to pass under the arch, along the narrow ledge of the starling, and, if possible, attain the eastern platform, where, protected by the bridge, he would suffer less from the excessive violence of the gale.

Assured, if he remained much longer where he was, he would inevitably perish, Wood recommended himself to the protection of Heaven, and began his perilous course. Carefully sustaining the child which, even in that terrible extremity, he had not the heart to abandon, he fell upon his knees, and, guiding himself with his right hand, crept slowly on. He had scarcely entered the arch, when the indraught was so violent, and the noise of the wind so dreadful and astounding, that he almost determined to relinquish the undertaking. But the love of life prevailed over his fears. He went on.

The ledge, along which he crawled, was about a foot wide. In length the arch exceeded seventy feet. To the poor carpenter it seemed an endless distance. When, by slow and toilsome efforts, he had arrived midway, something obstructed his further progress. It was a huge stone placed there by some workmen occupied in repairing the structure. Cold drops stood upon Wood's brow, as he encountered this obstacle. To return was impossible,—to raise himself certain destruction. He glanced downwards at the impetuous torrent, which he could perceive shooting past him with lightning swiftness in the gloom. He listened to the thunder of the fall now mingling with the roar of the blast; and, driven almost frantic by what he heard and saw, he pushed with all his force against the stone. To his astonishment and delight it yielded to the pressure, toppled over the ledge, and sank. Such was the hubbub and tumult around him, that the carpenter could not hear its plunge into the flood. His course, however, was no longer interrupted, and he crept on.

After encountering other dangers, and being twice, compelled to fling himself flat upon his face to avoid slipping from the wet and slimy pathway, he was at length about to emerge from the lock, when, to his inexpressible horror, he found he had lost the child!

All the blood in his veins rushed to his heart, and he shook in every limb as he made this discovery. A species of vertigo seized him. His brain reeled. He fancied that the whole fabric of the bridge was cracking over head,—that the arch was tumbling upon him,—that the torrent was swelling around him, whirling him off, and about to bury him in the deafening abyss. He shrieked with agony, and clung with desperate tenacity to the roughened stones. But calmer thoughts quickly succeeded. On taxing his recollection, the whole circumstance rushed to mind with painful distinctness. He remembered that, before he attempted to dislodge the stone, he had placed the child in a cavity of the pier, which the granite mass had been intended to fill. This obstacle being removed, in his

eagerness to proceed, he had forgotten to take his little charge with him. It was still possible the child might be in safety. And so bitterly did the carpenter reproach himself with his neglect, that he resolved, at all risks, to go back in search of it. Acting upon this humane determination, he impelled himself slowly backwards,—for he did not dare to face the blast,—and with incredible labour and fatigue reached the crevice. His perseverance was amply rewarded. The child was still safe. It lay undisturbed in the remotest corner of the recess.

So overjoyed was the carpenter with the successful issue of his undertaking, that he scarcely paused a moment to recruit himself; but, securing the child, set out upon his return. Retracing his steps, he arrived, without further accident, at the eastern platform of the starling. As he anticipated, he was here comparatively screened from the fury of the wind; and when he gazed upon the roaring fall beneath him, visible through the darkness in a glistening sheet of foam, his heart overflowed with gratitude for his providential deliverance.

As he moved about upon the starling, Mr. Wood became sensible that he was not alone. Some one was standing beside him. This, then, must be the person whom he had seen spring upon the western platform at the time of the collision between the boats. The carpenter well knew from the obstacle which had interfered with his own progress, that the unknown could not have passed through the same lock as himself. But he might have crept along the left side of the pier, and beneath the further arch; whereas, Wood, as we have seen, took his course upon the right. The darkness prevented the carpenter from discerning the features or figure of the stranger; and the ceaseless din precluded the possibility of holding any communication by words with him. Wood, however, made known his presence to the individual by laying his hand upon his shoulder. The stranger started at the touch, and spoke. But his words were borne away by the driving wind.

Finding all attempts at conversation with his companion in misfortune in vain, Wood, in order to distract his thoughts, looked up at the gigantic structure standing, like a wall of solid darkness, before him. What was his transport on perceiving that a few yards above him a light was burning. The carpenter did not hesitate a moment. He took a handful of the gravelly mud, with which the platform was covered, and threw the small pebbles, one by one, towards the gleam. A pane of glass was shattered by each stone. The signal of distress was evidently understood. The light disappeared. The window was shortly after opened, and a rope ladder, with a lighted horn lantern attached to it, let down.

Wood grasped his companion's arm to attract his attention to this unexpected means of escape. The ladder was now within reach. Both advanced towards it, when, by the light of the lantern, Wood beheld, in the countenance of the stranger, the well-remembered and stern features of Rowland.

The carpenter trembled; for he perceived Rowland's gaze fixed first upon the infant, and then on himself.

"It is her child!" shrieked Rowland, in a voice heard above the howling of the tempest, "risen from this roaring abyss to torment me. Its parents have perished. And shall their wretched offspring live to blight my hopes, and blast my fame? Never!" And, with these words, he grasped Wood by the throat, and, despite his resistance, dragged him to the very verge of the platform.

All this juncture, a thundering crash was heard against the side of the bridge. A stack of chimneys, on the house above them, had yielded to the storm, and descended in a shower of bricks and stones.

When the carpenter a moment afterwards stretched out his hand, scarcely knowing whether he was alive or dead, he found himself alone. The fatal shower, from which he and his little charge escaped uninjured, had stricken his assailant and precipitated him into the boiling gulf.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," thought the carpenter, turning his attention to the child, whose feeble struggles and cries proclaimed that, as yet, life had not been extinguished by the hardships it had undergone. "Poor little creature!" he muttered, pressing it tenderly to his breast, as he grasped the rope and clambered up to the window: "if thou hast, indeed, lost both thy parents, as that terrible man said just now, thou art not wholly friendless and deserted, for I myself will be a father to thee! And in memory of this dreadful night, and the death from which I have, been the means of preserving thee, thou shalt bear the name of THAMES DARRELL."

No sooner had Wood crept through the window, than nature gave way, and he fainted. On coming to himself, he found he had been wrapped in a blanket and put to bed with a couple of hot bricks to his feet. His first inquiries were concerning the child, and he was delighted to find that it still lived and was doing well. Every care had been taken of it, as well as of himself, by the humane inmates of the house in which he had sought shelter.

About noon, next day, he was able to move; and the gale having abated, he set out homewards with his little charge.

The city presented a terrible picture of devastation. London Bridge had suffered a degree less than most places. But it was almost choked up with fallen stacks of chimneys, broken beams of timber, and shattered tiles. The houses overhung in a frightful manner, and looked as if the next gust would precipitate them into the river.

With great difficulty, Wood forced a path through the ruins. It was a work of no slight danger, for every instant a wall, or fragment of a building, came crashing to the ground. Thames Street was wholly impassable. Men were going hither and thither with barrows, and ladders and ropes, removing the rubbish, and trying to support the tottering habitations. Grace-church Street was entirely deserted, except by a few stragglers, whose curiosity got the better of their fears; or who, like the carpenter, were compelled to proceed along it. The tiles lay a foot thick in the road. In some cases they were ground almost to powder; in others, driven deeply into the earth, as if discharged from a piece of ordnance. The roofs and gables of many of the houses had been torn off. The signs of the shops were carried to incredible distances. Here and there, a building might be seen with the doors and windows driven in, and all access to it prevented by the heaps of bricks and tilesherds.

Through this confusion the carpenter struggled on;—now ascending, now descending the different mountains of rubbish that beset his path, at the imminent peril of his life and limbs, until he arrived in Fleet Street. The hurricane appeared to have raged in this quarter with tenfold fury. Mr. Wood scarcely knew where he was. The old aspect of the place was gone. In lieu of the substantial habitations which he had gazed on overnight, he beheld a row of falling scaffoldings, for such they seemed.

It was a dismal and depressing sight to see a great city thus suddenly overthrown; and the carpenter was deeply moved by the spectacle. As usual, however, on the occasion of any great calamity, a crowd was scouring the streets, whose sole object was plunder. While involved in this crowd, near Temple Bar,—where the thoroughfare was most dangerous from the masses of ruin that impeded it,—an individual, whose swarthy features recalled to the carpenter one of his tormentors of the previous night, collared him, and, with bitter imprecations accused him of stealing his child. In vain Wood protested his innocence. The ruffian's companions took his part. And the infant, in all probability, would have been snatched from its preserver, if a posse of the watch (sent out to maintain order and protect property) had not opportunely arrived, and by a vigorous application of their halberts dispersed his persecutors, and set him at liberty.

Mr. Wood then took to his heels, and never once looked behind him till he reached his own dwelling in Wych Street. His wife met him at the door, and into her hands he delivered his little charge.

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