JACK SHEPPARD
VOLUME II
BY
WILLIAM
HARRISON
AINSWORTH

Freeditorial

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER I
The Idle Apprentice

Twelve years! How many events have occurred during that long interval! how many changes have taken place! The whole aspect of things is altered. The child has sprung into a youth; the youth has become a man; the man has already begun to feel the advances of age. Beauty has bloomed and faded. Fresh flowers of loveliness have budded, expanded, died. The fashions of the day have become antiquated. New customs have prevailed over the old. Parties, politics, and popular opinions have changed. The crown has passed from the brow of one monarch to that of another. Habits and tastes are no longer the same. We, ourselves, are scarcely the same we were twelve years ago.

Twelve years ago! It is an awful retrospect. Dare we look back upon the darkened vista, and, in imagination retrace the path we have trod? With how many vain hopes is it shaded! with how many good resolutions, never fulfilled, is it paved! Where are the dreams of ambition in which, twelve years ago, we indulged? Where are the aspirations that fired us—the passions that consumed us then? Has our success in life been commensurate with our own desires—with the anticipations formed of us by others? Or, are we not blighted in heart, as in ambition? Has not the loved one been estranged by doubt, or snatched from us by the cold hand of death? Is not the goal, towards which we pressed, further off than ever—the prospect before us cheerless as the blank behind?—Enough of this. Let us proceed with our tale.

Twelve years, then, have elapsed since the date of the occurrences detailed in the preceding division of this history. At that time, we were beneath the sway of Anne: we are now at the commencement of the reign of George the First. Passing at a glance over the whole of the intervening period; leaving in the words of the poet,

—The growth untried
Of that wide gap—
we shall resume our narrative at the beginning of June, .

One Friday afternoon, in this pleasant month, it chanced that Mr. Wood, who had been absent on business during the greater part of the day, returned (perhaps not altogether undesignedly) at an earlier hour than was expected, to his dwelling in Wych Street, Drury Lane; and was about to enter his workshop, when, not hearing any sound of labour issue from within, he began to suspect that an apprentice, of whose habits of

industry he entertained some doubt, was neglecting his employment. Impressed with this idea, he paused for a moment to listen. But finding all continue silent, he cautiously lifted the latch, and crept into the room, resolved to punish the offender in case his suspicions should prove correct.

The chamber, into which he stole, like all carpenters' workshops, was crowded with the implements and materials of that ancient and honourable art. Saws, hammers, planes, axes, augers, adzes, chisels, gimblets, and an endless variety of tools were ranged, like a stand of martial weapons at an armoury, in racks against the walls. Over these hung levels, bevels, squares, and other instruments of measurement. Amid a litter of nails without heads, screws without worms, and locks without wards, lay a glue-pot and an oilstone, two articles which their owner was wont to term "his right hand and his left." On a shelf was placed a row of paint-jars; the contents of which had been daubed in rainbow streaks upon the adjacent closet and window sill. Divers plans and figures were chalked upon the walls; and the spaces between them were filled up with an almanack for the year; a godly ballad, adorned with a rude wood-cut, purporting to be "The History of Chaste Susannah;" an old print of the Seven Golden Candlesticks; an abstract of the various Acts of Parliament against drinking, swearing, and all manner of profaneness; and a view of the interior of Doctor Daniel Burgess's Presbyterian meeting-house in Russell Court, with portraits of the reverend gentleman and the principal members of his flock. The floor was thickly strewn with sawdust and shavings; and across the room ran a long and wide bench, furnished at one end with a powerful vice; next to which three nails driven into the boards served, it would appear from the lump of unconsumed tallow left in their custody, as a substitute for a candlestick. On the bench was set a quartern measure of gin, a crust of bread, and a slice of cheese. Attracted by the odour of the latter dainty, a hungry cat had contrived to scratch open the paper in which it was wrapped, displaying the following words in large characters:—"THE HISTORY OF THE FOUR KINGS, OR CHILD'S BEST GUIDE TO THE GALLOWS." And, as if to make the moral more obvious, a dirty pack of cards was scattered, underneath, upon the sawdust. Near the door stood a pile of deal planks, behind which the carpenter ensconced himself in order to reconnoitre, unobserved, the proceedings of his idle apprentice.

Standing on tiptoe, on a joint-stool, placed upon the bench, with his back to the door, and a clasp-knife in his hand, this youngster, instead of executing his appointed task, was occupied in carving his name upon a beam, overhead. Boys, at the time of which we write, were attired like men of their own day, or certain charity-children of ours; and the stripling in question was dressed in black plush breeches, and a gray drugget waistcoat, with immoderately long pockets, both of which were evidently the cast-off clothes of some one considerably his senior. Coat, on the present occasion, he had none, it being more convenient, as well as agreeable to him, to pursue his avocations in his

shirtsleeves; but, when fully equipped, he wore a large- cuffed, long-skirted garment, which had once been the property of his master.

In concealing himself behind the timber, Mr. Wood could not avoid making a slight shuffling sound. The noise startled the apprentice, who instantly suspended his labour, and gazed anxiously in the direction whence he supposed it proceeded. His face was that of a quick, intelligent-looking boy, with fine hazel eyes, and a clear olive complexion. His figure was uncommonly slim even for his age, which could not be more than thirteen; and the looseness of his garb made him appear thinner than he was in reality. But if his frame was immature, his looks were not so. He seemed to possess a penetration and cunning beyond his years—to hide a man's judgment under a boy's mask. The glance, which he threw at the door, was singularly expressive of his character: it was a mixture of alarm, effrontery, and resolution. In the end, resolution triumphed, as it was sure to do, over the weaker emotions, and he laughed at his fears. The only part of his otherwise-interesting countenance, to which one could decidedly object, was the mouth; a feature that, more than any other, is conceived to betray the animal propensities of the possessor. If this is true, it must be owned that the boy's mouth showed a strong tendency on his part to coarse indulgence. The eyes, too, though large and bright, and shaded by long lashes, seemed to betoken, as hazel eyes generally do in men, a faithless and uncertain disposition. The cheek-bones were prominent: the nose slightly depressed, with rather wide nostrils; the chin narrow, but well-formed; the forehead broad and lofty; and he possessed such an extraordinary flexibility of muscle in this region, that he could elevate his eye-brows at pleasure up to the very verge of his sleek and shining black hair, which, being closely cropped, to admit of his occasionally wearing a wig, gave a singular bullet-shape to his head. Taken altogether, his physiognomy resembled one of those vagabond heads which Murillo delighted to paint, and for which Guzman d'Alfarache, Lazarillo de Tormes, or Estevanillo Gonzalez might have sat:—faces that almost make one in love with roguery, they seem so full of vivacity and enjoyment. There was all the knavery, and more than all the drollery of a Spanish picaroon in the laughing eyes of the English apprentice; and, with a little more warmth and sunniness of skin on the side of the latter, the resemblance between them would have been complete.

Satisfied, as he thought, that he had nothing to apprehend, the boy resumed his task, chanting, as he plied his knife with redoubled assiduity, the following—not inappropriate strains:—

THE NEWGATE STONE.
When Claude Du Val was in Newgate thrown,
He carved his name on the dungeon stone;
Quoth a dubsman, who gazed on the shattered wall,

"You have carved your epitaph, Claude Du Val,
With your chisel so fine, tra la!"
"This S wants a little deepening," mused the apprentice, retouching the letter in question; "ay, that's better."

Du Val was hang'd, and the next who came
On the selfsame stone inscribed his name:
"Aha!" quoth the dubsman, with devilish glee,
"Tom Waters your doom is the triple tree!
With your chisel so fine, tra la!"
"Tut, tut, tut," he cried, "what a fool I am to be sure! I ought to have cut John, not Jack. However, it don't signify. Nobody ever called me John, that I recollect. So I dare say I was christened Jack. Deuce take it! I was very near spelling my name with one P.

Within that dungeon lay Captain Bew,
Rumbold and Whitney—a jolly crew!
All carved their names on the stone, and all
Share the fate of the brave Du Val!
With their chisels so fine, tra la!
"Save us!" continued the apprentice, "I hope this beam doesn't resemble the Newgate stone; or I may chance, like the great men the song speaks of, to swing on the Tyburn tree for my pains. No fear o' that.—Though if my name should become as famous as theirs, it wouldn't much matter. The prospect of the gallows would never deter me from taking to the road, if I were so inclined.

Full twenty highwaymen blithe and bold,
Rattled their chains in that dungeon old;
Of all that number there 'scaped not one
Who carved his name on the Newgate Stone.
With his chisel so fine, tra la!
"There!" cried the boy, leaping from the stool, and drawing back a few paces on the bench to examine his performance,—"that'll do. Claude du Val himself couldn't have carved it better—ha! ha!"

The name inscribed upon the beam (of which, as it has been carefully preserved by the subsequent owners of Mr. Wood's habitation in Wych Street, we are luckily enabled to furnish a facsimile) was

"I've half a mind to give old Wood the slip, and turn highwayman," cried Jack, as he closed the knife, and put it in his pocket.

"The devil you have!" thundered a voice from behind, that filled the apprentice with dismay. "Come down, sirrah, and I'll teach you how to deface my walls in future. Come down, I say, instantly, or I'll make you." Upon which, Mr. Wood caught hold of Jack's leg, and dragged him off the bench.

"And so you'll turn highwayman, will you, you young dog?" continued the carpenter, cuffing him soundly,—"rob the mails, like Jack Hall, I suppose."

"Yes, I will," replied Jack sullenly, "if you beat me in that way."

Amazed at the boy's assurance, Wood left off boxing his ears for a moment, and, looking at him steadfastly, said in a grave tone, "Jack, Jack, you'll come to be hanged!"

" Better be hanged than hen-pecked," retorted the lad with a malicious grin.

"What do you mean by that, sirrah?" cried Wood, reddening with anger. "Do you dare to insinuate that Mrs. Wood governs me?"

"It's plain you can't govern yourself, at all events," replied Jack coolly; "but, be that as it may, I won't be struck for nothing."

"Nothing," echoed Wood furiously. "Do you call neglecting your work, and singing flash songs nothing? Zounds! you incorrigible rascal, many a master would have taken you before a magistrate, and prayed for your solitary confinement in Bridewell for the least of these offences. But I'll be more lenient, and content myself with merely chastising you, on condition—"

"You may do as you please, master," interrupted Jack, thrusting his hand into his pocket, as if in search of the knife; "but I wouldn't advise you to lay hands on me again."

Mr. Wood glanced at the hardy offender, and not liking the expression of his countenance, thought it advisable to postpone the execution of his threats to a more favourable opportunity. So, by way of gaining time, he resolved to question him further.

"Where did you learn the song I heard just now?" he demanded, in an authoritative tone.

"At the Black Lion in our street," replied Jack, without hesitation.

"The worst house in the neighbourhood—the constant haunt of reprobates and thieves," groaned Wood. "And who taught it you—the landlord, Joe Hind?"

"No; one Blueskin, a fellow who frequents the Lion," answered Jack, with a degree of candour that astonished his master nearly as much as his confidence. "It was that song that put it into my head to cut my name on the beam."

"A white wall is a fool's paper, Jack,—remember that," rejoined Wood. "Pretty company for an apprentice to keep!—pretty houses for an apprentice to frequent! Why, the rascal you mention is a notorious house-breaker. He was tried at the last Old Bailey sessions; and only escaped the gallows by impeaching his accomplices. Jonathan Wild brought him off."

"Do you happen to know Jonathan Wild, master?" inquired Jack, altering his tone, and assuming a more respectful demeanour.

"I've seen him some years ago, I believe," answered Wood; "and, though he must be much changed by this time, I dare say I should know him again."

"A short man, isn't he, about your height, Sir,—with a yellow beard, and a face as sly as a fox's?"

"Hem!" replied Wood, coughing slightly to conceal a smile; "the description's not amiss. But why do you ask?"

"Because—" stammered the boy.

"Speak out—don't be alarmed," said Wood, in a kind and encouraging tone. "If you've done wrong, confess it, and I'll forgive you!"

"I don't deserve to be forgiven!" returned Jack, bursting into tears; "for I'm afraid I've done very wrong. Do you know this, Sir?" he added, taking a key from his pocket.

"Where did you find it!" asked Wood.

"It was given me by a man who was drinking t'other night with Blueskin at the Lion! and who, though he slouched his hat over his eyes, and muffled his chin in a handkerchief, must have been Jonathan Wild."

"Where did he get it?" inquired Wood, in surprise.

"That I can't say. But he promised to give me a couple of guineas if I'd ascertain whether it fitted your locks."

"Zounds!" exclaimed Wood; "it's my old master-key. This key," he added, taking it from the boy, "was purloined from me by your father, Jack. What he intended to do with it is of little consequence now. But before he suffered at Tyburn, he charged your mother to restore it. She lost it in the Mint. Jonathan Wild must have stolen it from her."

"He must," exclaimed Jack, hastily; "but only let me have it till to-morrow, and if I don't entrap him in a snare from which, with all his cunning, he shall find it difficult to escape, my name's not Jack Sheppard."

"I see through your design, Jack," returned the carpenter, gravely; "but I don't like under-hand work. Even when you've a knave to deal with, let your actions be plain, and above-board. That's my maxim; and it's the maxim of every honest man. It would be a great matter, I must own, to bring Jonathan Wild to justice. But I can't consent to the course you would pursue—at least, not till I've given it due consideration. In regard to yourself, you've had a very narrow escape. Wild's intention, doubtless, was to use you as far as he found necessary, and then to sell you. Let this be a caution to you in future—with whom, and about what you deal. We're told, that 'Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul.' Avoid taverns and bad company, and you may yet do well. You promise to become a first-rate workman. But you want one quality, without which all others are valueless. You want industry—you want steadiness. Idleness is the key of beggary, Jack. If you don't conquer this disgraceful propensity in time, you'll soon come to want; and then nothing can save you. Be warned by your father's fate. As you brew so must you drink. I've engaged to watch over you as a son, and I will do so as far as I'm able; but if you neglect my advice, what chance have I of benefitting you? On one point I've made up my mind—you shall either obey me, or leave me. Please yourself. Here are your indentures, if you choose to seek another master."

"I will obey you, master,—indeed I will!" implored Jack, seriously alarmed at the carpenter's calm displeasure.

"We shall see. Good words, without deeds, are rushes and reeds. And now take away those cards, and never let me see them again. Drive away the cat; throw that measure of gin through the window; and tell me why you've not so much as touched the packing-case for Lady Trafford, which I particularly desired you to complete against my return. It must be sent home this evening. She leaves town to-morrow."

"It shall be ready in two hours," answered Jack, seizing a piece of wood and a plane; "it isn't more than four o'clock. I'll engage to get the job done by six. I didn't expect you home before that hour, Sir."

"Ah, Jack," said Wood, shaking his head, "where there's a will there's a way. You can do anything you please. I wish I could get you to imitate Thames Darrell."

"I'm sure I understand the business of a carpenter much better than he does," replied Jack, adroitly adjusting the board, and using the plane with the greatest rapidity.

"Perhaps," replied Wood, doubtfully.

"Thames was always your favourite," observed Jack, as he fastened another piece of wood on the teeth of the iron stopper.

"I've made no distinction between you, hitherto," answered Wood; "nor shall I do so, unless I'm compelled."

"I've had the hard work to do, at all events," rejoined Jack, "But I won't complain. I'd do anything for Thames Darrell."

"And Thames Darrell would do anything for you, Jack," replied a blithe voice. "What's the matter, father!" continued the new-comer, addressing Wood. "Has Jack displeased you? If so, overlook his fault this once. I'm sure he'll do his best to content you. Won't you, Jack?"

"That I will," answered Sheppard, eagerly.

"When it thunders, the thief becomes honest," muttered Wood.

"Can I help you, Jack?" asked Thames, taking up a plane.

"No, no, let him alone," interposed Wood. "He has undertaken to finish this job by six o'clock, and I wish to see whether he'll be as good as his word."

"He'll have hard work to do it by that time, father," remonstrated Thames; "you'd better let me help him."

" On no account," rejoined Wood peremptorily. "A little extra exertion will teach him the advantage of diligence at the proper season. Lost ground must be regained. I need

scarcely ask whether you've executed your appointed task, my dear? You're never behindhand."

Thames turned away at the question, which he felt might be construed into a reproach. But Sheppard answered for him.

"Darrell's job was done early this morning," he said; "and if I'd attended to his advice, the packing-case would have been finished at the same time."

"You trusted too much to your own skill, Jack," rejoined Thames. "If I could work as fast as you, I might afford to be as idle. See how he gets on, father," he added, appealing to Wood: "the box seems to grow under his hands."

"You're a noble-hearted little fellow, Thames," rejoined Wood, casting a look of pride and affection at his adopted son, whose head he gently patted; "and give promise of a glorious manhood."

Thames Darrell was, indeed, a youth of whom a person of far greater worldly consequence than the worthy carpenter might have been justly proud. Though a few months younger than his companion Jack Sheppard, he was half a head taller, and much more robustly formed. The two friends contrasted strikingly with each other. In Darrell's open features, frankness and honour were written in legible characters; while, in Jack's physiognomy, cunning and knavery were as strongly imprinted. In all other respects they differed as materially. Jack could hardly be accounted good-looking: Thames, on the contrary, was one of the handsomest boys possible. Jack's complexion was that of a gipsy; Darrell's as fresh and bright as a rose. Jack's mouth was coarse and large; Darrell's small and exquisitely carved, with the short, proud upper lip, which belongs to the highest order of beauty. Jack's nose was broad and flat; Darrell's straight and fine as that of Antinous. The expression pervading the countenance of the one was vulgarity; of the other, that which is rarely found, except in persons of high birth. Darrell's eyes were of that clear gray which it is difficult to distinguish from blue by day and black at night; and his rich brown hair, which he could not consent to part with, even on the promise of a new and modish peruke from his adoptive father, fell in thick glossy ringlets upon his shoulders; whereas Jack's close black crop imparted the peculiar bullet-shape we have noticed, to his head.

While Thames modestly expressed a hope that he might not belie the carpenter's favourable prediction, Jack Sheppard thought fit to mount a small ladder placed against the wall, and, springing with the agility of an ape upon a sort of frame, contrived to sustain short spars and blocks of timber, began to search about for a piece of wood required in the work on which he was engaged. Being in a great hurry, he took little heed

where he set his feet; and a board giving way, he must have fallen, if he had not grasped a large plank laid upon the transverse beam immediately over his head.

"Take care, Jack," shouted Thames, who witnessed the occurrence; "that plank isn't properly balanced. You'll have it down."

But the caution came too late. Sheppard's weight had destroyed the equilibrium of the plank: it swerved, and slowly descended. Losing his presence of mind, Jack quitted his hold, and dropped upon the frame. The plank hung over his head. A moment more and he would have been crushed beneath the ponderous board, when a slight but strong arm arrested its descent.

"Get from under it, Jack!" vociferated Thames. "I can't hold it much longer—it'll break my wrist. Down we come!" he exclaimed, letting go the plank, which fell with a crash, and leaping after Sheppard, who had rolled off the frame.

All this was the work of a minute.

"No bones broken, I hope," said Thames, laughing at Jack, who limped towards the bench, rubbing his shins as he went.

" All right," replied Sheppard, with affected indifference.

"It's a mercy you both escaped!" ejaculated Wood, only just finding his tongue. "I declare I'm all in a cold sweat. How came you, Sir," he continued, addressing Sheppard, "to venture upon that frame. I always told you some accident would happen."

"Don't scold him, father," interposed Thames; "he's been frightened enough already."

"Well, well, since you desire it, I'll say no more," returned Wood. "You hay'n't hurt your arm, I trust, my dear?" he added, anxiously.

"Only sprained it a little, that's all," answered Thames; "the pain will go off presently."

"Then you are hurt," cried the carpenter in alarm. "Come down stairs directly, and let your mother look at your wrist. She has an excellent remedy for a sprain. And do you, Jack, attend to your work, and mind you don't get into further mischief."

"Hadn't Jack better go with us?" said Thames. "His shin may need rubbing."

"By no means," rejoined Wood, hastily. "A little suffering will do him good. I meant to give him a drubbing. That bruise will answer the same purpose."

"Thames," said Sheppard in a low voice, as he threw a vindictive glance at the carpenter, "I shan't forget this. You've saved my life."

"Pshaw! you'd do as much for me any day, and think no more about it. It'll be your turn to save mine next."

"True, and I shan't be easy till my turn arrives."

"I tell you what, Jack," whispered Thames, who had noticed Sheppard's menacing glance, and dreaded some further indiscretion on his part, "if you really wish to oblige me, you'll get that packing-case finished by six o'clock. You can do it, if you will."

"And I will, if I can, depend upon it," answered Sheppard, with a laugh.

So saying, he manfully resumed his work; while Wood and Thames quitted the room, and went down stairs.

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER II.

Thames Darrell.

Thames Darrell's arm having been submitted to the scrutiny of Mrs. Wood, was pronounced by that lady to be very much sprained; and she, forthwith, proceeded to bathe it with a reddish-coloured lotion. During this operation, the carpenter underwent a severe catechism as to the cause of the accident; and, on learning that the mischance originated with Jack Sheppard, the indignation of his helpmate knew no bounds; and she was with difficulty prevented from flying to the workshop to inflict summary punishment on the offender.

"I knew how it would be," she cried, in the shrill voice peculiar to a shrew, "when you brought that worthless hussy's worthless brat into the house. I told you no good would come of it. And every day's experience proves that I was right. But, like all your overbearing sex, you must have your own way. You'll never be guided by me—never!"

"Indeed, my love, you're entirely mistaken," returned the carpenter, endeavouring to deprecate his wife's rising resentment by the softest looks, and the meekest deportment.

So far, however, was this submission from producing the desired effect, that it seemed only to lend additional fuel to her displeasure. Forgetting her occupation in her anger, she left off bathing Darrell's wrist; and, squeezing his arm so tightly that the boy winced with pain, she clapped her right hand upon her hip, and turned, with flashing eyes and an inflamed countenance, towards her crest-fallen spouse.

"What!" she exclaimed, almost choked with passion,—"I advised you to burthen yourself with that idle and good-for-nothing pauper, who'm you ought rather to send to the workhouse than maintain at your own expense, did I! I advised you to take him as an apprentice; and, so far from getting the regular fee with him, to give him a salary? I advised you to feed him, and clothe him, and treat him like his betters; to put up with his insolence, and wink at his faults? I counselled all this, I suppose. You'll tell me next, I dare say, that I recommended you to go and visit his mother so frequently under the plea of charity; to give her wine, and provisions, and money; to remove her from the only fit quarters for such people—the Mint; and to place her in a cottage at Willesden, of which you must needs pay the rent? Marry, come up! charity should begin at home. A discreet husband would leave the dispensation of his bounty, where women are

concerned, to his wife. And for my part, if I were inclined to exercise my benevolence at all, it should be in favour of some more deserving object than that whining, hypocritical Magdalene."

"It was the knowledge of this feeling on your part, my love, that made me act without your express sanction. I did all for the best, I'm sure. Mrs. Sheppard is—"

"I know what Mrs. Sheppard is, without your information, Sir. I haven't forgotten her previous history. You've your own reasons, no doubt, for bringing up her son—perhaps, I ought rather to say your son, Mr. Wood."

"Really, my love, these accusations are most groundless—this violence is most unnecessary."

"I can't endure the odious baggage. I hope I may never come near her."

"I hope you never may, my love," humbly acquiesced the carpenter.

"Is my house to be made a receptacle for all your natural children, Sir? Answer me that."

"Winny," said Thames, whose glowing cheek attested the effect produced upon him by the insinuation; "Winny," said he, addressing a pretty little damsel of some twelve years of age, who stood by his side holding the bottle of embrocation, "help me on with my coat, please. This is no place for me."

"Sit down, my dear, sit down," interposed Mrs. Wood, softening her asperity. "What I said about natural children doesn't apply to you. Don't suppose," she added, with a scornful glance at her helpmate, "that I would pay him the compliment of thinking he could possibly be the father of such a boy as you."

Mr. Wood lifted up his hands in mute despair.

"Owen, Owen," pursued Mrs. Wood, sinking into a chair, and fanning herself violently,—"what a fluster you have put me into with your violence, to be sure! And at the very time, too, when you know I'm expecting a visit from Mr. Kneebone, on his return from Manchester. I wouldn't have him see me in this state for the world. He'd never forgive you."

"Poh, poh, my dear! Mr. Kneebone invariably takes part with me, when any trifling misunderstanding arises between us. I only wish he was not a Papist and a Jacobite."

"Jacobite!" echoed Mrs. Wood. "Marry, come up! Mightn't he just as reasonably complain of your being a Hanoverian and a Presbyterian? It's all matter of opinion. And now, my love," she added, with a relenting look, "I'm content to make up our quarrel. But you must promise me not to go near that abandoned hussy at Willesden. One can't help being jealous, you know, even of an unworthy object."

Glad to make peace on any terms, Mr. Wood gave the required promise, though he could not help thinking that if either of them had cause to be jealous he was the party.

And here, we may be permitted to offer an observation upon the peculiar and unaccountable influence which ladies of a shrewish turn so frequently exercise over—we can scarcely, in this case, say—their lords and masters; an influence which seems not merely to extend to the will of the husband, but even to his inclinations. We do not remember to have met with a single individual, reported to be under petticoat government, who was not content with his lot,—nay, who so far from repining, did not exult in his servitude; and we see no way of accounting for this apparently inexplicable conduct—for which, among other phenomena of married life, various reasons have been assigned, though none entirely satisfactory to us—except upon the ground that these domineering dames possess some charm sufficiently strong to counteract the irritating effect of their tempers; some secret and attractive quality of which the world at large is in ignorance, and with which their husbands alone can be supposed to be acquainted. An influence of this description appeared to be exerted on the present occasion. The worthy carpenter was restored to instant good humour by a glance from his helpmate; and, notwithstanding the infliction he had just endured, he would have quarrelled with any one who had endeavoured to persuade him that he was not the happiest of men, and Mrs. Wood the best of wives.

"Women must have their wills while they live, since they can make none when they die," observed Wood, as he imprinted a kiss of reconciliation on the plump hand of his consort;—a sentiment to the correctness of which the party chiefly interested graciously vouchsafed her assent.

Lest the carpenter should be taxed with too much uxoriousness, it behoves us to ascertain whether the personal attractions of his helpmate would, in any degree, justify the devotion he displayed. In the first place, Mrs. Wood had the advantage of her husband in point of years, being on the sunny side of forty,—a period pronounced by competent judges to be the most fascinating, and, at the same time, most critical epoch of woman's existence,—whereas, he was on the shady side of fifty,—a term of life not generally conceived to have any special recommendation in female eyes. In the next place, she really had some pretensions to beauty. Accounted extremely pretty in her youth, her features and person expanded as she grew older, without much detriment to

their original comeliness. Hers was beauty on a large scale no doubt; but it was beauty, nevertheless: and the carpenter thought her eyes as bright, her complexion as blooming, and her figure (if a little more buxom) quite as captivating as when he led her to the altar some twenty years ago.

On the present occasion, in anticipation of Mr. Kneebone's visit, Mrs. Wood was dressed with more than ordinary care, and in more than ordinary finery. A dove-coloured kincob gown, embroidered with large trees, and made very low in front, displayed to the greatest possible advantage, the rounded proportions of her figure; while a high-heeled, red-leather shoe did not detract from the symmetry of a very neat ankle, and a very small foot. A stomacher, fastened by imitation-diamond buckles, girded that part of her person, which should have been a waist; a coral necklace encircled her throat, and a few black patches, or mouches, as they were termed, served as a foil to the bloom of her cheek and chin. Upon a table, where they had been hastily deposited, on the intelligence of Darrell's accident, lay a pair of pink kid gloves, bordered with lace, and an enormous fan; the latter, when opened, represented the metamorphosis and death of Actæon. From her stomacher, to which it was attached by a multitude of glittering steel chains, depended an immense turnip-shaped watch, in a pinchbeck case. Her hair was gathered up behind, in a sort of pad, according to the then prevailing mode; and she wore a muslin cap, and pinners with crow-foot edging. A black silk fur-belowed scarf covered her shoulders; and over the kincob gown hung a yellow satin apron, trimmed with white Persian.

But, in spite of her attractions, we shall address ourselves to the younger, and more interesting couple.

"I could almost find in my heart to quarrel with Jack Sheppard for occasioning you so much pain," observed little Winifred Wood, as, having completed her ministration to the best of her ability, she helped Thames on with his coat.

"I don't think you could find in your heart to quarrel with any one, Winny; much less with a person whom I like so much as Jack Sheppard. My arm's nearly well again. And I've already told you the accident was not Jack's fault. So, let's think no more about it."

" It's strange you should like Jack so much dear Thames. He doesn't resemble you at all."

"The very reason why I like him, Winny. If he did resemble me, I shouldn't care about him. And, whatever you may think, I assure you, Jack's a downright good-natured fellow."

Good-natured fellows are always especial favourites with boys. And, in applying the term to his friend, Thames meant to pay him a high compliment. And so Winifred understood him.

"Well," she said, in reply, "I may have done Jack an injustice. I'll try to think better of him in future."

"And, if you want an additional inducement to do so, I can tell you there's no one—not even his mother—whom he loves so well as you."

"Loves!" echoed Winifred, slightly colouring.

"Yes, loves, Winny. Poor fellow! he sometimes indulges the hope of marrying you, when he grows old enough."

"Thames!"

"Have I said anything to offend you?"

"Oh! no. But if you wouldn't have me positively dislike Jack Sheppard, you'll never mention such a subject again. Besides," she added, blushing yet more deeply, "it isn't a proper one to talk upon."

"Well then, to change it," replied Thames, gravely, "suppose I should be obliged to leave you."

Winifred looked as if she could not indulge such a supposition for a single moment.

"Surely," she said, after a pause, "you don't attach any importance to what my mother has just said. She has already forgotten it."

"But I never can forget it, Winny. I will no longer be a burthen to those upon whom I have no claim, but compassion."

As he said this, in a low and mournful, but firm voice, the tears gathered thickly in Winifred's dark eyelashes.

"If you are in earnest, Thames," she replied, with a look of gentle reproach, "you are very foolish; and, if in jest, very cruel. My mother, I'm sure, didn't intend to hurt your feelings. She loves you too well for that. And I'll answer for it, she'll never say a syllable to annoy you again."

Thames tried to answer her, but his voice failed him.

"Come! I see the storm has blown over," cried Winifred, brightening up.

"You're mistaken, Winny. Nothing can alter my determination. I shall quit this roof to-morrow."

The little girl's countenance fell.

"Do nothing without consulting my father—your father, Thames," she implored. "Promise me that."

"Willingly. And what's more, I promise to abide by his decision."

"Then, I'm quite easy," cried Winifred, joyfully.

"I'm sure he won't attempt to prevent me," rejoined Thames.

The slight smile that played upon Winifred's lips seemed to say that she was not quite so sure. But she made no answer.

"In case he should consent—"

"He never will," interrupted Winifred.

"In case he should, I say," continued Thames, "will you promise to let Jack Sheppard take my place in your affections, Winny?"

"Never!" replied the little damsel, "I can never love any one so much as you."

"Excepting your father."

Winifred was going to say "No," but she checked herself; and, with cheeks mantling with blushes, murmured, "I wish you wouldn't tease me about Jack Sheppard."

The foregoing conversation, having been conducted throughout in a low tone, and apart, had not reached the ears of Mr. and Mrs. Wood, who were, furthermore, engaged in a little conjugal tête-à-tête of their own. The last observation, however, caught the attention of the carpenter's wife.

"What's that you're saying about Jack Sheppard?" she cried.

"Thames was just observing—"

" Thames!" echoed Mrs. Wood, glancing angrily at her husband. "There's another instance of your wilfulness and want of taste. Who but you would have dreamed of giving the boy such a name? Why, it's the name of a river, not a Christian. No gentleman was ever called Thames, and Darrell is a gentleman, unless the whole story of his being found in the river is a fabrication!"

"My dear, you forget—"

"No, Mr. Wood, I forget nothing. I've an excellent memory, thank God! And I perfectly remember that everybody was drowned upon that occasion—except yourself and the child!"

"My love you're beside yourself—"

"I was beside myself to take charge of your—"

"Mother?" interposed Winifred.

"It's of no use," observed Thames quietly, but with a look that chilled the little damsel's heart;—"my resolution is taken."

"You at least appear to forget that Mr. Kneebone is coming, my dear," ventured Mr. Wood.

"Good gracious! so I do," exclaimed his amiable consort. "But you do agitate me so much. Come into the parlour, Winifred, and dry your eyes directly, or I'll send you to bed. Mr. Wood, I desire you'll put on your best things, and join us as soon as possible. Thames, you needn't tidy yourself, as you've hurt your arm. Mr. Kneebone will excuse you. Dear me! if there isn't his knock. Oh! I'm in such a fluster!"

Upon which, she snatched up her fan, cast a look into the glass, smoothed down her scarf, threw a soft expression into her features, and led the way into the next room, whither she was followed by her daughter and Thames Darrell.

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER III.

The Jacobite.

Mr. William Kneebone was a woollen-draper of "credit and renown," whose place of business was held at the sign of the Angel (for, in those days, every shop had its sign), opposite Saint Clement's church in the Strand. A native of Manchester, he was the son of Kenelm Kneebone, a staunch Catholic, and a sergeant of dragoons, who lost his legs and his life while fighting for James the Second at the battle of the Boyne, and who had little to bequeath his son except his laurels and his loyalty to the house of Stuart.

The gallant woollen-draper was now in his thirty-sixth year. He had a handsome, jolly-looking face; stood six feet two in his stockings; and measured more than a cloth-yard shaft across the shoulders—athletic proportions derived from his father the dragoon. And, if it had not been for a taste for plotting, which was continually getting him into scrapes, he might have been accounted a respectable member of society.

Of late, however, his plotting had assumed a more dark and dangerous complexion. The times were such that, with the opinions he entertained, he could not remain idle. The spirit of disaffection was busy throughout the kingdom. It was on the eve of that memorable rebellion which broke forth, two months later, in Scotland. Since the accession of George the First to the throne in the preceding year, every effort had been made by the partisans of the Stuarts to shake the credit of the existing government, and to gain supporters to their cause. Disappointed in their hopes of the restoration of the fallen dynasty after the death of Anne, the adherents of the Chevalier de Saint George endeavoured, by sowing the seeds of dissension far and wide, to produce a general insurrection in his favour. No means were neglected to accomplish this end. Agents were dispersed in all directions—offers the most tempting held out to induce the wavering to join the Chevalier's standard. Plots were hatched in the provinces, where many of the old and wealthy Catholic families resided, whose zeal for the martyr of their religion (as the Chevalier was esteemed), sharpened by the persecutions they themselves endured, rendered them hearty and efficient allies. Arms, horses, and accoutrements were secretly purchased and distributed; and it is not improbable that, if the unfortunate prince, in whose behalf these exertions were made, and who was not deficient in courage, as he proved at the battle of Malplaquet, had boldly placed himself at the head of his party at an earlier period, he might have regained the crown of his ancestors. But the indecision, which had been fatal to his race, was fatal to him. He delayed the blow

till the fortunate conjuncture was past. And when, at length, it was struck, he wanted energy to pursue his advantages.

But we must not anticipate the course of events. At the precise period of this history, the Jacobite party was full of hope and confidence. Louis the Fourteenth yet lived, and expectations were, therefore, indulged of assistance from France. The disgrace of the leaders of the late Tory administration had strengthened, rather than injured, their cause. Mobs were gathered together on the slightest possible pretext; and these tumultuous assemblages, while committing the most outrageous excesses, loudly proclaimed their hatred to the house of Hanover, and their determination to cut off the Protestant succession. The proceedings of this faction were narrowly watched by a vigilant and sagacious administration. The government was not deceived (indeed, every opportunity was sought by the Jacobites of parading their numbers,) as to the force of its enemies; and precautionary measures were taken to defeat their designs. On the very day of which we write, namely, the th of June , Bolingbroke and Oxford were impeached of high treason. The Committee of Secrecy—that English Council of Ten—were sitting, with Walpole at their head; and the most extraordinary discoveries were reported to be made. On the same day, moreover, which, by a curious coincidence, was the birthday of the Chevalier de Saint George, mobs were collected together in the streets, and the health of that prince was publicly drunk under the title of James the Third; while, in many country towns, the bells were rung, and rejoicings held, as if for a reigning monarch:—the cry of the populace almost universally being, "No King George, but a Stuart!"

The adherents of the Chevalier de Saint George, we have said, were lavish in promises to their proselytes. Posts were offered to all who chose to accept them. Blank commissions, signed by the prince, to be filled up by the name of the person, who could raise a troop for his service, were liberally bestowed. Amongst others, Mr. Kneebone, whose interest was not inconsiderable with the leaders of his faction, obtained an appointment as captain in a regiment of infantry, on the conditions above specified. With a view to raise recruits for his corps, the warlike woollen-draper started for Lancashire, under the colour of a journey on business. He was pretty successful in Manchester,—a town which may be said to have been the head-quarters of the disaffected. On his return to London, he found that applications had been made from a somewhat doubtful quarter by two individuals, for the posts of subordinate officers in his troop. Mr. Kneebone, or, as he would have preferred being styled, Captain Kneebone, was not perfectly satisfied with the recommendations forwarded by the applicants. But this was not a season in which to be needlessly scrupulous. He resolved to judge for himself. Accordingly, he was introduced to the two military aspirants at the Cross Shovels in the Mint, by our old acquaintance, Baptist Kettleby. The Master of the Mint, with whom the Jacobite captain had often had transactions before, vouched for their being men of honour and loyalty;

and Kneebone was so well satisfied with his representations, that he at once closed the matter by administering to the applicants the oath of allegiance and fidelity to King James the Third, and several other oaths besides, all of which those gentlemen took with as little hesitation as the sum of money, afterwards tendered, to make the compact binding. The party, then, sat down to a bowl of punch; and, at its conclusion, Captain Kneebone regretted that an engagement to spend the evening with Mrs. Wood, would preclude the possibility of his remaining with his new friends as long as his inclinations prompted. At this piece of information, the two subordinate officers were observed to exchange glances; and, after a little agreeable raillery on their captain's gallantry, they begged permission to accompany him in his visit. Kneebone, who had drained his glass to the restoration of the house of Stuart, and the downfall of the house of Hanover, more frequently than was consistent with prudence, consented; and the trio set out for Wych Street, where they arrived in the jolliest humour possible.

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Kneebone and his Friends.

Mrs. Wood was scarcely seated before Mr. Kneebone made his appearance. To her great surprise and mortification he was not alone; but brought with him a couple of friends, whom he begged to introduce as Mr. Jeremiah Jackson, and Mr. Solomon Smith, chapmen, (or what in modern vulgar parlance would be termed bagmen) travelling to procure orders for the house of an eminent cloth manufacturer in Manchester. Neither the manners, the looks, nor the attire of these gentlemen prepossessed Mrs. Wood in their favour. Accordingly, on their presentation, Mr. Jeremiah Jackson and Mr. Solomon Smith received something very like a rebuff. Luckily, they were not easily discomposed. Two persons possessing a more comfortable stock of assurance could not be readily found. Imitating the example of Mr. Kneebone, who did not appear in the slightest degree disconcerted by his cool reception, each sank carelessly into a chair, and made himself at home in a moment. Both had very singular faces; very odd wigs, very much pulled over their brows; and very large cravats, very much raised above their chins. Besides this, each had a large black patch over his right eye, and a very queer twist at the left side of his mouth, so that if their object had been disguise, they could not have adopted better precautions. Mrs. Wood thought them both remarkably plain, but Mr. Smith decidedly the plainest of the two. His complexion was as blue as a sailor's jacket, and though Mr. Jackson had one of the ugliest countenances imaginable, he had a very fine set of teeth. That was something in his favour. One peculiarity she did not fail to notice. They were both dressed in every respect alike. In fact, Mr. Solomon Smith seemed to be Mr. Jeremiah Jackson's double. He talked in the same style, and pretty nearly in the same language; laughed in the same manner, and coughed, or sneezed at the same time. If Mr. Jackson took an accurate survey of the room with his one eye, Mr. Smith's solitary orb followed in the same direction. When Jeremiah admired the Compasses in the arms of the Carpenter's Company over the chimney-piece, or the portraits of the two eminent masters of the rule and plane, William Portington, and John Scott, Esquires, on either side of it, Solomon was lost in wonder. When Mr. Jackson noticed a fine service of old blue china in an open japan closet, Mr. Smith had never seen anything like it. And finally, when Jeremiah, having bestowed upon Mrs. Wood a very free-and-easy sort of stare, winked at Mr. Kneebone, his impertinence was copied to the letter by Solomon. All three, then, burst into an immoderate fit of laughter. Mrs. Wood's astonishment and displeasure momentarily increased. Such freedoms from such people were not to be endured. Her patience was waning fast. Still, in spite of her

glances and gestures, Mr. Kneebone made no effort to check the unreasonable merriment of his companions, but rather seemed to encourage it. So Mrs. Wood went on fuming, and the trio went on laughing for some minutes, nobody knew why or wherefore, until the party was increased by Mr. Wood, in his Sunday habiliments and Sunday buckle. Without stopping to inquire into the cause of their mirth, or even to ask the names of his guests, the worthy carpenter shook hands with the one-eyed chapmen, slapped Mr. Kneebone cordially on the shoulder, and began to laugh as heartily as any of them.

Mrs. Wood could stand it no longer.

" I think you're all bewitched," she cried.

"So we are, Ma'am, by your charms," returned Mr. Jackson, gallantly.

"Quite captivated, Ma'am," added Mr. Smith, placing his hand on his breast.

Mr. Kneebone and Mr. Wood laughed louder than ever.

"Mr. Wood," said the lady bridling up, "my request may, perhaps, have some weight with you. I desire, Sir, you'll recollect yourself. Mr. Kneebone," she added, with a glance at that gentleman, which was meant to speak daggers, "will do as he pleases."

Here the chapmen set up another boisterous peal.

"No offence, I hope, my dear Mrs. W," said Mr. Kneebone in a conciliatory tone. "My friends, Mr. Jackson and Mr. Smith, may have rather odd ways with them; but—"

"They have very odd ways," interrupted Mrs. Wood, disdainfully.

"Our worthy friend was going to observe, Ma'am, that we never fail in our devotion to the fair sex," said Mr. Jackson.

"Never, Ma'am!" echoed Mr. Smith, "upon my conscience."

"My dear," said the hospitable carpenter, "I dare say Mr. Kneebone and his friends would be glad of a little refreshment."

"They shall have it, then," replied his better half, rising. "You base ingrate," she added, in a whisper, as she flounced past Mr. Kneebone on her way to the door, "how could you

bring such creatures with you, especially on an occasion like this, when we haven't met for a fortnight!"

"Couldn't help it, my life," returned the gentleman addressed, in the same tone; "but you little know who those individuals are."

"Lord bless us! you alarm me. Who are they?"

Mr. Kneebone assumed a mysterious air; and bringing his lips close to Mrs. Wood's ear, whispered, "secret agents from France—you understand—friends to the cause—hem!"

"I see,—persons of rank!"

Mr. Kneebone nodded.

"Noblemen."

Mr. Kneebone smiled assent.

"Mercy on us! Well, I thought their manners quite out o' the common. And so, the invasion really is to take place after all; and the Chevalier de Saint George is to land at the Tower with fifty thousand Frenchmen; and the Hanoverian usurper's to be beheaded; and Doctor Sacheverel's to be made a bishop, and we're all to be—eh?"

"All in good time," returned Kneebone, putting his finger to his lips; "don't let your imagination run away with you, my charmer. That boy," he added, looking at Thames, "has his eye upon us."

Mrs. Wood, however, was too much excited to attend to the caution.

"O, lud!" she cried; "French noblemen in disguise! and so rude as I was! I shall never recover it!"

"A good supper will set all to rights," insinuated Kneebone. "But be prudent, my angel."

"Never fear," replied the lady. "I'm prudence personified. You might trust me with the Chevalier himself,—I'd never betray him. But why didn't you let me know they were coming. I'd have got something nice. As it is, we've only a couple of ducks—and they were intended for you. Winny, my love, come with me. I shall want you.—Sorry to quit your lord—worships, I mean,—I don't know what I mean," she added, a little confused, and dropping a profound curtsey to the disguised noblemen, each of whom replied by a

bow, worthy, in her opinion, of a prince of the blood at the least,—"but I've a few necessary orders to give below."

"Don't mind us, Ma'am," said Mr. Jackson: "ha! ha!"

"Not in the least, Ma'am," echoed Mr. Smith: "ho! ho!"

"How condescending!" thought Mrs. Wood. "Not proud in the least, I declare. Well, I'd no idea," she continued, pursuing her ruminations as she left the room, "that people of quality laughed so. But it's French manners, I suppose."

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER V.

Hawk and Buzzard.

Mrs. Wood's anxiety to please her distinguished guests speedily displayed itself in a very plentiful, if not very dainty repast. To the duckling, peas, and other delicacies, intended for Mr. Kneebone's special consumption, she added a few impromptu dishes, tossed off in her best style; such as lamb chops, broiled kidneys, fried ham and eggs, and toasted cheese. Side by side with the cheese (its never-failing accompaniment, in all seasons, at the carpenter's board) came a tankard of swig, and a toast. Besides these there was a warm gooseberry-tart, and a cold pigeon pie—the latter capacious enough, even allowing for its due complement of steak, to contain the whole produce of a dovecot; a couple of lobsters and the best part of a salmon swimming in a sea of vinegar, and shaded by a forest of fennel. While the cloth was laid, the host and Thames descended to the cellar, whence they returned, laden with a number of flasks of the same form, and apparently destined to the same use as those depicted in Hogarth's delectable print—the Modern Midnight Conversation.

Mrs. Wood now re-appeared with a very red face; and, followed by Winifred, took her seat at the table. Operations then commenced. Mr. Wood carved the ducks; Mr. Kneebone helped to the pigeon-pie; while Thames unwired and uncorked a bottle of stout Carnarvonshire ale. The woollen-draper was no despicable trencherman in a general way; but his feats with the knife and fork were child's sport compared with those of Mr. Smith. The leg and wing of a duck were disposed of by this gentleman in a twinkling; a brace of pigeons and a pound of steak followed with equal celerity; and he had just begun to make a fierce assault upon the eggs and ham. His appetite was perfectly Gargantuan. Nor must it be imagined, that while he thus exercised his teeth, he neglected the flagon. On the contrary, his glass was never idle, and finding it not filled quite so frequently as he desired, he applied himself, notwithstanding the expressive looks and muttered remonstrances of Mr. Jackson, to the swig. The latter gentleman did full justice to the good things before him; but he drank sparingly, and was visibly annoyed by his companion's intemperance. As to Mr. Kneebone, what with flirting with Mrs. Wood, carving for his friends, and pledging the carpenter, he had his hands full. At this juncture, and just as a cuckoo-clock in the corner struck sis, Jack Sheppard walked into the room, with the packing-case under his arm.

"I was in the right, you see, father," observed Thames, smiling; "Jack has done his task."

"So I perceive," replied Wood.

"Where am I to take it to?" asked Sheppard.

"I told you that before," rejoined Wood, testily. "You must take it to Sir Rowland Trenchard's in Southampton Fields. And, mind, it's for his sister, Lady Trafford."

"Very well, Sir," replied Sheppard.

"Wet your whistle before you start, Jack," said Kneebone, pouring out a glass of ale. "What's that you're taking to Sir Rowland Trenchard's?"

"Only a box, Sir," answered Sheppard, emptying the glass.

"It's an odd-shaped one," rejoined Kneebone, examining it attentively. "But I can guess what it's for. Sir Rowland is one of us," he added, winking at his companions, "and so was his brother-in-law, Sir Cecil Trafford. Old Lancashire families both. Strict Catholics, and loyal to the backbone. Fine woman, Lady Trafford—a little on the wane though."

"Ah! you're so very particular," sighed Mrs. Wood.

"Not in the least," returned Kneebone, slyly, "not in the least. Another glass, Jack."

"Thank'ee, Sir," grinned Sheppard.

"Off with it to the health of King James the Third, and confusion to his enemies!"

"Hold!" interposed Wood; "that is treason. I'll have no such toast drunk at my table!"

"It's the king's birthday," urged the woollen draper.

" Not my king's," returned Wood. "I quarrel with no man's political opinions, but I will have my own respected!"

"Eh day!" exclaimed Mrs. Wood; "here's a pretty to-do about nothing. Marry, come up! I'll see who's to be obeyed. Drink the toast, Jack."

"At your peril, sirrah!" cried Wood.

"He was hanged that left his drink behind, you know, master," rejoined Sheppard. "Here's King James the Third, and confusion to his enemies!"

"Very well," said the carpenter, sitting down amid the laughter of the company.

"Jack!" cried Thames, in a loud voice, "you deserve to be hanged for a rebel as you are to your lawful king and your lawful master. But since we must have toasts," he added, snatching up a glass, "listen to mine: Here's King George the First! a long reign to him! and confusion to the Popish Pretender and his adherents!"

"Bravely done!" said Wood, with tears in his eyes.

"That's the kinchin as was to try the dub for us, ain't it?" muttered Smith to his companion as he stole a glance at Jack Sheppard.

"Silence!" returned Jackson, in a deep whisper; "and don't muddle your brains with any more of that Pharaoh. You'll need all your strength to grab him."

"What's the matter?" remarked Kneebone, addressing Sheppard, who, as he caught the single but piercing eye of Jackson fixed upon him, started and trembled.

"What's the matter?" repeated Mrs. Wood in a sharp tone.

"Ay, what's the matter, boy!" reiterated Jackson sternly. "Did you never see two gentlemen with only a couple of peepers between them before!"

"Never, I'll be sworn!" said Smith, taking the opportunity of filling his glass while his comrade's back was turned; "we're a nat'ral cur'osity."

"Can I have a word with you, master?" said Sheppard, approaching Wood.

"Not a syllable!" answered the carpenter, angrily. "Get about your business!"

" Thames!" cried Jack, beckoning to his friend.

But Darrell averted his head.

"Mistress!" said the apprentice, making a final appeal to Mrs. Wood.

"Leave the room instantly, sirrah!" rejoined the lady, bouncing up, and giving him a slap on the cheek that made his eyes flash fire.

"May I be cursed," muttered Sheppard, as he slunk away with (as the woollen-draper pleasantly observed) 'a couple of boxes in charge,' "if ever I try to be honest again!"

"Take a little toasted cheese with the swig, Mr. Smith," observed Wood. "That's an incorrigible rascal," he added, as Sheppard closed the door; "it's only to-day that I discovered—"

"What?" asked Jackson, pricking up his ears.

"Don't speak ill of him behind his back, father," interposed Thames.

"If I were your father, young gentleman," returned Jackson, enraged at the interruption, "I'd teach you not to speak till you were spoken to."

Thames was about to reply, but a glance from Wood checked him.

"The rebuke is just," said the carpenter; "at the same time, I'm not sorry to find you're a friend to fair play, which, as you seem to know, is a jewel. Open that bottle with a blue seal, my dear. Gentlemen! a glass of brandy will be no bad finish to our meal."

This proposal giving general satisfaction, the bottle circulated swiftly; and Smith found the liquor so much to his taste, that he made it pay double toll on its passage.

"Your son is a lad of spirit, Mr. Wood," observed Jackson, in a slightly-sarcastic tone.

"He's not my son," rejoined the carpenter.

"How, Sir?"

"Except by adoption. Thames Darrell is—"

"My husband nicknames him Thames," interrupted Mrs. Wood, "because he found him in the river!—ha! ha!"

" Ha! ha!" echoed Smith, taking another bumper of brandy; "he'll set the Thames on fire one of these days, I'll warrant him!"

"That's more than you'll ever do, you drunken fool!" growled Jackson, in an under tone: "be cautious, or you'll spoil all!"

"Suppose we send for a bowl of punch," said Kneebone.

"With all my heart!" replied Wood. And, turning to his daughter, he gave the necessary directions in a low tone.

Winifred, accordingly, left the room, and a servant being despatched to the nearest tavern, soon afterwards returned with a crown bowl of the ambrosian fluid. The tables were then cleared. Bottles and glasses usurped the place of dishes and plates. Pipes were lighted; and Mr. Kneebone began to dispense the fragrant fluid; begging Mrs. Wood, in a whisper, as he filled a rummer to the brim, not to forget the health of the Chevalier de Saint George—a proposition to which the lady immediately responded by drinking the toast aloud.

"The Chevalier shall hear of this," whispered the woollen-draper.

"You don't say so!" replied Mrs. Wood, delighted at the idea.

Mr. Kneebone assured her that he did say so; and, as a further proof of his sincerity, squeezed her hand very warmly under the table.

Mr. Smith, now, being more than half-seas over, became very uproarious, and, claiming the attention of the table, volunteered the following

DRINKING SONG.
I.
Jolly nose! the bright rubies that garnish thy tip
Are dug from the mines of canary;
And to keep up their lustre I moisten my lip
With hogsheads of claret and sherry.
II.
Jolly nose! he who sees thee across a broad glass
Beholds thee in all thy perfection;
And to the pale snout of a temperate ass
Entertains the profoundest objection.
III.
For a big-bellied glass is the palette I use,
And the choicest of wine is my colour;
And I find that my nose takes the mellowest hues
The fuller I fill it—the fuller!
IV.
Jolly nose! there are fools who say drink hurts the sight;

Such dullards know nothing about it.
'T is better, with wine, to extinguish the light,
Than live always, in darkness, without it!
"How long may it be since that boy was found in the way Mrs. Wood mentions?" inquired Jackson, as soon as the clatter that succeeded Mr. Smith's melody had subsided.

"Let me see," replied Wood; "exactly twelve years ago last November."

"Why, that must be about the time of the Great Storm," rejoined Jackson.

"Egad!" exclaimed Wood, "you've hit the right nail on the head, anyhow. It was on the night of the Great Storm that I found him."

"I should like to hear all particulars of the affair," said Jackson, "if it wouldn't be troubling you too much."

Mr. Wood required little pressing. He took a sip of punch and commenced his relation. Though meant to produce a totally different effect, the narrative seemed to excite the risible propensities rather than the commiseration of his auditor; and when Mr. Wood wound it up by a description of the drenching he had undergone at the Mint pump, the other could hold out no longer, but, leaning back in his chair, gave free scope to his merriment.

"I beg your pardon," he cried; "but really—ha! ha!—you must excuse me!—that is so uncommonly diverting—ha! ha! Do let me hear it again?—ha! ha! ha!"

"Upon my word," rejoined Wood, "you seem vastly entertained by my misfortunes."

" To be sure! Nothing entertains me so much. People always rejoice at the misfortunes of others—never at their own! The droll dogs! how they must have enjoyed it!—ha! ha!"

"I dare say they did. But I found it no laughing matter, I can assure you. And, though it's a long time ago, I feel as sore on the subject as ever."

"Quite natural! Never forgive an injury!—I never do!—ha! ha!"

"Really, Mr. Jackson, I could almost fancy we had met before. Your laugh reminds me of—of——"

"Whose, Sir?" demanded Jackson, becoming suddenly grave.

"You'll not be offended, I hope," returned Wood, drily, "if I say that your voice, your manner, and, above all, your very extraordinary way of laughing, put me strangely in mind of one of the 'droll dogs,' (as you term them,) who helped to perpetrate the outrage I've just described."

"Whom do you mean?" demanded Jackson.

"I allude to an individual, who has since acquired an infamous notoriety as a thief-taker; but who, in those days, was himself the associate of thieves."

"Well, Sir, his name?"

"Jonathan Wild."

"'Sblood!" cried Jackson, rising, "I can't sit still and hear Mr. Wild, whom I believe to be as honest a gentleman as any in the kingdom, calumniated!"

"Fire and fury!" exclaimed Smith, getting up with the brandy-bottle in his grasp; "no man shall abuse Mr. Wild in my presence! He's the right-hand of the community! We could do nothing without him!"

"We!" repeated Wood, significantly.

"Every honest man, Sir! He helps us to our own again."

"Humph!" ejaculated the carpenter.

"Surely," observed Thames, laughing, "to one who entertains so high an opinion of Jonathan Wild, as Mr. Jackson appears to do, it can't be very offensive to be told, that he's like him."

" I don't object to the likeness, if any such exists, young Sir," returned Jackson, darting an angry glance at Thames; "indeed I'm rather flattered by being thought to resemble a gentleman of Mr. Wild's figure. But I can't submit to hear the well-earned reputation of my friend termed an 'infamous notoriety.'"

"No, we can't stand that," hiccupped Smith, scarcely able to keep his legs.

"Well, gentlemen," rejoined Wood, mildly; "since Mr. Wild is a friend of yours, I'm sorry for what I said. I've no doubt he's as honest as either of you."

"Enough," returned Jackson, extending his hand; "and if I've expressed myself warmly, I'm sorry for it likewise. But you must allow me to observe, my good Sir, that you're wholly in the wrong respecting my friend. Mr. Wild never was the associate of thieves."

"Never," echoed Smith, emphatically, "upon my honour."

"I'm satisfied with your assurance," replied the carpenter, drily.

"It's more than I am," muttered Thames.

"I was not aware that Jonathan Wild was an acquaintance of yours, Mr. Jackson," said Kneebone, whose assiduity to Mrs. Wood had prevented him from paying much attention to the previous scene.

"I've known him all my life," replied the other.

"The devil you have! Then, perhaps, you can tell me when he intends to put his threat into execution?"

"What threat?" asked Jackson.

"Why, of hanging the fellow who acts as his jackal; one Blake, or Blueskin, I think he's called."

"You've been misinformed, Sir," interposed Smith. "Mr. Wild is incapable of such baseness."

"Bah!" returned the woollen-draper. "I see you don't know him as well as you pretend. Jonathan is capable of anything. He has hanged twelve of his associates already. The moment they cease to be serviceable, or become dangerous he lodges an information, and the matter's settled. He has always plenty of evidence in reserve. Blueskin is booked. As sure as you're sitting there, Mr. Smith, he'll swing after next Old Bailey sessions. I wouldn't be in his skin for a trifle!"

"But he may peach," said Smith casting an oblique glance at Jackson.

"It would avail him little if he did," replied Kneebone. "Jonathan does what he pleases in the courts."

"Very true," chuckled Jackson; "very true."

"Blueskin's only chance would be to carry his threat into effect," pursued the woollen-draper.

"Aha!" exclaimed Jackson. "He threatens, does he?"

"More than that," replied Kneebone; "I understand he drew a knife upon Jonathan, in a quarrel between them lately. And since then, he has openly avowed his determination of cutting his master's throat on the slightest inkling of treachery. But, perhaps Mr. Smith will tell you I'm misinformed, also, on that point."

"On the contrary," rejoined Smith, looking askance at his companion, "I happen to know you're in the right."

"Well, Sir, I'm obliged to you," said Jackson; "I shall take care to put Mr. Wild on his guard against an assassin."

"And I shall put Blueskin on the alert against the designs of a traitor," rejoined Smith, in a tone that sounded like a menace.

"In my opinion," remarked Kneebone, "it doesn't matter how soon society is rid of two such scoundrels; and if Blueskin dies by the rope, and Jonathan by the hand of violence, they'll meet the fate they merit. Wild was formerly an agent to the Jacobite party, but, on the offer of a bribe from the opposite faction, he unhesitatingly deserted and betrayed his old employers. Of late, he has become the instrument of Walpole, and does all the dirty work for the Secret Committee. Several arrests of importance have been intrusted to him; but, forewarned, forearmed, we have constantly baffled his schemes;—ha! ha! Jonathan's a devilish clever fellow. But he can't have his eyes always about him, or he'd have been with us this morning at the Mint, eh, Mr. Jackson!"

" So he would," replied the latter: "so he would."

"With all his cunning, he may meet with his match," continued Kneebone, laughing. "I've set a trap for him."

"Take care you don't fall into it yourself," returned Jackson, with a slight sneer.

"Were I in your place," said Smith, "I should be apprehensive of Wild, because he's a declared enemy."

"And were I in yours," rejoined the woollen-draper, "I should be doubly apprehensive, because he's a professed friend. But we're neglecting the punch all this time. A bumper round, gentlemen. Success to our enterprise!"

"Success to our enterprise!" echoed the others, significantly.

"May I ask whether you made any further inquiries into the mysterious affair about which we were speaking just now?" observed Jackson, turning to the carpenter.

"I can't say I did," replied Wood, somewhat reluctantly; "what with the confusion incident to the storm, and the subsequent press of business, I put it off till it was too late. I've often regretted that I didn't investigate the matter. However, it doesn't much signify. All concerned in the dark transaction must have perished."

"Are you sure of that," inquired Jackson.

"As sure as one reasonably can be. I saw their boat swept away, and heard the roar of the fall beneath the bridge; and no one, who was present, could doubt the result. If the principal instigator of the crime, whom I afterwards encountered on the platform, and who was dashed into the raging flood by the shower of bricks, escaped, his preservation must have been indeed miraculous."

"Your own was equally so," said Jackson ironically. "What if he did escape?"

"My utmost efforts should be used to bring him to justice."

"Hum!"

"Have you any reason to suppose he survived the accident?" inquired Thames eagerly.

Jackson smiled and put on the air of a man who knows more than he cares to tell.

"I merely asked the question," he said, after he had enjoyed the boy's suspense for a moment.

The hope that had been suddenly kindled in the youth's bosom was as suddenly extinguished.

"If I thought he lived——" observed Wood.

"If," interrupted Jackson, changing his tone: "he does live. And it has been well for you that he imagines the child was drowned."

"Who is he?" asked Thames impatiently.

"You're inquisitive, young gentleman," replied Jackson, coldly. "When you're older, you'll know that secrets of importance are not disclosed gratuitously. Your adoptive father understands mankind better."

"I'd give half I'm worth to hang the villain, and restore this boy to his rights," said Mr. Wood.

"How do you know he has any rights to be restored to?" returned Jackson, with a grin. "Judging from what you tell me, I've no doubt he's the illegitimate offspring of some handsome, but lowborn profligate; in which case, he'll neither have name, nor wealth for his inheritance. The assassination, as you call it, was, obviously, the vengeance of a kinsman of the injured lady, who no doubt was of good family, upon her seducer. The less said, therefore, on this point the better; because, as nothing is to be gained by it, it would only be trouble thrown away. But, if you have any particular fancy for hanging the gentleman, who chose to take the law into his own hands—and I think your motive extremely disinterested and praiseworthy—why, it's just possible, if you make it worth my while, that your desires may be gratified."

"I don't see how this is to be effected, unless you yourself were present at the time," said Wood, glancing suspiciously at the speaker.

"I had no hand in the affair," replied Jackson, bluntly; "but I know those who had; and could bring forward evidence, if you require it."

" The best evidence would be afforded by an accomplice of the assassin," rejoined Thames, who was greatly offended by the insinuation as to his parentage.

"Perhaps you could point out such a party, Mr. Jackson?" said Wood, significantly.

"I could," replied Thames.

"Then you need no further information from me," rejoined Jackson, sternly.

"Stay!" cried Wood, "this is a most perplexing business—if you really are privy to the affair——"

"We'll talk of it to-morrow, Sir," returned Jackson, cutting him short. "In the mean time, with your permission, I'll just make a few minutes of our conversation."

"As many as you please," replied Wood, walking towards the chimney-piece, and taking down a constable's, staff, which hung upon a nail.

Jackson, mean time, produced a pocket-book; and, after deliberately sharpening the point of a pencil, began to write on a blank leaf. While he was thus occupied, Thames, prompted by an unaccountable feeling of curiosity, took up the penknife which the other had just used, and examined the haft. What he there noticed occasioned a marked change in his demeanour. He laid down the knife, and fixed a searching and distrustful gaze upon the writer, who continued his task, unconscious of anything having happened.

"There," cried Jackson, closing the book and rising, "that'll do. To-morrow at twelve I'll be with you, Mr. Wood. Make up your mind as to the terms, and I'll engage to find the man."

"Hold!" exclaimed the carpenter, in an authoritative voice: "we can't part thus. Thames, look the door." (An order which was promptly obeyed.) "Now, Sir, I must insist upon a full explanation of your mysterious hints, or, as I am headborough of the district, I shall at once take you into custody."

Jackson treated this menace with a loud laugh of derision.

" What ho!" he cried slapping Smith, who had fallen asleep with the brandy-bottle in his grasp, upon the shoulder. "It is time!"

"For what?" grumbled the latter, rubbing his eyes.

"For the caption!" replied Jackson, coolly drawing a brace of pistols from his pockets.

"Ready!" answered Smith, shaking himself, and producing a similar pair of weapons.

"In Heaven's name! what's all this?" cried Wood.

"Be still, and you'll receive no injury," returned Jackson. "We're merely about to discharge our duty by apprehending a rebel. Captain Kneebone! we must trouble you to accompany us."

"I've no intention of stirring," replied the woollen-draper, who was thus unceremoniously disturbed: "and I beg you'll sit down, Mr. Jackson."

"Come, Sir!" thundered the latter, "no trifling! Perhaps," he added, opening a warrant, "you'll obey this mandate?"

"A warrant!" ejaculated Kneebone, starting to his feet.

"Ay, Sir, from the Secretary of State, for your arrest! You're charged with high-treason."

"By those who've conspired with me?"

"No! by those who've entrapped you! You've long eluded our vigilance; but we've caught you at last!"

"Damnation!" exclaimed the woollen-draper; "that I should be the dupe of such a miserable artifice!"

"It's no use lamenting now, Captain! You ought rather to be obliged to us for allowing you to pay this visit. We could have secured you when you left the Mint. But we wished to ascertain whether Mrs. Wood's charms equalled your description."

"Wretches!" screamed the lady; "don't dare to breathe your vile insinuations against me! Oh! Mr. Kneebone, are these your French noblemen?"

"Don't upbraid me!" rejoined the woollen-draper.

"Bring him along, Joe!" said Jackson, in a whisper to his comrade.

Smith obeyed. But he had scarcely advanced a step, when he was felled to the ground by a blow from the powerful arm of Kneebone, who, instantly possessing himself of a pistol, levelled it at Jackson's head.

"Begone! or I fire!" he cried.

"Mr. Wood," returned Jackson, with the utmost composure; "you're a headborough, and a loyal subject of King George. I call upon you to assist me in the apprehension of this person. You'll be answerable for his escape."

"Mr. Wood, I command you not to stir," vociferated the carpenter's better-half; "recollect you'll be answerable to me."

"I declare I don't know what to do," said Wood, burned by conflicting emotions. "Mr. Kneebone! you would greatly oblige me by surrendering yourself."

"Never!" replied the woollen-draper; "and if that treacherous rascal, by your side, doesn't make himself scarce quickly, I'll send a bullet through his brain."

"My death will lie at your door," remarked Jackson to the carpenter.

"Show me your warrant!" said Wood, almost driven to his wit's-end; "perhaps it isn't regular?"

"Ask him who he is?" suggested Thames.

"A good idea!" exclaimed the carpenter. "May I beg to know whom I've the pleasure of adressing? Jackson, I conclude, is merely an assumed name."

"What does it signify?" returned the latter, angrily.

"A great deal!" replied Thames. "If you won't disclose your name, I will for you! You are Jonathan Wild!"

"Further concealment is needless," answered the other, pulling off his wig and black patch, and resuming his natural tone of voice; "I am Jonathan Wild!"

"Say you so!" rejoined Kneebone; "then be this your passport to eternity."

Upon which he drew the trigger of the pistol, which, luckily for the individual against whom it was aimed, flashed in the pan.

" I might now send you on a similar journey!" replied Jonathan, with a bitter smile, and preserving the unmoved demeanour he had maintained throughout; "but I prefer conveying you, in the first instance, to Newgate. The Jacobite daws want a scarecrow."

So saying, he sprang, with a bound like that of a tiger-cat, against the throat of the woollen-draper. And so sudden and well-directed was the assault, that he completely overthrew his gigantic antagonist.

"Lend a hand with the ruffles, Blueskin!" he shouted, as that personage, who had just recovered from the stunning effects of the blow, contrived to pick himself up. "Look quick, d—n you, or we shall never master him!"

"Murder!" shrieked Mrs. Wood, at the top of her voice.

"Here's a pistol!" cried Thames, darting towards the undischarged weapon dropped by Blueskin in the scuffle, and pointing it at Jonathan. "Shall I shoot him?"

"Yes! yes! put it to his ear!" cried Mrs. Wood; "that's the surest way!"

"No! no! give it me!" vociferated Wood, snatching the pistol, and rushing to the door, against which he placed his back.

"I'll soon settle this business. Jonathan Wild!" he added, in a loud voice, "I command you to release your prisoner."

"So I will," replied Jonathan, who, with Blueskin's aid, had succeeded in slipping a pair of handcuffs over the woollen-draper's wrists, "when I've Mr. Walpole's order to that effect—but not before."

"You'll take the consequences, then?"

"Willingly."

"In that case I arrest you, and your confederate, Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin, on a charge of felony," returned Wood, brandishing his staff; "resist my authority, if you dare."

"A clever device," replied Jonathan; "but it won't serve your turn. Let us pass, Sir. Strike the gag, Blueskin."

" You shall not stir a footstep. Open the window, Thames, and call for assistance."

"Stop!" cried Jonathan, who did not care to push matters too far, "let me have a word with you, Mr. Wood."

"I'll have no explanations whatever," replied the carpenter, disdainfully, "except before a magistrate."

"At least state your charge. It is a serious accusation."

"It is," answered Wood. "Do you recollect this key? Do you recollect to whom you gave it, and for what purpose? or shall I refresh your memory?"

Wild appeared confounded.

"Release your prisoner," continued Wood, "or the window is opened."

"Mr. Wood," said Jonathan, advancing towards him, and speaking in a low tone, "the secret of your adopted son's birth is known to me. The name of his father's murderer is also known to me. I can help you to both,—nay, I will help you to both, if you do not interfere with my plans. The arrest of this person is of consequence to me. Do not oppose it, and I will serve you. Thwart me, and I become your mortal enemy. I have but to give a hint of that boy's existence in the proper quarter, and his life will not be worth a day's purchase."

"Don't listen to him, father," cried Thames, unconscious of what was passing; "there are plenty of people outside."

"Make your choice," said Jonathan.

"If you don't decide quickly, I'll scream," cried Mrs. Wood, popping her head through the window.

"Set your prisoner free!" returned Wood.

"Take off the ruffles, Blueskin," rejoined Wild. "You know my fixed determination," he added in a low tone, as he passed the carpenter. "Before to-morrow night that boy shall join his father."

So saying, he unlocked the door and strode out of the room.

"Here are some letters, which will let you see what a snake you've cherished in your bosom, you uxorious old dotard," said Blueskin, tossing a packet of papers to Wood, as he followed his leader.

"'Odd's-my-life! what's this?" exclaimed the carpenter, looking at the superscription of one of them. "Why, this is your writing Dolly, and addressed to Mr. Kneebone."

"My writing! no such thing!" ejaculated the lady, casting a look of alarm at the woollen-draper.

"Confusion! the rascal must have picked my pocket of your letters," whispered Kneebone, "What's to be done?"

"What's to be done! Why, I'm undone! How imprudent in you not to burn them. But men are so careless, there's no trusting anything to them! However, I must try to brazen it out.—Give me the letters, my love," she added aloud, and in her most winning accents; "they're some wicked forgeries."

"Excuse me, Madam," replied the carpenter, turning his back upon her, and sinking into a chair: "Thames, my love, bring me my spectacles. My heart misgives me. Fool that I was to marry for beauty! I ought to have remembered that a fair woman and a slashed gown always find some nail in the way."

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VI.

The first Step towards the Ladder.

If there is one thing on earth, more lovely than another, it is a fair girl of the tender age of Winifred Wood! Her beauty awakens no feeling beyond that of admiration. The charm of innocence breathes around her, as fragrance is diffused by the flower, sanctifying her lightest thought and action, and shielding her, like a spell, from the approach of evil. Beautiful is the girl of twelve,—who is neither child nor woman, but something between both, something more exquisite than either!

Such was the fairy creature presented to Thames Darrell, under the following circumstances.

Glad to escape from the scene of recrimination that ensued between his adopted parents, Thames seized the earliest opportunity of retiring, and took his way to a small chamber in the upper part of the house, where he and Jack were accustomed to spend most of their leisure in the amusements, or pursuits, proper to their years. He found the door ajar, and, to his surprise, perceived little Winifred seated at a table, busily engaged in tracing some design upon a sheet of paper. She did not hear his approach, but continued her occupation without raising her head.

It was a charming sight to watch the motions of her tiny fingers as she pursued her task; and though the posture she adopted was not the most favourable that might have been chosen for the display of her sylphlike figure, there was something in her attitude, and the glow of her countenance, lighted up by the mellow radiance of the setting sun falling upon her through the panes of the little dormer-window, that seemed to the youth inexpressibly beautiful. Winifred's features would have been pretty, for they were regular and delicately formed, if they had not been slightly marked by the small-pox;—a disorder, that sometimes spares more than it destroys, and imparts an expression to be sought for in vain in the smoothest complexion. We have seen pitted cheeks, which we would not exchange for dimples and a satin skin. Winifred's face had a thoroughly amiable look. Her mouth was worthy of her face; with small, pearly-white teeth; lips glossy, rosy, and pouting; and the sweetest smile imaginable, playing constantly about them. Her eyes were soft and blue, arched over by dark brows, and fringed by long silken lashes. Her hair was of the darkest brown, and finest texture; and, when unloosed, hung down to her heels. She was dressed in a little white frock, with a very

long body, and very short sleeves, which looked (from a certain fullness about the hips,) as if it was intended to be worn with a hoop. Her slender throat was encircled by a black riband, with a small locket attached to it; and upon the top of her head rested a diminutive lace cap.

The room in which she sat was a portion of the garret, assigned, as we have just stated, by Mr. Wood as a play-room to the two boys; and, like most boy's playrooms, it exhibited a total absence of order, or neatness. Things were thrown here and there, to be taken up, or again cast aside, as the whim arose; while the broken-backed chairs and crazy table bore the marks of many a conflict. The characters of the youthful occupants of the room might be detected in every article it contained. Darell's peculiar bent of mind was exemplified in a rusty broadsword, a tall grenadier's cap, a musket without lock or ramrod, a belt and cartouch-box, with other matters evincing a decided military taste. Among his books, Plutarch's Lives, and the Histories of Great Commanders, appeared to have been frequently consulted; but the dust had gathered thickly upon the Carpenter's Manual, and a Treatise on Trigonometry and Geometry. Beneath the shelf, containing these books, hung the fine old ballad of 'St. George for England' and a loyal ditty, then much in vogue, called 'True Protestant Gratitude, or, Britain's Thanksgiving for the First of August, Being the Day of His Majesty's Happy Accession to the Throne.' Jack Sheppard's library consisted of a few ragged and well-thumbed volumes abstracted from the tremendous chronicles bequeathed to the world by those Froissarts and Holinsheds of crime—the Ordinaries of Newgate. His vocal collection comprised a couple of flash songs pasted against the wall, entitled 'The Thief-Catcher's Prophecy,' and the 'Life and Death of the Darkman's Budge;' while his extraordinary mechanical skill was displayed in what he termed (Jack had a supreme contempt for orthography,) a 'Moddle of his Mas. Jale off Newgate;' another model of the pillory at Fleet Bridge; and a third of the permanent gibbet at Tyburn. The latter specimen, of his workmanship was adorned with a little scarecrow figure, intended to represent a housebreaking chimney-sweeper of the time, described in Sheppard's own hand-writing, as 'Jack Hall a-hanging.' We must not omit to mention that a family group from the pencil of little Winifred, representing Mr. and Mrs. Wood in very characteristic attitudes, occupied a prominent place on the walls.

For a few moments, Thames regarded the little girl through the half-opened door in silence. On a sudden, a change came over her countenance, which, up to this moment, had worn a smiling and satisfied expression. Throwing down the pencil, she snatched up a piece of India-rubber, and exclaiming,—"It isn't at all like him! it isn't half handsome enough!" was about to efface the sketch, when Thames darted into the room.

"Who isn't it like?" he asked, endeavouring to gain possession of the drawing, which, af the sound of his footstep, she crushed between her fingers.

"I can't tell you!" she replied, blushing deeply, and clinching her little hand as tightly as possible; "it's a secret!"

"I'll soon find it out, then," he returned, playfully forcing the paper from her grasp.

"Don't look at it, I entreat," she cried.

But her request was unheeded. Thames unfolded the drawing, smoothed out its creases, and beheld a portrait of himself.

"I've a good mind not to speak to you again, Sir!" cried Winifred, with difficulty repressing a tear of vexation; "you've acted unfairly."

"I feel I have, dear Winny!" replied Thames, abashed at his own rudeness; "my conduct is inexcusable."

"I'll excuse it nevertheless," returned the little damsel, affectionately extending her hand to him.

"Why were you afraid to show me this picture, Winny?" asked the youth.

"Because it's not like you," was her answer.

"Well, like or not, I'm greatly pleased with it, and must beg it from you as a memorial——"

"Of what?" she interrupted, startled by his change of manner.

"Of yourself," he replied, in a mournful tone. "I shall value it highly, and will promise never to part with it. Winny, this is the last night I shall pass beneath your father's roof."

" Have you told him so?" she inquired, reproachfully. "No; but I shall, before he retires to rest."

"Then you will stay!" she cried, clapping her hands joyfully, "for I'm sure he won't part with you. Oh! thank you—thank you! I'm so happy!"

"Stop, Winny!" he answered, gravely; "I haven't promised yet."

"But you will,—won't you?" she rejoined, looking him coaxingly in the face.

Unable to withstand this appeal, Thames gave the required promise, adding,—"Oh! Winny, I wish Mr. Wood had been my father, as well as yours."

"So do I!" she cried; "for then you would have been really my brother. No, I don't, either; because——"

"Well, Winny?"

"I don't know what I was going to say," she added, in some confusion; "only I'm sorry you were born a gentleman."

"Perhaps, I wasn't," returned Thames, gloomily, as the remembrance of Jonathan Wild's foul insinuation crossed him. "But never mind who, or what I am. Give me this picture. I'll keep it for your sake."

"I'll give you something better worth keeping," she answered, detaching the ornament from her neck, and presenting it to him; "this contains a lock of my hair, and may remind you sometimes of your little sister. As to the picture, I'll keep it myself, though, if you do go I shall need no memorial of you. I'd a good many things to say to you, besides—but you've put them all out of my head."

With this, she burst into tears, and sank with her face upon his shoulder. Thames did not try to cheer her. His own heart was too full of melancholy foreboding. He felt that he might soon be separated—perhaps, for ever—from the fond little creature he held in his arms, whom he had always regarded with the warmest fraternal affection, and the thought of how much she would suffer from the separation so sensibly affected him, that he could not help joining in her grief.

From this sorrowful state he was aroused by a loud derisive whistle, followed by a still louder laugh; and, looking up, he beheld the impudent countenance of Jack Sheppard immediately before him.

"Aha!" exclaimed Jack, with a roguish wink, "I've caught you,—have I?"

The carpenter's daughter was fair and free—
Fair, and fickle, and false, was she!
She slighted the journeyman, (meaning me!)
And smiled on a gallant of high degree.
Degree! degree!
She smiled on a gallant of high degree.

Ha! ha! ha!"
"Jack!" exclaimed Thames, angrily.

But Sheppard was not to be silenced. He went on with his song, accompanying it with the most ridiculous grimaces:

"When years were gone by, she began to rue
Her love for the gentleman, (meaning you!)
'I slighted the journeyman fond,' quoth she,
'But where is my gallant of high degree?
Where! where!
Oh! where is my gallant of high degree?'
Ho! ho! ho!"
"What are you doing here!" demanded Thames.

"Oh! nothing at all," answered Jack, sneeringly, "though this room's as much mine as yours, for that matter. 'But I don't desire to spoil sport,—not I. And, if you'll give me such a smack of your sweet lips, Miss, as you've just given Thames, I'll take myself off in less than no time."

The answer to this request was a "smack" of a very different description, bestowed upon Sheppard's outstretched face by the little damsel, as she ran out of the room.

"'Odd's! bodikins!" cried Jack, rubbing his cheek, "I'm in luck to-day. However, I'd rather have a blow from the daughter than the mother. I know who hits hardest. I tell you what, Thames," he added, flinging himself carelessly into a chair, "I'd give my right hand,— and that's no light offer for a carpenter's 'prentice,—if that little minx were half as fond of me as she is of you."

"That's not likely to be the case, if you go on in this way," replied Thames, sharply.

"Why, what the devil would you have had me do!—make myself scarce, eh? You should have tipped me the wink."

"No more of this," rejoined Thames, "or we shall quarrel."

"Who cares if we do?" retorted Sheppard, with a look of defiance.

"Jack," said the other, sternly; "don't provoke me further, or I'll give you a thrashing."

"Two can play at that game, my blood," replied Sheppard, rising, and putting himself into a posture of defence.

"Take care of yourself, then," rejoined Thames, doubling his fists, and advancing towards him: "though my right arm's stiff, I can use it, as you'll find."

Sheppard was no match for his opponent, for, though he possessed more science, he was deficient in weight and strength; and, after a short round, in which he had decidedly the worst of it, a well-directed hit on the nob stretched him at full length on the floor.

"That'll teach you to keep a civil tongue in your head for the future," observed Thames, as he helped Jack to his feet.

"I didn't mean to give offence," replied Sheppard, sulkily. "But, let me tell you, it's not a pleasant sight to see the girl one likes in the arms of another."

"You want another drubbing, I perceive," said Thames, frowning.

"No, I don't. Enough's as good as a feast of the dainties you provide. I'll think no more about her. Save us!" he cried, as his glance accidentally alighted on the drawing, which Winifred had dropped in her agitation. "Is this her work?"

"It is," answered Thames. "Do you see any likeness?"

"Don't I," returned Jack, bitterly. "Strange!" he continued, as if talking to himself. "How very like it is!"

" Not so strange, surely," laughed Thames, "that a picture should resemble the person for whom it's intended."

"Ay, but it is strange how much it resembles somebody for whom it's not intended. It's exactly like a miniature I have in my pocket."

"A miniature! Of whom?"

"That I can't say," replied Jack, mysteriously. "But, I half suspect, of your father."

"My father!" exclaimed Thames, in the utmost astonishment; "let me see it!"

"Here it is," returned Jack, producing a small picture in a case set with brilliants.

Thames took it, and beheld the portrait of a young man, apparently—judging from his attire—of high rank, whose proud and patrician features certainly presented a very striking resemblance to his own.

"You're right Jack," he said, after a pause, during which he contemplated the picture with the most fixed attention: "this must have been my father!"

"No doubt of it," answered Sheppard; "only compare it with Winny's drawing, and you'll find they're as like as two peas in a pod."

"Where did you get it?" inquired Thames.

"From Lady Trafford's, where I took the box."

"Surely, you haven't stolen it?"

"Stolen's an awkward word. But, as you perceive, I brought it away with me."

"It must be restored instantly,—be the consequences what they may."

"You're not going to betray me!" cried Jack, in alarm.

"I am not," replied Thames; "but I insist upon your taking it back at once."

"Take it back yourself," retorted Jack, sullenly. "I shall do no such thing."

"Very well," replied Thames, about to depart.

"Stop!" exclaimed Jack, planting himself before the door; "do you want to get me sent across the water?"

"I want to save you from disgrace and ruin," returned Thames.

" Bah!" cried Jack, contemptuously; "nobody's disgraced and ruined unless he's found out. I'm safe enough if you hold your tongue. Give me that picture, or I'll make you!"

"Hear me," said Thames, calmly; "you well know you're no match for me."

"Not at fisticuffs, perhaps," interrupted Jack, fiercely; "but I've my knife."

"You daren't use it."

"Try to leave the room, and see whether I daren't," returned Jack, opening the blade.

"I didn't expect this from you," rejoined Thames, resolutely. "But your threats won't prevent my leaving the room when I please, and as I please. Now, will you stand aside?"

"I won't," answered Jack, obstinately.

Thames said not another word, but marched boldly towards him, and seized him by the collar.

"Leave go!" cried Jack, struggling violently, and raising his hand, "or I'll maul you for life."

But Thames was not to be deterred from his purpose; and the strife might have terminated seriously, if a peace-maker had not appeared in the shape of little Winifred, who, alarmed by the noise, rushed suddenly into the room.

"Ah!" she screamed, seeing the uplifted weapon in Sheppard's hand, "don't hurt Thames—don't, dear Jack! If you want to kill somebody, kill me, not him."

And she flung herself between them.

Jack dropped the knife, and walked sullenly aside.

"What has caused this quarrel, Thames?" asked the little girl, anxiously.

"You," answered Jack, abruptly.

"No such thing," rejoined Thames. "I'll tell you all about it presently. But you must leave us now, dear Winny, Jack and I have something to settle between ourselves. Don't be afraid. Our quarrel's quite over."

"Are you sure of that?" returned Winifred, looking uneasily at Jack.

" Ay, ay," rejoined Sheppard; "he may do what he pleases,—hang me, if he thinks proper,—if you wish it."

With this assurance, and at the reiterated request of Thames, the little girl reluctantly withdrew.

"Come, come, Jack," said Thames, walking up to Sheppard, and taking his hand, "have done with this. I tell you once more, I'll say and do nothing to get you into trouble. Best assured of that. But I'm resolved to see Lady Trafford. Perhaps, she may tell me whose picture this is."

"So she may," returned Jack, brightening up; "it's a good idea. I'll go with you. But you must see her alone; and that'll be no easy matter to manage, for she's a great invalid, and has generally somebody with her. Above all, beware of Sir Rowland Trenchard. He's as savage and suspicious as the devil himself. I should never have noticed the miniature at all, if it hadn't been for him. He was standing by, rating her ladyship,—who can scarcely stir from the sofa,—while I was packing up her jewels in the case, and I observed that she tried to hide a small casket from him. His back was no sooner turned, than she slipped this casket into the box. The next minute, I contrived, without either of 'em perceiving me, to convey it into my own pocket. I was sorry for what I did afterwards; for, I don't know why, but, poor, lady! with her pale face, and black eyes, she reminded me of my mother."

"That, alone, ought to have prevented you from acting as you did, Jack," returned Thames, gravely.

"I should never have acted as I did," rejoined Sheppard, bitterly; "if Mrs. Wood hadn't struck me. That blow made me a thief. And, if ever I'm brought to the gallows, I shall lay my death at her door."

"Well, think no more about it," returned Thames. "Do better in future."

"I will, when I've had my revenge," muttered Jack. "But, take my advice, and keep out of Sir Rowland's way, or you'll get the poor lady into trouble as well as me."

"Never fear," replied Thames, taking up his hat. "Come, let's be off."

The two boys, then, emerged upon the landing, and were about to descend the stairs, when the voices of Mr. and Mrs. Wood resounded from below. The storm appeared to have blown over, for they were conversing in a very amicable manner with Mr. Kneebone, who was on the point of departing.

"Quite sorry, my good friend, there should have been any misunderstanding between us," observed the woollen-draper.

"Don't mention it," returned Wood, in the conciliatory tone of one who admits he has been in the wrong; "your explanation is perfectly satisfactory."

"We shall expect you to-morrow," insinuated Mrs. Wood; "and pray, don't bring anybody with you,—especially Jonathan Wild."

"No fear of that," laughed Kneebone.—"Oh! about that boy, Thames Darrell. His safety must be looked to. Jonathan's threats are not to be sneezed at. The rascal will be at work before the morning. Keep your eye upon the lad. And mind he doesn't stir out of your sight, on any pretence whatever, till I call."

"You hear that," whispered Jack.

"I do," replied Thames, in the same tone; "we haven't a moment to lose."

"Take care of yourself," said Mr. Wood, "and I'll take care of Thames. It's never a bad day that has a good ending. Good night! God bless you!"

Upon this, there was a great shaking of hands, with renewed apologies and protestations of friendship on both sides; after which Mr. Kneebone took his leave.

"And so, you really suspected me?" murmured Mrs. Wood, reproachfully, as they returned to the parlour. "Oh! you men! you men! Once get a thing into your head, and nothing will beat it out."

"Why, my love," rejoined her husband, "appearances, you must allow, were a little against you. But since you assure me you didn't write the letters, and Mr. Kneebone assures me he didn't receive them, I can't do otherwise than believe you. And I've made up my mind that a husband ought to believe only half that he hears, and nothing that he sees."

"An excellent maxim!" replied his wife, approvingly; "the best I ever heard you utter."

"I must now go and look after Thames," observed the carpenter.

"Oh! never mind him: he'll take no harm! Come with me into the parlour. I can't spare you at present. Heigho!"

"Now for it!" cried Jack, as the couple entered the room: "the coast's clear."

Thames was about to follow, when he felt a gentle grasp upon his arm. He turned, and beheld Winifred.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I shall be back presently," replied Thames, evasively.

"Don't go, I beg of you!" she implored. "You're in danger. I overheard what Mr. Kneebone said, just now."

"Death and the devil! what a cursed interruption!" cried Jack, impatiently. "If you loiter in this way, old Wood will catch us."

"If you stir, I'll call him!" rejoined Winifred. "It's you, Jack, who are persuading my brother to do wrong. Thames," she urged, "the errand, on which you're going, can't be for any good, or you wouldn't be afraid of mentioning it to my father."

"He's coming!" cried Jack, stamping his foot, with vexation. "Another moment, and it'll be too late."

"Winny, I must go!" said Thames, breaking from her.

"Stay, dear Thames!—stay!" cried the little girl. "He hears me not! he's gone!" she added, as the door was opened and shut with violence; "something tells me I shall never see him again!"

When her father, a moment afterwards, issued from the parlour to ascertain the cause of the noise, he found her seated on the stairs, in an agony of grief.

"Where's Thames?" he hastily inquired.

Winifred pointed to the door. She could not speak.

"And Jack?"

"Gone too," sobbed his daughter.

Mr. Wood uttered something like an imprecation.

"God forgive me for using such a word!" he cried, in a troubled tone; "if I hadn't yielded to my wife's silly request, this wouldn't have happened!"

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VII.

Brother and Sister.

On the same evening, in a stately chamber of a noble old mansion of Elizabeth's time, situated in Southampton Fields, two persons were seated. One of these, a lady, evidently a confirmed invalid, and attired in deep mourning, reclined upon a sort of couch, or easy chair, set on wheels, with her head supported by cushions, and her feet resting upon a velvet footstool. A crutch, with a silver handle, stood by her side, proving the state of extreme debility to which she was reduced. It was no easy matter to determine her age, for, though she still retained a certain youthfulness of appearance, she had many marks in her countenance, usually indicating the decline of life, but which in her case were, no doubt, the result of constant and severe indisposition. Her complexion was wan and faded, except where it was tinged by a slight hectic flush, that made the want of colour more palpable; her eyes were large and black, but heavy and lustreless; her cheeks sunken; her frame emaciated; her dark hair thickly scattered with gray. When younger, and in better health, she must have been eminently lovely; and there were still the remains of great beauty about her. The expression, however, which would chiefly have interested a beholder, was that of settled and profound melancholy.

Her companion was a person of no inferior condition. Indeed it was apparent, from the likeness between them, that they were nearly related. He had the same dark eyes, though lighted by a fierce flame; the same sallow complexion; the same tall, thin figure, and majestic demeanour; the same proud cast of features. But here the resemblance stopped. The expression was wholly different. He looked melancholy enough, it is true. But his gloom appeared to be occasioned by remorse, rather than sorrow. No sterner head was ever beheld beneath the cowl of a monk, or the bonnet of an inquisitor. He seemed inexorable, and inscrutable as fate itself.

"Well, Lady Trafford," he said, fixing a severe look upon her. "You depart for Lancashire to-morrow. Have I your final answer?"

"You have, Sir Rowland," she answered, in a feeble tone, but firmly. "You shall have the sum you require, but——"

"But what, Madam!"

"Do not misunderstand me," she proceeded. "I give it to King James—not so you: for the furtherance of a great and holy cause, not for the prosecution of wild and unprofitable schemes."

Sir Rowland bit his lips to repress the answer that rose to them.

"And the will?" he said, with forced calmness. "Do you still refuse to make one!"

"I have made one," replied Lady Trafford.

"How?" cried her brother, starting.

"Rowland," she rejoined, "you strive in vain to terrify me into compliance with your wishes. Nothing shall induce me to act contrary to the dictates of my conscience. My will is executed, and placed in safe custody."

"In whose favour is it made?" he inquired, sternly.

"In favour of my son."

"You have no son," rejoined Sir Rowland, moodily.

"I had one," answered his sister, in a mournful voice; "and, perhaps, I have one still."

"If I thought so—" cried the knight fiercely; "but this is idle," he added, suddenly checking himself. "Aliva, your child perished with its father."

"And by whom were they both destroyed?" demanded his sister, raising herself by a painful effort, and regarding him with a searching glance.

"By the avenger of his family's dishonour—by your brother," he replied, coolly.

" Brother," cried Lady Trafford, her eye blazing with unnatural light, and her cheek suffused with a crimson stain: "Brother," she cried, lifting her thin fingers towards Heaven, "as God shall judge me, I was wedded to that murdered man!"

"A lie!" ejaculated Sir Rowland, furiously; "a black, and damning lie!"

"It is the truth," replied his sister, falling backwards upon the couch. "I will swear it upon the cross!"

"His name, then?" demanded the knight. "Tell me that, and I will believe you."

"Not now—not now!" she returned, with a shudder. "When I am dead you will learn it. Do not disquiet yourself. You will not have to wait long for the information. Rowland," she added, in an altered tone, "I am certain I shall not live many days. And if you treat me in this way, you will have my death to answer for, as well as the deaths of my husband and child. Let us part in peace. We shall take an eternal farewell of each other."

"Be it so!" rejoined Sir Rowland, with concentrated fury; "but before we do part, I am resolved to know the name of your pretended husband!"

"Torture shall not wrest it from me," answered his sister, firmly.

"What motive have you for concealment?" he demanded.

"A vow," she answered,—"a vow to my dead husband."

Sir Rowland looked at her for a moment, as if he meditated some terrible reply. He then arose, and, taking a few turns in the chamber, stopped suddenly before her.

"What has put it into your head that your son yet lives?" he asked.

"I have dreamed that I shall see him before I die," she rejoined.

"Dreamed!" echoed the knight, with a ghastly smile. "Is that all? Then learn from me that your hopes are visionary as their foundation. Unless he can arise from the bottom of the Thames, where he and his abhorred father lie buried, you will never behold him again in this world."

"Heaven have compassion on you, Rowland!" murmured his sister, crossing her hands and looking upwards; "you have none on me."

"I will have none till I have forced the villain's name from you!" he cried, stamping the floor with rage.

"Rowland, your violence is killing me," she returned, in a plaintive tone.

"His name, I say!—his name!" thundered the knight.

And he unsheathed his sword.

Lady Trafford uttered a prolonged scream, and fainted. When she came to herself, she found that her brother had quitted the room, leaving her to the care of a female attendant. Her first orders were to summon the rest of her servants to make immediate preparations for her departure for Lancashire.

"To-night, your ladyship?" ventured an elderly domestic.

"Instantly, Hobson," returned Lady Trafford; "as soon as the carriage can be brought round."

"It shall be at the door in ten minutes. Has your ladyship any further commands?"

"None whatever. Yet, stay! There is one thing I wish you to do. Take that box, and put it into the carriage yourself. Where is Sir Rowland?"

"In the library, your ladyship. He has given orders that no one is to disturb him. But there's a person in the hall—a very odd sort of man—waiting to see him, who won't be sent away."

"Very well. Lose not a moment, Hobson."

The elderly domestic bowed, took up the case, and retired.

"Your ladyship is far too unwell to travel," remarked the female attendant, assisting her to rise; "you'll never be able to reach Manchester."

"It matters not, Norris," replied Lady Trafford: "I would rather die on the road, than be exposed to another such scene as I have just encountered."

" Dear me!" sympathised Mrs. Norris. "I was afraid from the scream I heard, that something dreadful had happened, Sir Rowland has a terrible temper indeed—a shocking temper! I declare he frightens me out of my senses."

"Sir Rowland is my brother," resumed Lady Trafford coldly.

"Well that's no reason why he should treat your ladyship so shamefully, I'm sure. Ah! how I wish, poor dear Sir Cecil were alive! he'd keep him in order."

Lady Trafford sighed deeply.

"Your ladyship has never been well since you married Sir Cecil," rejoined Mrs. Norris. "For my part, I don't think you ever quite got over the accident you met with on the night of the Great Storm."

"Norris!" gasped Lady Trafford, trembling violently.

"Mercy on us! what have I said!" cried the attendant, greatly alarmed by the agitation of her mistress; "do sit down, your ladyship, while I run for the ratifia and rosa solis."

"It is past," rejoined Lady Trafford, recovering herself by a powerful effort; "but never allude to the circumstance again. Go and prepare for our departure."

In less time than Hobson had mentioned, the carriage was announced. And Lady Trafford having been carried down stairs, and placed within it, the postboy drove off, at a rapid pace for Barnet.

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VIII.

Miching Mallecho.

Sir Rowland, meantime, paced his chamber with a quick and agitated step. He was ill at ease, though he would not have confessed his disquietude even to himself. Not conceiving that his sister—feeble as she was, and yielding as she had ever shown herself to his wishes, whether expressed or implied—would depart without consulting him, he was equally surprised and enraged to hear the servants busied in transporting her to the carriage. His pride, however, would not suffer him to interfere with their proceedings; much less could he bring himself to acknowledge that he had been in the wrong, and entreat Lady Trafford to remain, though he was well aware that her life might be endangered if she travelled by night. But, when the sound of the carriage-wheels died away, and he felt that she was actually gone, his resolution failed him, and he rang the bell violently.

"My horses, Charcam," he said, as a servant appeared.

The man lingered.

"'Sdeath! why am I not obeyed?" exclaimed the knight, angrily. "I wish to overtake Lady Trafford. Use despatch!"

"Her ladyship will not travel beyond Saint Alban's to-night, Sir Rowland, so Mrs. Norris informed me," returned Charcam, respectfully; "and there's a person without, anxious for an audience, whom, with submission, I think your honour would desire to see."

"Ah!" exclaimed Sir Rowland, glancing significantly at Charcam, who was a confidant in his Jacobite schemes; "is it the messenger from Orchard-Windham, from Sir William?"

"No, Sir Rowland."

"From Mr. Corbet Kynaston, then? Sir John Packington's courier was here yesterday."

"No, Sir Rowland."

"Perhaps he is from Lord Derwentwater, or Mr. Forster? News is expected from Northumberland."

"I can't exactly say, Sir Rowland. The gentleman didn't communicate his business to me. But I'm sure it's important."

Charcam said this, not because he knew anything about the matter; but, having received a couple of guineas to deliver the message, he, naturally enough, estimated its importance by the amount of the gratuity.

"Well, I will see him," replied the knight, after a moment's pause; "he may be from the Earl of Mar. But let the horses be in readiness. I shall ride to St. Alban's to-night."

So saying, he threw himself into a chair. And Charcam, fearful of another charge in his master's present uncertain mood, disappeared.

The person, shortly afterwards ushered into the room, seemed by the imperfect light,—for the evening was advancing, and the chamber darkened by heavy drapery,—to be a middle-sized middle-aged man, of rather vulgar appearance, but with a very shrewd aspect. He was plainly attired in a riding-dress and boots of the period, and wore a hanger by his side.

"Your servant, Sir Rowland," said the stranger, ducking his head, as he advanced.

"Your business, Sir?" returned the other, stiffly.

The new-comer looked at Charcam. Sir Rowland waved his hand, and the attendant withdrew.

"You don't recollect me, I presume?" premised the stranger, taking a seat.

The knight, who could ill brook this familiarity, instantly arose.

"Don't disturb yourself," continued the other, nowise disconcerted by the rebuke. "I never stand upon ceremony where I know I shall be welcome. We have met before."

"Indeed!" rejoined Sir Rowland, haughtily; "perhaps, you will refresh my memory as to the time, and place."

"Let me see. The time was the th of November, : the place, the Mint in Southwark. I have a good memory, you perceive, Sir Rowland."

The knight staggered as if struck by a mortal wound. Speedily recovering himself, however, he rejoined, with forced calmness, "You are mistaken, Sir. I was in Lancashire, at our family seat, at the time you mention."

The stranger smiled incredulously.

"Well, Sir Rowland," he said, after a brief pause, during which the knight regarded him with a searching glance, as if endeavouring to recall his features, "I will not gainsay your words. You are in the right to be cautious, till you know with whom you have to deal; and, even then, you can't be too wary. 'Avow nothing, believe nothing, give nothing for nothing,' is my own motto. And it's a maxim of universal application: or, at least, of universal practice. I am not come here to play the part of your father-confessor. I am come to serve you."

"In what way, Sir?" demanded Trenchard, in astonishment.

"You will learn anon. You refuse me your confidence. I applaud your prudence: it is, however, needless. Your history, your actions, nay, your very thoughts are better known to me than to your spiritual adviser."

"Make good your assertions," cried Trenchard, furiously, "or——"

"To the proof," interrupted the stranger, calmly. "You are the son of Sir Montacute Trenchard, of Ashton-Hall, near Manchester. Sir Montacute had three children—two daughters and yourself. The eldest, Constance, was lost, by the carelessness of a servant, during her infancy, and has never since been heard of: the youngest, Aliva, is the present Lady Trafford. I merely mention these circumstances to show the accuracy of my information."

"If this is the extent of it, Sir," returned the knight, ironically, "you may spare yourself further trouble. These particulars are familiar to all, who have any title to the knowledge."

"Perhaps so," rejoined the stranger; "but I have others in reserve, not so generally known. With your permission, I will go on in my own way. Where I am in error, you can set me right.—Your father, Sir Montacute Trenchard, who had been a loyal subject of King James the Second, and borne arms in his service, on the abdication of that monarch, turned his back upon the Stuarts, and would never afterwards recognise their claims to the crown. It was said, that he received an affront from James, in the shape of

a public reprimand, which his pride could not forgive. Be this as it may, though a Catholic, he died a friend to the Protestant succession."

"So far you are correct," observed Trenchard; "still, this is no secret."

" Suffer me to proceed," replied the stranger. "The opinions, entertained by the old knight, naturally induced him to view with displeasure the conduct of his son, who warmly espoused the cause he had deserted. Finding remonstrances of no avail, he had recourse to threats; and when threats failed, he adopted more decided measures."

"Ha!" ejaculated Trenchard.

"As yet," pursued the stranger, "Sir Montacute had placed no limit to his son's expenditure. He did not quarrel with Rowland's profusion, for his own revenues were ample; but he did object to the large sums lavished by him in the service of a faction he was resolved not to support. Accordingly, the old knight reduced his son's allowance to a third of its previous amount; and, upon further provocation, he even went so far as to alter his will in favour of his daughter, Aliva, who was then betrothed to her cousin, Sir Cecil Trafford."

"Proceed, Sir," said Trenchard, breathing hard.

"Under these circumstances, Rowland did what any other sensible person would do. Aware of his father's inflexibility of purpose, he set his wits to work to defeat the design. He contrived to break off his sister's match; and this he accomplished so cleverly, that he maintained the strictest friendship with Sir Cecil. For two years he thought himself secure; and, secretly engaged in the Jacobite schemes of the time, in which, also, Sir Cecil was deeply involved, he began to relax in his watchfulness over Aliva. About this time,—namely, in November, —while young Trenchard was in Lancashire, and his sister in London, on a visit, he received a certain communication from his confidential servant, Davies, which, at once, destroyed his hopes. He learnt that his sister was privately married—the name or rank of her husband could not be ascertained—and living in retirement in an obscure dwelling in the Borough, where she had given birth to a son. Rowland's plans were quickly formed, and as quickly executed. Accompanied by Sir Cecil, who still continued passionately enamoured of his sister, and to whom he represented that she had fallen a victim to the arts of a seducer, he set off, at fiery speed, for the metropolis. Arrived there, their first object was to seek out Davies, by whom they were conducted to the lady's retreat,—a lone habitation, situated on the outskirts of Saint George's Fields in Southwark. Refused admittance, they broke open the door. Aliva's husband, who passed by the name of Darrell, confronted them sword in hand. For a few minutes he kept them at bay. But, urged by his wife's cries, who was

more anxious for the preservation of her child's life than her own, he snatched up the infant, and made his escape from the back of the premises. Rowland and his companions instantly started in pursuit, leaving the lady to recover as she might. They tracked the fugitive to the Mint; but, like hounds at fault, they here lost all scent of their prey. Meantime, the lady had overtaken them; but, terrified by the menaces of her vindictive kinsmen, she did not dare to reveal herself to her husband, of whose concealment on the roof of the very house the party were searching she was aware. Aided by an individual, who was acquainted with a secret outlet from the tenement, Darrell escaped. Before his departure, he gave his assistant a glove. That glove is still preserved. In her endeavour to follow him, Aliva met with a severe fall, and was conveyed away, in a state of insensibility, by Sir Cecil. She was supposed to be lifeless; but she survived the accident, though she never regained her strength. Directed by the same individual, who had helped Darrell to steal a march upon him, Rowland, with Davies, and another attendant, continued the pursuit. Both the fugitive and his chasers embarked on the Thames. The elements were wrathful as their passions. The storm burst upon them in its fury. Unmindful of the terrors of the night, unscared by the danger that threatened him, Rowland consigned his sister's husband and his sister's child to the waves."

"Bring your story to an end, Sir," said Trenchard who had listened to the recital with mingled emotions of rage and fear.

" I have nearly done," replied the stranger.—"As Rowland's whole crew perished in the tempest, and he only escaped by miracle, he fancied himself free from detection. And for twelve years he has been so; until his long security, well-nigh obliterating remembrance of the deed, has bred almost a sense of innocence within his breast. During this period Sir Montacute has been gathered to his fathers. His title has descended to Rowland: his estates to Aliva. The latter has, since, been induced to unite herself to Sir Cecil, on terms originating with her brother, and which, however strange and unprecedented, were acquiesced in by the suitor."

Sir Rowland looked bewildered with surprise.

"The marriage was never consummated," continued the imperturbable stranger. "Sir Cecil is no more. Lady Trafford, supposed to be childless, broken in health and spirits, frail both in mind and body, is not likely to make another marriage. The estates must, ere long, revert to Sir Rowland."

"Are you man, or fiend?" exclaimed Trenchard, staring at the stranger, as he concluded his narration.

"You are complimentary, Sir Rowland," returned the other, with a grim smile.

"If you are human," rejoined Trenchard, with stern emphasis, "I insist upon knowing whence you derived your information?"

"I might refuse to answer the question, Sir Rowland. But I am not indisposed to gratify you. Partly, from your confessor; partly, from other sources."

"My confessor!" ejaculated the knight, in the extremity of surprise; "has he betrayed his sacred trust?"

"He has," replied the other, grinning; "and this will be a caution to you in future, how you confide a secret of consequence to a priest. I should as soon think of trusting a woman. Tickle the ears of their reverences with any idle nonsense you please: but tell them nothing you care to have repeated. I was once a disciple of Saint Peter myself, and speak from experience."

"Who are you?" ejaculated Trenchard, scarcely able to credit his senses.

" I'm surprised you've not asked that question before, Sir Rowland. It would have saved me much circumlocution, and you some suspense. My name is Wild—Jonathan Wild."

And the great thief-taker indulged himself in a chuckle at the effect produced by this announcement. He was accustomed to such surprises, and enjoyed them.

Sir Rowland laid his hand upon his sword.

"Mr. Wild," he said, in a sarcastic tone, but with great firmness; "a person of your well-known sagacity must be aware that some secrets are dangerous to the possessor."

"I am fully aware of it, Sir Rowland," replied Jonathan, coolly; "but I have nothing to fear; because, in the first place, it will be to your advantage not to molest me; and, in the second, I am provided against all contingencies. I never hunt the human tiger without being armed. My janizaries are without. One of them is furnished with a packet containing the heads of the statement I have just related, which, if I don't return at a certain time, will be laid before the proper authorities. I have calculated my chances, you perceive."

"You have forgotten that you are in my power," returned the knight, sternly; "and that all your allies cannot save you from my resentment."

"I can at least, protect myself," replied Wild, with, provoking calmness. "I am accounted a fair shot, as well as a tolerable swordsman, and I will give proof of my skill in both lines, should occasion require it. I have had a good many desperate engagements in my time, and have generally come off victorious. I bear the marks of some of them about me still," he continued, taking off his wig, and laying bare a bald skull, covered with cicatrices and plates of silver. "This gash," he added, pointing to one of the larger scars, "was a wipe from the hanger of Tom Thurland, whom I apprehended for the murder of Mrs. Knap. This wedge of silver," pointing to another, "which would mend a coffee-pot, serves to stop up a breach made by Will Colthurst, who robbed Mr. Hearl on Hounslow-Heath. I secured the dog after he had wounded me. This fracture was the handiwork of Jack Parrot (otherwise called Jack the Grinder), who broke into the palace of the Bishop of Norwich. Jack was a comical scoundrel, and made a little too free with his grace's best burgundy, as well as his grace's favourite housekeeper. The Bishop, however, to show him the danger of meddling with the church, gave him a dance at Tyburn for his pains. Not a scar but has its history. The only inconvenience I feel from my shattered noddle is an incapacity to drink. But that's an infirmity shared by a great many sounder heads than mine. The hardest bout I ever had was with a woman—Sally Wells, who was afterwards lagged for shoplifting. She attacked me with a carving-knife, and, when I had disarmed her, the jade bit off a couple of fingers from my left hand. Thus, you see, I've never hesitated and never shall hesitate to expose my life where anything is to be gained. My profession has hardened me."

And, with this, he coolly re-adjusted his peruke.

"What do you expect to gain from this interview, Mr. Wild!" demanded Trenchard, as if he had formed a sudden resolution.

"Ah! now we come to business," returned Jonathan, rubbing his hands, gleefully. "These are my terms, Sir Rowland," he added, taking a sheet of paper from his pocket, and pushing it towards the knight.

Trenchard glanced at the document.

"A thousand pounds," he observed, gloomily, "is a heavy price to pay for doubtful secrecy, when certain silence might be so cheaply procured."

"You would purchase it at the price of your head," replied Jonathan, knitting his brows. "Sir Rowland," he added, savagely, and with somewhat of the look of a bull-dog before he flies at his foe, "if it were my pleasure to do so, I could crush you with a breath. You are wholly in my power. Your name, with the fatal epithet of 'dangerous' attached to it,

stands foremost on the list of Disaffected now before the Secret Com mittee. I hold a warrant from Mr. Walpole for your apprehension."

"Arrested!" exclaimed Trenchard, drawing his sword.

"Put up your blade, Sir Rowland," rejoined Jonathan, resuming his former calm demeanour, "King James the Third will need it. I have no intention of arresting you. I have a different game to play; and it'll be your own fault, if you don't come off the winner. I offer you my assistance on certain terms. The proposal is so far from being exorbitant, that it should be trebled if I had not a fellow-feeling in the cause. To be frank with you, I have an affront to requite, which can be settled at the same time, and in the same way with your affair. That's worth something to me; for I don't mind paying for revenge. After all a thousand pounds is a trifle to rid you of an upstart, who may chance to deprive you of tens of thousands."

"Did I hear you aright?" asked Trenchard, with startling eagerness.

"Certainly," replied Jonathan, with the most perfect sangfroid, "I'll undertake to free you from the boy. That's part of the bargain."

"Is he alive!" vociferated Trenchard.

"To be sure," returned Wild; "he's not only alive, but likely for life, if we don't clip the thread."

Sir Rowland caught at a chair for support, and passed his hand across his brow, on which the damp had gathered thickly.

"The intelligence seems new to you. I thought I'd been sufficiently explicit," continued Jonathan. "Most persons would have guessed my meaning."

"Then it was not a dream!" ejaculated Sir Rowland in a hollow voice, and as if speaking to himself. "I did see them on the platform of the bridge—the child and his preserver! They were not struck by the fallen ruin, nor whelmed in the roaring flood,—or, if they were, they escaped as I escaped. God! I have cheated myself into a belief that the boy perished! And now my worst fears are realized—he lives!"

"As yet," returned Jonathan, with fearful emphasis.

" I cannot—dare not injure him," rejoined Trenchard, with a haggard look, and sinking, as if paralysed, into a chair.

Jonathan laughed scornfully.

"Leave him to me," he said. "He shan't trouble you further."

"No," replied Sir Rowland, who appeared completely prostrated. "I will struggle no longer with destiny. Too much blood has been shed already."

"This comes of fine feelings!" muttered Jonathan, contemptuously. "Give me your thorough-paced villain. But I shan't let him off thus. I'll try a strong dose.—Am I to understand that you intend to plead guilty, Sir Rowland?" he added. "If so, I may as well execute my warrant."

"Stand off, Sir!" exclaimed Trenchard, starting suddenly backwards.

"I knew that would bring him to," thought Wild.

"Where is the boy?" demanded Sir Rowland.

"At present under the care of his preserver—one Owen Wood, a carpenter, by whom he was brought up."

"Wood!" exclaimed Trenchard,—"of Wych Street?"

"The same."

"A boy from his shop was here a short time ago. Could it be him you mean?"

"No. That boy was the carpenter's apprentice, Jack Sheppard. I've just left your nephew."

At this moment Charcam entered the room.

"Beg pardon, Sir Rowland," said the attendant, "but there's a boy from Mr. Wood, with a message for Lady Trafford."

"From whom?" vociferated Trenchard.

"From Mr. Wood the carpenter."

"The same who was here just now?"

"No, Sir Rowland, a much finer boy."

"'Tis he, by Heaven!" cried Jonathan; "this is lucky. Sir Rowland," he added, in a deep whisper, "do you agree to my terms?"

"I do," answered Trenchard, in the same tone.

"Enough!" rejoined Wild; "he shall not return."

" Have you acquainted him with Lady Trafford's departure?" said the knight, addressing Charcam, with as much composure as he could assume.

"No, Sir Rowland," replied the attendant, "as you proposed to ride to Saint Albans to-night, I thought you might choose to see him yourself. Besides, there's something odd about the boy; for, though I questioned him pretty closely concerning his business, he declined answering my questions, and said he could only deliver his message to her ladyship. I thought it better not to send him away till I'd mentioned the circumstance to you."

"You did right," returned Trenchard.

"Where is he?" asked Jonathan.

"In the hall," replied Charcam.

"Alone?"

"Not exactly, Sir. There's another lad at the gate waiting for him—the same who was here just now, that Sir Rowland was speaking of, who fastened up the jewel-case for her ladyship."

"A jewel-case!" exclaimed Jonathan. "Ah, I see it all!" he cried, with a quick glance. "Jack Sheppard's fingers are lime-twigs. Was anything missed after the lad's departure, Sir Rowland?"

"Not that I'm aware of," said the knight.—"Stay! something occurs to me." And he conferred apart with Jonathan.

"That's it!" cried Wild when Trenchard concluded. "This young fool is come to restore the article—whatever it may be—which Lady Trafford was anxious to conceal, and which

his companion purloined. It's precisely what such a simpleton would do. We have him as safe as a linnet in a cage; and could wring his neck round as easily. Oblige me by acting under my guidance in the matter, Sir Rowland. I'm an old hand at such things. Harkee," he added, "Mr. What's-your-name!"

"Charcam," replied the attendant, bowing.

"Very well, Mr. Charcoal, you may bring in the boy. But not a word to him of Lady Trafford's absence—mind that. A robbery has been committed, and your master suspects this lad as an accessory to the offence. He, therefore, desires to interrogate him. It will be necessary to secure his companion; and as you say he is not in the house, some caution must be used in approaching him, or he may chance to take to his heels, for he's a slippery little rascal. When you've seized him, cough thrice thus,—and two rough-looking gentlemen will make their appearance. Don't be alarmed by their manners, Mr. Charcoal. They're apt to be surly to strangers, but it soon wears off. The gentleman with the red beard will relieve you of your prisoner. The other must call a coach as quickly as he can."

"For whom, Sir?" inquired Charcam. "For me—his master, Mr. Jonathan Wild."

"Are you Mr. Jonathan Wild?" asked the attendant, in great trepidation.

"I am, Charcoal. But don't let my name frighten you. Though," said the thief-taker, with a complacent smile, "all the world seems to tremble at it. Obey my orders, and you've nothing to fear. About them quickly. Lead the lad to suppose that he'll be introduced to Lady Trafford. You understand me, Charcoal."

The attendant did not understand him. He was confounded by the presence in which he found himself. But, not daring to confess his want of comprehension, he made a profound reverence, and retired.

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER IX.

Consequences of the Theft.

"How do you mean to act, Sir?" inquired Trenchard, as soon as they were left alone.

"As circumstances shall dictate, Sir Rowland," returned Jonathan. "Something is sure to arise in the course of the investigation, of which I can take advantage. If not, I'll convey him to St. Giles's round-house on my own responsibility."

"Is this your notable scheme!" asked the knight, scornfully.

" Once there," proceeded Wild, without noticing the interruption, "he's as good as in his grave. The constable, Sharples, is in my pay. I can remove the prisoner at any hour of the night I think fit: and I will remove him. You must, know, Sir Rowland—for I've no secrets from you—that, in the course of my business I've found it convenient to become the owner of a small Dutch sloop; by means of which I can transmit any light ware,—such as gold watches, rings, and plate, as well as occasionally a bank or goldsmith's note, which has been spoken with by way of the mail,—you understand me?—to Holland or Flanders, and obtain a secure and ready market for them. This vessel is now in the river, off Wapping. Her cargo is nearly shipped. She will sail, at early dawn to-morrow, for Rotterdam. Her commander, Rykhart Van Galgebrok, is devoted to my interests. As soon as he gets into blue water, he'll think no more of pitching the boy overboard than of lighting his pipe. This will be safer than cutting his throat on shore. I've tried the plan, and found it answer. The Northern Ocean keeps a secret better than the Thames, Sir Rowland. Before midnight, your nephew shall be safe beneath the hatches of the Zeeslang."

"Poor child!" muttered Trenchard, abstractedly; "the whole scene upon the river is passing before me. I hear the splash in the water—I see the white object floating like a sea-bird on the tide—it will not sink!"

"'Sblood!" exclaimed Jonathan, in a tone of ill-disguised contempt; "it won't do to indulge those fancies now. Be seated, and calm yourself."

"I have often conjured up some frightful vision of the dead," murmured the knight, "but I never dreamed of an interview with the living."

"It'll be over in a few minutes," rejoined Jonathan, impatiently; "in fact, it'll be over too soon for me. I like such interviews. But we waste time. Have the goodness to affix your name to that memorandum, Sir Rowland. I require nothing, you see, till my share of the contract is fulfilled."

Trenchard took up a pen.

" It's the boy's death-warrant," observed Jonathan, with a sinister smile.

"I cannot sign it," returned Trenchard.

"Damnation!" exclaimed Wild with a snarl, that displayed his glistening fangs to the farthest extremity of his mouth, "I'm not to be trifled with thus. That paper must be signed, or I take my departure."

"Go, Sir," rejoined the knight, haughtily.

"Ay, ay, I'll go, fast enough!" returned Jonathan, putting his hands into his pockets, "but not alone, Sir Rowland."

At this juncture, the door was flung open, and Charcam entered, dragging in Thames, whom he held by the collar, and who struggled in vain to free himself from the grasp imposed upon him.

"Here's one of the thieves, Sir Rowland!" cried the attendant. "I was only just in time. The young rascal had learnt from some of the women-servants that Lady Trafford was from home, and was in the very act of making off when I got down stairs. Come along, my Newgate bird!" he continued, shaking him with great violence.

Jonathan gave utterance to a low whistle.

"If things had gone smoothly," he thought, "I should have cursed the fellow's stupidity. As it is, I'm not sorry for the blunder."

Trenchard, meanwhile, whose gaze was fixed upon the boy, became livid as death, but he moved not a muscle.

"'T is he!" he mentally ejaculated.

"What do you think of your nephew, Sir Rowland?" whispered Jonathan, who sat with his back towards Thames, so that his features were concealed from the youth's view. "It would be a thousand pities, wouldn't it, to put so promising a lad out of the way?"

"Devil!" exclaimed the knight fiercely, "Give me the paper."

Jonathan hastily picked up the pen, and presented it to Trenchard, who attached his signature to the document.

" If I am the devil," observed Wild, "as some folks assert, and I myself am not unwilling to believe, you'll find that I differ from the generally-received notions of the arch-fiend, and faithfully execute the commands of those who confide their souls to my custody."

"Take hence this boy, then," rejoined Trenchard; "his looks unman me."

"Of what am I accused?" asked Thames, who though a good deal alarmed at first, had now regained his courage.

"Of robbery!" replied Jonathan in a thundering voice, and suddenly confronting him. "You've charged with assisting your comrade, Jack Sheppard, to purloin certain articles of value from a jewel-case belonging to Lady Trafford. Aha!" he continued, producing a short silver staff, which he carried constantly about with him, and uttering a terrible imprecation, "I see you're confounded. Down on your marrow-bones, sirrah! Confess your guilt, and Sir Rowland may yet save you from the gallows."

"I've nothing to confess," replied Thames, boldly; "I've done no wrong. Are you my accuser?"

"I am," replied Wild; "have you anything to allege to the contrary?"

"Only this," returned Thames: "that the charge is false, and malicious, and that you know it to be so."

"Is that all!" retorted Jonathan. "Come, I must search you my youngster!"

"You shan't touch me," rejoined Thames; and, suddenly bursting from Charcam, he threw himself at the feet of Trenchard. "Hear me, Sir Rowland!" he cried. "I am innocent, f have stolen nothing. This person—this Jonathan Wild, whom I beheld for the first time, scarcely an hour ago, in Wych Street, is—I know not why—my enemy. He has sworn that he'll take away my life!"

"Bah!" interrupted Jonathan. "You won't listen to this nonsense, Sir Rowland!"

"If you are innocent, boy," said the knight, controlling his emotion; "you have nothing to apprehend. But, what brought you here?"

" Excuse me, Sir Rowland. I cannot answer that question. My business is with Lady Trafford."

"Are you aware that I am her ladyship's brother?" returned the knight. "She has no secrets from me."

"Possibly not," replied Thames, in some confusion; "but I am not at liberty to speak."

"Your hesitation is not in your favour," observed Trenchard, sternly.

"Will he consent, to be searched?" inquired Jonathan.

"No," rejoined Thames, "I won't be treated like a common felon, if I can help it."

"You shall be treated according to your deserts, then," said Jonathan, maliciously. And, in spite of the boy's resistance, he plunged his hands into his pockets, and drew forth the miniature.

"Where did you get this from?" asked Wild, greatly surprised at the result of his investigation.

Thames returned no answer.

"I thought as much," continued Jonathan. "But we'll find a way to make you open your lips presently. Bring in his comrade," he added, in a whisper to Charcam; "I'll take care of him. And don't neglect my instructions this time." Upon which, with an assurance that he would not do so, the attendant departed.

"You can, of course, identify this picture as Lady Trafford's property?" pursued Jonathan, with a meaning glance, as he handed it to the knight.

"I can," replied Trenchard. "Ha!" he exclaimed, with a sudden start, as his glance fell upon the portrait; "how came this into your possession, boy?"

"Why don't you answer, sirrah?" cried Wild, in a savage tone, and striking him with the silver staff. "Can't you speak?"

"I don't choose," replied Thames, sturdily; "and your brutality shan't make me."

"We'll see that," replied Jonathan, dealing him another and more violent blow.

"Let him alone," said Trenchard authoritatively, "I have another question to propose. Do you know whoso portrait this is?"

" I do not," replied Thames, repressing his tears, "but I believe it to be the portrait of my father."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the knight, in astonishment. "Is your father alive?"

"No," returned Thames; "he was assassinated while I was an infant."

"Who told you this is his portrait?" demanded Trenchard.

"My heart," rejoined Thames, firmly; "which now tells me I am in the presence of his murderer."

"That's me," interposed Jonathan; "a thief-taker is always a murderer in the eyes of a thief. I'm almost sorry your suspicions are unfounded, if your father in any way resembled you, my youngster. But I can tell you who'll have the pleasure of hanging your father's son; and that's a person not a hundred miles distant from you at this moment—ha! ha!"

As he said this, the door was opened, and Charcam entered, accompanied by a dwarfish, shabby-looking man, in a brown serge frock, with coarse Jewish features, and a long red beard. Between the Jew and the attendant came Jack Sheppard; while a crowd of servants, attracted by the news, that the investigation of a robbery was going forward, lingered at the doorway in hopes of catching something of the proceedings.

When Jack was brought in, he cast a rapid glance around him, and perceiving Thames in the custody of Jonathan, instantly divined how matters stood. As he looked in this direction, Wild gave him a significant wink, the meaning of which he was not slow to comprehend.

"Get it over quickly," said Trenchard, in a whisper to the thief-taker.

Jonathan nodded assent.

"What's your name?" he said, addressing the audacious lad, who was looking about him as coolly as if nothing material was going on.

"Jack Sheppard," returned the boy, fixing his eyes upon a portrait of the Earl of Mar. "Who's that queer cove in the full-bottomed wig?"

" Attend to me, sirrah," rejoined Wild, sternly. "Do you know this picture?" he added, with another significant look, and pointing to the miniature.

"I do," replied Jack, carelessly.

"That's well. Can you inform us whence it came?"

"I should think so."

"State the facts, then."

"It came from Lady Trafford's jewel-box."

Here a murmur of amazement arose from the assemblage outside.

"Close the door!" commanded Trenchard, impatiently.

"In my opinion, Sir Rowland," suggested Jonathan; "you'd better allow the court to remain open."

"Be it so," replied the knight, who saw the force of this reasoning. "Continue the proceedings."

"You say that the miniature was abstracted from Lady Trafford's jewel-box," said Jonathan, in a loud voice. "Who took it thence?"

"Thames Darrell; the boy at your side."

"Jack!" cried Thames, in indignant surprise.

But Sheppard took no notice of the exclamation.

A loud buzz of curiosity circulated among the domestics; some of whom—especially the females—leaned forward to obtain a peep at the culprit.

"Si—lence!" vociferated Charcam, laying great emphasis on the last syllable.

"Were you present at the time of the robbery?" pursued Jonathan.

"I was," answered Sheppard.

"And will swear to it?"

"I will."

"Liar!" ejaculated Thames.

"Enough!" exclaimed Wild, triumphantly.

"Close the court, Mr. Charcoal. They've heard quite enough for my purpose," he muttered, as his orders were obeyed, and the domestics excluded. "It's too late to carry 'em before a magistrate now, Sir Rowland; so, with your permission, I'll give 'em a night's lodging in Saint Giles's round-house. You, Jack Sheppard, have nothing to fear, as you've become evidence against your accomplice. To-morrow, I shall carry you before Justice Walters, who'll take your information; and I've no doubt but Thames Darrell will be fully committed. Now, for the cage, my pretty canary-bird. Before we start, I'll accommodate you with a pair of ruffles." And he proceeded to handcuff his captive.

"Hear me!" cried Thames, bursting into tears. "I am innocent. I could not have committed this robbery. I have only just left Wych Street. Send for Mr. Wood, and you'll find that I've spoken the truth."

"You'd better hold your peace, my lad," observed Jonathan, in a menacing tone.

"Lady Trafford would not have thus condemned me!" cried Thames.

"Away with him!" exclaimed Sir Rowland, impatiently.

"Take the prisoners below, Nab," said Jonathan, addressing the dwarfish Jew; "I'll join you in an instant."

The bearded miscreant seized Jack by the waist, and Thames by the nape of the neck, and marched off, like the ogre in the fairy tale, with a boy under each arm, while Charcam brought upt the rear.

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER X.

Mother and Son.

They had scarcely been gone a moment, when a confused noise was heard without, and Charcam re-entered the room, with a countenance of the utmost bewilderment and alarm.

"What's the matter with the man?" demanded Wild.

"Her ladyship—" faltered the attendant.

"What of her?" cried the knight. "Is she returned!"

"Y—e—s, Sir Rowland," stammered Charcam.

"The devil!" ejaculated Jonathan. "Here's a cross-bite."

"But that's not all, your honour," continued Charcam; "Mrs. Norris says she's dying."

" Dying!" echoed the knight.

"Dying, Sir Rowland. She was taken dreadfully ill on the road, with spasms and short breath, and swoonings,—worse than ever she was before. And Mrs. Norris was so frightened that she ordered the postboys to drive back as fast as they could. She never expected to get her ladyship home alive."

"My God!" cried Trenchard, stunned by the intelligence, "I have killed her."

"No doubt," rejoined Wild, with a sneer; "but don't let all the world know it."

"They're lifting her out of the carriage," interposed Charcam; "will it please your honour to send for some advice and the chaplain?"

"Fly for both," returned Sir Rowland, in a tone of bitter anguish.

"Stay!" interposed Jonathan. "Where are the boys?"

"In the hall."

"Her ladyship will pass through it?"

"Of course; there's no other way."

"Then, bring them into this room, the first thing—quick! They must not meet, Sir Rowland," he added, as Charcam hastened to obey his instructions.

"Heaven has decreed it otherwise," replied the knight, dejectedly. "I yield to fate."

"Yield to nothing," returned Wild, trying to re-assure him; "above all, when your designs prosper. Man's fate is in his own hands. You are your nephew's executioner, or he is yours. Cast off this weakness. The next hour makes, or mars you for ever. Go to your sister, and do not quit her till all is over. Leave the rest to me."

Sir Rowland moved irresolutely towards the door, but recoiled before a sad spectacle. This was his sister, evidently in the last extremity. Borne in the arms of a couple of assistants, and preceded by Mrs. Norris, wringing her hands and wepping, the unfortunate lady was placed upon a couch. At the same time, Charcam, who seemed perfectly distracted by the recent occurrences, dragged in Thames, leaving Jack Sheppard outside in the custody of the dwarfish Jew.

" Hell's curses!" muttered Jonathan between his teeth; "that fool will ruin all. Take him away," he added, striding up to Charcam.

"Let him remain," interposed Trenchard.

"As you please, Sir Rowland," returned Jonathan, with affected indifference; "but I'm not going to hunt the deer for another to eat the ven'son, depend on 't."

But seeing that no notice was taken of the retort, he drew a little aside, and folded his arms, muttering, "This whim will soon be over. She can't last long. I can pull the strings of this stiff-necked puppet as I please."

Sir Rowland, meantime, throw himself on his knees beside his sister, and, clasping her chilly fingers within his own, besought her forgiveness in the most passionate terms. For a few minutes, she appeared scarcely sensible of his presence. But, after some restoratives had been administered by Mrs. Norris, she revived a little.

"Rowland," she said, in a faint voice, "I have not many minutes to live. Where is Father Spencer? I must have absolution. I have something that weighs heavily upon my mind."

Sir Rowland's brow darkened.

"I have sent for him," Aliva, he answered; "he will be here directly, with your medical advisers."

"They are useless," she returned. "Medicine cannot save mo now."

"Dear sister——"

"I should die happy, if I could behold my child."

"Comfort yourself, then, Aliva. You shall behold him."

"You are mocking me, Rowland. Jests are not for seasons like this."

"I am not, by Heaven," returned the knight, solemnly. "Leave us, Mrs. Norris, and do not return till Father Spencer arrives."

"Your ladyship——" hesitated Norris.

"Go!" said Lady Trafford; "it is my last request."

And her faithful attendant, drowned in tears, withdrew, followed by the two assistants.

Jonathan stepped behind a curtain.

"Rowland," said Lady Trafford, regarding him with a look of indescribable anxiety, "you have assured me that I shall behold my son. Where is he?"

"Within this room," replied the knight.

"Here!" shrieked Lady Trafford.

"Here," repeated her brother. "But calm yourself, dear sister, or the interview will be too much for you."

"I am calm—quite calm, Rowland," she answered, with lips whose agitation belied her words. "Then, the story of his death was false. I knew it. I was sure you could not have the heart to slay a child—an innocent child. God forgive you!"

"May He, indeed, forgive me!" returned Trenchard, crossing himself devoutly; "but my guilt is not the less heavy, because your child escaped. This hand consigned him to destruction, but another was stretched forth to save him. The infant was rescued from a watery-grave by an honest mechanic, who has since brought him up as his own son."

"Blessings upon him!" cried Lady Trafford, fervently. "But trifle with mo no longer. Moments are ages now. Let me see my child, if he is really here?"

"Behold him!" returned Trenchard, taking Thames (who had been a mute, but deeply-interested, witness of the scene) by the hand, and leading him towards her.

"Ah!" exclaimed Lady Trafford, exerting all her strength. "My sight is failing me. Let me have more light, that I may behold him. Yes!" she screamed, "these are his father's features! It is—it is my son!"

"Mother!" cried Thames; "are you, indeed, my mother?"

"I am, indeed—my own sweet boy!" she sobbed, pressing him tenderly to her breast.

"Oh!—to see you thus!" cried Thames, in an agony of affliction.

"Don't weep, my love," replied the lady, straining him still more closely to her. "I am happy—quite happy now."

During this touching interview, a change had come over Sir Rowland, and he half repented of what he had done.

" You can no longer refuse to tell me the name of this youth's father, Aliva," he said.

"I dare not, Rowland," she answered. "I cannot break my vow. I will confide it to Father Spencer, who will acquaint you with it when I am no more. Undraw the curtain, love," she added to Thames, "that I may look at you."

"Ha!" exclaimed her son, starting back, as he obeyed her, and disclosed Jonathan Wild.

"Be silent," said Jonathan, in a menacing whisper.

"What have you seen?" inquired Lady Trafford.

"My enemy," replied her son.

"Your enemy!" she returned imperfectly comprehending him. "Sir Rowland is your uncle—he will be your guardian—he will protect you. Will you not, brother?"

"Promise," said a deep voice in Trenchard's ear.

"He will kill me," cried Thames. "There is a man in this room who seeks my life."

"Impossible!" rejoined his mother.

"Look at these fetters," returned Thames, holding up his manacled wrists; "they were put on by my uncle's command."

"Ah!" shrieked Lady Trafford.

"Not a moment is to be lost," whispered Jonathan to Trenchard. "His life—or yours?"

"No one shall harm you more, my dear," cried Lady Trafford. "Your uncle must protect you. It will be his interest to do so. He will be dependent on you."

"Do what you please with him," muttered Trenchard to Wild.

"Take off these chains, Rowland," said Lady Trafford, "instantly, I command you."

"I will," replied Jonathan, advancing, and rudely seizing Thames.

"Mother!" cried the son, "help!"

"What is this?" shrieked Lady Trafford, raising herself on the couch, and extending her hands towards him. "Oh, God! would you take him from me?—would you murder him?"

" His father's name?—and he is free," rejoined Rowland, holding her arms.

"Release him first—and I will disclose it!" cried Lady Trafford; "on my soul, I will!"

"Speak then!" returned Rowland.

"Too late!" shrieked the lady, falling heavily backwards,—"too late!—oh!"

Heedless of her cries, Jonathan passed a handkerchief tightly over her son's mouth, and forced him out of the room.

When he returned, a moment or so afterwards, he found Sir Rowland standing by the lifeless body of his sister. His countenance was almost as white and rigid as that of the corpse by his side.

"This is your work," said the knight, sternly.

"Not entirely," replied Jonathan, calmly; "though I shouldn't be ashamed of it if it were. After all, you failed in obtaining the secret from her, Sir Rowland. Women are hypocrites to the last—true only to themselves."

"Peace!" cried the knight, fiercely.

"No offence," returned Jonathan. "I was merely about to observe that I am in possession of her secret."

"You!"

"Didn't I tell you that the fugitive Darrell gave me a glove! But we'll speak of this hereafter. You can purchase the information from me whenever you're so disposed. I shan't drive a hard bargain. To the point however. I came back to say, that I've placed your nephew in a coach; and, if you'll be at my lock in the Old Bailey an hour after midnight, you shall hear the last tidings of him."

"I will be there," answered Trenchard, gloomily.

"You'll not forget the thousand, Sir Rowland—short accounts, you know."

"Fear nothing. You shall have your reward."

"Thank'ee,—thank'ee. My house is the next door to the Cooper's Arms, in the Old Bailey, opposite Newgate. You'll find me at supper."

So saying, he bowed and departed.

" That man should have been an Italian bravo," murmured the knight, sinking into a chair: "he has neither fear nor compunction. Would I could purchase his apathy as easily as I can procure his assistance."

Soon after this Mrs. Norris entered the room, followed by Father Spencer. On approaching the couch, they found Sir Rowland senseless, and extended over the dead body of his unfortunate sister.

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XI.

The Mohocks.

Jonathan Wild, meanwhile, had quitted the house. He found a coach at the door, with the blinds carefully drawn up, and ascertained from a tall, ill-looking, though tawdrily-dressed fellow, who held his horse by the bridle, and whom he addressed as Quilt Arnold, that the two boys were safe inside, in the custody of Abraham Mendez, the dwarfish Jew. As soon as he had delivered his instructions to Quilt, who, with Abraham, constituted his body-guard, or janizaries, as he termed them, Jonathan mounted his steed, and rode off at a gallop. Quilt was not long in following his example. Springing upon the box, he told the coachman to make the best of his way to Saint Giles's. Stimulated by the promise of something handsome to drink, the man acquitted himself to admiration in the management of his lazy cattle. Crack went the whip, and away floundered the heavy vehicle through the deep ruts of the ill-kept road, or rather lane, (for it was little better,) which, then, led across Southampton Fields. Skirting the noble gardens of Montague House, (now, we need scarcely say, the British Museum,) the party speedily reached Great Russell Street,—a quarter described by Strype, in his edition of old Stow's famous Survey, "as being graced with the best buildings in all Bloomsbury, and the best inhabited by the nobility and gentry, especially the north side, as having gardens behind the houses, and the prospect of the pleasant fields up to Hampstead and Highgate; insomuch that this place, by physicians, is esteemed the most healthful of any in London." Neither of the parties outside bestowed much attention upon these stately and salubriously-situated mansions; indeed, as it was now not far from ten o'clock, and quite dark, they could scarcely discern them. But, in spite of his general insensibility to such matters, Quilt could not help commenting upon the delicious perfume wafted from the numerous flower-beds past which they were driving. The coachman answered by a surly grunt, and, plying his whip with redoubled zeal, shaped his course down Dyot Street; traversed that part of Holborn, which is now called Broad Street, and where two ancient alms-houses were, then, standing in the middle of that great thoroughfare, exactly opposite the opening of Compston Street; and, diving under a wide gateway on the left, soon reached a more open space, surrounded by mean habitations, coach-houses and stables, called Kendrick Yard, at the further end of which Saint Giles's round-house was situated.

No sooner did the vehicle turn the corner of this yard, than Quilt became aware, from the tumultuous sounds that reached his ears, as well as from the flashing of various

lanterns at the door of the round-house, that some disturbance was going on; and, apprehensive of a rescue, if he drew up in the midst of the mob, he thought it prudent to come to a halt. Accordingly, he stopped the coach, dismounted, and hastened towards the assemblage, which, he was glad to find, consisted chiefly of a posse of watchmen and other guardians of the night. Quilt, who was an ardent lover of mischief, could not help laughing most heartily at the rueful appearance of these personages. Not one of them but bore the marks of having been engaged in a recent and severe conflict. Quarter-staves, bludgeons, brown-bills, lanterns, swords, and sconces were alike shivered; and, to judge from the sullied state of their habiliments, the claret must have been tapped pretty freely. Never was heard such a bawling as these unfortunate wights kept up. Oaths exploded like shells from a battery in full fire, accompanied by threats of direst vengeance against the individuals who had maltreated them. Here, might be seen a poor fellow whose teeth were knocked down his throat, spluttering out the most tremendous menaces, and gesticulating like a madman: there, another, whose nose was partially slit, vented imprecations and lamentations in the same breath. On the right, stood a bulky figure, with a broken rattle hanging out of his great-coat pocket, who held up a lantern to his battered countenance to prove to the spectators that both his orbs of vision were darkened: on the left, a meagre constable had divested himself of his shirt, to bind up with greater convenience a gaping cut in the arm.

"So, the Mohocks have been at work, I perceive," remarked Quilt, as he drew near the group.

"'Faith, an' you may say that," returned a watchman, who was wiping a ruddy stream from his brow; "they've broken the paice, and our pates into the bargain. But shurely I'd know that vice," he added, turning his lantern towards the janizary. "Ah! Quilt Arnold, my man, is it you? By the powers! I'm glad to see you. The sight o' your 'andsome phiz allys does me good."

"I wish I could return the compliment, Terry. But your cracked skull is by no means a pleasing spectacle. How came you by the hurt, eh?"

"How did I come by it?—that's a nate question. Why, honestly enouch. It was lent me by a countryman o' mine; but I paid him back in his own coin—ha! ha!"

"A countryman of yours, Terry?"

"Ay, and a noble one, too, Quilt—more's the pity! You've heard of the Marquis of Slaughterford, belike?"

"Of course; who has not? He's the leader of the Mohocks, the general of the Scourers, the prince of rakes, the friend of the surgeons and glaziers, the terror of your tribe, and the idol of the girls!"

"That's him to a hair?" cried Terence, rapturously. "Och! he's a broth of a boy!"

"Why, I thought he'd broken your head, Terry?"

"Phooh! that's nothing? A piece o' plaster'll set all to rights; and Terry O'Flaherty's not the boy to care for the stroke of a supple-jack. Besides, didn't I tell you that I giv' him as good as he brought—and better! I jist touched him with my 'Evenin' Star,' as I call this shillelah," said the watchman, flourishing an immense bludgeon, the knob of which appeared to be loaded with lead, "and, by Saint Patrick! down he cum'd like a bullock."

"Zounds!" exclaimed Quilt, "did you kill him?"

"Not quite," replied Terence, laughing; "but I brought him to his senses."

"By depriving him of 'em, eh! But I'm sorry you hurt his lordship, Terry. Young noblemen ought to be indulged in their frolics. If they do, now and then, run away with a knocker, paint a sign, beat the watch, or huff a magistrate, they pay for their pastime, and that's sufficient. What more could any reasonable man—especially a watchman—desire? Besides, the Marquis, is a devilish fine fellow, and a particular friend of mine. There's not his peer among the peerage."

"Och! if he's a friend o' yours, my dear joy, there's no more to be said; and right sorry am I, I struck him. But, bloodan'-'ouns! man, if ould Nick himself were to hit me a blow, I'd be afther givin' him another."

"Well, well—wait awhile," returned Quilt; "his lordship won't forget you. He's as generous as he's frolicsome."

As he spoke, the door of the round-house was opened, and a stout man, with a lantern in his hand, presented himself at the threshold.

"There's Sharples," cried Quilt.

"Whist!" exclaimed Terence; "he elevates his glim. By Jasus! he's about to spake to us."

"Gem'men o' the votch!" cried Sharples, as loudly as a wheezy cough would permit him, "my noble pris'ner—ough! ough;—the Markis o' Slaughterford——"

Further speech was cut short by a volley of execrations from the angry guardians of the night.

"No Mohocks! No Scourers!" cried the mob.

"Hear! hear!" vociferated Quilt.

"His lordship desires me to say—ough! ough!"

Fresh groans and hisses.

"Von't you hear me?—ough! ough!" demanded Sharples, after a pause.

"By all means," rejoined Quilt.

"Raise your vice, and lave off coughin'," added Terence.

"The long and the short o' the matter's this then," returned Sharples with dignity, "the Markis begs your acceptance o' ten guineas to drink his health."

The hooting was instantaneously changed to cheers.

"And his lordship, furthermore, requests me to state," proceeded Sharples, in a hoarse tone, "that he'll be responsible for the doctors' bill of all such gem'men as have received broken pates, or been otherwise damaged in the fray—ough! ough!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the mob.

"We're all damaged—we've all got broken pates," cried a dozen voices.

"Ay, good luck to him! so we have," rejoined Terence; "but we've no objection to take out the dochter's bill in drink."

"None whatever," replied the mob.

"Your answer, gem'men?" demanded Sharples.

"Long life to the Markis, and we accept his honourable proposal," responded the mob.

"Long life to the Marquis!" reiterated Terence; "he's an honour to ould Ireland!"

"Didn't I tell you how it would be?" remarked Quilt.

"Troth, and so did you," returned the watchman; "but I couldn't belave it. In futur', I'll keep the 'Evenin' Star' for his lordship's enemies."

"You'd better," replied Quilt. "But bring your glim this way. I've a couple of kinchens in yonder rattler, whom I wish to place under old Sharples's care."

"Be handy, then," rejoined Terence, "or, I'll lose my share of the smart money."

With the assistance of Terence, and a linkboy who volunteered his services, Quilt soon removed the prisoners from the coach, and leaving Sheppard to the custody of Abraham, proceeded to drag Thames towards the round-house. Not a word had been exchanged between the two boys on the road. Whenever Jack attempted to speak, he was checked by an angry growl from Abraham; and Thames, though his heart was full almost to bursting, felt no inclination to break the silence. His thoughts, indeed, were too painful for utterance, and so acute were his feelings, that, for some time, they quite overcame him. But his grief was of short duration. The elastic spirits of youth resumed their sway; and, before the coach stopped, his tears had ceased to flow. As to Jack Sheppard, he appeared utterly reckless and insensible, and did nothing but whistle and sing the whole way.

While he was dragged along in the manner just described, Thames looked around to ascertain, if possible, where he was; for he did not put entire faith in Jonathan's threat of sending him to the round-house, and apprehensive of something even worse than imprisonment. The aspect of the place, so far as he could discern through the gloom, was strange to him; but chancing to raise his eyes above the level of the surrounding habitations, he beheld, relieved against the sombre sky, the tall steeple of Saint Giles's church, the precursor of the present structure, which was not erected till some fifteen years later. He recognised this object at once. Jonathan had not deceived him.

"What's this here kinchen in for?" asked Terence, as he and Quilt strode along, with Thames between them.

"What for?" rejoined Quilt, evasively.

"Oh! nothin' partickler—mere curossity," replied Terence. "By the powers!" he added, turning his lantern full upon the face of the captive, "he's a nice genn-teel-lookin' kiddy, I must say. Pity he's ta'en to bad ways so airly."

"You may spare me your compassion, friend," observed Thames; "I am falsely detained."

"Of course," rejoined Quilt, maliciously; "every thief is so. If we were to wait till a prig was rightfully nabbed, we might tarry till doomsday. We never supposed you helped yourself to a picture set with diamonds—not we!"

"Is the guv'ner consarned in this job?" asked Terence, in a whisper.

"He is," returned Quilt, significantly. "Zounds! what's that!" he cried, as the noise of a scuffle was heard behind them. "The other kid's given my partner the slip. Here, take this youngster, Terry; my legs are lighter than old Nab's." And, committing Thames to the care of the watchman, he darted after the fugitive.

"Do you wish to earn a rich reward, my good friend?" said Thames to the watchman, as soon as they were left alone.

"Is it by lettin' you go, my darlin', that I'm to airn it?" inquired Terence. "If so, it won't pay. You're Mister Wild's pris'ner, and worse luck to it!"

"I don't ask you to liberate me," urged Thames; "but will you convey a message for me?"

"Where to, honey?"

"To Mr. Wood's, the carpenter in Wych Street. He lives near the Black Lion."

"The Black Lion!" echoed Terence. "I know the house well; by the same token that it's a flash crib. Och! many a mug o' bubb have I drained wi' the landlord, Joe Hind. And so Misther Wudd lives near the Black Lion, eh?"

"He does," replied Thames. "Tell him that I—his adopted son, Thames Darrell—am detained here by Jonathan Wild."

"Thames Ditton—is that your name?"

"No," replied the boy, impatiently; "Darrell—Thames Darrell."

"I'll not forget it. It's a mighty quare 'un, though. I never yet heard of a Christians as was named after the Shannon or the Liffy; and the Thames is no better than a dhurty puddle, compared wi' them two noble strames. But then you're an adopted son, and that makes all the difference. People do call their unlawful children strange names. Are you quite shure you haven't another alyas, Masther Thames Ditton?"

" Darrell, I tell you. Will you go? You'll be paid handsomely for your trouble."

"I don't mind the throuble," hesitated Terence, who was really a good-hearted fellow at the bottom; "and I'd like to sarve you if I could, for you look like a gentleman's son, and that goes a great way wi' me. But if Misther Wild were to find out that I thwarted his schames——"

"I'd not be in your skin for a trifle," interrupted Quilt, who having secured Sheppard, and delivered him to Abraham, now approached them unawares; "and it shan't be my fault if he don't hear of it."

"'Ouns!" ejaculated Terence, in alarm, "would you turn snitch on your old pal, Quilt?"

"Ay, if he plays a-cross," returned Quilt. "Come along, my sly shaver. With all your cunning, we're more than a match for you."

"But not for me," growled Terence, in an under tone.

"Remember!" cried Quilt, as he forced the captive along.

"Remember the devil!" retorted Terence, who had recovered his natural audacity. "Do you think I'm afeard of a beggarly thief-taker and his myrmidons? Not I. Master Thames Ditton, I'll do your biddin'; and you, Misther Quilt Arnold, may do your worst, I defy you."

"Dog!" exclaimed Quilt, turning fiercely upon him, "do you threaten?"

But the watchman eluded his grasp, and, mingling with the crowd, disappeared.

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XII.

Saint Giles's Round-house.

Saint Giles's Round-house was an old detached fabric, standing in an angle of Kendrick Yard. Originally built, as its name imports, in a cylindrical form, like a modern Martello tower, it had undergone, from time to time, so many alterations, that its symmetry was, in a great measure, destroyed. Bulging out more in the middle than at the two extremities, it resembled an enormous cask set on its end,—a sort of Heidelberg tun on a large scale,—and this resemblance was increased by the small circular aperture—it hardly deserved to be called a door—pierced, like the bung-hole of a barrell, through the side of the structure, at some distance from the ground, and approached by a flight of wooden steps. The prison was two stories high, with a flat roof surmounted by a gilt vane fashioned like a key; and, possessing considerable internal accommodation, it had, in its day, lodged some thousands of disorderly personages. The windows were small, and strongly grated, looking, in front, on Kendrick Yard, and, at the back, upon the spacious burial-ground of Saint Giles's Church. Lights gleamed from the lower rooms, and, on a nearer approach to the building, the sound of revelry might be heard from within.

Warned of the approach of the prisoners by the increased clamour, Sharples, who was busied in distributing the Marquis's donation, affected to throw the remainder of the money among the crowd, though, in reality, he kept back a couple of guineas, which he slipped into his sleeve, and running hastily up the steps, unlocked the door. He was followed, more leisurely, by the prisoners; and, during their ascent, Jack Sheppard made a second attempt to escape by ducking suddenly down, and endeavouring to pass under his conductor's legs. The dress of the dwarfish Jew was not, however, favourable to this expedient. Jack was caught, as in a trap, by the pendant tails of Abraham's long frock; and, instead of obtaining his release by his ingenuity, he only got a sound thrashing.

Sharples received them at the threshold, and holding his lantern towards the prisoners to acquaint himself with their features, nodded to Quilt, between whom and himself some secret understanding seemed to subsist, and then closed and barred the door.

"Vell," he growled, addressing Quilt, "you know who's here, I suppose?"

" To be sure I do," replied Quilt; "my noble friend, the Marquis of Slaughterford. What of that?"

"Vot 'o that!" echoed Sharples, peevishly: "Everythin'. Vot am I to do vith these young imps, eh?"

"What you generally do with your prisoners, Mr. Sharples," replied Quilt; "lock 'em up."

"That's easily said. But, suppose I've no place to lock 'em up in, how then?"

Quilt looked a little perplexed. He passed his arm under that of the constable, and drew him aside.

"Vell, vell," growled Sharples, after he had listened to the other's remonstrances, "it shall be done. But it's confounded inconvenient. One don't often get sich a vindfal as the Markis——"

"Or such a customer as Mr. Wild," edged in Quilt.

"Now, then, Saint Giles!" interposed Sheppard, "are we to be kept here all night?"

"Eh day!" exclaimed Sharples: "wot new-fledged bantam's this?"

"One that wants to go to roost," replied Sheppard. "So, stir your stumps, Saint Giles; and, if you mean to lock us up, use despatch."

"Comin'! comin'!" returned the constable, shuffling towards him.

"Coming!—so is midnight—so is Jonathan Wild," retorted Jack, with a significant look at Thames.

"Have you never an out-o-the-vay corner, into vich you could shtow these troublesome warmint?" observed Abraham. "The guv'ner'll be here afore midnight."

Darrell's attention was drawn to the latter part of this speech by a slight pressure on his foot. And, turning at the touch, he perceived Sheppard's glance fixed meaningly upon him.

"Stow it, Nab!" exclaimed Quilt, angrily; "the kinchen's awake."

"Awake!—to be sure I am, my flash cove," replied Sheppard; "I'm down as a hammer."

"I've just bethought me of a crib as'll serve their turn," interposed Sharples, "at any rate, they'll be out o' the vay, and as safe as two chicks in a coop."

" Lead the way to it then, Saint Giles," said Jack, in a tone of mock authority.

The place, in which they stood, was a small entrance-chamber, cut off, like the segment of a circle, from the main apartment, (of which it is needless to say it originally constituted a portion,) by a stout wooden partition. A door led to the inner room; and it was evident from the peals of merriment, and other noises, that, ever and anon, resounded from within, that this chamber was occupied by the Marquis and his friends. Against the walls hung an assortment of staves, brown-bills, (weapons then borne by the watch,) muskets, handcuffs, great-coats, and lanterns. In one angle of the room stood a disused fire-place, with a rusty grate and broken chimney-piece; in the other there was a sort of box, contrived between the wall and the boards, that looked like an apology for a cupboard. Towards this box Sharples directed his steps, and, unlocking a hatch in the door, disclosed a recess scarcely as large, and certainly not as clean, as a dog-kennel.

"Vill this do?" demanded the constable, taking the candle from the lantern, the better to display the narrow limits of the hole. "I call this ere crib the Little-Ease, arter the runaway prentices' cells in Guildhall. I have squeezed three kids into it afore now. To be sure," he added, lowering his tone, "they wos little 'uns, and one on 'em was smothered—ough! ough!—how this cough chokes me!"

Sheppard, meanwhile, whose hands were at liberty, managed to possess himself, unperceived, of the spike of a halbert, which was lying, apart from the pole, upon a bench near him. Having secured this implement, he burst from his conductor, and, leaping into the hatch, as clowns generally spring into the clock-faces, when in pursuit of harlequin in the pantomime,—that is, back foremost,—broke into a fit of loud and derisive laughter, kicking his heels merrily all the time against the boards. His mirth, however, received an unpleasant check; for Abraham, greatly incensed by his previous conduct, caught him by the legs, and pushed him with such violence into the hole that the point of the spike, which he had placed in his pocket, found its way through his clothes to the flesh, inflicting a slight, but painful wound. Jack, who had something of the Spartan in his composition, endured his martyrdom without flinching; and carried his stoical indifference so far, as even to make a mocking grimace in Sharples's face, while that amiable functionary thrust Thames into the recess beside him.

"How go you like your quarters, sauce-box?" asked Sharples, in a jeering tone.

"Better than your company, Saint Giles," replied Sheppard; "so, shut the door, and make yourself scarce."

"That boy'll never rest till he finds his vay to Bridewell," observed Sharples.

"Or the street," returned Jack: "mind my words, the prison's not built that can keep me."

"We'll see that, young hempseed," replied Sharples, shutting the hatch furiously in his face, and locking it. "If you get out o' that cage, I'll forgive you. Now, come along, gem'men, and I'll show you some precious sport."

The two janizaries followed him as far as the entrance to the inner room, when Abraham, raising his finger to his lips, and glancing significantly in the direction of the boys, to explain his intention to his companions, closed the door after them, and stole softly back again, planting himself near the recess.

For a few minutes all was silent. At length Jack Sheppard observed:—"The coast's clear. They're gone into the next room."

Darrell returned no answer.

"Don't be angry with me, Thames," continued Sheppard, in a tone calculated, as he thought, to appease his companion's indignation. "I did all for the best, as I'll explain."

"I won't reproach you, Jack," said the other, sternly. "I've done with you."

"Not quite, I hope," rejoined Sheppard. "At all events, I've not done with you. If you owe your confinement to me, you shall owe your liberation to me, also."

" I'd rather lie here for ever, than be indebted to you for my freedom," returned Thames.

"I've done nothing to offend you," persisted Jack. "Nothing!" echoed the other, scornfully. "You've perjured yourself."

"That's my own concern," rejoined Sheppard. "An oath weighs little with me, compared with your safety."

"No more of this," interrupted Thames, "you make the matter worse by these excuses."

"Quarrel with me as much as you please, Thames, but hear me," returned Sheppard. "I took the course I pursued to serve you."

"Tush!" cried Thames; "you accused me to skreen yourself."

"On my soul, Thames, you wrong me!" replied Jack, passionately. "I'd lay down my life for yours."

"And you expect me to believe you after what has passed?"

"I do; and, more than that, I expect you to thank me."

"For procuring my imprisonment?"

"For saving your life."

"How?"

"Listen to me, Thames. You're in a more serious scrape than you imagine. I overheard Jonathan Wild's instructions to Quilt Arnold, and though he spoke in slang, and in an under tone, my quick ears, and acquaintance with the thieves' lingo, enabled me to make out every word he uttered. Jonathan is in league with Sir Rowland to make away with you. You are brought here that their designs may be carried into effect with greater security. Before morning, unless, we can effect an escape, you'll be kidnapped, or murdered, and your disappearance attributed to the negligence of the constable."

"Are you sure of this?" asked Thames, who, though as brave a lad as need be, could not repress a shudder at the intelligence.

"Certain. The moment I entered the room, and found you a prisoner in the hands of Jonathan Wild, I guessed how matters stood, and acted accordingly. Things haven't gone quite as smoothly as I anticipated; but they might have been worse. I can save you, and will. But, say we're friends."

"You're not deceiving me!" said Thames, doubtfully.

"I am not, by Heaven!" replied Sheppard, firmly.

"Don't swear, Jack, or I shall distrust you. I can't give you my hand; but you may take it."

"Thank you! thank you!" faltered Jack, in a voice full of emotion. "I'll soon free you from these bracelets."

"You needn't trouble yourself," replied Thames. "Mr. Wood will be here presently."

"Mr. Wood!" exclaimed Jack, in surprise. "How have you managed to communicate with him?"

Abraham, who had listened attentively to the foregoing conversation,—not a word of which escaped him,—now drew in his breath, and brought his ear closer to the boards.

"By means of the watchman who had the charge of me," replied Thames.

"Curse him!" muttered Abraham.

"Hist!" exclaimed Jack. "I thought I heard a noise. Speak lower. Somebody may be on the watch—perhaps, that old ginger-hackled Jew."

"I don't care if he is," rejoined Thames, boldly. "He'll learn that his plans will be defeated."

"He may learn how to defeat yours," replied Jack.

"So he may," rejoined Abraham, aloud, "so he may."

"Death and fiends!" exclaimed Jack; "the old thief is there. I knew it. You've betrayed yourself, Thames."

"Vot o' that?" chuckled Abraham. "You can shave him, you know."

"I can," rejoined Jack; "and you, too, old Aaron, if I'd a razor."

"How soon do you expect Mishter Vudd?" inquired the janizary, tauntingly.

"What's that to you?" retorted Jack, surlily.

"Because I shouldn't like to be out o' the vay ven he arrives," returned Abraham, in a jeering tone; "it vouldn't be vell bred."

"Vouldn't it!" replied Jack, mimicking his snuffling voice; "then shtay vere you are, and be cursed to you."

" It's all up," muttered Thames. "Mr. Wood will be intercepted. I've destroyed my only chance."

"Not your only chance, Thames," returned Jack, in the same undertone; "but your best. Never mind. We'll turn the tables upon 'em yet. Do you think we could manage that old clothesman between us, if we got out of this box?"

"I'd manage him myself, if my arms were free," replied Thames, boldly.

"Shpeak up, vill you?" cried Abraham, rapping his knuckles against the hatch. "I likes to hear vot you says. You can have no shecrets from me."

"Vy don't you talk to your partner, or Saint Giles, if you vant conversation, Aaron?" asked Jack, slyly.

"Because they're in the next room, and the door's shut; that's vy, my jack-a-dandy!" replied Abraham, unsuspiciously.

"Oh! they are—are they?" muttered Jack, triumphantly; "that'll do. Now for it, Thames! Make as great a row as you can to divert his attention."

With this, he drew the spike from his pocket; and, drowning the sound of the operation by whistling, singing, shuffling, and other noises, contrived, in a few minutes, to liberate his companion from the handcuffs.

"Now, Jack," cried Thames, warmly grasping Sheppard's hand, "you are my friend again. I freely forgive you."

Sheppard cordially returned the pressure; and, cautioning Thames, "not to let the ruffles drop, or they might tell a tale," began to warble the following fragment of a robber melody:—

"Oh! give me a chisel, a knife, or a file,
And the dubsmen shall find that I'll do it in style!
Tol-de-rol!"
"Vot the devil are you about, noisy?" inquired Abraham.

"Practising singing, Aaron," replied Jack. "Vot are you?"

"Practising patience," growled Abraham.

" Not before it's needed," returned Jack, aloud; adding in a whisper, "get upon my shoulders, Thames. Now you're up, take this spike. Feel for the lock, and prize it open,—

you don't need to be told how. When it's done, I'll push you through. Take care of the old clothesman, and leave the rest to me.

When the turnkey, next morning, stepp'd into his room,
The sight of the hole in the wall struck him dumb;
The sheriff's black bracelets lay strewn on the ground,
But the lad that had worn 'em could nowhere be found.
Tol-de-rol!"
As Jack concluded his ditty, the door flew open with a crash, and Thames sprang through the aperture.

This manoeuvre was so suddenly executed that it took Abraham completely by surprise. He was standing at the moment close to the hatch, with his ear at the keyhole, and received a severe blow in the face. He staggered back a few paces; and, before he could recover himself, Thames tripped up his heels, and, placing the point of the spike at his throat, threatened to stab him if he attempted to stir, or cry out. Nor had Jack been idle all this time. Clearing the recess the instant after his companion, he flew to the door of the inner room, and, locking it, took out the key. The policy of this step was immediately apparent. Alarmed by the noise of the scuffle, Quilt and Sharples rushed to the assistance of their comrade. But they were too late. The entrance was barred against them; and they had the additional mortification of hearing Sheppard's loud laughter at their discomfiture.

"I told you the prison wasn't built that could hold me," cried Jack.

"You're not out yet, you young hound," rejoined Quilt, striving ineffectually to burst open the door.

"But I soon shall be," returned Jack; "take these," he added, flinging the handcuffs against the wooden partition, "and wear 'em yourself."

"Halloo, Nab!" vociferated Quilt. "What the devil are you about! Will you allow yourself to be beaten by a couple of kids?"

" Not if I can help it," returned Abraham, making a desperate effort to regain his feet. "By my shalvation, boy," he added, fiercely, "if you don't take your hande off my peard, I'll sthrangle you."

"Help me, Jack!" shouted Thames, "or I shan't be able to keep the villain down."

"Stick the spike into him, then," returned Sheppard, coolly, "while I unbar the outlet."

But Thames had no intention of following his friend's advice. Contenting himself with brandishing the weapon in the Jew's eyes, he exerted all his force to prevent him from rising.

While this took place, while Quilt thundered at the inner door, and Jack drew back the bolts of the outer, a deep, manly voice was heard chanting—as if in contempt of the general uproar—the following strain:—

With pipe and punch upon the board,
And smiling nymphs around us;
No tavern could more mirth afford
Than old Saint Giles's round-house!
The round-house! the round-house!
The jolly—jolly round-house!
"The jolly, jolly round-house!" chorussed Sheppard, as the last bar yielded to his efforts. "Hurrah! come along, Thames; we're free."

"Not sho fasht—not sho fasht!" cried Abraham, struggling with Thames, and detaining him; "if you go, you musht take me along vid you."

"Save yourself, Jack!" shouted Thames, sinking beneath the superior weight and strength of his opponent; "leave me to my fate!"

"Never," replied Jack, hurrying towards him. And, snatching the spike from Thames, he struck the janizary a severe blow on the head. "I'll make sure work this time," he added, about to repeat the blow.

"Hold!" interposed Thames, "he can do no more mischief. Let us be gone."

"As you please," returned Jack, leaping up; "but I feel devilishly inclined to finish him. However, it would only be robbing the hangman of his dues."

With this, he was preparing to follow his friend, when their egress was prevented by the sudden appearance of Jonathan Wild and Blueskin.

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XIII.

The Magdalene.

The household of the worthy carpenter, it may be conceived, was thrown into the utmost confusion and distress by the unaccountable disappearance of the two boys. As time wore on, and they did not return, Mr. Wood's anxiety grew so insupportable, that he seized his hat with the intention of sallying forth in search of them, though he did not know whither to bend his steps, when his departure was arrested by a gentle knock at the door.

"There he is!" cried Winifred, starting up, joyfully, and proving by the exclamation that her thoughts were dwelling upon one subject only. "There he is!"

"I fear not," said her father, with a doubtful shake of the head. "Thames would let himself in; and Jack generally finds an entrance through the backdoor or the shop-window, when he has been out at untimely hours. But, go and see who it is, love. Stay! I'll go myself."

His daughter, however, anticipated him. She flew to the door, but returned the next minute, looking deeply disappointed, and bringing the intelligence that it was "only Mrs. Sheppard."

"Who?" almost screamed Mrs. Wood.

"Jack Sheppard's mother," answered the little girl, dejectedly; "she has brought a basket of eggs from Willesden, and some flowers for you."

"For me!" vociferated Mrs. Wood, in indignant surprise. "Eggs for me! You mistake, child. They must be for your father."

"No; I'm quite sure she said they're for you," replied Winifred; "but she does want to see father."

" I thought as much," sneered Mrs. Wood.

"I'll go to her directly," said Wood, bustling towards the door. "I dare say she has called to inquire about Jack."

"I dare say no such thing," interposed his better half, authoritatively; "remain where you are, Sir."

"At all events, let me send her away, my dear," supplicated the carpenter, anxious to avert the impending storm.

"Do you hear me?" cried the lady, with increasing vehemence. "Stir a foot, at your peril."

"But, my love," still remonstrated Wood, "you know I'm going to look after the boys——"

"After Mrs. Sheppard, you mean, Sir," interrupted his wife, ironically. "Don't think to deceive me by your false pretences. Marry, come up! I'm not so easily deluded. Sit down, I command you. Winny, show the person into this room. I'll see her myself; and that's more than she bargained for, I'll be sworn."

Finding it useless to struggle further, Mr. Wood sank, submissively, into a chair, while his daughter hastened to execute her arbitrary parent's commission.

"At length, I have my wish," continued Mrs. Wood, regarding her husband with a glance of vindictive triumph. "I shall behold the shameless hussy, face to face; and, if I find her as good-looking as she's represented, I don't know what I'll do in the end; but I'll begin by scratching her eyes out."

In this temper, it will naturally be imagined, that Mrs. Wood's reception of the widow, who, at that moment, was ushered into the room by Winifred, was not particularly kind and encouraging. As she approached, the carpenter's wife eyed her from head to foot, in the hope of finding something in her person or apparel to quarrel with. But she was disappointed. Mrs. Sheppard's dress—extremely neat and clean, but simply fashioned, and of the plainest and most unpretending material,—offered nothing assailable; and her demeanour was so humble, and her looks so modest, that—if she had been ill-looking—she might, possibly, have escaped the shafts of malice preparing to be levelled against her. But, alas! she was beautiful—and beauty is a crime not to be forgiven by a jealous woman.

As the lapse of time and change of circumstances have wrought a remarkable alteration in the appearance of the poor widow, it may not be improper to notice it here. When first brought under consideration, she was a miserable and forlorn object; squalid in attire, haggard in looks, and emaciated in frame. Now, she was the very reverse of all

this. Her dress, it has just been said, was neatness and simplicity itself. Her figure, though slight, had all the fulness of health; and her complexion—still pale, but without its former sickly cast,—contrasted agreeably, by its extreme fairness, with the dark brows and darker lashes that shaded eyes which, if they had lost some of their original brilliancy, had gained infinitely more in the soft and chastened lustre that replaced it. One marked difference between the poor outcast, who, oppressed by poverty, and stung by shame, had sought temporary relief in the stupifying draught,—that worst "medicine of a mind diseased,"—and those of the same being, freed from her vices, and restored to comfort and contentment, if not to happiness, by a more prosperous course of events, was exhibited in the mouth. For the fresh and feverish hue of lip which years ago characterised this feature, was now substituted a pure and wholesome bloom, evincing a total change of habits; and, though the coarse character of the mouth remained, in some degree, unaltered, it was so modified in expression, that it could no longer be accounted a blemish. In fact, the whole face had undergone a transformation. All its better points were improved, while the less attractive ones (and they were few in comparison) were subdued, or removed. What was yet more worthy of note was, that the widow's countenance had an air of refinement about it, of which it was utterly destitute before, and which seemed to intimate that her true position in society was far above that wherein accident had placed her.

" Well, Mrs. Sheppard," said the carpenter, advancing to meet her, and trying to look as cheerful and composed as he could; "what brings you to town, eh?—Nothing amiss, I trust?"

"Nothing whatever, Sir," answered the widow. "A neighbour offered me a drive to Paddington; and, as I haven't heard of my son for some time, I couldn't resist the temptation of stepping on to inquire after him, and to thank you for your great goodness to us both, I've brought a little garden-stuff and a few new-laid eggs for you, Ma'am," she added turning to Mrs. Wood, who appeared to be collecting her energies for a terrible explosion, "in the hope that they may prove acceptable. Here's a nosegay for you, my love," she continued, opening her basket, and presenting a fragrant bunch of flowers to Winifred, "if your mother will allow me to give it you."

"Don't touch it, Winny!" screamed Mrs. Wood, "it may be poisoned."

"I'm not afraid, mother," said the little girl, smelling at the bouquet. "How sweet these roses are! Shall I put them into water?"

"Put them where they came from," replied Mrs. Wood, severely, "and go to bed."

"But, mother, mayn't I sit up to see whether Thames returns?" implored Winifred.

"What can it matter to you whether he returns or not, child," rejoined Mrs. Wood, sharply. "I've spoken. And my word's law—with you, at least," she added, bestowing a cutting glance upon her husband.

The little girl uttered no remonstrance; but, replacing the flowers in the basket, burst into tears, and withdrew.

Mrs. Sheppard, who witnessed this occurrence with dismay, looked timorously at Wood, in expectation of some hint being given as to the course she had better pursue; but, receiving none, for the carpenter was too much agitated to attend to her, she ventured to express a fear that she was intruding.

"Intruding!" echoed Mrs. Wood; "to be sure you are! I wonder how you dare show your face in this house, hussy!"

" I thought you sent for me, Ma'am," replied the widow, humbly.

"So I did," retorted Mrs. Wood; "and I did so to see how far your effrontery would carry you."

"I'm sure I'm very sorry. I hope I haven't given any unintentional offence?" said the widow, again meekly appealing to Wood.

"Don't exchange glances with him under my very nose, woman!" shrieked Mrs. Wood; "I'll not bear it. Look at me, and answer me one question. And, mind! no prevaricating—nothing but the truth will satisfy me."

Mrs. Sheppard raised her eyes, and fixed them upon her interrogator.

"Are you not that man's mistress?" demanded Mrs. Wood, with a look meant to reduce her supposed rival to the dust.

"I am no man's mistress," answered the widow, crimsoning to her temples, but preserving her meek deportment, and humble tone.

"That's false!" cried Mrs. Wood. "I'm too well acquainted with your proceedings, Madam, to believe that. Profligate women are never reclaimed. He has told me sufficient of you—"

"My dear," interposed Wood, "for goodness' sake—"

"I will speak," screamed his wife, totally disregarding the interruption; "I will tell this worthless creature what I know about her,—and what I think of her."

"Not now, my love—not now," entreated Wood.

"Yes, now," rejoined the infuriated dame; "perhaps, I may never have another opportunity. She has contrived to keep out of my sight up to this time, and I've no doubt she'll keep out of it altogether for the future."

"That was my doing, dearest," urged the carpenter; "I was afraid if you saw her that some such scene as this might occur."

"Hear me, Madam, I beseech you," interposed Mrs. Sheppard, "and, if it please you to visit your indignation on any one let it be upon me, and not on your excellent husband, whose only fault is in having bestowed his charity upon so unworthy an object as myself."

" Unworthy, indeed!" sneered Mrs. Wood.

"To him I owe everything," continued the widow, "life itself—nay, more than life,—for without his assistance I should have perished, body and soul. He has been a father to me and my child."

"I never doubted the latter point, I assure you, Madam," observed Mrs. Wood.

"You have said," pursued the widow, "that she, who has once erred, is irreclaimable. Do not believe it, Madam. It is not so. The poor wretch, driven by desperation to the commission of a crime which her soul abhors, is no more beyond the hope of reformation than she is without the pale of mercy. I have suffered—I have sinned—I have repented. And, though neither peace nor innocence can be restored to my bosom; though tears cannot blot out my offences, nor sorrow drown my shame; yet, knowing that my penitence is sincere, I do not despair that my transgressions may be forgiven."

"Mighty fine!" ejaculated Mrs. Wood, contemptuously.

"You cannot understand me, Madam; and it is well you cannot. Blest with a fond husband, surrounded by every comfort, you have never been assailed by the horrible temptations to which misery has exposed me. You have never known what it is to want food, raiment, shelter. You have never seen the child within your arms perishing from hunger, and no relief to be obtained. You have never felt the hearts of all hardened

against you; have never heard the jeer or curse from every lip; nor endured the insult and the blow from every hand. I have suffered all this. I could resist the tempter now, I am strong in health,—in mind. But then—Oh! Madam, there are moments—moments of darkness, which overshadow a whole existence—in the lives of the poor houseless wretches who traverse the streets, when reason is well-nigh benighted; when the horrible promptings of despair can, alone, be listened to; and when vice itself assumes the aspect of virtue. Pardon what I have said, Madam. I do not desire to extenuate my guilt—far less to defend it; but I would show you, and such as you—who, happily, are exempted from trials like mine—how much misery has to do with crime. And I affirm to you, on my own conviction, that she who falls, because she has not strength granted her to struggle with affliction, may be reclaimed,—may repent, and be forgiven,—even as she, whose sins, 'though many, were forgiven her'.

"It gladdens me to hear you talk thus, Joan," said Wood, in a voice of much emotion, while his eyes filled with tears, "and more than repays me for all I have done for you."

"If professions of repentance constitute a Magdalene, Mrs. Sheppard is one, no doubt," observed Mrs. Wood, ironically; "but I used to think it required something more than mere words to prove that a person's character was abused."

"Very right, my love," said Wood, "very sensibly remarked. So it does. Bu I can speak to that point. Mrs. Sheppard's conduct, from my own personal knowledge, has been unexceptionable for the last twelve years. During that period she has been a model of propriety."

"Oh! of course," rejoined Mrs. Wood; "I can't for an instant question such distinterested testimony. Mrs. Sheppard, I'm sure, will say as much for you. He's a model of conjugal attachment and fidelity, a pattern to his family, and an example to his neighbours. Ain't he, Madam?'"

"He is, indeed," replied the widow, fervently; "more—much more than that."

"He's no such thing!" cried Mrs. Wood, furiously. "He's a base, deceitful, tyrannical, hoary-headed libertine—that's what he is. But, I'll expose him. I'll proclaim his misdoings to the world; and, then, we shall see where he'll stand. Marry, come up! I'll show him what an injured wife can do. If all wives were of my mind and my spirit, husbands would soon be taught their own insignificance. But a time will come (and that before long,) when our sex will assert its superiority; and, when we have got the upper hand, let 'em try to subdue us if they can. But don't suppose, Madam, that anything I say has reference to you. I'm speaking of virtuous women—of WIVES, Madam. Mistresses neither deserve consideration nor commiseration."

"I expect no commiseration," returned Mrs. Sheppard, gently, "nor do I need any. But, rather than be the cause of any further misunderstanding between you and my benefactor, I will leave London and its neighbourhood for ever."

"Pray do so, Madam," retorted Mrs. Wood, "and take your son with you."

"My son!" echoed the widow, trembling.

"Yes, your son, Madam. If you can do any good with him, it's more than we can. The house will be well rid of him, for a more idle, good-for-nothing reprobate never crossed its threshold."

"Is this true, Sir?" cried Mrs. Sheppard, with an agonized look at Wood. "I know you'll not deceive me. Is Jack what Mrs. Wood represents him?"

"He's not exactly what I could desire him to be, Joan," replied the carpenter, reluctantly, "But a ragged colt sometimes makes the best horse. He'll mend, I hope."

"Never," said Mrs. Wood,—"he'll never mend. He has taken more than one step towards the gallows already. Thieves and pickpockets are his constant companions."

"Thieves!" exclaimed Mrs. Sheppard, horror-stricken.

"Jonathan Wild and Blueskin have got him into their hands," continued Mrs. Wood.

"Impossible!" exclaimed the widow, wildly.

"If you doubt my word, woman," replied the carpenter's wife, coldly, "ask Mr. Wood."

"I know you'll contradict it, Sir," said the widow, looking at Wood as if she dreaded to have her fears confirmed,—"I know you will."

"I wish I could, Joan," returned the carpenter, sadly.

Mrs. Sheppard let fall her basket.

"My son," she murmured, wringing her hands piteously—, "my son the companion of thieves! My son in Jonathan Wild's power! It cannot be."

" Why not?" rejoined Mrs. Wood, in a taunting tone. "Your son's father was a thief; and Jonathan Wild (unless I'm misinformed,) was his friend,—so it's not unnatural he should show some partiality towards Jack."

"Jonathan Wild was my husband's bitterest enemy," said Mrs. Sheppard. "He first seduced him from the paths of honesty, and then betrayed him to a shameful death, and he has sworn to do the same thing by my son. Oh, Heavens; that I should have ever indulged a hope of happiness while that terrible man lives!"

"Compose yourself, Joan," said Wood; "all will yet be well."

"Oh, no,—no," replied Mrs. Sheppard, distractedly. "All cannot be well, if this is true. Tell me, Sir," she added, with forced calmness, and grasping Wood's arm; "what has Jack done? Tell me in a word, that I may know the worst. I can bear anything but suspense."

"You're agitating yourself unnecessarily, Joan," returned Wood, in a soothing voice. "Jack has been keeping bad company. That's the only fault I know of."

"Thank God for that!" ejaculated Mrs. Sheppard, fervently. "Then it is not too late to save him. Where is he, Sir? Can I see him?"

"No, that you can't," answered Mrs. Wood; "he has gone out without leave, and has taken Thames Darrell with him. If I were Mr. Wood, when he does return, I'd send him about his business. I wouldn't keep an apprentice to set my authority at defiance."

Mr. Wood's reply, if he intended any, was cut short by a loud knocking at the door.

"'Odd's-my-life!—what's that?" he cried, greatly alarmed.

"It's Jonathan Wild come back with a troop of constables at his heels, to search the house," rejoined Mrs. Wood, in equal trepidation. "We shall all be murdered. Oh! that Mr. Kneebone were here to protect me!"

"If it is Jonathan," rejoined Wood, "it is very well for Mr. Kneebone he's not here. He'd have enough to do to protect himself, without attending to you. I declare I'm almost afraid to go to the door. Something, I'm convinced, has happened to the boys."

"Has Jonathan Wild been here to-day?" asked Mrs. Sheppard, anxiously.

"To be sure he has!" returned Mrs. Wood; "and Blueskin, too. They're only just gone, mercy on us! what a clatter," she added, as the knocking was repeated more violently than before.

While the carpenter irresolutely quitted the room, with a strong presentiment of ill upon his mind, a light quick step was heard descending the stairs, and before he could call out to prevent it, a man was admitted into the passage.

"Is this Misther Wudd's, my pretty miss?" demanded the rough voice of the Irish watchman.

"It is", seplied Winifred; "have you brought any tidings of Thames Darrell!"

"Troth have I!" replied Terence: "but, bless your angilic face, how did you contrive to guess that?"

"Is he well?—is he safe?—is he coming back," cried the little girl, disregarding the question.

"He's in St. Giles's round-house," answered Terence; "but tell Mr. Wudd I'm here, and have brought him a message from his unlawful son, and don't be detainin' me, my darlin', for there's not a minute to lose if the poor lad's to be recused from the clutches of that thief and thief-taker o' the wurld, Jonathan Wild."

The carpenter, upon whom no part of this hurried dialogue had been lost, now made his appearance, and having obtained from Terence all the information which that personage could impart respecting the perilous situation of Thames, he declared himself ready to start to Saint Giles's at once, and ran back to the room for his hat and stick; expressing his firm determination, as he pocketed his constable's staff with which he thought it expedient to arm himself, of being direfully revenged upon the thief-taker: a determination in which he was strongly encouraged by his wife. Terence, meanwhile, who had followed him, did not remain silent, but recapitulated his story, for the benefit of Mrs. Sheppard. The poor widow was thrown into an agony of distress on learning that a robbery had been committed, in which her son (for she could not doubt that Jack was one of the boys,) was implicated; nor was her anxiety alleviated by Mrs. Wood, who maintained stoutly, that if Thames had been led to do wrong, it must be through the instrumentality of his worthless companion.

"And there you're right, you may dipind, marm," observed Terence. "Master Thames Ditt—what's his blessed name?—has honesty written in his handsome phiz; but as to his companion, Jack Sheppard, I think you call him, he's a born and bred thief. Lord bless

you marm! we sees plenty on 'em in our purfession. Them young prigs is all alike. I seed he was one,—and a sharp un, too,—at a glance."

"Oh!" exclaimed the widow, covering her face with her hands.

"Take a drop of brandy before we start, watchman," said Wood, pouring out a glass of spirit, and presenting it to Terence, who smacked his lips as he disposed of it. "Won't you be persuaded, Joan?" he added, making a similar offer to Mrs. Sheppard, which she gratefully declined. "If you mean to accompany us, you may need it."

"You are very kind, Sir," returned the widow, "but I require no support. Nothing stronger than water has passed my lips for years."

"We may believe as much of that as we please, I suppose," observed the carpenter's wife, with a sneer. "Mr. Wood," she continued, in an authoritative tone, seeing her husband ready to depart, "one word before you set out. If Jack Sheppard or his mother ever enter this house again, I leave it—that's all. Now, do what you please. You know my fixed determination."

Mr. Wood made no reply; but, hastily kissing his weeping daughter, and bidding her be of good cheer, hurried off. He was followed with equal celerity by Terence and the widow. Traversing what remained of Wych Street at a rapid pace, and speeding along Drury Lane, the trio soon found themselves in Kendrick Yard. When they came to the round-house, Terry's courage failed him. Such was the terror inspired by Wild's vindictive character, that few durst face him who had given him cause for displeasure. Aware that he should incur the thief-taker's bitterest animosity by what he had done, the watchman, whose wrath against Quilt Arnold had evaporated during the walk, thought it more prudent not to hazard a meeting with his master, till the storm had, in some measure, blown over. Accordingly, having given Wood such directions as he thought necessary for his guidance, and received a handsome gratuity in return for his services, he departed.

It was not without considerable demur and delay on the part of Sharples that the carpenter and his companion could gain admittance to the round-house. Reconnoitring them through a small grated loophole, he refused to open the door till they had explained their business. This, Wood, acting upon Terry's caution, was most unwilling to do; but, finding he had no alternative, he reluctantly made known his errand and the bolts were undrawn. Once in, the constable's manner appeared totally changed. He was now as civil as he had just been insolent. Apologizing for their detention, he answered the questions put to him respecting the boys, by positively denying that any such prisoners had been entrusted to his charge, but offered to conduct him to every cell in

the building to prove the truth of his assertion. He then barred and double-locked the door, took out the key, (a precautionary measure which, with a grim smile, he said he never omitted,) thrust it into his vest, and motioning the couple to follow him, led the way to the inner room. As Wood obeyed, his foot slipped; and, casting his eyes upon the floor, he perceived it splashed in several places with blood. From the freshness of the stains, which grew more frequent as they approached the adjoining chamber, it was evident some violence had been recently perpetrated, and the carpenter's own blood froze within his veins as he thought, with a thrill of horror, that, perhaps on this very spot, not many minutes before his arrival, his adopted son might have been inhumanly butchered. Nor was this impression removed as he stole a glance at Mrs. Sheppard, and saw from her terrified look that she had made the same alarming discovery as himself. But it was now too late to turn back, and, nerving himself for the shock he expected to encounter, he ventured after his conductor. No sooner had they entered the room than Sharples, who waited to usher them in, hastily retreated, closed the door, and turning the key, laughed loudly at the success of his stratagem. Vexation at his folly in suffering himself to be thus entrapped kept Wood for a short time silent. When he could find words, he tried by the most urgent solicitations to prevail upon the constable to let him out. But threats and entreaties—even promises were ineffectual; and the unlucky captive, after exhausting his powers of persuasion, was compelled to give up the point.

The room in which he was detained—that lately occupied by the Mohocks, who, it appeared, had been allowed to depart,—was calculated to inspire additional apprehension and disgust. Strongly impregnated with the mingled odours of tobacco, ale, brandy, and other liquors, the atmosphere was almost stifling. The benches running round the room, though fastened to the walls by iron clamps, had been forcibly wrenched off; while the table, which was similarly secured to the boards, was upset, and its contents—bottles, jugs, glasses, and bowls were broken and scattered about in all directions. Everything proclaimed the mischievous propensities of the recent occupants of the chamber.

Here lay a heap of knockers of all sizes, from the huge lion's head to the small brass rapper: there, a collection of sign-boards, with the names and calling of the owners utterly obliterated. On this side stood the instruments with which the latter piece of pleasantry had been effected,—namely, a bucket filled with paint and a brush: on that was erected a trophy, consisting of a watchman's rattle, a laced hat, with the crown knocked out, and its place supplied by a lantern, a campaign wig saturated with punch, a torn steen-kirk and ruffles, some half-dozen staves, and a broken sword.

As the carpenter's gaze wandered over this scene of devastation, his attention was drawn by Mrs. Sheppard towards an appalling object in one corner. This was the body of a man, apparently lifeless, and stretched upon a mattress, with his head bound up in a

linen cloth, through which the blood had oosed. Near the body, which, it will be surmised, was that of Abraham Mendez, two ruffianly personages were seated, quietly smoking, and bestowing no sort of attention upon the new-comers. Their conversation was conducted in the flash language, and, though unintelligible to Wood, was easily comprehended by this companion, who learnt, to her dismay, that the wounded man had received his hurt from her son, whose courage and dexterity formed the present subject of their discourse. From other obscure hints dropped by the speakers, Mrs. Sheppard ascertained that Thames Darrell had been carried off—where she could not make out—by Jonathan Wild and Quilt Arnold; and that Jack had been induced to accompany Blueskin to the Mint. This intelligence, which she instantly communicated to the carpenter, drove him almost frantic. He renewed his supplications to Sharples, but with no better success than heretofore; and the greater part of the night was passed by him and the poor widow, whose anxiety, if possible, exceeded his own, in the most miserable state imaginable.

At length, about three o'clock, as the first glimmer of dawn became visible through the barred casements of the round-house, the rattling of bolts and chains at the outer door told that some one was admitted. Whoever this might be, the visit seemed to have some reference to the carpenter, for, shortly afterwards, Sharples made his appearance, and informed the captives they were free. Without waiting to have the information repeated, Wood rushed forth, determined as soon as he could procure assistance, to proceed to Jonathan Wild's house in the Old Bailey; while Mrs. Sheppard, whose maternal fears drew her in another direction, hurried off to the Mint.

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XIV.

The Flash Ken.

In an incredibly short space of time,—for her anxiety lent wings to her feet,—Mrs. Sheppard reached the debtor's garrison. From a scout stationed at the northern entrance, whom she addressed in the jargon of the place, with which long usage had formerly rendered her familiar, she ascertained that Blueskin, accompanied by a youth, whom she knew by the description must be her son, had arrived there about three hours before, and had proceeded to the Cross Shovels. This was enough for the poor widow. She felt she was now near her boy, and, nothing doubting her ability to rescue him from his perilous situation, she breathed a fervent prayer for his deliverance; and bending her steps towards the tavern in question, revolved within her mind as she walked along the best means of accomplishing her purpose. Aware of the cunning and desperate characters of the persons with whom she would have to deal,—aware, also, that she was in a quarter where no laws could be appealed to, nor assistance obtained, she felt the absolute necessity of caution. Accordingly, when she arrived at the Shovels, with which, as an old haunt in her bygone days of wretchedness she was well acquainted, instead of entering the principal apartment, which she saw at a glance was crowded with company of both sexes, she turned into a small room on the left of the bar, and, as an excuse for so doing, called for something to drink. The drawers at the moment were too busy to attend to her, and she would have seized the opportunity of examining, unperceived, the assemblage within, through a little curtained window that overlooked the adjoining chamber, if an impediment had not existed in the shape of Baptist Kettleby, whose portly person entirely obscured the view. The Master of the Mint, in the exercise of his two-fold office of governor and publican, was mounted upon a chair, and holding forth to his guests in a speech, to which Mrs. Sheppard was unwillingly compelled to listen.

"Gentlemen of the Mint," said the orator, "when I was first called, some fifty years ago, to the important office I hold, there existed across the water three places of refuge for the oppressed and persecuted debtor."

"We know it," cried several voices.

"It happened, gentlemen," pursued the Master, "on a particular occasion, about the time I've mentioned, that the Archduke of Alsatia, the Sovereign of the Savoy, and the Satrap of Salisbury Court, met by accident at the Cross Shovels. A jolly night we made of it, as

you may suppose; for four such monarchs don't often come together. Well, while we were smoking our pipes, and quaffing our punch, Alsatia turns to me and says, 'Mint,' says he, 'you're well off here.'—'Pretty well,' says I; 'you're not badly off at the Friars, for that matter.'—'Oh! yes we are,' says he.—'How so?' says I.—'It's all up with us,' says he; 'they've taken away our charter.'—'They can't,' says I.—'They have,' says he.—'They can't, I tell you,' says I, in a bit of a passion; 'it's unconstitutional.'—'Unconstitutional or not,' says Salisbury Court and Savoy, speaking together, 'it's true. We shall become a prey to the Philistines, and must turn honest in self-defence.'—'No fear o' that,' thought I.—'I see how it'll be,' observed Alsatia, 'everybody'll pay his debts, and only think of such a state of things as that.'—'It's not to be thought of,' says I, thumping the table till every glass on it jingled; 'and I know a way as'll prevent it.'—'What is it, Mint?' asked all three.—'Why, hang every bailiff that sets a foot in your territories, and you're safe,' says I.—'We'll do it,' said they, filling their glasses, and looking as fierce as King George's grenadier guards; 'here's your health, Mint.' But, gentlemen, though they talked so largely, and looked so fiercely, they did not do it; they did not hang the bailiffs; and where are they?"

" Ay, where are they?" echoed the company with indignant derision.

"Gentlemen," returned the Master, solemnly, "it is a question easily answered—they are NOWHERE! Had they hanged the bailiffs, the bailiffs would not have hanged them. We ourselves have been similarly circumstanced. Attacked by an infamous and unconstitutional statute, passed in the reign of the late usurper, William of Orange, (for I may remark that, if the right king had been upon the throne, that illegal enactment would never have received the royal assent—the Stuarts—Heaven preserve 'em!—always siding with the debtors); attacked in this outrageous manner, I repeat, it has been all but 'up' with US! But the vigorous resistance offered on that memorable occasion by the patriotic inhabitants of Bermuda to the aggressions of arbitrary power, secured and established their privileges on a firmer basis than heretofore; and, while their pusillanimous allies were crushed and annihilated, they became more prosperous than ever. Gentlemen, I am proud to say that I originated—that I directed those measures. I hope to see the day, when not Southwark alone, but London itself shall become one Mint,—when all men shall be debtors, and none creditors,—when imprisonment for debt shall be utterly abolished,—- when highway-robbery shall be accounted a pleasant pastime, and forgery an accomplishment,—when Tyburn and its gibbets shall be overthrown,—capital punishments discontinued,—Newgate, Ludgate, the Gatehouse, and the Compters razed to the ground,—Bridewell and Clerkenwell destroyed,—the Fleet, the King's Bench, and the Marshalsea remembered only by name! But, in the mean time, as that day may possibly be farther off than I anticipate, we are bound to make the most of the present. Take care of yourselves, gentlemen, and your governor will take care of you. Before I sit down, I have a toast to propose, which I am sure will be

received, as it deserves to be, with enthusiasm. It is the health of a stranger,—of Mr. John Sheppard. His father was one of my old customers, and I am happy to find his son treading in his steps. He couldn't be in better hands than those in which he has placed himself. Gentlemen,—Mr. Sheppard's good health, and success to him!"

Baptist's toast was received with loud applause, and, as he sat down amid the cheers of the company, and a universal clatter of mugs and glasses, the widow's view was no longer obstructed. Her eye wandered quickly over that riotous and disorderly assemblage, until it settled upon one group more riotous and disorderly than the rest, of which her son formed the principal figure. The agonized mother could scarcely repress a scream at the spectacle that met her gaze. There sat Jack, evidently in the last stage of intoxication, with his collar opened, his dress disarranged, a pipe in his mouth, a bowl of punch and a half-emptied rummer before him,—there he sat, receiving and returning, or rather attempting to return,—for he was almost past consciousness,—the blandishments of a couple of females, one of whom had passed her arm round his neck, while the other leaned over the back of his chair and appeared from her gestures to be whispering soft nonsense into his ear.

Both these ladies possessed considerable personal attractions. The younger of the two, who was seated next to Jack, and seemed to monopolize his attention, could not be more than seventeen, though her person had all the maturity of twenty. She had delicate oval features, light, laughing blue eyes, a pretty nez retroussé, (why have we not the term, since we have the best specimens of the feature?) teeth of pearly whiteness, and a brilliant complexion, set off by rich auburn hair, a very white neck and shoulders,—the latter, perhaps, a trifle too much exposed. The name of this damsel was Edgeworth Bess; and, as her fascinations will not, perhaps, be found to be without some influence upon the future fortunes of her boyish admirer, we have thought it worth while to be thus particular in describing them. The other bona roba, known amongst her companions as Mistress Poll Maggot, was a beauty on a much larger scale,—in fact, a perfect Amazon. Never theless though nearly six feet high, and correspondingly proportioned, she was a model of symmetry, and boasted, with the frame of a Thalestris or a Trulla, the regular lineaments of the Medicean Venus. A man's laced hat,—whether adopted from the caprice of the moment, or habitually worn, we are unable to state,—cocked knowingly on her head, harmonized with her masculine appearance. Mrs. Maggot, as well as her companion Edgeworth Bess, was showily dressed; nor did either of them disdain the aid supposed to be lent to a fair skin by the contents of the patchbox. On an empty cask, which served him for a chair, and opposite Jack Sheppard, whose rapid progress in depravity afforded him the highest satisfaction, sat Blueskin, encouraging the two women in their odious task, and plying his victim with the glass as often as he deemed it expedient to do so. By this time, he had apparently accomplished all he desired; for moving the bottle out of Jack's reach, he appropriated it entirely to his own use, leaving

the devoted lad to the care of the females. Some few of the individuals seated at the other tables seemed to take an interest in the proceedings of Blueskin and his party, just as a bystander watches any other game; but, generally speaking, the company were too much occupied with their own concerns to pay attention to anything else. The assemblage was for the most part, if not altogether, composed of persons to whom vice in all its aspects was too familiar to present much of novelty, in whatever form it was exhibited. Nor was Jack by any means the only stripling in the room. Not far from him was a knot of lads drinking, swearing, and playing at dice as eagerly and as skilfully as any of the older hands. Near to these hopeful youths sat a fence, or receiver, bargaining with a clouter, or pickpocket, for a suit,—or, to speak in more intelligible language, a watch and seals, two cloaks, commonly called watch-cases, and a wedge-lobb, otherwise known as a silver snuff-box. Next to the receiver was a gang of housebreakers, laughing over their exploits, and planning fresh depredations; and next to the housebreakers came two gallant-looking gentlemen in long periwigs and riding-dresses, and equipped in all other respects for the road, with a roast fowl and a bottle of wine before them. Amid this varied throng,—varied in appearance, but alike in character,—one object alone, we have said, rivetted Mrs. Sheppard's attention; and no sooner did she in some degree recover from the shock occasioned by the sight of her son's debased condition, than, regardless of any other consideration except his instant removal from the contaminating society by which he was surrounded, and utterly forgetting the more cautious plan she meant to have adopted, she rushed into the room, and summoned him to follow her.

"Halloa!" cried Jack, looking round, and trying to fix his inebriate gaze upon the speaker,—"who's that?"

"Your mother," replied Mrs. Sheppard. "Come home directly, Sir."

"Mother be——!" returned Jack. "Who is it, Bess?"

"How should I know?" replied Edgeworth Bess. "But if it is your mother, send her about her business."

"That I will," replied Jack, "in the twinkling of a bedpost."

"Glad to see you once more in the Mint, Mrs. Sheppard," roared Blueskin, who anticipated some fun. "Come and sit down by me."

"Take a glass of gin, Ma'am," cried Poll Maggot, holding up a bottle of spirit; "it used to be your favourite liquor, I've heard."

"Jack, my love," cried Mrs. Sheppard, disregarding the taunt, "come away."

"Not I," replied Jack; "I'm too comfortable where I am. Be off!"

"Jack!" exclaimed his unhappy parent.

"Mr. Sheppard, if you please, Ma'am," interrupted the lad; "I allow nobody to call me Jack. Do I, Bess, eh?"

"Nobody whatever, love," replied Edgeworth Bess; "nobody but me, dear."

"And me," insinuated Mrs. Maggot. "My little fancy man's quite as fond of me as of you, Bess. Ain't you, Jacky darling?"

" Not quite, Poll," returned Mr. Sheppard; "but I love you next to her, and both of you better than Her," pointing with the pipe to his mother.

"Oh, Heavens!" cried Mrs. Sheppard.

"Bravo!" shouted Blueskin. "Tom Sheppard never said a better thing than that—ho! ho!"

"Jack," cried his mother, wringing her hands in distraction, "you'll break my heart!"

"Poh! poh!" returned her son; "women don't so easily break their hearts. Do they, Bess?"

"Certainly not," replied the young lady appealed to, "especially about their sons."

"Wretch!" cried Mrs. Sheppard, bitterly.

"I say," retorted Edgeworth Bess, with a very unfeminine imprecation, "I shan't stand any more of that nonsense. What do you mean by calling me wretch, Madam!" she added marching up to Mrs. Sheppard, and regarding her with an insolent and threatening glance.

"Yes—what do you mean, Ma'am?" added Jack, staggering after her.

"Come with me, my love, come—come," cried his mother, seizing his hand, and endeavouring to force him away.

"He shan't go," cried Edgeworth Bess, holding him by the other hand. "Here, Poll, help me!"

Thus exhorted, Mrs. Maggot lent her powerful aid, and, between the two, Jack was speedily relieved from all fears of being carried off against his will. Not content with this exhibition of her prowess, the Amazon lifted him up as easily as if he had been an infant, and placed him upon her shoulders, to the infinite delight of the company, and the increased distress of his mother.

"Now, let's see who'll dare to take him down," she cried.

"Nobody shall," cried Mr. Sheppard from his elevated position. "I'm my own master now, and I'll do as I please. I'll turn cracksman, like my father—rob old Wood—he has chests full of money, and I know where they're kept—I'll rob him, and give the swag to you, Poll—I'll—"

Jack would have said more; but, losing his balance, he fell to the ground, and, when taken up, he was perfectly insensible. In this state, he was laid upon a bench, to sleep off his drunken fit, while his wretched mother, in spite of her passionate supplications and resistance, was, by Blueskin's command, forcibly ejected from the house, and driven out of the Mint.

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XV.

The Robbery in Willesden Church.

During the whole of the next day and night, the poor widow hovered like a ghost about the precincts of the debtors' garrison,—for admission (by the Master's express orders,) was denied her. She could learn nothing of her son, and only obtained one solitary piece of information, which added to, rather than alleviated her misery,—namely, that Jonathan Wild had paid a secret visit to the Cross Shovels. At one time, she determined to go to Wych Street, and ask Mr. Wood's advice and assistance, but the thought of the reception she was likely to meet with from his wife deterred her from executing this resolution. Many other expedients occurred to her; but after making several ineffectual attempts to get into the Mint unobserved, they were all abandoned.

At length, about an hour before dawn on the second day—Sunday—having spent the early part of the night in watching at the gates of the robbers' sanctuary, and being almost exhausted from want of rest, she set out homewards. It was a long walk she had to undertake, even if she had endured no previous fatigue, but feeble as she was, it was almost more than she could accomplish. Daybreak found her winding her painful way along the Harrow Road; and, in order to shorten the distance as much as possible, she took the nearest cut, and struck into the meadows on the right. Crossing several fields, newly mown, or filled with lines of tedded hay, she arrived, not without great exertion, at the summit of a hill. Here her strength completely failed her, and she was compelled to seek some repose. Making her couch upon a heap of hay, she sank at once into a deep and refreshing slumber.

When she awoke, the sun was high in Heaven. It was a bright and beautiful day: so bright, so beautiful, that even her sad heart was cheered by it. The air, perfumed with the delicious fragrance of the new-mown grass, was vocal with the melodies of the birds; the thick foliage of the trees was glistening in the sunshine; all nature seemed happy and rejoicing; but, above all, the serene Sabbath stillness reigning around communicated a calm to her wounded spirit.

What a contrast did the lovely scene she now gazed upon present to the squalid neighbourhood she had recently quitted! On all sides, expanded prospects of country the most exquisite and most varied. Immediately beneath her lay Willesden,—the most charming and secluded village in the neighbourhood of the metropolis—with its

scattered farm-houses, its noble granges, and its old grey church-tower just peeping above a grove of rook-haunted trees.

Towards this spot Mrs. Sheppard now directed her steps. She speedily reached her own abode,—a little cottage, standing in the outskirts of the village. The first circumstance that struck her on her arrival seemed ominous. Her clock had stopped—stopped at the very hour on which she had quitted the Mint! She had not the heart to wind it up again.

After partaking of some little refreshment, and changing her attire, Mrs. Sheppard prepared for church. By this time, she had so far succeeded in calming herself, that she answered the greetings of the neighbours whom she encountered on her way to the sacred edifice—if sorrowfully, still composedly.

Every old country church is beautiful, but Willesden is the most beautiful country church we know; and in Mrs. Sheppard's time it was even more beautiful than at present, when the hand of improvement has proceeded a little too rashly with alterations and repairs. With one or two exceptions, there were no pews; and, as the intercourse with London was then but slight, the seats were occupied almost exclusively by the villagers. In one of these seats, at the end of the aisle farthest removed from the chancel, the widow took her place, and addressed herself fervently to her devotions.

The service had not proceeded far, when she was greatly disturbed by the entrance of a person who placed himself opposite her, and sought to attract her attention by a number of little arts, surveying her, as he did so, with a very impudent and offensive stare. With this person—who was no other than Mr. Kneebone—she was too well acquainted; having, more than once, been obliged to repel his advances; and, though his impertinence would have given her little concern at another season, it now added considerably to her distraction. But a far greater affliction was in store for her.

Just as the clergyman approached the altar, she perceived a boy steal quickly into the church, and ensconce himself behind the woollen-draper, who, in order to carry on his amatory pursuits with greater convenience, and at the same time display his figure (of which he was not a little vain) to the utmost advantage, preferred a standing to a sitting posture. Of this boy she had only caught a glimpse;—but that glimpse was sufficient to satisfy her it was her son,—and, if she could have questioned her own instinctive love, she could not question her antipathy, when she beheld, partly concealed by a pillar immediately in the rear of the woollen-draper, the dark figure and truculent features of Jonathan Wild. As she looked in this direction, the thief-taker raised his eyes—those gray, blood-thirsty eyes!—their glare froze the life-blood in her veins.

As she averted her gaze, a terrible idea crossed her. Why was he there? why did the tempter dare to invade that sacred spot! She could not answer her own questions, but vague fearful suspicions passed through her mind. Meanwhile, the service proceeded; and the awful command, "Thou shalt not steal!" was solemnly uttered by the preacher, when Mrs. Sheppard, who had again looked round towards her son, beheld a hand glance along the side of the woollen-draper. She could not see what occurred, though she guessed it; but she saw Jonathan's devilish triumphing glance, and read in it,—"Your son has committed a robbery—here—in these holy walls—he is mine—mine for ever!"

She uttered a loud scream, and fainted.

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XVI.

Jonathan Wild's House in the Old Bailey.

Just as St. Sepulchre's church struck one, on the eventful night of the th of June, (to which it will not be necessary to recur,) a horseman, mounted on a powerful charger, and followed at a respectful distance by an attendant, galloped into the open space fronting Newgate, and directed his course towards a house in the Old Bailey. Before he could draw in the rein, his steed—startled apparently by some object undistinguishable by the rider,—swerved with such suddenness as to unseat him, and precipitate him on the ground. The next moment, however, he was picked up, and set upon his feet by a person who, having witnessed the accident, flew across the road to his assistance.

"You're not hurt I hope, Sir Rowland?" inquired this individual.

"Not materially, Mr. Wild," replied the other, "a little shaken, that's all. Curses light on the horse!" he added, seizing the bridle of his steed, who continued snorting and shivering, as if still under the influence of some unaccountable alarm; "what can ail him?"

"I know what ails him, your honour," rejoined the groom, riding up as he spoke; "he's seen somethin' not o' this world."

"Most likely," observed Jonathan, with a slight sneer; "the ghost of some highwayman who has just breathed his last in Newgate, no doubt."

"May be," returned the man gravely.

"Take him home, Saunders," said Sir Rowland, resigning his faulty steed to the attendant's care, "I shall not require you further. Strange!" he added, as the groom departed; "Bay Stuart has carried me through a hundred dangers, but never played me such a trick before."

"And never should again, were he mine," rejoined Jonathan. "If the best nag ever foaled were to throw me in this unlucky spot, I'd blow his brains out."

"What do you mean, Sir?" asked Trenchard.

"A fall against Newgate is accounted a sign of death by the halter," replied Wild, with ill-disguised malignity.

"Tush!" exclaimed Sir Rowland, angrily.

"From that door," continued the thief-taker, pointing to the gloomy portal of the prison opposite which they were standing, "the condemned are taken to Tyburn. It's a bad omen to be thrown near that door."

"I didn't suspect you of so much superstition, Mr. Wild," observed the knight, contemptuously.

"Facts convince the most incredulous," answered Jonathan, drily. "I've known several cases where the ignominious doom I've mentioned has been foretold by such an accident as has just befallen you. There was Major Price—you must recollect him, Sir Rowland,—he stumbled as he was getting out of his chair at that very gate. Well, he was executed for murder. Then there was Tom Jarrot, the hackney-coachman, who was pitched off the box against yonder curbstone, and broke his leg. It was a pity he didn't break his neck, for he was hanged within the year. Another instance was that of Toby Tanner—"

"No more of this," interrupted Trenchard; "where is the boy?"

"Not far hence," replied Wild. "After all our pains we were near losing him, Sir Rowland."

"How so?" asked the other, distrustfully.

"You shall hear," returned Jonathan. "With the help of his comrade, Jack Sheppard, the young rascal made a bold push to get out of the round-house, where my janizaries had lodged him, and would have succeeded too, if, by good luck,—for the devil never deserts so useful an agent as I am, Sir Rowland,—I hadn't arrived in time to prevent him. As it was, my oldest and trustiest setter, Abraham Mendez, received a blow on the head from one of the lads that will deprive me of his services for a week to come,—if, indeed it does not disable him altogether. However, if I've lost one servant, I've gained another, that's one comfort. Jack Sheppard is now wholly in my hands."

"What is this to me, Sir?" said Trenchard, cutting him short.

"Nothing whatever," rejoined the thief-taker, coldly. "But it is much to me. Jack Sheppard is to me what Thames Darrell is to you—an object of hatred. I owed his father a grudge: that I settled long ago. I owe his mother one, and will repay the debt, with interest, to her son. I could make away with him at once, as you are about to make away with your nephew, Sir Rowland,—but that wouldn't serve my turn. To be complete, my vengeance must be tardy. Certain of my prey, I can afford to wait for it. Besides, revenge is sweetened by delay; and I indulge too freely in the passion to rob it of any of its zest. I've watched this lad—this Sheppard—from infancy; and, though I have apparently concerned myself little about him, I have never lost sight of my purpose. I have suffered him to be brought up decently—honestly; because I would make his fall the greater, and deepen the wound I meant to inflict upon his mother. From this night I shall pursue a different course; from this night his ruin may be dated. He is in the care of those who will not leave the task assigned to them—the utter perversion of his principles—half-finished. And when I have steeped him to the lips in vice and depravity; when I have led him to the commission of every crime; when there is neither retreat nor advance for him; when he has plundered his benefactor, and broken the heart of his mother—then—but not till then, I will consign him to the fate to which I consigned his father. This I have sworn to do—this I will do."

"Not unless your skull's bullet-proof," cried a voice at his elbow; and, as the words were uttered, a pistol was snapped at his head, which,—fortunately or unfortunately, as the reader pleases,—only burnt the priming. The blaze, however, was sufficient to reveal to the thief-taker the features of his intended assassin. They were those of the Irish watchman.

"Ah! Terry O'Flaherty!" vociferated Jonathan, in a tone that betrayed hot the slightest discomposure. "Ah! Terry O'Flaherty!" he cried, shouting after the Irishman, who took to his heels as soon as he found his murderous attempt unsuccessful; "you may run, but you'll not get out of my reach. I'll put a brace of dogs on your track, who'll soon hunt you down. You shall swing for this after next sessions, or my name's not Jonathan Wild. I told you, Sir Rowland," he added, turning to the knight, and chuckling, "the devil never deserts me."

"Conduct me to your dwelling, Sir, without further delay," said Trenchard, sternly,—"to the boy."

"The boy's not at my house," replied Wild.

"Where is he, then?" demanded the other, hastily.

"At a place we call the Dark House at Queenhithe," answered Jonathan, "a sort of under-ground tavern or night-cellar, close to the river-side, and frequented by the crew of the Dutch skipper, to whose care he's to be committed. You need have no apprehensions about him, Sir Rowland. He's safe enough now. I left him in charge of Quilt Arnold and Rykhart Van Galgebrok—the skipper I spoke of—with strict orders to shoot him if he made any further attempt at escape; and they're not lads—the latter especially—to be trifled with. I deemed it more prudent to send him to the Dark House than to bring him here, in case of any search after him by his adoptive father—the carpenter Wood. If you choose, you can see him put on board the Zeeslang yourself, Sir Rowland. But, perhaps, you'll first accompany me to my dwelling for a moment, that we may arrange our accounts before we start. I've a few necessary directions to leave with my people, to put 'em on their guard against the chance of a surprise. Suffer me to precede you. This way, Sir Rowland."

The thief-taker's residence was a large dismal-looking, habitation, separated from the street by a flagged court-yard, and defended from general approach by an iron railing. Even in the daylight, it had a sombre and suspicious air, and seemed to slink back from the adjoining houses, as if afraid of their society. In the obscurity in which it was now seen, it looked like a prison, and, indeed, it was Jonathan's fancy to make it resemble one as much as possible. The windows were grated, the doors barred; each room had the name as well as the appearance of a cell; and the very porter who stood at the gate, habited like a jailer, with his huge bunch of keys at his girdle, his forbidding countenance and surly demeanour seemed to be borrowed from Newgate. The clanking of chains, the grating of locks, and the rumbling of bolts must have been music in Jonathan's ears, so much pains did he take to subject himself to such sounds. The scanty furniture of the rooms corresponded with their dungeon-like aspect. The walls were bare, and painted in stone-colour; the floors, devoid of carpet; the beds, of hangings; the windows, of blinds; and, excepting in the thief-taker's own audience-chamber, there was not a chair or a table about the premises; the place of these conveniences being elsewhere supplied by benches, and deal-boards laid across joint-stools. Great stone staircases leading no one knew whither, and long gloomy passages, impressed the occasional visitor with the idea that he was traversing a building of vast extent; and, though this was not the case in reality, the deception was so cleverly contrived that it seldom failed of producing the intended effect. Scarcely any one entered Mr. Wild's dwelling without apprehension, or quitted it without satisfaction. More strange stories were told of it than of any other house in London. The garrets were said to be tenanted by coiners, and artists employed in altering watches and jewelry; the cellars to be used as a magazine for stolen goods. By some it was affirmed that a subterranean communication existed between the thief-taker's abode and Newgate, by means of which he was enabled to maintain a secret correspondence with the imprisoned felons: by others, that an under-ground passage led to extensive vaults, where such malefactors

as he chose to screen from justice might lie concealed till the danger was blown over. Nothing, in short, was too extravagant to be related of it; and Jonathan, who delighted in investing himself and his residence with mystery, encouraged, and perhaps originated, these marvellous tales. However this may be, such was the ill report of the place that few passed along the Old Bailey without bestowing a glance of fearful curiosity at its dingy walls, and wondering what was going on inside them; while fewer still, of those who paused at the door, read, without some internal trepidation, the formidable name—inscribed in large letters on its bright brass-plate—of JONATHAN WILD.

Arrived at his habitation, Jonathan knocked in a peculiar manner at the door, which was instantly opened by the grim-visaged porter just alluded to. No sooner had Trenchard crossed the threshold than a fierce barking was heard at the farther extremity of the passage, and, the next moment, a couple of mastiffs of the largest size rushed furiously towards him. The knight stood upon his defence; but he would unquestionably have been torn in pieces by the savage hounds, if a shower of oaths, seconded by a vigorous application of kicks and blows from their master, had not driven them growling off. Apologizing to Sir Rowland for this unpleasant reception, and swearing lustily at his servant for occasioning it by leaving the dogs at liberty, Jonathan ordered the man to light them to the audience-room. The command was sullenly obeyed, for the fellow did not appear to relish the rating. Ascending the stairs, and conducting them along a sombre gallery, in which Trenchard noticed that every door was painted black, and numbered, he stopped at the entrance of a chamber; and, selecting a key from the bunch at his girdle, unlocked it. Following his guide, Sir Rowland found himself in a large and lofty apartment, the extent of which he could not entirely discern until lights were set upon the table. He then looked around him with some curiosity; and, as the thief-taker was occupied in giving directions to his attendant in an undertone, ample leisure was allowed him for investigation. At the first glance, he imagined he must have stumbled upon a museum of rarities, there were so many glass-cases, so many open cabinets, ranged against the walls; but the next convinced him that if Jonathan was a virtuoso, his tastes did not run in the ordinary channels. Trenchard was tempted to examine the contents of some of these cases, but a closer inspection made him recoil from them in disgust. In the one he approached was gathered together a vast assortment of weapons, each of which, as appeared from the ticket attached to it, had been used as an instrument of destruction. On this side was a razor with which a son had murdered his father; the blade notched, the haft crusted with blood: on that, a bar of iron, bent, and partly broken, with which a husband had beaten out his wife's brains. As it is not, however, our intention to furnish a complete catalogue of these curiosities, we shall merely mention that in front of them lay a large and sharp knife, once the property of the public executioner, and used by him to dissever the limbs of those condemned to death for high-treason; together with an immense two-pronged flesh-fork, likewise employed by the same terrible functionary to plunge the quarters of his victims in the

caldrons of boiling tar and oil. Every gibbet at Tyburn and Hounslow appeared to have been plundered of its charnel spoil to enrich the adjoining cabinet, so well was it stored with skulls and bones, all purporting to be the relics of highwaymen famous in their day. Halters, each of which had fulfilled its destiny, formed the attraction of the next compartment; while a fourth was occupied by an array of implements of housebreaking almost innumerable, and utterly indescribable. All these interesting objects were carefully arranged, classed, and, as we have said, labelled by the thief-taker. From this singular collection Trenchard turned to regard its possessor, who was standing at a little distance from him, still engaged in earnest discourse with his attendant, and, as he contemplated his ruthless countenance, on which duplicity and malignity had set their strongest seals, he could not help calling to mind all he had heard of Jonathan's perfidiousness to his employers, and deeply regretting that he had placed himself in the power of so unscrupulous a miscreant.

Jonathan Wild, at this time, was on the high-road to the greatness which he subsequently, and not long afterwards, obtained. He was fast rising to an eminence that no one of his nefarious profession ever reached before him, nor, it is to be hoped, will ever reach again. He was the Napoleon of knavery, and established an uncontrolled empire over all the practitioners of crime. This was no light conquest; nor was it a government easily maintained. Resolution, severity, subtlety, were required for it; and these were qualities which Jonathan possessed in an extraordinary degree. The danger or difficulty of an exploit never appalled him. What his head conceived his hand executed. Professing to stand between the robber and the robbed, he himself plundered both. He it was who formed the grand design of a robber corporation, of which he should be the sole head and director, with the right of delivering those who concealed their booty, or refused to share it with him, to the gallows. He divided London into districts; appointed a gang to each district; and a leader to each gang, whom he held responsible to himself. The country was partitioned in a similar manner. Those whom he retained about his person, or placed in offices of trust, were for the most part convicted felons, who, having returned from transportation before their term had expired, constituted, in his opinion, the safest agents, inasmuch as they could neither be legal evidences against him, nor withhold any portion of the spoil of which he chose to deprive them. But the crowning glory of Jonathan, that which raised him above all his predecessors in iniquity, and clothed this name with undying notoriety—was to come. When in the plenitude of his power, he commenced a terrible trade, till then unknown—namely, a traffic in human blood. This he carried on by procuring witnesses to swear away the lives of those persons who had incurred his displeasure, or whom it might be necessary to remove.

No wonder that Trenchard, as he gazed at this fearful being, should have some misgivings cross him.

Apparently, Jonathan perceived he was an object of scrutiny; for, hastily dismissing his attendant, he walked towards the knight.

"So, you're admiring my cabinet, Sir Rowland," he remarked, with a sinister smile; "it is generally admired; and, sometimes by parties who afterwards contribute to the collection themselves,—ha! ha! This skull," he added, pointing to a fragment of mortality in the case beside them, "once belonged to Tom Sheppard, the father of the lad I spoke of just now. In the next box hangs the rope by which he suffered. When I've placed another skull and another halter beside them, I shall be contented."

"To business, Sir!" said the knight, with a look of abhorrence.

"Ay, to business," returned Jonathan, grinning, "the sooner the better."

"Here is the sum you bargained for," rejoined Trenchard, flinging a pocket-book on the table; "count it."

Jonathan's eyes glistened as he told over the notes.

"You've given me more than the amount, Sir Rowland," he said, after he had twice counted them, "or I've missed my reckoning. There's a hundred pounds too much."

"Keep it," said Trenchard, haughtily.

"I'll place it to your account, Sir Rowland," answered the thief-taker, smiling significantly. "And now, shall we proceed to Queenhithe?"

"Stay!" cried the other, taking a chair, "a word with you, Mr. Wild."

"As many as you please, Sir Rowland," replied Jonathan, resuming his seat. "I'm quite at your disposal."

" I have a question to propose to you," said Trenchard, "relating to—" and he hesitated.

"Relating to the father of the boy—Thames Darrell," supplied Jonathan. "I guessed what was coming. You desire to know who he was, Sir Rowland. Well, you shall know."

"Without further fee?" inquired the knight.

"Not exactly," answered Jonathan, drily. "A secret is too valuable a commodity to be thrown away. But I said I wouldn't drive a hard bargain with you, and I won't. We are alone, Sir Rowland," he added, snuffing the candles, glancing cautiously around, and lowering his tone, "and what you confide to me shall never transpire,—at least to your disadvantage."

"I am at a loss to understand you Sir,", said Trenchard.

"I'll make myself intelligible before I've done," rejoined Wild. "I need not remind you, Sir Rowland, that I am aware you are deeply implicated in the Jacobite plot which is now known to be hatching."

"Ha!" ejaculated the other.

"Of course, therefore," pursued Jonathan, "you are acquainted with all the leaders of the proposed insurrection,—nay, must be in correspondence with them."

"What right have you to suppose this, Sir?" demanded Trenchard, sternly.

"Have a moment's patience, Sir Rowland," returned Wild; "and you shall hear. If you will furnish me with a list of these rebels, and with proofs of their treason, I will not only insure your safety, but will acquaint you with the real name and rank of your sister Aliva's husband, as well as with some particulars which will never otherwise reach your ears, concerning your lost sister, Constance."

"My sister Constance!" echoed the knight; "what of her?"

"You agree to my proposal, then?" said Jonathan.

"Do you take me for as great a villain as yourself, Sir?" said the knight, rising.

"I took you for one who wouldn't hesitate to avail himself of any advantage chance might throw in his way," returned the thief-taker, coldly. "I find I was in error. No matter. A time may come,—and that ere long,—when you will be glad to purchase my secrets, and your own safety, at a dearer price than the heads of your companions."
"Are you ready?" said Trenchard, striding towards the door.
"I am," replied Jonathan, following him, "and so," he added in an undertone, "are your captors."
A moment afterwards, they quitted the house.

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XVII.

The Night-Cellar.

After a few minutes' rapid walking, during which neither party uttered a word, Jonathan Wild and his companion had passed Saint Paul's, dived down a thoroughfare on the right, and reached Thames Street.

At the period of this history, the main streets of the metropolis were but imperfectly lighted, while the less-frequented avenues were left in total obscurity; but, even at the present time, the maze of courts and alleys into which Wild now plunged, would have perplexed any one, not familiar with their intricacies, to thread them on a dark night. Jonathan, however, was well acquainted with the road. Indeed, it was his boast that he could find his way through any part of London blindfolded; and by this time, it would seem, he had nearly arrived at his destination; for, grasping his companion's arm, he led him along a narrow entry which did not appear to have an outlet, and came to a halt. Cautioning the knight, if he valued his neck, to tread carefully, Jonathan then descended a steep flight of steps; and, having reached the bottom in safety, he pushed open a door, that swung back on its hinges as soon as it had admitted him; and, followed by Trenchard, entered the night-cellar.

The vault, in which Sir Rowland found himself, resembled in some measure the cabin of a ship. It was long and narrow, with a ceiling supported by huge uncovered rafters, and so low as scarcely to allow a tall man like himself to stand erect beneath it. Notwithstanding the heat of the season,—which was not, however, found particularly inconvenient in this subterranean region,—a large heaped-up fire blazed ruddily in one corner, and lighted up a circle of as villanous countenances as ever flame shone upon.

The guests congregated within the night-cellar were, in fact, little better than thieves; but thieves who confined their depredations almost exclusively to the vessels lying in the pool and docks of the river. They had as many designations as grades. There were game watermen and game lightermen, heavy horsemen and light horsemen, scuffle-hunters, and long-apron men, lumpers, journeymen coopers, mud-larks, badgers, and ratcatchers—a race of dangerous vermin recently, in a great measure, extirpated by the vigilance of the Thames Police, but at this period flourishing in vast numbers. Besides these plunderers, there were others with whom the disposal of their pillage necessarily brought them into contact, and who seldom failed to attend them during their hours of

relaxation and festivity;—to wit, dealers in junk, old rags, and marine stores, purchasers of prize-money, crimps, and Jew receivers. The latter formed by far the most knavish-looking and unprepossessing portion of the assemblage. One or two of the tables were occupied by groups of fat frowzy women in flat caps, with rings on their thumbs, and baskets by their sides; and no one who had listened for a single moment to their coarse language and violent abuse of each other, would require to be told they were fish-wives from Billingsgate.

The present divinity of the cellar was a comely middle-aged dame, almost as stout, and quite as shrill-voiced, as the Billingsgate fish-wives above-mentioned, Mrs. Spurling, for so was she named, had a warm nut-brown complexion, almost as dark as a Creole; and a moustache on her upper lip, that would have done no discredit to the oldest dragoon in the King's service. This lady was singularly lucky in her matrimonial connections. She had been married four times: three of her husbands died of hempen fevers; and the fourth, having been twice condemned, was saved from the noose by Jonathan Wild, who not only managed to bring him off, but to obtain for him the situation of under-turnkey in Newgate.

On the appearance of the thief-taker, Mrs. Spurling was standing near the fire superintending some culinary preparation; but she no sooner perceived him, than hastily quitting her occupation, she elbowed a way for him and the knight through the crowd, and ushered them, with much ceremony, into an inner room, where they found the objects of their search, Quilt Arnold and Rykhart Van Galgebrok, seated at a small table, quietly smoking. This service rendered, without waiting for any farther order, she withdrew.

Both the janizary and the skipper arose as the others entered the room.

"This is the gentleman," observed Jonathan, introducing Trenchard to the Hollander, "who is about to intrust his young relation to your care."

"De gentleman may rely on my showing his relation all de attention in my power," replied Van Galgebrok, bowing profoundly to the knight; "but if any unforseen accident—such as a slip overboard—should befal de jonker on de voyage, he mushn't lay de fault entirely on my shoulders—haw! haw!"

"Where is he?" asked Sir Rowland, glancing uneasily around. "I do not see him."

"De jonker. He's here," returned the skipper, pointing significantly downwards. "Bring him out, Quilt."

So saying, he pushed aside the table, and the janizary stooping down, undrew a bolt and opened a trap-door.

"Come out!" roared Quilt, looking into the aperture. "You're wanted."

But as no answer was returned, he trust his arm up to the shoulder into the hole, and with some little difficulty and exertion of strength, drew forth Thames Darrell.

The poor boy, whose hands were pinioned behind him, looked very pale, but neither trembled, nor exhibited any other symptom of alarm.

"Why didn't you come out when I called you, you young dog?" cried Quilt in a savage tone.

"Because I knew what you wanted me for!" answered Thames firmly.

"Oh! you did, did you?" said the janizary. "And what do you suppose we mean to do with you, eh?"

"You mean to kill me," replied Thames, "by my cruel uncle's command. Ah! there he stands!" he exclaimed as his eye fell for the first time upon Sir Rowland. "Where is my mother?" he added, regarding the knight with a searching glance.

"Your mother is dead," interposed Wild, scowling.

"Dead!" echoed the boy. "Oh no—no! You say this to terrify me—to try me. But I will not believe you. Inhuman as he is, he would not kill her. Tell me, Sir," he added, advancing towards the knight, "tell me has this man spoken falsely?—Tell me my mother is alive, and do what you please with me."

"Tell him so, and have done with him, Sir Rowland," observed Jonathan coldly.

"Tell me the truth, I implore you," cried Thames. "Is she alive?"

"She is not," replied Trenchard, overcome by conflicting emotions, and unable to endure the boy's agonized look.

"Are you answered?" said Jonathan, with a grin worthy of a demon.

"My mother!—my poor mother!" ejaculated Thames, falling on his knees, and bursting into tears. "Shall I never see that sweet face again,—never feel the pressure of those kind

hands more—nor listen to that gentle voice! Ah! yes, we shall meet again in Heaven, where I shall speedily join you. Now then," he added more calmly, "I am ready to die. The only mercy you can show me is to kill me."

"Then we won't even show you that mercy," retorted the thief-taker brutally. "So get up, and leave off whimpering. Your time isn't come yet."

" Mr. Wild," said Trenchard, "I shall proceed no further in this business. Set the boy free."

"If I disobey you, Sir Rowland," replied the thief-taker, "you'll thank me for it hereafter. Gag him," he added, pushing Thames rudely toward Quilt Arnold, "and convey him to the boat."

"A word," cried the boy, as the janizary was preparing to obey his master's orders. "What has become of Jack Sheppard?"

"Devil knows!" answered Quilt; "but I believe he's in the hands of Blueskin, so there's no doubt he'll soon be on the high-road to Tyburn."

"Poor Jack!" sighed Thames. "You needn't gag me," he added, "I'll not cry out."

"We won't trust you, my youngster," answered the janizary. And, thrusting a piece of iron into his mouth, he forced him out of the room.

Sir Rowland witnessed these proceedings like one stupified. He neither attempted to prevent his nephew's departure, nor to follow him.

Jonathan kept his keen eye fixed upon him, as he addressed himself for a moment to the Hollander.

"Is the case of watches on board?" he asked in an under tone.

"Ja," replied the skipper.

"And the rings?"

"Ja."

"That's well. You must dispose of the goldsmith's note I gave you yesterday, as soon as you arrive at Rotterdam. It'll be advertised to-morrow."

"De duivel!" exclaimed Van Galgebrok, "Very well. It shall be done as you direct. But about dat jonker," he continued, lowering his voice; "have you anything to add consarnin' him? It's almosht a pity to put him onder de water."

"Is the sloop ready to sail?" asked Wild, without noticing the skipper's remark.

"Ja," answered Van; "at a minut's nodish."

"Here are your despatches," said Jonathan with a significant look, and giving him a sealed packet. "Open them when you get on board—not before, and act as they direct you."

"I ondershtand," replied the skipper, putting his finger to his nose; "it shall be done."

"Sir Rowland," said Jonathan, turning to the knight, "will it please you to remain here till I return, or will you accompany us?"

"I will go with you," answered Trenchard, who, by this time, had regained his composure, and with it all his relentlessness of purpose.

"Come, then," said Wild, marching towards the door, "we've no time to lose."

Quitting the night-cellar, the trio soon arrived at the riverside. Quilt Arnold was stationed at the stair-head, near which the boat containing the captive boy was moored. A few words passed between him and the thief-taker as the latter came up; after which, all the party—with the exception of Quilt, who was left on shore—embarked within the wherry, which was pushed from the strand and rowed swiftly along the stream—for the tide was in its favour—by a couple of watermen. Though scarcely two hours past midnight, it was perfectly light. The moon had arisen, and everything could be as plainly distinguished as during the day. A thin mist lay on the river, giving the few craft moving about in it a ghostly look. As they approached London Bridge, the thief-taker whispered Van Galgebrok, who acted as steersman, to make for a particular arch—near the Surrey shore. The skipper obeyed, and in another moment, they swept through the narrow lock. While the watermen were contending with the eddies occasioned by the fall below the bridge, Jonathan observed a perceptible shudder run through Trenchard's frame.

"You remember that starling, Sir Rowland," he said maliciously, "and what occurred on it, twelve years ago?"

"Too well," answered the knight, frowning. "Ah! what is that?" he cried, pointing to a dark object floating near them amid the boiling waves, and which presented a frightful resemblance to a human face.

" We'll see," returned the thief-taker. And, stretching out his hand, he lifted the dark object from the flood.

It proved to be a human head, though with scarcely a vestige of the features remaining. Here and there, patches of flesh adhered to the bones, and the dank dripping hair hanging about what had once been the face, gave it a ghastly appearance.

"It's the skull of a rebel," said Jonathan, with marked emphasis on the word, "blown by the wind from a spike on the bridge above us. I don't know whose brainless head it may be, but it'll do for my collection." And he tossed it carelessly into the bottom of the boat.

After this occurence, not a word was exchanged between them until they came in sight of the sloop, which was lying at anchor off Wapping. Arrived at her side, it was soon evident, from the throng of seamen in Dutch dresses that displayed themselves, that her crew were on the alert, and a rope having been thrown down to the skipper, he speedily hoisted himself on deck. Preparations were next made for taking Thames on board. Raising him in his arms, Jonathan passed the rope round his body, and in this way the poor boy was drawn up without difficulty.

While he was swinging in mid air, Thames regarded his uncle with a stern look, and cried in a menacing voice, "We shall meet again."

"Not in this world," returned Jonathan. "Weigh anchor, Van!" he shouted to the skipper, "and consult your despatches."

"Ja—ja," returned the Hollander. And catching hold of Thames, he quitted the deck.

Shortly afterwards, he re-appeared with the information that the captive was safe below; and giving the necessary directions to his crew, before many minutes had elapsed, the Zeeslang spread her canvass to the first breeze of morning.

By the thief-taker's command, the boat was then rowed toward a muddy inlet, which has received in more recent times the name of Execution Dock. As soon as she reached this spot, Wild sprang ashore, and was joined by several persons,—among whom was Quilt Arnold, leading a horse by the bridle,—he hastened down the stairs to meet him. A coach was also in attendance, at a little distance.

Sir Rowland, who had continued absorbed in thought, with his eyes fixed upon the sloop, as she made her way slowly down the river, disembarked more leisurely.

"At length I am my own master," murmured the knight, as his foot touched the strand.

"Not so, Sir Rowland," returned Jonathan; "you are my prisoner."

"How!" ejaculated Trenchard, starting back and drawing his sword.

"You are arrested for high treason," rejoined Wild, presenting a pistol at his head, while he drew forth a parchment,—"here is my warrant."

"Traitor!" cried Sir Rowland—"damned—double-dyed traitor!"

"Away with him," vociferated Jonathan to his myrmidons, who, having surrounded Trenchard, hurried him off to the coach before he could utter another word,—"first to Mr. Walpole, and then to Newgate. And now, Quilt," he continued, addressing the janizary, who approached him with the horse, "fly to St. Giles's round-house, and if, through the agency of that treacherous scoundrel, Terry O'Flaherty, whom I've put in my Black List, old Wood should have found his way there, and have been detained by Sharpies as I directed, you may release him. I don't care how soon he learns that he has lost his adopted son. When I've escorted you proud fool to his new quarters, I'll proceed to the Mint and look after Jack Sheppard."

With this, he mounted his steed and rode off.

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XVIII.

How Jack Sheppard broke out of the Cage at Willesden.

The heart-piercing scream uttered by Mrs. Sheppard after the commission of the robbery in Willesden church was productive of unfortunate consequences to her son. Luckily, she was bereft of consciousness, and was thus spared the additional misery of witnessing what afterwards befell him. Startled by the cry, as may be supposed, the attention of the whole congregation was drawn towards the quarter whence it proceeded. Amongst others, a person near the door, roused by the shriek, observed a man make his exit with the utmost precipitation. A boy attempted to follow; but as the suspicions of the lookers-on were roused by the previous circumstances, the younger fugitive was seized and detained. Meanwhile, Mr. Kneebone, having been alarmed by something in the widow's look before her feelings found vent in the manner above described, thrust his hand instinctively into his coat in search of his pocket-book,—about the security of which, as it contained several letters and documents implicating himself and others in the Jacobite plot, he was, not unnaturally, solicitous,—and finding it gone, he felt certain he had been robbed. Turning quickly round, in the hope of discovering the thief, he was no less surprised than distressed—for in spite of his faults, the woollen-draper was a good-natured fellow—to perceive Jack Sheppard in custody. The truth at once flashed across his mind. This, then, was the cause of the widow's wild inexplicable look,—of her sudden shriek! Explaining his suspicious in a whisper to Jack's captor, who proved to be a church-warden and a constable, by name John Dump,—Mr. Kneebone begged him to take the prisoner into the churchyard. Dump instantly complied, and as soon as Jack was removed from the sacred edifice, his person was searched from head to foot—but without success. Jack submitted to this scrutiny with a very bad grace, and vehemently protested his innocence. In vain did the woollen-draper offer to set him free if he would restore the stolen article, or give up his associate, to whom it was supposed he might have handed it. He answered with the greatest assurance, that he knew nothing whatever of the matter—had seen no pocket-book, and no associate to give up. Nor did he content himself with declaring his guiltlessness of the crime imputed to him, but began in his turn to menace his captor and accuser, loading the latter with the bitterest upbraidings. By this time, the churchyard was crowded with spectators, some of whom dispersed in different directions in quest of the other robber. But all that could be ascertained in the village was, that a man had ridden off a short time before in the direction of London. Of this man Kneebone resolved to go in pursuit; and leaving Jack in charge of the constable, he proceeded to the small inn,—

which bore then, as it bears now, the name of the Six Bells,—where, summoning the hostler, his steed was instantly brought him, and, springing on its back, he rode away at full speed.

Meanwhile, after a consultation between Mr. Dump and the village authorities, it was agreed to lock up the prisoner in the cage. As he was conveyed thither, an incident occurred that produced a considerable impression on the feelings of the youthful offender. Just as they reached the eastern outlet of the churchyard—where the tall elms cast a pleasant shade over the rustic graves—a momentary stop took place. At this gate two paths meet. Down that on the right the young culprit was dragged—along that on the left a fainting woman was borne in the arms of several females. It was his mother, and as he gazed on her pallid features and motionless frame, Jack's heart severely smote him. He urged his conductors to a quicker pace to get out of sight of the distressing spectacle, and even felt relieved when he was shut out from it and the execrations of the mob by the walls of the little prison.

The cage at Willesden was, and is—for it is still standing—a small round building about eight feet high, with a pointed tiled roof, to which a number of boards, inscribed with the names of the parish officers, and charged with a multitude of admonitory notices to vagrants and other disorderly persons, are attached. Over these boards the two arms of a guide-post serve to direct the way-farer—on the right hand to the neighbouring villages of Neasdon and Kingsbury, and on the left to the Edgeware Road and the healthy heights of Hampstead. The cage has a strong door, with an iron grating at the top, and further secured by a stout bolt and padlock. It is picturesquely situated beneath a tree on the high road, not far from the little hostel before mentioned, and at no great distance from the church.

For some time after he was locked up in this prison Jack continued in a very dejected state. Deserted by his older companion in iniquity, and instigator to crime, he did not know what might become of him; nor, as we have observed, was the sad spectacle he had just witnessed, without effect. Though within the last two days he had committed several heinous offences, and one of a darker dye than any with which the reader has been made acquainted, his breast was not yet so callous as to be wholly insensible to the stings of conscience. Wearied at length with thinking on the past, and terrified by the prospect of the future, he threw himself on the straw with which the cage was littered, and endeavoured to compose himself to slumber. When he awoke, it was late in the day; but though he heard voices outside, and now and then caught a glimpse of a face peeping at him through the iron grating over the door, no one entered the prison, or held any communication with him. Feeling rather exhausted, it occurred to him that possibly some provisions might have been left by the constable; and, looking about, he perceived a pitcher of water and a small brown loaf on the floor. He ate of the bread with great

appetite, and having drunk as much as he chose of the water, poured the rest on the floor. His hunger satisfied, his spirits began to revive, and with this change of mood all his natural audacity returned. And here he was first visited by that genius which, in his subsequent career, prompted him to so many bold and successful attempts. Glancing around his prison, he began to think it possible he might effect an escape from it. The door was too strong, and too well secured, to break open,—the walls too thick: but the ceiling,—if he could reach it—there, he doubted not, he could make an outlet. While he was meditating flight in this way, and tossing about on the straw, he chanced upon an old broken and rusty fork. Here was an instrument which might be of the greatest service to him in accomplishing his design. He put it carefully aside, resolved to defer the attempt till night. Time wore on somewhat slowly with the prisoner, who had to control his impatience in the best way he could; but as the shades of evening were darkening, the door was unlocked, and Mr. Dump popped his head into the cage. He brought another small loaf, and a can with which he replenished the pitcher, recommending Jack to be careful, as he would get nothing further till morning. To this Jack replied, that he should be perfectly contented, provided he might have a small allowance of gin. The latter request, though treated with supreme contempt by Mr. Dump, made an impression on some one outside; for not long after the constable departed, Jack heard a tap at the door, and getting up at the summons, he perceived the tube of a pipe inserted between the bars. At once divining the meaning of this ingenious device, he applied his mouth to the tube, and sucked away, while the person outside poured spirit into the bowl. Having drunk as much as he thought prudent, and thanked his unknown friend for his attention, Jack again lay down on the straw, and indulged himself with another nap, intending to get up as soon as it was perfectly dark. The strong potation he had taken, combined with fatigue and anxiety he had previously undergone, made him oversleep himself, and when he awoke it was just beginning to grow light. Cursing himself for his inertness, Jack soon shook off this drowsiness, and set to work in earnest. Availing himself of certain inequalities in the door, he soon managed to climb up to the roof; and securing his feet against a slight projection in the wall, began to use the fork with great effect. Before many minutes elapsed, he had picked a large hole in the plaster, which showered down in a cloud of dust; and breaking off several laths, caught hold of a beam, by which he held with one hand, until with the other he succeeded, not without some difficulty, in forcing out one of the tiles. The rest was easy. In a few minutes more he had made a breach in the roof wide enough to allow him to pass through. Emerging from this aperture, he was about to descend, when he was alarmed by hearing the tramp of horses' feet swiftly approaching, and had only time to hide himself behind one of the largest sign-boards before alluded to when two horsemen rode up. Instead of passing on, as Jack expected, these persons stopped opposite the cage, when one of them, as he judged from the sound, for he did not dare to look out of his hiding place, dismounted. A noise was next heard, as if some instrument were applied to the door with the intent to force it open, and Jack's fears were at once

dispelled, At first, he had imagined they were officers of justice, come to convey him to a stronger prison: but the voice of one of the parties, which he recognised, convinced him they were his friends.

"Look quick, Blueskin, and be cursed to you!" was growled in the deep tones of Jonathan Wild. "We shall have the whole village upon us while you're striking the jigger. Use the gilt, man!"

"There's no need of picklock or crow-bar, here, Mr. Wild," cried Jack, placing his hat on the right arm of the guide-post, and leaning over the board, "I've done the trick myself."

"Why, what the devil's this?" vociferated Jonathan, looking up. "Have you broken out of the cage, Jack?"

"Something like it," replied the lad carelessly.

"Bravo!" cried the thief-taker approvingly.

"Well, that beats all I ever heard of!" roared Blueskin.

"But are you really there?"

"No, I'm here," answered Jack, leaping down. "I tell you what, Mr. Wild," he added, laughing, "it must be a stronger prison than Willesden cage that can hold me."

"Ay, ay," observed Jonathan, "you'll give the keepers of his Majesty's jails some trouble before you're many years older, I'll warrant you. But get up behind, Blueskin. Some one may observe us."

"Come, jump up," cried Blueskin, mounting his steed, "and I'll soon wisk you to town. Edgeworth Bess and Poll Maggot are dying to see you. I thought Bess would have cried her pretty eyes out when she heard you was nabbed. You need give yourself no more concern about Kneebone. Mr. Wild has done his business."

"Ay—ay," laughed Jonathan. "The pocket-book you prigged contained the letters I wanted. He's now in spring-ankle warehouse with Sir Rowland Trenchard. So get up, and let's be off."

"Before I leave this place, I must see my mother."

"Nonsense," returned Jonathan gruffly. "Would you expose yourself to fresh risk? If it hadn't been for her you wouldn't have been placed in your late jeopardy."

"I don't care for that," replied Jack. "See her I will. Leave me behind: I'm not afraid. I'll be at the Cross Shovels in the course of the day."

"Nay, if you're bent upon this folly," observed Wild, who appeared to have his own reasons for humouring the lad, "I shan't hinder you. Blueskin will take care of the horses, and I'll go with you."

So saying, he dismounted; and flinging his bridle to his companion, and ordering him to ride off to a little distance, he followed Jack, who had quitted the main road, and struck into a narrow path opposite the cage. This path, bordered on each side by high privet hedges of the most beautiful green, soon brought them to a stile.

"There's the house," said Jack, pointing to a pretty cottage, the small wooden porch of which was covered with roses and creepers, with a little trim garden in front of it. "I'll be back in a minute."

"Don't hurry yourself," said Jonathan, "I'll wait for you here."

Jack Sheppard Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XIX.

Good and Evil.

As Jack opened the gate, and crossed the little garden, which exhibited in every part the neatness and attention of its owner, he almost trembled at the idea of further disturbing her peace of mind. Pausing with the intention of turning back, he glanced in the direction of the village church, the tower of which could just be seen through the trees. The rooks were cawing amid the boughs, and all nature appeared awaking to happiness. From this peaceful scene Jack's eye fell upon Jonathan, who, seated upon the stile, under the shade of an elder tree, was evidently watching him. A sarcastic smile seemed to play upon the chief-taker's lips; and abashed at his own irresolution, the lad went on.

After knocking for some time at the door without effect, he tried the latch, and to his surprise found it open. He stepped in with a heavy foreboding of calamity. A cat came and rubbed herself against him as he entered the house, and seemed by her mewing to ask him for food. That was the only sound he heard.

Jack was almost afraid of speaking; but at length he summoned courage to call out "Mother!"

"Who's there?" asked a faint voice from the bed.

"Your son," answered the boy.

"Jack," exclaimed the widow, starting up and drawing back the curtain. "Is it indeed you, or am I dreaming?"

"You're not dreaming, mother," he answered. "I'm come to say good bye to you, and to assure you of my safety before I leave this place."

"Where are you going?" asked his mother.

"I hardly know," returned Jack; "but it's not safe for me to remain much longer here."

"True," replied the widow, upon whom all the terrible recollections of the day before crowded, "I know it isn't. I won't keep you long. But tell me how have you escaped from

the confinement in which you were placed—come and sit by me—here—upon the bed—give me your hand—and tell me all about it."

Her son complied, and sat down upon the patch-work coverlet beside her.

"Jack," said Mrs. Sheppard, clasping him with a hand that burnt with fever, "I have been ill—dreadfully ill—I believe delirious—I thought I should have died last night—I won't tell you what agony you have caused me—I won't reproach you. Only promise me to amend—to quit your vile companions—and I will forgive you—will bless you. Oh! my dear, dear son, be warned in time. You are in the hands of a wicked, a terrible man, who will not stop till he has completed your destruction. Listen to your mother's prayers, and do not let her die broken-hearted."

"It is too late," returned Jack, sullenly; "I can't be honest if I would."

"Oh! do not say so," replied his wretched parent. "It is never too late. I know you are in Jonathan Wild's power, for I saw him near you in the church; and if ever the enemy of mankind was permitted to take human form, I beheld him then. Beware of him, my son! Beware of him! You know not what villany he is capable of. Be honest, and you will be happy. You are yet a child; and though you have strayed from the right path, a stronger hand than your own has led you thence. Return, I implore of you, to your master,—to Mr. Wood. Acknowledge your faults. He is all kindness, and will overlook them for your poor father's sake—for mine. Return to him, I say—"

"I can't," replied Jack, doggedly.

"Can't!" repeated his mother. "Why not?"

"I'll tell you," cried a deep voice from the back of the bed. And immediately afterwards the curtain was drawn aside, and disclosed the Satanic countenance of Jonathan Wild, who had crept into the house unperceived, "I'll tell you, why he can't go back to his master," cried the thief-taker, with a malignant grin. "He has robbed him."

"Robbed him!" screamed the widow. "Jack!"

Her son averted his gaze.

"Ay, robbed him," reiterated Jonathan. "The night before last, Mr. Wood's house was broken into and plundered. Your son was seen by the carpenter's wife in company with the robbers. Here," he added, throwing a handbill on the bed, "are the particulars of the burglary, with the reward for Jack's apprehension."

"Ah!" ejaculated the widow, hiding her face.

" Come," said Wild, turning authoritatively to Jack,—"you have overstayed your time."

"Do not go with him, Jack!" shrieked his mother. "Do not—do not!"

"He must!" thundered Jonathan, "or he goes to jail."

"If you must go to prison, I will go with you," cried Mrs. Sheppard: "but avoid that man as you would a serpent."

"Come along," thundered Jonathan.

"Hear me, Jack!" shrieked his mother. "You know not what you do. The wretch you confide in has sworn to hang you. As I hope for mercy, I speak the truth!—let him deny it if he can."

"Pshaw!" said Wild. "I could hang him now if I liked. But he may remain with you if he pleases: I sha'n't hinder him."

"You hear, my son," said the widow eagerly. "Choose between good and evil;—between him and me. And mind, your life,—more than your life—hangs upon your choice."

"It does so," said Wild. "Choose, Jack."

The lad made no answer, but left the room.

"He is gone!" cried Mrs. Sheppard despairingly.

"For ever!" said the thief-taker, preparing to follow.

"Devil!" cried the widow, catching his arm, and gazing with frantic eagerness in his face, "how many years will you give my son before you execute your terrible threat?"

"NINE!" answered Jonathan sternly.


Freeditorial