OLD SAINT PAUL'S
VOLUME VI
BY
WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH

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I

THE FIRE-HALL

About nine o'clock on the night of Saturday, the second of September, 1666—and rather more than nine months after the incidents last related,—three men took their way from Smithfield to Islington. They proceeded at a swift pace and in silence, until, having mounted the steep hill on which the suburb in question is situated, they halted at a short distance from the high walls surrounding the great water-works formed by the New-River-head. The night was dark, but free from cloud, in consequence of a strong easterly wind which prevailed at the time.

"It is dark in London now," observed one of the three persons to his companions as he cast his eye in the direction of the great city, that lay buried in gloom beneath them; "but there will be light enough soon."

"A second dawn, and brighter than the first, shall arise upon it," replied one of his companions, a tall, gaunt man, whose sole covering was a sheepskin, girded round his loins. "Such a flame shall be kindled within it, as hath not been seen since showers of brimstone and fire descended upon the sinful cities of the plain. 'The Lord shall come with flames of fire,'" he added, pointing his long staff towards the city. "'He shall make them like a fiery oven, in the time of his wrath. They shall be utterly consumed.'"

"Amen!" exclaimed the third person, who stood near him, in a deep voice, and with something of a foreign accent.

"Not so loud, friends," rejoined the first speaker. "Let us set about the task. I will ascertain that no one is on the watch."

With this he moved towards the water-works, and skirting the circular walls, to satisfy himself that all was secure, he returned to his companions, and they proceeded to the principal entrance to the place. Noiselessly unlocking the gates, the leader of the party admitted the others into an open space of some extent, in the midst of which was a large reservoir of water. He then gave each of them a small key, and bidding them use despatch, they began to turn the cocks of the leaden pipes connected with the reservoir, while he hastened to the further end of the inclosure, and employed himself in a similar manner. In this way, and in less than a quarter of an hour, the whole of the cocks were stopped.

"And now give me the keys," said the leader.

Taking them as they were offered, he added his own to the number, and flung them as far as he could into the reservoir, laughing slightly as the noise of the splash occasioned by their fall into the water reached the ears.

"They will not be found till this pool is drained," he observed to his companions. "And now let us go. Our business here is done."

"Stay yet a moment," cried Solomon Eagle, who was standing at the brink of the reservoir, with his eyes fixed upon it. "Stay!" he cried, arresting him. "A vision rises before me. I see in this watery mirror a representation of the burning city. And what are those fearful forms that feed the flames? Fiends, in our likeness—fiends! And see how wide and far the conflagration spreads. The whole city is swallowed up by an earthquake. It sinks to the bottomless pit—down—down!"

"No more of this," cried the leader, impatiently. "Come along." And, followed by the others, he rushed to the gates, and locking them after him, flung the key away.

"A hundred pounds were paid to the servant of the chief officer of the works to bring those keys to me," he said, "and he executed his commission faithfully and well. Water will be vainly sought for to quench the conflagration."

"I like not the vision I have just beheld," said Solomon Eagle, in a troubled tone. "It seems to portend mischief."

"Think of it no more," rejoined the leader, "or regard it as it was—a phantom created by your overheated imagination. Yon city has sinned so deeply, that it is the will of Heaven it should be destroyed; and it has been put into our hearts by the Supreme Power to undertake the terrible task. We are the chosen instruments of the divine displeasure. Everything favours the design—the long-continued dry weather—the strong easterly wind, which will bear the flames into the heart of the city—the want of water, occasioned by the stopping of these pipes, the emptying of the various aqueducts, and the destruction of the Thames water-tower, which we have accomplished. Everything favours it, I say, and proves that the hand of Heaven directs us. Yes, London shall fall! We have received our commission from on high, and must execute it, regardless of the consequences. For my own part, I feel as little compunction to the task, as the thunderbolt launched from on high does for the tree it shivers."

"Philip Grant has uttered my sentiments exactly," said the man who, it has been mentioned, spoke with a slight foreign accent. "I have neither misgiving nor compunction. You appear to have forgotten your own denunciations, brother."

"Not so, Brother Hubert," rejoined the enthusiast, "and I now recognise in the vision a delusion of the Evil One to turn me from my holy purpose. But it has failed. The impious and impenitent city is doomed, and nothing can save it. And yet I would fain see it once more as I beheld it this morn when day arose upon it for the last time, from the summit of Saint Paul's. It looked so beautiful that my heart smote me, and tears started to my eyes, to think that those goodly habitations, those towers, temples, halls, and palaces, should so soon be levelled with the dust."

"Hear what the prophet saith," rejoined Hubert. "'Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffic. Therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, and will bring thee to ashes upon the earth, in the sight of all those that behold thee.'"

Solomon Eagle flung himself upon his knees, and his example was imitated by the others. Having recited a prayer in a low deep tone, he arose, and stretching out his arms, solemnly denounced the city. As he pronounced the words, a red and fiery star shot from the dark vault of the sky, and seemed to fall in the midst of the city.

"Did you not see that sign?" cried Grant, eagerly. "It heralds us to our task."

So saying, he ran swiftly down the hill, and, followed by the others, did not slacken his pace till they reached the city. They then shaped their course more slowly towards Saint Paul's, and having gained the precincts of the cathedral, Solomon Eagle, who now assumed the place of leader, conducted them to a small door on the left of the great northern entrance, and unlocking it, ushered them into a narrow passage behind the rich carved work of the choir. Traversing it, they crossed the mid aisle, and soon reached the steps leading to Saint Faith's. It was profoundly dark, but they were all well acquainted with the road, and did not miss their footing. It required, however, some caution to thread the ranks of the mighty pillars filling the subterranean church. But at last this was accomplished, and they entered the vault beyond the charnel, where they found Chowles and Judith Malmayns. The former was wrapped in a long black cloak, and was pacing to and fro within the narrow chamber. When Solomon Eagle appeared, he sprang towards him, and regarding him inquiringly, cried, "Have you done it?—have you done it?"

The enthusiast replied in the affirmative. "Heaven be praised!" exclaimed Chowles. And he skipped about with the wildest expressions of delight. A gleam of satisfaction, too,

darted from Judith's savage eyes. She had neither risen nor altered her position on the arrival of the party, but she now got up, and addressed the enthusiast. A small iron lamp, suspended by a chain from the vaulted roof, lighted the chamber. The most noticeable figure amidst the group was that of Solomon Eagle, who, with his blazing eyes, long jet-black locks, giant frame, and tawny skin, looked like a supernatural being. Near him stood the person designated as Robert Hubert. He was a young man, and appeared to have lived a life of great austerity. His features were thin; his large black eyes set in deep caverns; his limbs seemed almost destitute of flesh; and his looks wild and uncertain, like those of an insane person. His tattered and threadbare garb resembled that of a French ecclesiastic. The third person, who went by the name of Philip Grant, had a powerful frame, though somewhat bent, and a haughty deportment and look, greatly at variance with his miserable attire and haggard looks. His beard was long and grizzled, and his features, though sharpened by care, retained some traces of a noble expression. A few minutes having passed in conversation, Grant observed to the enthusiast, "I must now leave you for a short time. Give me the key that I may let myself out."

"You are not going to betray us?" cried Chowles, suspiciously.

"Why should I betray you?" rejoined Grant, sternly. "I am too anxious for the event to disclose it."

"True, true," replied Chowles.

"I do not mistrust you, brother," observed Solomon Eagle, giving him the key.

"I know whither you are going," observed Judith Malmayns. "You are about to warn Mr. Bloundel and his partner—apprentice no longer—Leonard Holt, of the approaching conflagration. But your care will be thrown away."

"Does she speak the truth, brother?" demanded Hubert, raising his eyes from the Bible which he was reading in the corner of the vault.

"I will do nothing to endanger the design," rejoined Grant; "of that rest assured."

With this, he strode forth, traversed Saint Faith's, and, notwithstanding the gloom, reached, without difficulty, the little door by which he had entered the cathedral. Issuing from it, he took the way, as Judith had surmised, to Wood-street, and pausing before the grocer's door, knocked against it. The summons was presently answered by Blaize; and to Grant's inquiries whether his master was within, he replied, "Which of my masters did you mean? I have two."

"The younger," replied Grant, "Leonard Holt."

"So far you are fortunate," rejoined Blaize. "Mr. Bloundel has retired to rest, but Mr. Holt is still downstairs. Pray what may be your business with him at this hour? It should be important."

"It is important," rejoined Grant, "and does not admit of a moment's delay. Tell him so."

Eyeing the stranger with a look of suspicion, the porter was about to enter into a parley with him, when Leonard himself cut it short, and learning the nature of the application, desired Grant to follow him into the adjoining room. The nine months which had passed over Leonard's head since he was last brought under notice, had wrought a material change in his appearance. He had a grave and thoughtful air, somewhat inclining to melancholy, but in other respects he was greatly improved. His health was completely restored, and the thoughtful expression added character to his handsome physiognomy, and harmonised well with his manly and determined bearing. He was habited plainly, but with some degree of taste. As Judith Malmayns had intimated, he was now Mr. Bloundel's partner, and his whole appearance denoted his improved circumstances. The alteration did not escape the notice of the stranger, who regarded him with much curiosity, and closed the door behind him as he entered the room.

"You are looking much better than when we last met, Leonard Holt," he said, in tones that made his hearer start, "and I am glad to perceive it. Prosperity seems to attend your path, and you deserve it; whereas misery and every other ill—and I deserve them—dog mine."

"I did not recognise you at first, Mr. Thirlby," replied Leonard; "for, in truth, you are much changed. But you desire to speak with me on a matter of importance. Can I aid you? You may need money. Here is my purse."

"I do not want it," replied the other, scornfully rejecting the offer.
"I have a proposal to make to you."
"I shall be glad to hear it," replied Leonard. "But first tell me how you effected your escape after your arrest on that disastrous night when, in self-defence, and unintentionally, I wounded your son, Lord Argentine?"

"Would you had killed him!" cried the other, fiercely. "I have lost all feelings of a father for him. He it was who contrived my arrest, and he would have gladly seen me borne to the scaffold, certain it would have freed him from me for ever. I was hurried away by the officers from the scene of strife, and conveyed to the Tun at Cornhill, which you know

has been converted into a round-house, and where I was locked up for the night. But while I was lying on the floor of my prison, driven well-nigh frantic by what had occurred, there were two persons without labouring to effect my deliverance—nor did they labour in vain. These were Chowles and Judith, my foster-sister, and whom, you may remember, I suspected—and most unfairly—of intending my betrayal. By means of a heavy bribe, they prevailed on one of the officers to connive at my escape. An iron bar was removed from the window of my prison, and I got through the aperture. Judith concealed me for some days in the vaults of Saint Faith's, after which I fled into the country, where I wandered about for several months, under the name of Philip Grant. Having learnt that my son though severely hurt by you, had recovered from his wound, and that his sister, the Lady Isabella, had accompanied him to his seat in Staffordshire, I proceeded thither, and saw her, unknown to him. I found her heart still true to you. She told me you had disappeared immediately after the termination of the conflict, and had not been heard of till her brother was out of danger, when you returned to Wood-street."

"The information was correct," replied Leonard. "I was dragged away by a person whom I did not recognise at the time, but who proved to be the Earl of Rochester. He conducted me to a place of safety, thrust a purse into my hand, and left me. As soon as I could do so with safety, I returned to my master's house. But how long have you been in London?"

"Nearly a month," replied Grant. "And now let me ask you one question.
Do you ever think of Isabella?"
"Often, very often," replied Leonard. "But as I dare not indulge the hope of a union with her, I have striven to banish her image from my mind."

"She cannot forget you, Leonard," rejoined Grant. "And now to my proposal. I have another plan for your aggrandisement that cannot fail. I am in possession of a monstrous design, the revelation of which will procure you whatever you desire. Ask a title from the king, and he will give it; and when in possession of that title, demand the hand of the Lady Isabella, and her proud brother will not refuse you. Call in your porter—seize me. I will offer a feigned resistance. Convey me before the king. Make your own terms with him. He will accede to them. Will you do it?"

"No," replied Leonard, "I will not purchase the daughter at the price of the father's life."

"Heed me not," replied Grant, supplicatingly, "I am wholly indifferent to life. And what matters it whether I am dragged to the scaffold for one crime or another?"

"You plead in vain," returned Leonard, firmly.

"Reflect," cried Grant, in an agonised tone. "A word from you will not only win you Isabella, but save the city from destruction."

"Save the city!" exclaimed Leonard. "What mean you?"

"Swear to comply with my request, and you shall know. But not otherwise," replied Grant.

"I cannot—I cannot," rejoined Leonard; "and unfortunately you have said too much for your own safety. I must, though most reluctantly, detain you."

"Hear me, Leonard, and consider well what you do," cried Grant, planting himself before the door. "I love you next to my daughter, and chiefly because she loves you. I have told you I have a design to discover, to which I am a party—a hellish, horrible design—which threatens this whole city with destruction. It is your duty, having told you thus much, to arrest me, and I will offer no resistance. Will you not turn this to your advantage? Will you not make a bargain with the king?"

"I have said I will not," rejoined Leonard.

"Then be warned by me," rejoined Grant. "Arouse your partner. Pack up all your goods and make preparations for instant flight, for the danger will invade you before you are aware of it."

"Is it fire?" demanded Leonard, upon whose mind the denunciations of
Solomon Eagle now rushed.
"You will see," replied Grant, with a terrible laugh. "You will repent your determination when it is too late. Farewell."

"Hold!" cried Leonard, advancing towards him, and trying to lay hands upon him, "I arrest you in the king's name."

"Off!" exclaimed Grant, dashing him forcibly backwards. And striking down Blaize, who tried to stop him in the passage, he threw open the street-door, and disappeared. Fearful of pursuit, Grant took a circuitous route to Saint Paul's, and it was full half an hour after the interview above related before he reached the cathedral. Just as he passed through the small door, the clock tolled forth the hour of midnight, and when he gained the mid aisle, he heard footsteps approaching, and encountered his friends.

"We had given you up," said Chowles, "and fearing you intended us some treachery, were about to do the job without you."

"I have been unavoidably detained," replied Grant. "Let us about it at once."

"I have got the fire-balls with me," observed Hubert.

"It is well," returned Grant.

Quitting the cathedral, they proceeded to Thames-street, and tracking it to Fish-street-hill, struck off on the right into an alley that brought them to Pudding-lane.

"This is the house," said Chowles, halting before a two-storied wooden habitation, over the door of which was suspended the sign of the "Wheat Sheaf, with the name THOMAS FARRYNER, BAKER, inscribed beneath it.

"And here," said Hubert, "shall begin the great fire of London."

As he said this, he gave a fire-ball to Solomon Eagle, who lighted the fuze at Chowles's lantern. The enthusiast then approached a window of the baker's shop, and breaking a small pane of glass within it, threw the fire-ball into the room. It alighted upon a heap of chips and fagots lying near a large stack of wood used for the oven, and in a few minutes the whole pile had caught and burst into a flame, which, quickly mounting to the ceiling, set fire to the old, dry, half-decayed timber that composed it.

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II

THE FIRST NIGHT OF THE FIRE

Having seen the stack of wood kindled, and the flames attack the building in such a manner as to leave no doubt they would destroy it, the incendiaries separated, previously agreeing to meet together in half an hour at the foot of London Bridge; and while the others started off in different directions, Chowles and Judith retreated to a neighbouring alley commanding a view of the burning habitation.

"At last the great design is executed," observed Chowles, rubbing his hands gleefully. "The fire burns right merrily, and will not soon be extinguished. Who would have thought we should have found such famous assistants as the two madmen, Solomon Eagle and Robert Hubert—and your scarcely less mad foster-brother, Philip Grant? I can understand the motives that influenced the two first to the deed, but not those of the other."

"Nor I," replied Judith, "unless he wishes in some way or other to benefit Leonard Holt by it. For my part, I shall enjoy this fire quite as much on its own account as for the plunder it will bring us. I should like to see every house in this great city destroyed."

"You are in a fair way of obtaining your wish," replied Chowles; "but provided I have the sacking of them, I don't care how many are saved. Not but that such a fire will be a grand sight, which I should be sorry to miss. You forget, too, that if Saint Paul's should be burnt down, we shall lose our hoards. However, there's no chance of that."

"Not much," replied Judith, interrupting him. "But see! the baker has at last discovered that his dwelling is on fire. He bursts open the window, and, as I live, is about to throw himself out of it."

As she spoke, one of the upper windows in the burning habitation was burst open, and a poor terrified wretch appeared at it in his night-dress, vociferating in tones of the wildest alarm, "Fire! fire!—help! help!"

"Shall we go forward?" said Chowles. Judith hesitated for a moment, and then assenting, they hurried towards the spot.

"Can we give you any help, friend?" cried Chowles.

"Take care of this," rejoined the baker, flinging a bag of money to the ground, "and I will endeavour to let down my wife and children. The staircase is on fire, and we are almost stifled with smoke. God help us!" And the exclamation was followed by fearful shrieks from within, followed by the appearance of a woman, holding two little children in her arms, at the window.

"This must be money," said Judith, utterly heedless of the fearful scene occurring above, and taking up the bag and chinking it; "silver, by the sound. Shall we make off with it?"

"No, no," replied Chowles, "we must not run any risk for such a paltry booty. Let us bide our time."

At this juncture, the baker, who had disappeared for a few seconds from the window, again presented himself at it, and, with some difficulty, forced a feather bed through it, which was instantly placed by Chowles in such a position beneath, as to break the fall of the descending parties. Tying a couple of sheets together, and fastening one end round his wife's waist, the baker lowered her and the children to the ground. They alighted in safety; but just as he was about to follow their example, the floor of the room gave way, and though he succeeded in springing through the window, he missed the feather bed, and broke his leg in the fall. He was picked up by Chowles and Judith, and placed upon the bed in a state of insensibility, and was soon afterwards conveyed with his family to the house of a neighbour.

Meanwhile, the fire had spread to the houses on either side of the unfortunate man's habitation, and both of them being built entirely of wood, they were almost instantly in flames. The alarm too had become general; the inhabitants of the adjoining houses were filled with indescribable terror, and the narrow street was speedily crowded with persons of both sexes, who had rushed from their beds to ascertain the extent of the danger. All was terror and confusion. The fire-bells of Saint Margaret's, Saint George's, and Saint Andrew's, in Botolph-lane, began to toll, and shouts were heard on every side, proving that the whole neighbourhood was roused.

To add to the general distress, a report was raised that a house in Fish-street-hill was on fire, and it was soon found to be true, as an immense volume of flames burst forth in that quarter. While the rest of the spectators, distracted by this calamity, and hardly knowing what to do, hurried in the direction of the new fire, Chowles and Judith eyed each other askance, and the former whispered to his companion, "This is another piece of Hubert's handiwork."

The two wretches now thought it time to bestir themselves. So much confusion prevailed, that they were wholly unobserved, and under the plea of rendering assistance, they entered houses and carried off whatever excited their cupidity, or was sufficiently portable. No wealthy house had been attacked as yet, and therefore their spoil was but trifling. The poor baker seemed to be the bearer of ill-luck, for he had not been many minutes in his new asylum before it likewise caught fire. Another house, too, in Fish-street-hill, and lower down than the first, was observed to be burning, and as this was out of the current of the wind, and consequently could not have been occasioned by the showers of sparks that marked its course, a cry was instantly raised that incendiaries were abroad, and several suspicious-looking persons were seized in consequence.

Meantime no efforts had been made to stop the progress of the original conflagration in Pudding-lane, which continued to rage with the greatest fury, spreading from house to house with astonishing rapidity. All the buildings in this neighbourhood being old, and of wood, which was as dry as tinder, a spark alighting upon them would have sufficed to set them on fire. It may be conceived, therefore, what must have been the effect of a vast volume of flame, fanned by a powerful wind. House after house caught, as if constructed of touchwood, and the fire roared and raged to such a degree, that those who stood by were too much terrified to render any effectual assistance. Indeed, the sole thought that now seemed to influence all was the preservation of a portion of their property. No one regarded his neighbour, or the safety of the city. The narrow street was instantly filled with goods and furniture of all kinds, thrown out of the windows or pushed out of the doors; but such was the fierceness of the fire, and the extraordinary rapidity with which it advanced, that the very articles attempted to be saved were seized by it, and thus formed a means of conveying it to the opposite houses.

In this way a number of persons were inclosed for a short time between two fires, and seemed in imminent danger of being burned to death. The perilous nature of their situation was, moreover, increased by a sudden and violent gust of wind, which, blowing the flames right across the street, seemed to envelop all within them. The shrieks that burst from the poor creatures thus involved were most appalling. Fortunately, they sustained no greater damage than was occasioned by the fright and a slight scorching, for the next moment the wind shifted, and, sweeping back the flames, they were enabled to effect their retreat. Chowles and Judith were among the sufferers, and in the alarm of the moment lost all the booty they had obtained.

Soon after this the whole street was on fire. All idea of preserving their property was therefore abandoned by the inhabitants, and they thought only of saving themselves. Hundreds of half-naked persons of both sexes rushed towards Thames-street in search of a place of refuge. The scene was wholly without parallel for terror. Many fires had occurred in London, but none that raged with such fierceness as the present

conflagration, or promised to be so generally destructive. It gathered strength and fury each moment, now rising high into the air in a towering sheet of flame, now shooting forward like an enormous dragon vomiting streams of fire upon its foes. All at once the flames changed colour, and were partially obscured by a thick black smoke. A large warehouse filled with resin, tar, and other combustible matters, had caught fire, and the dense vapour proceeded from the burning pitch. But it cleared off in a few minutes, and the flames burnt more brightly and fiercely than ever.

Up to this time, none of the civic authorities having arrived, several persons set off to give information of the calamity to the lord mayor (Sir Thomas Bludworth), and the other magistrates. A small party of the watch were on the spot, but they were unable to render any effectual assistance. As the conflagration advanced, those occupying houses in its track quitted them, and left their goods a prey to the numerous plunderers, who were now gathered together pursuing their vocation like unhallowed beings amid the raging element. The whole presented a scene of the wildest alarm, confusion, and license. Vociferations, oaths, shrieks, and outcries of every description stunned the ear. Night was turned into day. The awful roaring of the flames was ever and anon broken by the thundering fall of some heavy roof. Flakes of fire were scattered far and wide by the driving wind, carrying destruction wherever they alighted, and spreading the conflagration on all sides, till it seemed like a vast wedge of fire driven into the heart of the city. And thus it went on, swallowing up all before it, like an insatiate monster, and roaring for very joy. Meanwhile, the incendiaries had met, as concerted, near the foot of the bridge, and all except Philip Grant seemed to rejoice in the progress of the conflagration. Chowles made some comment upon his moody looks and silence, and whispered in his ear, "You have now an opportunity of retrieving your fortune, and may make yourself richer than your son. Take my advice, and do not let it pass."

"Away, tempter!" cried Grant—"I have lighted a fire within my breast which never will be quenched."

"Poh, poh!" rejoined Judith; "do not turn faint-hearted now."

"The fire rages fiercely," cried Solomon Eagle, gazing at the vast sheet of flame overtopping the buildings near them, "but we must keep it alive. Take the remainder of the fire-balls, Hubert, and cast them into some of the old houses in Crooked-lane."

Hubert prepared to obey. "I will go with you, and point out the best spots," said Chowles. "Our next place of rendezvous must be the vaults beneath Saint Faith's."

"Agreed!" exclaimed the others. And they again separated, Hubert and Chowles to kindle fresh fires, and Grant to watch the conflagration at a distance. As to Solomon

Eagle, he rushed towards the scene of destruction, and forcing himself into the midst of the crowd, mounted a post, crying in a loud voice:

"I told you a second judgment would come upon you on account of your iniquities, and you now find that I avouched the truth. The Lord himself hath come to preach to you, as he did in the fiery mount of Sinai, and a terrible exhortation it shall be, and one ye shall not easily forget. This fire shall not be quenched till the whole city is laid prostrate. Ye doubted my words when I told you of the plague; ye laughed at me and scoffed me; but ye became believers in the end, and now conviction is forced upon you a second time. You will vainly attempt to save your dwellings. It is the Lord's will they should be destroyed, and man's efforts to avert the judgment will be ineffectual!"

While the majority listened to him with fear and trembling, and regarded him as a prophet, a few took the opposite view of the question, and coupling his appearance with the sudden outbreak of the fire, were disposed to regard him as an incendiary. They therefore cried out—"He has set fire to our houses. Down with him! down with him!"

Other voices joined in the outcry, and an attempt was made to carry the menace into effect; but a strong party rallied round the enthusiast, who derided the attempts of his opponents. Planting himself on the steps of Saint Margaret's Church, he continued to pour forth exhortations to the crowd, until he was driven into the interior of the pile by the fast-approaching flames. The whole body of the church was filled with poor wretches who had sought refuge within it, having brought with them such of their goods as they were able to carry off. But it soon became evident that the sacred structure would be destroyed, and their screams and cries on quitting it were truly heartrending. Solomon Eagle was the last to go forth, and he delayed his departure till the flames burst through the windows. Another great storehouse of oil, tar, cordage, hemp, flax, and other highly inflammable articles, adjoining the church, had caught fire, and the flames speedily reached the sacred fabric. The glass within the windows was shivered; the stone bars split asunder; and the seats and other woodwork withinside catching fire, the flames ascended to the roof, and kindled its massive rafters.

Great efforts were now made to check the fire. A few of the cumbrous and unmanageable engines of the day were brought to the spot, but no water could be obtained. All the aqueducts, pipes, and sluices were dry, and the Thames water-tower was found to be out of order, and the pipes connected with it empty. To add to the calamity, the tide was out, and it was not only difficult, but dangerous, to obtain water from the river. The scanty supply served rather to increase than check the flames. All sorts of rumours prevailed among the crowd. It could no longer be doubted that the fire, which kept continually breaking out in fresh places, was the work of incendiaries, and it was now supposed that it must have been caused by the French or the Dutch, with both

of which nations the country was then at war, and the most fearful anticipations that it was only the prelude of a sudden invasion were entertained. Some conjectured it might be the work of the Papists; and it chancing that a professor of that religion was discovered among the mob, he was with difficulty rescued from their fury by the watch, and conveyed to Newgate. Other persons, who were likewise suspected of being incendiaries, were conveyed with him.

This, though it satisfied the multitude, did not check the progress of the fire, nor put a stop to the terror and tumult that prevailed. Every moment a fresh family were turned into the street, and by their cries added to the confusion. The plunderers had formed themselves into bands, pillaging everything they could lay hands on—carrying off boxes, goods, and coffers, breaking into cellars, broaching casks of spirits and ale, and emptying flasks of wine. Hundreds of persons who did not join in the pillage made free with the contents of the cellars, and a large portion of the concourse was soon in a state of intoxication.

Thus, wild laughter and exclamations of frenzied mirth were heard amid the wailings of women and the piteous cries of children. It was indeed dreadful to see the old and bed-ridden forced into the street to seek a home where they could; nor yet less dreadful to behold others roused from a bed of sickness at dead of night, and by such a fearful summons. Still, fanned by the wind, and fed by a thousand combustible matters, the fire pressed fearfully on, devouring all before it, and increasing in fury and power each instant; while the drunken mob laughed, roared, shouted, and rejoiced beside it, as if in emulation of the raging flames.

To proceed for a moment to Wood Street. When Philip Grant quitted Leonard in the manner before related, the latter followed him to the door, and saw him disappear in the gloom. But he did not attempt pursuit, because he could not persuade himself that any danger was really to be apprehended. He thought it, however, advisable to consult with Mr. Bloundel on the subject, and accordingly proceeded to his room and roused him.

After hearing what had occurred, the grocer looked very grave, and said, "I am not disposed to treat this matter so lightly as you do, Leonard. I fear this unhappy man has some desperate design in view. What it is I cannot—dare not—conjecture. But I confess I am full of apprehension. I shall not retire to rest to-night, but shall hold myself in readiness to act in whatever way may be necessary, You had better go forth, and if anything occurs, give notice to the proper authorities. We have not now such a lord mayor as we had during the season of the plague. The firm and courageous Sir John Lawrence is but ill succeeded by the weak and vacillating Sir Thomas Bludworth. Still, the latter may be equal to this emergency, and if anything happens, you must apply to him."

"I will follow your advice implicitly," rejoined Leonard. "At the same time, I think there is nothing to apprehend."

"It is better to err on the safe side," observed the grocer; "you cannot then reproach yourself with want of caution."

Shortly after this, Leonard sallied forth, and having determined what course to pursue in the first instance, proceeded to Saint Paul's. He found every door in the sacred structure fast closed. Not satisfied with this, he knocked at the great northern entrance till the summons was answered by a verger, and stating his object, demanded to be admitted, and to search the cathedral, as well as Saint Faith's. The verger offered no objection, and having examined the old building throughout, without discovering any traces of the person he was in quest of, Leonard quitted it.

More than ever convinced that he was right in his supposition, and that no danger was to be apprehended, he was about to return home, when the idea occurred to him that he might perhaps find Grant at the plague-pit in Finsbury Fields, and he accordingly shaped his course thither. A long period had elapsed since he had last visited the melancholy spot, and it was not without much painful emotion that he drew near the vast mound covering the victims of the pestilence. But Grant was not there, and though he paced round and round the dreary inclosure for some time, no one came. He then proceeded to the lesser plague-pit, and kneeling beside the grave of Amabel, bedewed it with his tears.

As he arose, with the intention of returning to Wood Street, he observed an extraordinary light in the sky a little to the left, evidently produced by the reflection of a great fire in that direction. On beholding this light, he said to himself, "Mr. Bloundel was right. This is the danger with which the city is threatened. It is now too late to avert it." Determined, however, to ascertain the extent of the calamity without an instant's loss of time, he set off at a swift pace, and in less than half an hour reached Fish Street Hill, and stood beside the conflagration. It was then nearly three o'clock, and a vast chasm of blackening ruins proclaimed the devastation that had been committed. Just as he arrived, the roof of Saint Margaret's fell in with a tremendous crash, and for a few minutes the fire was subdued. It then arose with greater fury than ever; burst out on both sides of the sacred structure, and caught the line of houses leading towards London Bridge. The first house was that of a vintner; and the lower part of the premises—the cellars and vaults—were filled with wine and spirits. These instantly blazed up, and burnt with such intensity that the adjoining habitation was presently in flames.

"I know who hath done all this!" exclaimed Leonard, half involuntarily, as he gazed on the work of destruction.

"Indeed!" exclaimed a bystander, gazing at him. "Who is it?—the
Dutchman or the Frenchman?"
"Neither," replied Leonard, who at that moment discovered Grant among the group opposite him. "Yonder stands the incendiary!"

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III

PROGRESS OF THE FIRE

Instantly surrounded and seized by the mob, Grant offered no resistance, but demanded to be led with his accuser before a magistrate. Almost as the words were uttered, a cry was raised that the lord mayor and the sheriffs were coming along East-cheap, and the prisoner and Leonard were immediately hurried off in that direction. They met the civic authorities at the corner of Saint Clement's-lane; but instead of paying any attention to them, the lord mayor, who appeared to be in a state of great agitation and excitement, ordered the javelin-men, by whom he was attended, to push the mob aside.

"I will not delay your worship an instant," cried Leonard; "but this dreadful fire is the work of incendiaries, of whom that man," pointing to Grant, "is the principal. I pray your worship to question him. He may have important revelations to make."

"Eh, what?" cried the lord mayor, addressing Grant. "Is it true you are an incendiary? Who are your accomplices? Where are they?"

"I have none," replied Grant, boldly—"I deny the charge altogether. Let my accuser prove it if he can."

"You hear what he says, young man," said the mayor. "Did you see him set fire to any house? Did you find any fire-balls on his person?"

"I did not," replied Leonard.

"I searched him, your worship," cried Chowles, who was among the bystanders, "the moment he was seized, and found nothing upon him. It is a false and malicious charge."

"It looks like it, I must say," replied the mayor. "On what grounds do you accuse him?" he added, angrily, to Leonard.

"On these," replied Leonard. "He came to me three hours ago, and confessed that he had a desperate design against the safety of the city, and made certain proposals to me, to which I would not listen. This is not the season for a full explanation of the matter. But I pray your worship, as you value the welfare of the city, to have him secured."

"There can be no harm in that," replied the lord mayor. "His appearance is decidedly against him. Let him be taken care of till the morrow, when I will examine further into the matter. Your name and place of abode, young man?"

"I am called Leonard Holt, and my business is that of a grocer, in Wood-street," was the reply.
"Enough," rejoined the mayor. "Take away the prisoner. I will hear nothing further now. Lord! Lord! how the fire rages, to be sure. We shall have the whole city burnt down, if we do not take care."

"That we shall, indeed," replied Sir Robert Viner, one of the sheriffs, "unless the most prompt and decisive measures are immediately adopted."

"What would you recommend?" cried the lord mayor, despairingly. Sir Robert looked perplexed by the question.
"If I might offer an opinion," interposed Leonard, "I would advise your worship to pull down all the houses in the way of the fire, as the only means of checking it."

"Pull down the houses!" cried the lord mayor. "Who ever heard of such an idea? Why, that would be worse than the fire. No, no; that will never do."

"The young man is in the right," observed Sir Joseph Sheldon, the other sheriff.

"Well, well—we shall see," replied the mayor. "But we are losing time here. Forward! Forward!"

And while Grant was borne off to Newgate by a guard of javelin-men, the lord mayor and his company proceeded to Fish-street-hill, where the whole conflagration burst upon them. The moment the lord mayor appeared, he was beset on all sides by hundreds of families soliciting his protection. Others came to give him the alarming intelligence that a very scanty supply of water only could be obtained, and that already two engines had been destroyed, while the firemen who worked them had narrowly escaped with life. Others again pressed him for instructions how to act—some suggesting one plan—some another,—and being of a weak and irresolute character, and utterly unequal to a fearful emergency like the present, he was completely bewildered. Bidding the houseless families take refuge in the churches, he ordered certain officers to attend them, and affecting to doubt the statement of those who affirmed there was no water, advised them to go to the river, where they would find plenty. In vain they assured him the tide was out, the Thames water-tower empty, the pipes and conduits dry. He would not believe anything of the sort, but upbraiding his informants with neglect, bade them try again. As to instructions, he could give none.

At last, a reluctant assent being wrung from him by Sir Joseph Sheldon, that a house should be pulled down, as suggested by Leonard, preparations were instantly made for putting the design into execution. The house selected was about four doors from the top of Fish-street-hill, and belonged to a birdcage-maker. But they encountered an unexpected opposition. Having ascertained their purpose, the owner fastened his doors, and refused to admit them. He harangued the mob from one of the upper windows, and producing a pistol, threatened to fire upon them if they attempted to gain a forcible entrance. The officers, however, having received their orders, were not to be intimidated, and commenced breaking down the door. The birdcage-maker then fired, but without effect; and before he had time to reload, the door had yielded to the combined efforts of the multitude, who were greatly enraged at his strange conduct. They rushed upstairs, but finding he had locked himself in the room, left him there, supposing him secure, and commenced the work of demolition. More than a hundred men were engaged in the task; but though they used the utmost exertion, they had little more than unroofed the building, when a cry was raised by those in the street that the house was on fire. Alarmed by the shout, they descended, and found the report true. Flames were issuing from the room lately occupied by the birdcage-maker. The wretch had set fire to his dwelling, and then made his escape with his family by a back staircase. Thus defeated, the workmen, with bitter imprecations on the fugitive, withdrew, and Leonard, who had lent his best assistance to the task, repaired to the lord mayor. He found him in greater consternation than ever.

"We must go further off, if we would do any good," said Leonard; "and as the present plan is evidently too slow, we must have recourse to gunpowder."

"Gunpowder!" exclaimed the lord mayor. "Would you blow up the city, like a second Guy Fawkes? I begin to suspect you are one of the incendiaries yourself, young man. Lord, Lord! What will become of us?"

"If your worship disapproves of my suggestion, at least give orders what is to be done," rejoined Leonard.

"I have done all I can," replied the mayor. "Who are you that talk to me thus?"

"I have told your worship I am a simple tradesman," replied Leonard. "But I have the welfare of the city at heart, and I cannot stand by and see it burnt to the ground without an effort to save it."

"Well, well, I dare say you mean very well, young man," rejoined the lord mayor, somewhat pacified. "But don't you perceive it's impossible to stop such a fire as this

without water, or engines. I'm sure I would willingly lay down my life to preserve the city. But what can I do?—what can any man do?"

"Much may be done if there is resolution to attempt it," returned Leonard. "I would recommend your worship to proceed, in the first place, to the wharves on the banks of the Thames, and cause the removal of the wood, coal, and other combustible matter with which they are crowded."

"Well thought of," cried the lord mayor. "I will go thither at once. Do you stay here. Your advice will be useful. I will examine you touching the incendiary to-morrow—that is, if we are any of us left alive, which I don't expect. Lord, Lord! what will become of us?" And with many similar ejaculations, he hurried off with the sheriffs, and the greater part of his attendants, and taking his way down Saint Michael's-lane, soon reached the river-side.

By this time, the fire had approached the summit of Fish-street-hill, and here the overhanging stories of the houses coming so close together as almost to meet at the top, the flames speedily caught the other side, and spread the conflagration in that direction. Two other houses were likewise discovered to be on fire in Crooked-lane, and in an incredibly short space the whole dense mass of habitations lying at the west side of Fish-street-hill, and between Crooked-lane and Eastcheap, were in flames, and threatening the venerable church of Saint Michael, which stood in the midst of them, with instant destruction. To the astonishment of all who witnessed it, the conflagration seemed to proceed as rapidly against the wind, as with it, and to be approaching Thames-street, both by Pudding-lane and Saint Michael's-lane. A large stable, filled with straw and hay, at the back of the Star Inn, in Little East cheap, caught fire, and carrying the conflagration eastward, had already conveyed it as far as Booth-lane.

It chanced that a poor Catholic priest, travelling from Douay to England, had landed that night, and taken up his quarters at the hotel above mentioned. The landlord, who had been roused by the cries of fire, and alarmed by the rumors of incendiaries, immediately called to mind his guest, and dragging him from his room, thrust him, half-naked, into the street. Announcing his conviction that the poor priest was an incendiary to the mob without, they seized him, and in spite of his protestations and explanations, which, being uttered in a foreign tongue, they could not comprehend, they were about to exercise summary punishment upon him, by hanging him to the sign-post before the landlord's door, when they were diverted from their dreadful purpose by Solomon Eagle, who prevailed upon them to carry him to New gate.

The conflagration had now assumed so terrific a character that it appalled even the stoutest spectator. It has been mentioned, that for many weeks previous to the direful

calamity, the weather had been remarkably dry and warm, a circumstance which had prepared the old wooden houses, abounding in this part of the city, for almost instantaneous ignition. Added to this, if the incendiaries themselves had deposited combustible materials at certain spots to extend the conflagration, they could not have selected better places than accident had arranged. All sorts of inflammable goods were contained in the shops and ware-houses,—oil, hemp, flax, pitch, tar, cordage, sugar, wine, and spirits; and when any magazine of this sort caught fire, it spread the conflagration with tenfold rapidity.

The heat of the flames had now become almost insufferable, and the sparks and flakes of fire fell so fast and thick, that the spectators were compelled to retreat to a considerable distance from the burning buildings. The noise occasioned by the cracking of the timbers, and the falling of walls and roofs, was awful in the extreme. All the avenues and thoroughfares near the fire were now choked up by carts, coaches, and other vehicles, which had been hastily brought thither to remove the goods of the inhabitants, and the hurry of the poor people to save a wreck of their property, and the attempts made by the gangs of plunderers to deprive them of it, constituted a scene of unparalleled tumult and confusion. As yet, no troops had appeared to maintain order, and seeing that as much mischief was almost done by the plunderers as by the fire, Leonard determined to go in search of the lord mayor, and acquaint him with the mischief that was occurring. Having heard that the fire had already reached London Bridge, he resolved to ascertain whether the report was true. As he proceeded down Saint Michael's-lane, he found the venerable church from which it was designated on fire, and with some difficulty forcing his way through the crowd, reached Thames-street, where he discovered that the conflagration had even made more fearful progress than he had anticipated. Fishmongers' Hall, a large square structure, was on fire, and burning swiftly,—the flames encircling its high roof, and the turret by which it was surmounted. Streams of fire, too, had darted down the numerous narrow alleys leading to the river-side, and reaching the wharves, had kindled the heaps of wood and coal with which they were filled. The party under the command of the lord mayor had used their utmost exertions to get rid of these combustible materials by flinging them into the Thames; but they came too late, and were driven away by the approach of the fire. Most of the barges and heavy craft were aground, and they, too, caught fire, and were burned, with their contents.

Finding he could neither render any assistance, nor obtain speech with the lord mayor, and anxious to behold the terrible yet sublime spectacle from the river, Leonard hastened to Old Swan-Stairs, and springing into a boat, ordered the waterman to row into the middle of the Thames. He could then discern the full extent of the conflagration, and trace the progress it was making. All the houses between Fishmongers' Hall and the bridge were on fire, and behind them rose a vast sheet of flame. Saint Magnus' Church, at the foot of the bridge, was next seized by the flame, and Leonard watched its

destruction. An ancient gateway followed, and soon afterwards a large stack of houses erected upon the bridge burst into flames.

The inhabitants of the houses on the bridge, having now become thoroughly alarmed, flung bedding, boxes, and articles of furniture, out of their windows into the river. A crowd of boats surrounded the starlings, and the terrified occupants of the structures above descending to them by the staircases in the interior of the piers, embarked with every article they could carry off. The river presented a most extraordinary scene. Lighted by the red and fierce reflection of the fire, and covered with boats, filled with families who had just quitted their habitations either on the bridge or in some other street adjoining it, its whole surface was speckled with pieces of furniture, or goods, that had been cast into it, and which were now floating up with the tide. Great crowds were collected on the Southward shore to watch the conflagration, while on the opposite side the wharves and quays were thronged with persons removing their goods, and embarking them in boats. One circumstance, noted by Pepys, and which also struck Leonard, was the singular attachment displayed by the pigeons, kept by the owners of several houses on the bridge, to the spots they had been accustomed to. Even when the flames attacked the buildings to which the dovecots were attached, the birds wheeled round and round them, until, their pinions being scorched by the fire, they dropped into the water.

Leonard remained on the river nearly two hours. He could not, in fact, tear himself away from the spectacle, which possessed a strange fascination in his eyes. He began to think that all the efforts of men were unavailing to arrest the progress of destruction, and he was for a while content to regard it as a mere spectacle. And never had he beheld a more impressive a more terrible sight. There lay the vast and populous city before him, which he had once before known to be invaded by an invisible but exterminating foe, now attacked by a furious and far-seen enemy. The fire seemed to form a vast arch—many-coloured as a rainbow,—reflected in the sky, and re-reflected in all its horrible splendor in the river.

Nor was the aspect of the city less striking. The innumerable towers and spires of the churches rose tall and dark through the wavering sheet of flame, and every now and then one of them would topple down or disappear, as if swallowed up by the devouring element. For a short space, the fire seemed to observe a regular progressive movement, but when it fell upon better material, it reared its blazing crest aloft, changed its hues, and burnt with redoubled intensity. Leonard watched it thread narrow alleys, and firing every lesser habitation in its course, kindle some great hall or other structure, whose remoteness seemed to secure it from immediate danger. At this distance, the roaring of the flames resembled that of a thousand furnaces. Ever and anon, it was broken by a sound like thunder, occasioned by the fall of some mighty edifice. Then there would

come a quick succession of reports like the discharge of artillery, followed by a shower of fiery flakes and sparks blown aloft, like the explosion of some stupendous firework. Mixed with the roaring of the flames, the thunder of falling roofs, the cracking of timber, was a wild hubbub of human voices, that sounded afar off like a dismal wail. In spite of its terror, the appearance of the fire was at that time beautiful beyond description. Its varying colors—its fanciful forms—now shooting out in a hundred different directions, like lightning-flashes,—now drawing itself up, as it were, and soaring aloft,—now splitting into a million tongues of flame,—these aspects so riveted the attention of Leonard, that he almost forgot in the sight the dreadful devastation going forward. His eyes ached with gazing at the fiery spectacle, and he was glad to rest them on the black masses of building that stood in stern relief against it, and which there could be little doubt would soon become its prey.

It was now broad daylight, except for the mighty cloud of smoke, which o'er-canopied the city, creating an artificial gloom. Leonard's troubled gaze wandered from the scene of destruction to Saint Paul's—an edifice, which; from the many events connected with his fortunes that had occurred there, had always a singular interest in his eyes. Calling to mind the denunciations poured forth by Solomon Eagle against this fane, he could not help fearing they would now be fulfilled. What added to his misgivings was, that it was now almost entirely surrounded by poles and scaffolding. Ever since the cessation of the plague, the repairs, suspended during that awful season, had been recommenced under the superintendence of Doctor Christopher Wren, and were now proceeding with renewed activity. The whole of the building was under repair, and a vast number of masons were employed upon it, and it was their scaffolding that impressed Leonard with a dread of what afterwards actually occurred. Accustomed to connect the figure of Solomon Eagle with the sacred structure, he could not help fancying that he discovered a speck resembling a human figure on the central tower. If it were the enthusiast, what must his feelings be at finding his predictions so fatally fulfilled? Little did Leonard think how the prophecy had been accomplished!

But his attention was speedily called to the progress of the conflagration. From the increased tumult in the city, it was evident the inhabitants were now thoroughly roused, and actively bestirring themselves to save their property. This was apparent, even on the river, from the multitude of boats deeply laden with goods of all kinds, which were now seen shaping their course towards Westminster. The fire, also, had made rapid progress on all sides. The vast pile of habitations at the north side of the bridge was now entirely in flames. The effect of this was awfully fine. Not only did the flames mount to a greater height, and appear singularly conspicuous from the situation of the houses, but every instant some blazing fragment fell with a tremendous splash into the water, where it hissed for a moment, and then was forever quenched, floating a black mass upon the surface. From the foot of the bridge to Coal Harbour Stairs, extended what Dryden finely

calls "a quay of fire." All the wharves and warehouses were in flames, and burning with astonishing rapidity, while this part of Thames-street, "the lodge of all combustibles," had likewise become a prey to the devouring element. The fire, too, had spread in an easterly direction, and consuming three churches, namely, Saint Andrew's, in Botolph-lane, Saint Mary's, in Love-lane, and Saint Dunstan's in the East, had invaded Tower-street, and seemed fast approaching the ancient fortress. So fascinated was Leonard with the sight, that he could have been well content to remain all day gazing at it, but he now recollected that he had other duties to perform, and directing the waterman to land him at Queenhithe, ascended Bread-street-hill, and betook himself to Wood-street.

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IV

LEONARD'S INTERVIEW WITH THE KING

Some rumours of the conflagration, as will be supposed, had ere this reached Mr. Bloundel, but he had no idea of the extent of the direful calamity, and when informed of it by Leonard, lifted up his hands despairingly, exclaiming, in accents of the deepest affliction—"Another judgment, then, has fallen upon this sinful city,—another judgment yet more terrible than the first. Man may have kindled this great fire, but the hand of God is apparent in it. 'Alas! alas! for thee, thou great city, Babylon! Alas for thee, thou mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come. The kings of the earth shall bewail thee, and lament for thee, when they see the smoke of thy burning.'"

"Your dwelling was spared in the last visitation, sir," observed Leonard, after a pause, "and you were able to shut yourself up, as in a strong castle, against the all-exterminating foe. But I fear you will not be able to ward off the assaults of the present enemy, and recommend you to remove your family and goods without delay to some place of security far from this doomed city."

"This is the Lord's Day, Leonard, and must be kept holy," replied the grocer. "To-morrow, if I am spared so long, I will endeavour to find some place of shelter."

"If the conflagration continues to spread as rapidly as it is now doing, to-morrow will be too late," rejoined Leonard.

"It may be so," returned the grocer, "but I will not violate the Sabbath. If the safety of my family is threatened, that is another matter, but I will not attempt to preserve my goods. Do not, however, let me influence you. Take such portion of our stock as belongs to you, and you know that a third of the whole is yours, and convey it where you please."

"On no account, sir," interrupted Leonard. "I should never think of acting in opposition to your wishes. This will be a sad Sunday for London."

"The saddest she has ever seen," replied the grocer; "for though the voice of prayer was silenced in her churches during the awful season of the plague, yet then men's minds had been gradually prepared for the calamity, and though filled with terror, they were not taken by surprise, as must now be the case. But let us to prayers, and may our earnest supplications avail in turning aside the Divine displeasure."

And summoning his family and household, all of whom were by this time stirring, and in the utmost consternation at what they had heard of the fire, he commenced a prayer adapted to the occasion in a strain of the utmost fervour; and as Leonard gazed at his austere countenance, now lighted up with holy zeal, and listened to his earnest intercessions in behalf of the devoted city, he was reminded of the prophet Jeremiah weeping for Jerusalem before the throne of grace.

Prayers over, the whole party sat down to their morning repast, after which, the grocer and his eldest son, accompanied by Leonard and Blaize, mounted to the roof of the house, and gazing in the direction of the conflagration, they could plainly distinguish the vast cloud of yellow smoke commingled with flame that marked the scene of its ravages. As the wind blew from this quarter, charged, as has been stated, with a cloud of sparks, many of the fire-drops were dashed in their faces, and compelled them to shade their eyes. The same awful roar which Leonard had heard on the river likewise broke upon their ears, while from all the adjoining streets arose a wild clamour of human voices, the burden of whose cries was "Fire! Fire!" The church bells, which should have been tolling to early devotion, were now loudly ringing the alarm, while their towers were crowded, as were the roofs of most of the houses, with persons gazing towards the scene of devastation. Nothing could be more opposite to the stillness and quiet of a Sabbath morn; and as the grocer listened to the noise and tumult prevailing around him, he could not repress a groan.

"I never thought my ears would be so much offended on this day," he said. "Let us go down. I have seen and heard enough."

They then descended, and Stephen Bloundel, who was greatly alarmed by what he had just witnessed, strongly urged his father to remove immediately. "There are seasons," said the young man, "when even our duty to Heaven becomes a secondary consideration; and I should be sorry if the fruit of your industry were sacrificed to your religious scruples."

"There are no such seasons," replied the grocer, severely; "and I am grieved that a son of mine should think so. If the inhabitants of this sinful city had not broken the Sabbath, and neglected God's commandments, this heavy judgment would not have fallen upon them. I shall neglect no precaution for the personal safety of my family, but I place my worldly goods in the hands of Him from whom I derived them, and to whom I am ready to restore them, whenever it shall please Him to take them."

"I am rebuked, father," replied Stephen, humbly; "and entreat your pardon for having ventured to differ with you. I am now fully sensible of the propriety of your conduct."

"And I have ever acquiesced in your wishes, be they what they may," said Mrs. Bloundel to her husband; "but I confess I am dreadfully frightened. I hope you will remove the first thing to-morrow."

"When midnight has struck, and the Sabbath is past, I shall commence my preparations," replied the grocer. "You must rest content till then." Mrs. Bloundel heaved a sigh, but said no more; and the grocer, retiring to a side-table, opened the Bible, and sat down calmly to its perusal. But though no further remonstrances reached his ears, there was great murmuring in the kitchen on the part of Blaize and Patience.

"Goodness knows what will become of us!" cried the latter. "I expect we shall all be burnt alive, owing to our master's obstinacy. What harm can there be in moving on a Sunday, I should like to know? I'm sure I'm too much hurried and flurried to say my prayers as I ought to do."

"And so am I," replied Blaize. "Mr. Bloundel is a great deal too particular. What a dreadful thing it would be if the house should be burnt down, and all my mother's savings, which were to form a provision for our marriage, lost."

"That would be terrible, indeed," cried Patience, with a look of dismay. "I think the wedding had better take place as soon as the fire is over. It can't last many days if it goes on at this rate."

"You are right," returned Blaize. "I have no objection. I'll speak to my mother at once." And stepping into the scullery, where old Josyna was washing some dishes, he addressed her—"Mother, I'm sadly afraid this great fire will reach us before our master will allow us to move. Hadn't you better let me take care of the money you intended giving me on my marriage with Patience?"

"No, no, myn goed zoon," replied Josyna, shaking her head—"I musd zee you married virsd."

"But I can't be married to-day," cried Blaize—"and there's no time to lose. The fire will be upon us directly."

"I cand help dat," returned his mother. "We musd place our drusd in God."

"There I quite agree with you, mother," replied Blaize; "but we must also take care of ourselves. If you won't give me the money, at least put it in a box to carry off at a moment's notice."

"Don't be afraid, myn zoon," replied Josyna. "I wond forged id."

"I'm sadly afraid you will, though," muttered Blaize, as he walked away. "There's no doing any good with her," he added to Patience. "She's as obstinate as Mr. Bloundel. I should like to see the fire of all things; but I suppose I musn't leave the house."

"Of course not," replied Patience, pettishly; "at such a time it would be highly improper. I forbid that."

"Then I must need submit," groaned Blaize—"I can't even have my own way before marriage."

When the proper time arrived, the grocer, accompanied by all his family and household, except old Josyna, who was left in charge of the house, repaired to the neighbouring church of Saint Alban's, but, finding the doors closed, and that no service was to be performed, he returned home with a sorrowful heart. Soon after this, Leonard took Mr. Bloundel apart, and observed to him, "I have a strong conviction that I could be useful in arresting the progress of the conflagration, and, as I cannot attend church service, I will, with your permission, devote myself to that object. It is my intention to proceed to Whitehall, and, if possible, obtain an audience of the king, and if I succeed in doing so, to lay a plan before him, which I think would prove efficacious."

"I will not ask what the plan is," rejoined the grocer, "because I doubt its success. Neither will I oppose your design, which is praiseworthy. Go, and may it prosper. Return in the evening, for I may need your assistance—perhaps protection."

Leonard then prepared to set forth. Blaize begged hard to accompany him, but was refused. Forcing his way through the host of carts, coaches, drays, and other vehicles thronging the streets, Leonard made the best of his way to Whitehall, where he speedily arrived. A large body of mounted troopers were stationed before the gates of the palace, and a regiment of the foot-guards were drawn up in the court. Drums were beating to arms, and other martial sounds were heard, showing the alarm that was felt. Leonard was stopped at the gate by a sentinel, and refused admittance; and he would in all probability have been turned back, if at that moment the Lords Argentine and Rochester had not come up. On seeing him, the former frowned, and passed quickly on, but the latter halted.

"You seem to be in some difficulty," remarked Rochester. "Can I help you?"

Leonard was about to turn away, but he checked himself. "I will not suffer my resentful feelings to operate injuriously to others," he muttered. "I desire to see the king, my

lord," he added, to the earl. "I have a proposal to make to him, which I think would be a means of checking the conflagration."

"Say you so?" cried Rochester. "Come along, then. Heaven grant your plan may prove successful; in which case, I promise you, you shall be nobly rewarded."

"I seek no reward, my lord," replied Leonard. "All I desire is to save the city."

"Well, well," rejoined Rochester, "it will be time enough to refuse his majesty's bounty when offered."

Upon this, he ordered the sentinel to withdraw, and Leonard followed him into the palace. They found the entrance-hall filled with groups of officers and attendants, all conversing together, it was evident from their looks and manner, on the one engrossing topic—the conflagration. Ascending a magnificent staircase, and traversing part of a grand gallery, they entered an ante-room, in which a number of courtiers and. pages—amongst the latter of whom was Chiffinch—were assembled. At the door of the inner chamber stood a couple of ushers, and as the earl approached, it was instantly thrown open. As Leonard, however, who followed close behind his leader, passed Chiffinch, the latter caught hold of his arm and detained him. Hearing the movement, Rochester turned, and said quickly to the page, "Let him pass, he is going with me."

"Old Rowley is in no humour for a jest to-day, my lord," replied Chiffinch, familiarly. "He is more serious than I have ever before seen him, and takes this terrible fire sadly to heart, as well he may. Mr. Secretary Pepys, of the Admiralty, is with him, and is detailing all particulars of the calamity to him, I believe."

"It is in reference to the fire that I have brought this young man with me," returned the earl. "Let him pass, I say. State your plan boldly," he added, as they entered the audience-chamber.

At the further end of the long apartment, on a chair of state, and beneath a canopy, sat Charles. He was evidently much disturbed, and looked eagerly at the new-comers, especially at Leonard, expecting to find him the bearer of some important intelligence. On the right of the king, and near an open window, which, looking towards the river, commanded a view of the fire on the bridge, as well as of part of the burning city, stood the Duke of York. The duke did not appear much concerned at the calamity, but was laughing with Lord Argentine, who stood close beside him. The smile fled from the lips of the latter as he beheld Leonard, and he looked angrily at Rochester, who did not, however, appear to notice his displeasure. On the left of the royal chair was Mr. Pepys, engaged, as Chiffinch had intimated, in detailing to the king the progress of the

conflagration; and next to the secretary stood the Earl of Craven,—a handsome, commanding, and martial-looking personage, though somewhat stricken in years. Three other noblemen— namely, the Lords Hollis, Arlington, and Ashley—were likewise present.

"Who have you with you, Rochester?" demanded Charles, as the earl and his companion approached him.

"A young man, my liege, who desires to make known to you a plan for checking this conflagration," replied the earl.

"Ah!" exclaimed the king; "let him accomplish that for us, and he shall ask what he will in return."

"I ventured to promise him as much," observed Rochester.

"Mine is a very simple and a very obvious plan, sire," said Leonard; "but I will engage, on the peril of my life, if you will give me sufficient authority, and means to work withal, to stop the further progress of this fire."

"In what way?" asked Charles, impatiently;—"in what way?"

"By demolishing the houses around the conflagration with gunpowder, so as to form a wide gap between those left and the flames," replied Leonard.

"A short and summary process, truly," replied the king; "but it would occasion great waste of property, and might be attended with other serious consequences."

"Not half so much property will be destroyed as if the slower and seemingly safer course of pulling down the houses is pursued," rejoined Leonard. "That experiment has been tried and failed."

"I am of the young man's opinion," observed the Earl of Craven.

"And I," added Pepys. "Better lose half the city than the whole. As it is, your majesty is not safe in your palace."

"Why, you do not think it can reach Whitehall?" cried the king, rising, and walking to the window. "How say you, brother," he added, to the Duke of York—"shall we act upon this young man's suggestion, and order the wholesale demolition of the houses which he recommends?"

"I would not advise your majesty to do so—at least, not without consideration," answered the duke. "This is a terrible fire, no doubt; but the danger may be greatly exaggerated, and if any ill consequences should result from the proposed scheme, the blame will be entirely laid upon your majesty."

"I care not for that," replied the king, "provided I feel assured it is for the best."

"The plan would do incalculably more mischief than the fire itself," observed Lord Argentine, "and would be met by the most determined opposition on the part of the owners of the habitations condemned to destruction. Whole streets will have to be blown up, and your majesty will easily comprehend the confusion and damage that will ensue."

"Lord Argentine has expressed my sentiments exactly," said the Duke of
York.
"There is nothing for it, then, but for your majesty to call for a fiddle, and amuse yourself, like Nero, while your city is burning," remarked Rochester, sarcastically.

"Another such jest, my lord," rejoined the king, sternly, "and it shall cost you your liberty. I will go upon the river instantly, and view the fire myself, and then decide what course shall be adopted."

"There are rumours that incendiaries are abroad, your majesty," remarked Argentine, glancing maliciously at Leonard—"it is not unlikely that he who lighted the fire should know how to extinguish it."

"His lordship says truly," rejoined Leonard. "There are incendiaries abroad, and the chief of them was taken by my hand, and lodged in Newgate, where he lies for examination."

"Ah!" exclaimed the king, eagerly; "did you catch the miscreant in the fact?"

"No, my liege," replied Leonard; "but he came to me a few hours before the outbreak of the fire, intimating that he was in possession of a plot against the city—a design so monstrous, that your majesty would give any reward to the discloser of it. He proposed to reveal this plot to me on certain terms."

"And you accepted them?" cried the king.

"No, my liege," replied Leonard; "I refused them, and would have secured him, but he escaped me at that time. I afterwards discovered him among the spectators near the fire, and caused his arrest."

"And who is this villain?" cried the king.

"I must refer your majesty to Lord Argentine," replied Leonard.

"Do you know anything of the transaction, my lord?" said Charles, appealing to him.

"Not I, your majesty," said Argentine, vainly endeavouring to conceal his anger and confusion. "The knave has spoken falsely."

"He shall rue it, if he has done so," rejoined the monarch. "What has the man you speak of to do with Lord Argentine?" he added to Leonard.

"He is his father," was the reply.

Charles looked at Lord Argentine, and became convinced from the altered expression of his countenance that the truth had been spoken. He, therefore, arose, and motioning him to follow him, led him into the recess of a window, where they remained in conversation for some minutes. While this was passing, the Earl of Rochester observed, in an undertone to Leonard, "You have made a mortal foe of Lord Argentine, but I will protect you."

"I require no other protection than I can afford myself, my lord," rejoined Leonard, coldly.

Shortly after this, Charles stepped forward with a graver aspect than before, and said, "Before proceeding to view this conflagration, I must give some directions in reference to it. To you, my Lord Craven, whose intrepidity I well know, I intrust the most important post. You will station yourself at the east of the conflagration, and if you find it making its way to the Tower, as I hear is the case, check it at all hazards. The old fortress must be preserved at any risk. But do not resort to gunpowder unless you receive an order from me accompanied by my signet-ring. My Lords Hollis and Ashley, you will have the care of the north-west of the city. Station yourselves near Newgate Market. Rochester and Arlington, your posts will be at Saint Paul's. Watch over the august cathedral. I would not have it injured for half my kingdom. Brother," he added to the Duke of York, "you will accompany me in my barge—and you, Mr. Pepys. You, young man," to Leonard, "can follow in my train."

"Has your majesty no post for me?" asked Argentine.

"No," replied Charles, turning coldly from him.

"Had not your majesty better let him have the custody of your gaol of Newgate?" remarked Rochester, sarcastically; "he has an interest in its safe keeping."

Lord Argentine turned deadly pale, but he made no answer. Attended by the Duke of York and Mr. Pepys, and followed at a respectful distance by Leonard, the king then passed through the ante-room, and descending the grand staircase, traversed a variety of passages, until he reached the private stairs communicating with the river. At the foot lay the royal barge, in which he embarked with his train. Charles appeared greatly moved by the sight of the thousands of his houseless subjects, whom he encountered in his passage down the Thames, and whenever a feeble shout was raised for him, he returned it with a blessing. When nearly opposite Queenhithe, he commanded the rowers to pause. The conflagration had made formidable progress since Leonard' beheld it a few hours back, and had advanced, nearly as far as the Still-yard on the river-side, while it was burning upwards through thick ranks of houses, almost as far as Cannon-street. The roaring of the flames was louder than ever—and the crash of falling habitations, and the tumult and cries of the affrighted populace, yet more terrific.

Charles gazed at the appalling spectacle like one who could not believe his senses, and it was some time before the overwhelming truth could force itself upon him. Tears then started to his eyes, and, uttering an ejaculation of despair, he commanded the rowers to make instantly for the shore.

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V.

HOW LEONARD SAVED THE KING'S LIFE.

The royal barge landed at Queenhithe, and Charles instantly disembarking, proceeded on foot, and at a pace that compelled, his attendants to move quickly, to keep up with him, to Thames-street. Here, however, the confusion was so great, owing to the rush of people, and the number of vehicles employed in the removal of goods, that he was obliged to come to a halt. Fortunately, at this moment, a company of the train-bands rode up, and their leader dismounting, offered his horse to the king, who instantly sprang into the saddle, and scarcely waiting till the Duke of York could be similarly accommodated, forced his way through the crowd as far as Brewer-lane, where his progress was stopped by the intense heat. A little more than a hundred yards from this point, the whole street was on fire, and the flames bursting from the windows and roofs of the houses, with a roar like that which might be supposed to be produced by the forges of the Cyclops, united in a vast blazing arch overhead. It chanced, too, that in some places cellars filled with combustible materials extended under the street, and here the ground would crack, and jets of fire shoot forth like the eruption of a volcano. The walls and timbers of the houses at some distance from the conflagration were scorched and blistered with the heat, and completely prepared for ignition; overhead being a vast and momentarily increasing cloud of flame-coloured smoke, which spread all over the city, filling it as with a thick mist, while the glowing vault above looked, as Evelyn expresses it, "like the top of a burning oven."

Two churches, namely, Allhallows the Great and Allhallows the Less, were burnt down in the king's sight, and the lofty spire of a third, Saint Lawrence Poulteney, had just caught fire, and looked like a flame-tipped spear. After contemplating this spectacle for some time, Charles roused himself from the state of stupefaction into which he was thrown, and determined, if possible, to arrest the further progress of the devouring element along the river-side, commanded all the houses on the west of Dowgate Dock to be instantly demolished. A large body of men were therefore set upon this difficult and dangerous, and, as it proved, futile task. Another party were ordered to the same duty on Dowgate-hill; and the crash of tumbling walls and beams was soon added to the general uproar, while clouds of dust darkened the air. It was with some difficulty that a sufficient space could be kept clear for carrying these operations into effect; and long before they were half-completed, Charles had the mortification of finding the fire gaining ground so rapidly, that they must prove ineffectual. Word was brought at this juncture that a fresh fire had broken out in Elbow-lane, and while the monarch was

listening to this dreary intelligence, a fearful cry was heard near the river, followed, the next moment, by a tumultuous rush of persons from that quarter. The fire, as if in scorn, had leapt across Dowgate Dock, and seizing upon the half-demolished houses, instantly made them its prey. The rapidity with which the conflagration proceeded was astounding, and completely baffled all attempts to check it. The wind continued blowing as furiously as ever, nor was there the slightest prospect of its abatement. All the king's better qualities were called into play by the present terrible crisis. With a courage and devotion that he seldom displayed, he exposed himself to the greatest risk, personally assisting at all the operations he commanded; while his humane attention to the sufferers by the calamity almost reconciled them to their deplorable situation. His movements were almost as rapid as those of the fire itself. Riding up Cannon-street, and from thence by Sweeting's-lane, to Lombard-street, and so on by Fenchurch-street to Tower-street, he issued directions all the way, checking every disturbance, and causing a band of depredators, who had broken into the house of a wealthy goldsmith, to be carried off to Newgate. Arrived in Tower-street, he found the Earl of Craven and his party stationed a little beyond Saint Dunstan's in the East.

All immediate apprehensions in this quarter appeared at an end. The church had been destroyed, as before mentioned, but several houses in its vicinity having been demolished, the fire had not extended eastward. Satisfied that the Tower was in no immediate danger, the king retraced his course, and encountering the lord mayor in Lombard-street, sharply reproved him for his want of zeal and discretion.

"I do not deserve your majesty's reproaches," replied the lord mayor. "Ever since the fire broke out I have not rested an instant, and am almost worn to death with anxiety and fatigue. I am just returned from Guildhall, where a vast quantity of plate belonging to the city companies has been deposited. Lord! Lord! what a fire this is!"

"You are chiefly to blame for its getting so much ahead," replied the king, angrily. "Had you adopted vigorous measures at the outset, it might have easily been got under. I hear no water was to be obtained. How was that?"

"It is a damnable plot, your majesty, designed by the Papists, or the Dutch, or the French—I don't know which—perhaps all three," rejoined the lord mayor; "and it appears that the cocks of all the pipes at the waterworks at Islington were turned, while the pipes and conduits in the city were empty. This is no accidental fire, your majesty."

"So I find," replied the king; "but it will be time enough to inquire into its origin hereafter. Meantime, we must act, and energetically, or we shall be equally as much to blame as the incendiaries. Let a proclamation be made, enjoining all those persons who

have been driven from their homes by the fire to proceed, with such effects as they have preserved, to Moorfields, where their wants shall be cared for."

"It shall be made instantly, your majesty," replied the lord mayor.

"Your next business will be to see to the removal of all the wealth from the goldsmiths' houses in this street, and in Gracechurch-street, to some places of security, Guildhall, or the Royal Exchange, for instance," continued the king.

"Your majesty's directions shall be implicitly obeyed," replied the lord mayor.

"You will then pull down all the houses to the east of the fire," pursued the king. "Get all the men you can muster; and never relax your exertions till you have made a wide and clear breach between the flames and their prey."

"I will—I will, your majesty," groaned the lord mayor.

"About it, then," rejoined the king; and striking spurs into his horse, he rode off with his train.

He now penetrated one of the narrow alleys leading to the Three Cranes in the Vintry, where he ascended to the roof of the habitation, that he might view the fire. He saw that it was making such rapid advances towards him, that it must very soon reach the building on which he stood, and, half suffocated with the smoke, and scorched with the fire-drops, he descended.

Not long after this, Waterman's Hall was discovered to be on fire; and, stirred by the sight, Charles made fresh efforts to check the progress of the conflagration by demolishing more houses. So eagerly did he occupy himself in the task, that his life had well-nigh fallen a sacrifice to his zeal. He was standing below a building which the workmen were unroofing, when all at once the whole of the upper part of the wall gave way, dragging several heavy beams with it, and would have infallibly crushed him, if Leonard, who was stationed behind him, had not noticed the circumstance, and rushing forward with the greatest promptitude, dragged him out of harm's way. An engineer, with whom the king was conversing at the time of the accident, was buried in the ruins, and when taken out was found fearfully mutilated and quite dead. Both Charles and his preserver were covered with dust and rubbish, and Leonard received a severe blow on the shoulder from a falling brick.

On recovering from the shock, which for some moments deprived him of the power of speech, Charles inquired for his deliverer, and, on being shown him, said, with a look of

surprise and pleasure, "What, is it you, young man? I am glad of it. Depend, upon it, I shall not forget the important service you have rendered me."

"If he remembers it, it will be the first time he has ever so exercised his memory," observed Chiffinch, in a loud whisper to Leonard. "I advise you, as a friend, not to let his gratitude cool."

Undeterred by this late narrow escape, Charles ordered fresh houses to be demolished, and stimulated the workmen to exertion by his personal superintendence of their operations. He commanded Leonard to keep constantly near him, laughingly observing, "I shall feel safe while you are by. You have a better eye for a falling house than any of my attendants."

Worn out at length with fatigue, Charles proceeded, with the Duke of York and his immediate attendants, to Painters' Hall, in little Trinity-lane, in quest of refreshment, where a repast was hastily prepared for him, and he sat down to it with an appetite such as the most magnificent banquet could not, under other circumstances, have provoked. His hunger satisfied, he despatched messengers to command the immediate attendance of the lord mayor, the sheriffs, and aldermen; and when they arrived, he thus addressed them:—"My lord mayor and gentlemen, it has been recommended to me by this young man," pointing to Leonard, "that the sole way of checking the further progress of this disastrous conflagration, which threatens the total destruction of our city, will be by blowing up the houses with gunpowder, so as to form a wide gap between the flames and the habitations yet remaining unseized. This plan will necessarily involve great destruction of property, and may, notwithstanding all the care that can be adopted, be attended with some loss of life; but I conceive it will be effectual. Before ordering it, however, to be put into execution, I desire to learn your opinion of it. How say you, my lord mayor and gentlemen? Does the plan meet with your approbation?"

"I pray your majesty to allow me to confer for a moment with my brethren," replied the lord mayor, cautiously, "before I return an answer. It is too serious a matter to decide upon at once."

"Be it so," replied the king.

And the civic authorities withdrew with the king. Leonard heard, though he did not dare to remark upon it, that the Duke of York leaned forward as the lord mayor passed him, and whispered in his ear, "Take heed what you do. He only desires to shift the responsibility of the act from his own shoulders to yours."

"If they assent," said the king to Leonard, "I will place you at the head of a party of engineers."

"I beseech your majesty neither to regard me nor them," replied Leonard. "Use the authority it has pleased Heaven to bestow upon you for the preservation of the city, and think and act for yourself, or you will assuredly regret your want of decision. It has been my fortune, with the assistance of God, to be the humble instrument of accomplishing your majesty's deliverance from peril, and I have your royal word that you will not forget it."

"Nor will I," cried the king, hastily.

"Then suffer the petition I now make to you to prevail," cried Leonard, falling on his knees. "Be not influenced by the opinion of the lord mayor and his brethren, whose own interests may lead them to oppose the plan; but, if you think well of it, instantly adopt it."

Charles looked irresolute, but might have yielded, if the Duke of York had not stepped forward. "Your majesty had better not act too precipitately," said the duke. "Listen to the counsels of your prudent advisers. A false step in such a case will be irretrievable."

"Nay, brother," rejoined the king, "I see no particular risk in it, after all, and I incline towards the young man's opinion."

"At least, hear what they have got to say," rejoined the duke. "And here they come. They have not been long in deliberation."

"The result of it may be easily predicted," said Leonard, rising.

As Leonard had foreseen, the civic authorities were adverse to the plan. The lord mayor in the name of himself and his brethren, earnestly solicited the king to postpone the execution of his order till all other means of checking the progress of the conflagration had been tried, and till such time, at least, as the property of the owners of the houses to be destroyed could be removed. He further added, that it was the unanimous opinion of himself and his brethren, that the plan was fraught with great peril to the safety of the citizens, and that they could not bring themselves to assent to it. If, therefore, his majesty chose to adopt it, they must leave the responsibility with him.

"I told your majesty how it would be," observed the Duke of York, triumphantly.

"I am sorry to find you are right, brother," replied the king, frowning.

"We are overruled, you see, friend," he added to Leonard.
"Your majesty has signed the doom of your city," rejoined Leonard, mournfully.

"I trust not—I trust not," replied Charles, hastily, and with an uneasy shrug of the shoulder. "Fail not to remind me when all is over of the obligation I am under to you."

"Your majesty has refused the sole boon I desired to have granted," rejoined Leonard.

"And do you not see the reason, friend?" returned the king. "These worthy and wealthy citizens desire to remove their property. Their arguments are unanswerable. I must give them time to do it. But we waste time here," he added, rising. "Remember," to Leonard, "my debt is not discharged. And I command you, on pain of my sovereign displeasure, not to omit to claim its payment."

"I will enter it in my memorandum-book, and will put your majesty in mind of it at the fitting season," observed Chiffinch, who had taken a great fancy to Leonard.

The king smiled good-humouredly, and quitting the hall with his attendants, proceeded to superintend the further demolition of houses. He next visited all the posts, saw that the different noblemen were at their appointed stations, and by his unremitting exertions, contrived to restore something like order to the tumultuous streets. Thousands of men were now employed in different quarters in pulling down houses, and the most powerful engines of war were employed in the work. The confusion that attended these proceedings is indescribable. The engineers and workmen wrought in clouds of dust and smoke, and the crash of falling timber and walls was deafening. In a short time, the upper part of Cornhill was rendered wholly impassable, owing to the heaps of rubbish; and directions were given to the engineers to proceed to the Poultry, and demolish the houses as far as the Conduit in Cheapside, by which means it was hoped that the Royal Exchange would be saved.

Meanwhile, all the wealthy goldsmiths and merchants in Lombard-street and Gracechurch-street had been actively employed in removing all their money, plate, and goods, to places of security. A vast quantity was conveyed to Guildhall, as has been stated, and the rest to different churches and halls remote from the scene of conflagration. But in spite of all their caution, much property was carried off by the depredators, and amongst others by Chowles and Judith, who contrived to secure a mass of plate, gold, and jewels, that satisfied even their rapacious souls. While this was passing in the heart of the burning city, vast crowds were streaming out of its gates, and encamping themselves, in pursuance of the royal injunction, in Finsbury Fields and Spitalfields. Others crossed the water to Southwark, and took refuge in Saint George's Fields; and it was a sad and touching sight to see all these families collected without

shelter or food, most of whom a few hours before were in possession of all the comforts of life, but were now reduced to the condition of beggars.

To return to the conflagration:—While one party continued to labour incessantly at the work of demolition, and ineffectually sought to quench the flames, by bringing a few engines to play upon them,—a scanty supply of water having now been obtained—the fire, disdaining such puny opposition, and determined to show its giant strength, leaped over all the breaches, drove the water-carriers back, compelled them to relinquish their buckets, and to abandon their engines, which it made its prey, and seizing upon the heaps of timber and other fragments occasioned by the demolition, consumed them, and marched onwards with furious exultation. It was now proceeding up Gracechurch-street, Saint Clement's-lane, Nicholas-lane, and Abchurch-lane at the same time, destroying all in its course. The whole of Lombard-street was choked up with the ruins and rubbish of demolished houses, through which thousands of persons were toiling to carry off goods, either for the purpose of assistance or of plunder. The king was at the west end of the street, near the church of Saint Mary Woolnoth, and the fearful havoc and destruction going forward drew tears from his eyes. A scene of greater confusion cannot be imagined. Leonard was in the midst of it, and, careless of his own safety, toiled amid the tumbling fragments of the houses to rescue some article of value for its unfortunate owner. While he was thus employed, he observed a man leap out of a window of a partly demolished house, disclosing in the action that he had a casket concealed under his cloak.

A second glance showed him that this individual was Pillichody, and satisfied that he had been plundering the house, he instantly seized him. The bully struggled violently, but at last, dropping the casket, made his escape, vowing to be revenged. Leonard laughed at his threats, and the next moment had the satisfaction of restoring the casket to its rightful owner, an old merchant, who issued from the house, and who, after thanking him, told him it contained jewels of immense value.

Not half an hour after this, the flames poured upon Lombard-street from the four avenues before mentioned, and the whole neighbourhood was on fire. With inconceivable rapidity, they then ran up Birchin-lane, and reaching Cornhill, spread to the right and left in that great thoroughfare. The conflagration had now reached the highest point of the city, and presented the grandest and most terrific aspect it had yet assumed from the river. Thus viewed, it appeared, as Pepys describes it, "as an entire arch of fire from the Three Cranes to the other side of the bridge, and in a bow up the hill, for an arch of above a mile long: it made me weep to see it." Vincent also likens its appearance at this juncture to that of a bow. "A dreadful bow it was," writes this eloquent nonconformist preacher, "such as mine eyes have never before seen; a bow which had God's arrow in it with a flaming point; a shining bow, not like that in the

cloud which brings water with it, and withal signifieth God's covenant not to destroy the world any more with water, but a bow having fire in it, and signifying God's anger, and his intention to destroy London with fire."

As the day drew to a close, and it became darker, the spectacle increased in terror and sublimity. The tall black towers of the churches assumed ghastly forms, and to some eyes appeared like infernal spirits plunging in a lake of flame, while even to the most reckless the conflagration seemed to present a picture of the terrors of the Last Day. Never before had such a night as that which ensued fallen upon London. None of its inhabitants thought of retiring to rest, or if they sought repose after the excessive fatigue they had undergone, it was only in such manner as would best enable them to rise and renew their exertions to check the flames, which were continued throughout the night, but wholly without success. The conflagration appeared to proceed at the same appalling rapidity. Halls, towers, churches, public and private buildings, were burning to the number of more than ten thousand, while clouds of smoke covered the vast expanse of more than fifty miles. Travellers approaching London from the north-east were enveloped in it ten miles off, and the fiery reflection in the sky could be discerned at an equal distance. The "hideous storm," as Evelyn terms the fearful and astounding noise produced by the roaring of the flames and the falling of the numerous fabrics, continued without intermission during the whole of that fatal night.

VI.

HOW THE GROCER'S HOUSE WAS BURNT.

It was full ten o'clock before Leonard could obtain permission to quit the king's party, and he immediately hurried to Wood-street. He had scarcely entered it, when the cry of "fire" smote his ears, and rushing forward in an agony of apprehension, he beheld Mr. Bloundel's dwelling in flames. A large crowd was collected before the burning habitation, keeping guard over a vast heap of goods and furniture that had been removed from it.

So much beloved was Mr. Bloundel, and in such high estimation was his character held, that all his neighbours, on learning that his house was on fire, flew to his assistance, and bestirred themselves so actively, that in an extraordinary short space of time they had emptied the house of every article of value, and placed it out of danger in the street. In vain the grocer urged them to desist: his entreaties were disregarded by his zealous friends; and when he told them they were profaning the Sabbath, they replied that the responsibility of their conduct would rest entirely on themselves, and they hoped they might never have anything worse to answer for. In spite of his disapproval of what was done, the grocer could not but be sensibly touched by their devotion, and as to his wife,

she said, with tears in her eyes, that "it was almost worth while having a fire to prove what good friends they had."

It was at this juncture that Leonard arrived. Way was instantly made for him, and leaping over the piles of chests and goods that blocked up the thoroughfare, he flew to Mr. Bloundel, who was standing in front of his flaming habitation with as calm and unmoved an expression of countenance as if nothing was happening, and presently ascertained from him in what manner the fire had originated. It appeared that while the whole of the family were assembled at prayers, in the room ordinarily used for that purpose, they were alarmed at supper by a strong smell of smoke, which seemed to arise from the lower part of the house, and that as soon as their devotions were ended, for Mr. Bloundel would not allow them to stir before, Stephen and Blaize had proceeded to ascertain the cause, and on going down to the kitchen, found a dense smoke issuing from the adjoining cellar, the door of which stood ajar. Hearing a noise in the yard, they darted up the back steps, communicating with the cellar, and discovered a man trying to make his escape over the wall by a rope-ladder. Stephen instantly seized him, and the man, drawing a sword, tried to free himself from his captor. In the struggle, he dropped a pistol, which Blaize snatching up, discharged with fatal effect against the wretch, who, on examination, proved to be Pillichody.

Efforts were made to check the fire, but in vain. The villain had accomplished his diabolical purpose too well. Acquainted with the premises, and with the habits of the family, he had got into the yard by means of a rope-ladder, and hiding himself till the servants were summoned to prayers, stole into the cellar, and placing a fire-ball amid a heap of fagots and coals, and near several large casks of oil, and other inflammable matters, struck a light, and set fire to it.

"I shall ever reproach myself that I was away when this calamity occurred," observed Leonard, as the grocer brought his relation to an end.

"Then you will do so without reason," replied Mr. Bloundel, "for you could have rendered no assistance, and you see my good neighbours have taken the matter entirely out of my hands."

"Whither do you intend removing, sir?" rejoined Leonard. "If I might suggest, I would advise you to go to Farmer Wingfield's, at Kensal Green."

"You have anticipated my intention," replied the grocer; "but we must now obtain some vehicles to transport these goods thither."

"Be that my part," replied Leonard. And in a short space of time he had procured half a dozen large carts, into which the whole of the goods were speedily packed, and a coach having been likewise fetched by Blaize, Mrs. Bloundel and the three younger children, together with old Josyna and Patience, were placed in it.

"I hope your mother has taken care of her money," whispered the latter to the porter, as he assisted her into the vehicle.

"Never mind whether she has or not," rejoined Blaize, in the same tone; "we shan't want it. I am now as rich as my master—perhaps richer. On stripping that rascal Pillichody, I found a large bag of gold, besides several caskets of jewels, upon him, all of which I consider lawful spoil, as he fell by my hand."

"To be sure," rejoined Patience. "I dare say he did not come very honestly by the treasures, but you can't help that, you know."

Blaize made no reply, but pushing her into the coach, shut the door. All being now in readiness, directions were given to the drivers of the carts whither to proceed, and they were put in motion. At this moment the grocer's firmness deserted him. Gazing at the old habitation, which was now wrapped in a sheet of flame, he cried in a voice broken with emotion, "In that house I have dwelt nearly thirty years—in that house all my children were born—in that house I found a safe refuge from the devouring pestilence. It is hard to quit it thus."

Controlling his emotion, however, the next moment, he turned away. But his feelings were destined to another trial. His neighbours flocked round him to bid him farewell, in tones of such sympathy and regard, that his constancy again deserted him.

"Thank you, thank you," he cried, pressing in turn each hand that was offered him. "Your kindness will never be effaced from my memory. God bless you all, and may He watch over you and protect you!" and with these words he broke from them. So great was the crowd and confusion in Cheapside, that nearly two hours elapsed before they reached Newgate; and, indeed, if it had not been for the interference of the Earl of Rochester, they would not, in all probability, have got out of the city at all. The earl was stationed near the Old 'Change, at the entrance to Saint Paul's Churchyard, and learning their distress, ordered a party of the guard by whom he was attended to force a passage for them. Both Mr. Bloundel and Leonard would have declined this assistance if they had had the power of doing so, but there was no help in the present case.

They encountered no further difficulties, but were necessarily compelled to proceed at a slow pace, and did not reach Paddington for nearly two hours, being frequently stopped

by persons eagerly asking as to the progress of the fire. One circumstance struck the whole party as remarkable. Such was the tremendous glare of the conflagration, that even at this distance the fire seemed close beside them, and if they had not known the contrary, they would have thought it could not be further off than Saint Giles's. The whole eastern sky in that direction seemed on fire, and glowed through the clouds of yellow smoke with which the air was filled with fearful splendour. After halting for a short time at the Wheat Sheaf, which they found open,—for, indeed, no house was closed that night,—to obtain some refreshment, and allay the intolerable thirst by which they were tormented, the party pursued their journey along the Harrow-road, and in due time approached Wingfield's residence.

The honest farmer, who, with his wife and two of his men, was standing in a field at the top of the hill, gazing at the conflagration, hearing the noise occasioned by the carts, ran to the road-side to see what was coming, and encountered Mr. Bloundel and Leonard, who had walked up the ascent a little more quickly than the others.

"I have been thinking of you," he said, after a cordial greeting had passed between them, "and wondering what would become of you in this dreadful fire. Nay, I had just told my dame I should go and look after you, and see whether I could be of any service to you. Well, I should be better pleased to see you in any way but this, though you could not be welcomer. I have room in the barn and outhouses for all you have brought, and hope and trust you have not lost much."

"I have lost nothing except the old house," replied the grocer, heaving a sigh.

"Another will soon be built," rejoined Wingfield, "and till that is done you shall not quit mine."

The coach having by this time arrived, Wingfield hastened towards it, and assisted its occupants to alight. Mrs. Bloundel was warmly welcomed by Dame Wingfield, and being taken with her children to the house, was truly happy to find herself under the shelter of its hospitable roof. The rest of the party, assisted by Wingfield and his men, exerting themselves to the utmost, the carts were speedily unloaded, and the goods deposited in the barns and outhouses. This done, the drivers were liberally rewarded for their trouble by Mr. Bloundel, and after draining several large jugs of ale brought them by the farmer, made the best of their way back, certain of obtaining further employment during the night.

Fatigued as he was, Leonard, before retiring to rest, could not help lingering on the brow of the hill to gaze at the burning city. The same effect was observable here as at Paddington, and the conflagration appeared little more than a mile off. The whole

heavens seemed on fire, and a distant roar was heard like the rush of a high wind through a mighty forest. Westminster Abbey and Saint Paul's could be distinctly seen in black relief against the sheet of flame, together with innumerable towers, spires, and other buildings, the whole constituting a picture unsurpassed for terrific grandeur since the world began, and only to be equalled by its final destruction.

Having gazed at the conflagration for some time, and fancied that he could even at this distance discern the fearful progress it made, Leonard retired to the barn, and throwing himself upon a heap of straw, instantly fell asleep. He was awakened the next morning by Farmer Wingfield, who came to tell him breakfast was ready, and having performed his ablutions, they adjourned to the house. Finding Mr. Bloundel comfortably established in his new quarters, Leonard proposed as soon as breakfast was over to proceed to town, and Wingfield volunteered to accompany him. Blaize, also, having placed his treasures, except a few pieces of gold, in the custody of Patience, begged to make one of the party, and his request being acceded to, the trio set out on foot, and gleaning fresh particulars of the fearful progress of the fire, as they advanced, passed along Oxford-road, and crossing Holborn Bridge, on the western side of which they were now demolishing the houses, mounted Snow-hill, and passed through the portal of Newgate.

Here they learnt that the whole of Wood-street was consumed, that the fire had spread eastward as far as Gutter-lane, and that Saint Michael's Church, adjoining Wood-street, Goldsmiths' Hall, and the church of Saint John Zachary, were in flames. They were also told that the greater part of Cheapside was on fire, and wholly impassable—while the destructive element was invading at one and the same time Guildhall and the Royal Exchange. They furthermore learnt that the conflagration had spread fearfully along the side of the river, had passed Queenhithe, consuming all the wharves and warehouses in its way, and having just destroyed Paul's Wharf, was at that time assailing Baynard's Castle. This intelligence determined them not to attempt to proceed further into the city, which they saw was wholly impracticable; and they accordingly turned down Ivy-lane, and approached the cathedral with the intention, if possible, of ascending the central tower. They found a swarm of booksellers' porters and assistants at the northern entrance, engaged in transporting immense bales of books and paper to the vaults in Saint Faith's, where it was supposed the stock would be in safety, permission to that effect having been obtained from the dean and chapter.

Forcing their way through this crowd, Leonard and his companions crossed the transept, and proceeded towards the door of the spiral staircase leading to the central tower. It was open, and they passed through it. On reaching the summit of the tower, which they found occupied by some dozen or twenty persons, a spectacle that far exceeded the utmost stretch of their imaginations burst upon them. Through clouds of

tawny smoke scarcely distinguishable from flame, so thickly were they charged with sparks and fire-flakes, they beheld a line of fire spreading along Cheapside and Cornhill, as far as the Royal Exchange, which was now in flames, and branching upwards in another line through Lawrence-lane to Guildhall, which was likewise burning. Nearer to them, on the north, the fire kindled by the wretched Pillichody, who only, perhaps, anticipated the work of destruction by a few hours, had, as they had heard, proceeded to Goldsmiths' Hall, and was rapidly advancing down Saint Ann's-lane to Aldersgate. But it was on the right, and to the south-east, that the conflagration assumed its most terrific aspect. There, from Bow Church to the river-side, beyond the bridge as far as Billingsgate, and from thence up Mincing-lane, crossing Fenchurch-street and Lime-street to Gracechurch and Cornhill, describing a space of more than two miles in length and one in depth, every habitation was on fire. The appearance of this bed of flame was like an ocean of fire agitated by a tempest, in which a number of barks were struggling, some of them being each moment engulfed. The stunning and unearthly roar of the flames aided this appearance, which was further heightened by the enormous billows of flame that ever and anon rolled tumultuously onward as they were caught by some gust of wind of more than usual violence. The spires of the churches looked like the spars of "tall admirals," that had foundered, while the blackening ruins of the halls and larger buildings well represented the ribs and beams of mighty hulks.

Leaving Leonard and his companions to the contemplation of this tremendous spectacle, we shall proceed to take a nearer view of its ravages. Every effort had been used to preserve the Royal Exchange by the city authorities, and by the engineers, headed by the king in person. All the buildings in its vicinity were demolished. But in vain. The irresistible and unrelenting foe drove the defenders back as before, seized upon their barricades, and used them, like a skilful besieger, against the fortress they sought to protect. Solomon Eagle, who was mounted upon a heap of ruins, witnessed this scene of destruction, and uttered a laugh of exultation as the flames seized upon their prey.

"I told you," he cried, "that the extortioners and usurers who resorted to that building, and made gold their god, would be driven forth, and their temple destroyed. And my words have come to pass. It burns—it burns—and so shall they, if they turn not from their ways."

Hearing this wild speech, and beholding the extraordinary figure of the enthusiast, whose scorched locks and smoke-begrimed limbs gave him almost the appearance of an infernal spirit, the king inquired, with some trepidation, from his attendants, who or what he was, and being informed, ordered them to seize him. But the enthusiast set their attempts at naught. Springing with wonderful agility from fragment to fragment of the ruins, and continuing his vociferations, he at last plunged through the flame into the

Exchange itself, rendering further pursuit, of course, impossible, unless those who desired to capture him, were determined to share his fate, which now seemed inevitable. To the astonishment of all, however, he appeared a few minutes afterwards on the roof of the blazing pile, and continued his denunciations till driven away by the flames. He seemed, indeed, to bear a charmed life, for it was rumoured—though the report was scarcely credited—that he had escaped from the burning building, and made good his retreat to Saint Paul's. Soon after this, the Exchange was one mass of flame. Having gained an entrance to the galleries, the fire ran round them with inconceivable swiftness, as was the case in the conflagration of this later structure, and filling every chamber, gushed out of the windows, and poured down upon the courts and walks below. Fearful and prodigious was the ruin that ensued. The stone walls cracked with the intense heat—tottered and fell—the pillars shivered and broke asunder, the statues dropped from their niches, and were destroyed, one only surviving the wreck—that of the illustrious founder, Sir Thomas Gresham.

Deploring the fate of the Royal Exchange, the king and his attendants proceeded to Guildhall. But here they were too late, nor could they even rescue a tithe of the plate and valuables lodged within it for security. The effects of the fire as displayed in this structure, were singularly grand and surprising. The greater part of the ancient fabric being composed of oak of the hardest kind, it emitted little flame, but became after a time red hot, and remained in this glowing state till night, when it resembled, as an eye-witness describes, "a mighty palace of gold, or a great building of burnished brass."

The greatest fury of the conflagration was displayed at the Poultry, where five distinct fires met, and united their forces—one which came roaring down Cornhill from the Royal Exchange—a second down Threadneedle-street—a third up Walbrook—a fourth along Bucklersbury—and a fifth that marched against the wind up Cheapside, all these uniting, as at a focus, a whirl of flame, an intensity of heat, and a thundering roar were produced, such as were nowhere else experienced.

To return to the party on the central tower of the cathedral:—Stunned and half stifled by the roar and smoke, Leonard and his companions descended from their lofty post, and returned to the body of the fane. They were about to issue forth, when Leonard, glancing down the northern aisle, perceived the Earl of Rochester and Lord Argentine standing together at the lower end of it. Their gestures showed that it was not an amicable meeting, and mindful of what had passed at Whitehall, Leonard resolved to abide the result. Presently, he saw Lord Argentine turn sharply round, and strike his companion in the face with his glove. The clash of swords instantly succeeded, and Leonard and Wingfield started forward to separate the combatants. Blaize, followed, but more cautiously, contenting himself with screaming at the top of his voice, "Murder! murder! sacrilege! a duel! a duel!"

Wingfield was the first to arrive at the scene of strife, but just as he reached the combatants, who were too much blinded by passion to notice his approach, Lord Argentine struck his adversary's weapon from his grasp, and would have followed up the advantage if the farmer had not withheld his arm. Enraged at the interference, Argentine turned his fury against the newcomer, and strove to use his sword against him—but in the terrible struggle that ensued, and at the close of which they fell together, the weapon, as if directed by the hand of an avenging fate, passed through his own breast, inflicting a mortal wound.

"Susan Wingfield is avenged!" said the farmer, as he arose, drenched in the blood of his opponent.

"Susan Wingfield!" exclaimed the wounded man—"what was she to you?"

"Much," replied the farmer. "She was my daughter."

"Ah!" exclaimed Argentine, with an expression of unutterable anguish.
"Let me have your forgiveness," he groaned.
"You have it," replied Wingfield, kneeling beside him, "and may God pardon us both—you for the wrong you did my daughter, me for being accidentally the cause of your death. But I trust you are not mortally hurt?"

"I have not many minutes to live," replied Argentine. "But is not that
Leonard Holt?"
"It is," said Rochester, stepping forward.

"I can then do one rightful act before I die," he said, raising himself on one hand, and holding the other forcibly to his side, so as to stanch in some degree the effusion of blood. "Leonard Holt," he continued, "my sister Isabella loves you—deeply, devotedly. I have tried to conquer the passion, but in vain. You have my consent to wed her."

"I am a witness to your words my lord," said Rochester, "and I call upon all present to be so likewise."

"Rochester, you were once my friend," groaned Argentine, "and may yet be a friend to the dead. Remember the king sells titles. Teach this young man how to purchase one. My sister must not wed one of his degree."

"Make yourself easy on that score," replied Rochester; "he has already sufficient claim upon the king. He saved his life yesterday."

"He will trust to a broken reed if he trusts to Charles's gratitude," replied Argentine. "Buy the title—buy it, I say. My sister left me yesterday. I visited my anger on her head, and she fled. I believe she took refuge with Doctor Hodges, but I am sure he can tell you where she is. One thing more," continued the dying man, fixing his glazing eyes on Leonard. "Go to Newgate—to—to a prisoner there—an incendiary—and obtain a document of him. Tell him, with my dying breath I charged you to do this. It will enable you to act as I have directed. Promise me you will go. Promise me you will fulfil my injunctions."

"I do," replied Leonard.

"Enough," rejoined Argentine. "May you be happy with Isabella." And removing his hand from his side, a copious effusion of blood followed, and, sinking backwards, he expired.

Old Saint Paul's Volume VI by William Harrison Ainsworth

VII

THE BURNING OF SAINT PAUL'S.

Several other persons having by this time come up, the body of Lord Argentine was conveyed to Bishop Kempe's Chapel, and left there till a fitting season should arrive for its removal. Confounded by the tragical event that had taken place, Leonard remained with his eyes fixed upon the blood-stained pavement, until he was roused by an arm which gently drew him away, while the voice of the Earl of Rochester breathed in his ear, "This is a sad occurrence, Leonard; and yet it is most fortunate for you, for it removes the only obstacle to your union with the Lady Isabella. You see how fleeting life is, and how easily we may be deprived of it. I tried to reason Lord Argentine into calmness; but nothing would satisfy him except my blood; and there he lies, though not by my hand. Let his fate be a lesson to us, and teach us to live in charity with each other. I have wronged you—deeply wronged you; but I will make all the atonement in my power, and let me think I am forgiven."

The blood rushed tumultuously to Leonard's heart as he listened to what the earl said, but overcoming his feelings of aversion by a powerful effort, he took the proffered hand.

"I do forgive you my lord," he said.

"Those words have removed a heavy weight from my soul," replied Rochester; "and if death should trip up my heels as suddenly as he did his who perished on this spot, I shall be better prepared to meet him. And now let me advise you to repair to Newgate without delay, and see the wretched man, and obtain the document from him. The fire will reach the gaol ere long, and the prisoners must of necessity be removed. Amid the confusion his escape might be easily accomplished."

"Recollect, my lord, that the direful conflagration now prevailing without is owing to him," replied Leonard. "I will never be accessory to his escape."

"And yet his death by the public executioner," urged Rochester. "Think of its effect on his daughter."

"Justice must take its course," rejoined Leonard. "I would not aid him to escape if he were my own father."

"In that case, nothing more is to be said," replied Rochester. "But at all events, see him as quickly as you can. I would accompany you, but my duty detains me here. When you return from your errand you will find me at my post near the entrance of the churchyard in front of Saint Michael's le Quern; that is, if I am not beaten from it. Having seen the father, your next business must be to seek out the daughter, and remove her from this dangerous neighbourhood. You have heard where she is to be found."

Upon this they separated, Leonard and his companions quitting the cathedral by the great western entrance, and proceeding towards Paul's-alley, and the earl betaking himself to the north-east corner of the churchyard. The former got as far as Ivy-lane, but found it wholly impassable, in consequence of the goods and furniture with which it was blocked up. They were, therefore, obliged to return to the precincts of the cathedral, where Blaize, who was greatly terrified by what he had seen, expressed his determination of quitting them, and hurried back to the sacred pile. Leonard and the farmer next essayed to get up Ave Maria-lane; but, finding that also impassable, they made for Ludgate, and, after a long delay and severe struggle, got through the portal. The Old Bailey was entirely filled with persons removing their goods; and they were here informed, to their great dismay, that the conflagration had already reached Newgate Market, which was burning with the greatest fury, and was at that moment seizing upon the gaol. No one, however, in answer to Leonard's inquiries, could tell him what had become of the prisoners.

"I suppose they have left them to burn," observed a bystander, who heard the question with a malicious look; "and it is the best way of getting rid of them." Paying no attention to the remark, nor to the brutal laugh accompanying it, Leonard, assisted by Wingfield, fought his way through the crowd till he reached the prison. The flames were bursting through its grated windows, and both wings, as well as the massive gate connecting them, were on fire. Regardless of the risk he ran, Leonard forced his way to the lodge-door, where two turnkeys were standing, removing their goods.

"What has become of the prisoners?" he asked.

"The debtors are set free," replied the turnkey addressed, "and all but one or two of the common felons are removed."

"And where are those poor creatures?" cried Leonard, horror-stricken.

"In the Stone Hold," replied the turnkey.

"And have you left them to perish there?" demanded Leonard.

"We couldn't help it," rejoined the turnkey. "It would have been risking our lives to venture near them. One is a murderer, taken in the fact; and the other is quite as bad, for he set the city on fire; so its right and fair he should perish by his own contrivance."

"Where does the Stone Hold lie?" cried Leonard, in a tone that startled the turnkey. "I must get these prisoners out."

"You can't, I tell you," rejoined the turnkey, doggedly. "They're burnt to a cinder by this time."

"Give me your keys, and show me the way to the cell," cried Leonard, authoritatively. "I will at least attempt to save them."

"Well, if you're determined to put an end to yourself, you may try," replied the turnkey; "but I've warned you as to what you may expect. This way," he added, opening a door, from which a thick volume of smoke issued; "if any of 'em's alive, you'll soon know by the cries." And, as if in answer to his remark, a most terrific shriek at that moment burst on their ears.

"Here are the keys," cried the turnkey, delivering them to Leonard. "You are not going too?" he added, as Wingfield pushed past him. "A couple of madmen! I shouldn't wonder if they were incendiaries."

Directed by the cries, Leonard pressed forward through the blinding and stifling smoke. After proceeding about twenty yards, he arrived at a cross passage where the smoke was not quite so dense, as it found an escape through a small grated aperture in the wall. And here a horrible sight was presented to him. At the further extremity of this passage was a small cell, from which the cries he had heard issued. Not far from it the stone roof had fallen in, and from the chasm thus caused the flames were pouring into the passage. Regardless of the risk he ran, Leonard dashed forward, and reaching the cell, beheld Grant, still living, but in such a dreadful state, that it was evident his sufferings must soon be ended. His hair and beard were singed close to his head and face, and his flesh was blistered, blackened, and scorched to the bone. On seeing Leonard, he uttered a hoarse cry, and attempted to speak, but the words rattled in his throat. He then staggered forward, and, to Leonard's inexpressible horror, thrust his arms through the bars of the cage, which were literally red-hot. Seeing he had something in one hand, though he could not unclose his fingers, Leonard took it from him, and the wretched man fell backwards. At this moment a loud crack was heard in the wall behind. Several ponderous stones dropped from their places, admitting a volume of flame that filled the whole cell, and disclosing another body on the floor, near which lay that of Grant. Horrified by the spectacle, Leonard staggered off, and, catching Wingfield's arm, sought

to retrace his steps. This was no easy matter, the smoke being so dense, that they could not see a foot before them, and was obliged to feel their way along the wall. On arriving at the cross passage, Wingfield would fain have turned off to the right, but Leonard drew him forcibly in the opposite direction; and most fortunate was it that he did so, or the worthy farmer would inevitably have perished. At last they reached the lodge, and sank down on a bench from exhaustion.

"So, my masters," observed the turnkey, with a grim smile, "you were not able to rescue them, I perceive?" But receiving no answer, he added, "Well, and what did you see?"

"A sight that would have moved even your stony heart to compassion," returned Leonard, getting up and quitting the lodge. Followed by Wingfield, and scarcely knowing where he was going, he forced his way through the crowd, and dashing down Snow-hill, did not stop till he reached Holborn Conduit, where, seizing a leathern bucket, he filled it with water, and plunged his head into it. Refreshed by the immersion, he now glanced at the document committed to him by Grant. It was a piece of parchment, and showed by its shrivelled and scorched appearance the agony which its late possessor must have endured, Leonard did not open it, but thrust it with a shudder into his doublet.

Meditating on the strange and terrible events that had just occurred, Leonard's thoughts involuntarily wandered to the Lady Isabella, whose image appeared to him like a bright star shining on troubled waters, and for the first time venturing to indulge in a hope that she might indeed be his, he determined immediately to proceed in search of her.

It was now high noon, but the mid-day sun was scarcely visible, or not visible at all; as it struggled through the masses of yellow vapour it looked red as blood. Bands of workmen were demolishing houses on the western side of Fleet Ditch, and casting the rubbish into the muddy sluice before them, by which means it was confidently but vainly hoped that the progress of the fire would be checked. Shaping their course along the opposite side of the ditch, and crossing to Fleet Bridge, Leonard and his companion passed through Salisbury-court to Whitefriars, and taking a boat, directed the waterman to land them at Puddle Dock. The river was still covered with craft of every description laden with goods, and Baynard's Castle, an embattled stone structure of great strength and solidity, built at the beginning of the fifteenth century on the site of another castle as old as the Conquest, being now wrapped in flames from foundation to turret, offered a magnificent spectacle. From this point the four ascents leading to the cathedral, namely, Addle-hill, Saint Bennet's-hill, Saint Peter's-hill, and Lambert-hill, with all their throng of habitations, were burning—the black lines of ruined walls standing in bold relief against the white sheet of flame. Billows of fire rolled upwards every moment towards Saint Paul's, and threatened it with destruction.

Landing at the appointed place Leonard and his companion ascended Saint Andrew's-hill, and, proceeding along Carter-lane, soon gained the precincts of the cathedral. Here the whole mass of habitations on the summit of Saint Bennet's-hill extending from the eastern, end of Carter-lane to Distaff-lane, was on fire, and the flames were dashed by the fierce wind against the south-east corner of the cathedral. A large crowd was collected at this point, and great efforts were made to save the venerable pile, but Leonard saw that its destruction was inevitable. Forcing a way through the throng with his companion, they reached Doctor Hodges's residence at the corner of Watling-street, and Leonard, without waiting to knock, tried the door, which yielded to his touch. The habitation was empty, and from the various articles scattered about it was evident its inmates must have fled with the greatest precipitation. Alarmed at this discovery, Leonard rushed forth with Wingfield, and sought to ascertain from the crowd without whither Doctor Hodges was gone, but could learn nothing more than that he had departed with his whole household a few hours before. At last it occurred to him that he might obtain some information from the Earl of Rochester, and he was about to cross to the other side of the churchyard, when he was arrested by a simultaneous cry of horror from the assemblage. Looking upwards, for there he saw the general gaze directed, he perceived that the scaffolding around the roof and tower of the cathedral had kindled, and was enveloping the whole upper part of the fabric in a network of fire. Flames were likewise bursting from the belfry, and from the lofty pointed windows below it, flickering and playing round the hoary buttresses, and disturbing the numerous jackdaws that built in their timeworn crevices, and now flew screaming forth. As Leonard gazed at the summit of the tower, be discerned through the circling eddies of smoke that enveloped it the figure of Solomon Eagle standing on the top of the battlements and waving his staff, and almost fancied he could hear his voice. After remaining in this perilous situation for some minutes, as if to raise anxiety for his safety to the highest pitch, the enthusiast sprang upon a portion of the scaffolding that was only partly consumed, and descended from pole to pole, regardless whether burning or not, with marvellous swiftness, and apparently without injury. Alighting on the roof, he speeded to the eastern extremity of the fane, and there commenced his exhortations to the crowd below.

It now became evident also, from the strange roaring noise proceeding from the tower, that the flames were descending the spiral staircase, and forcing their way through some secret doors or passages to the roof. Determined to take one last survey of the interior of the cathedral before its destruction, which he now saw was inevitable, Leonard motioned to Wingfield, and forcing his way through the crowd, which was now considerably thinned, entered the southern door. He had scarcely gained the middle of the transept when the door opened behind him, and two persons, whom, even in the brief glimpse he caught of them, he knew to be Chowles and Judith, darted towards the

steps leading to Saint Faith's. They appeared to be carrying a large chest, but Leonard was too much interested in what was occurring to pay much attention to them. There were but few persons besides himself and his companion within the cathedral, and these few were chiefly booksellers' porters, who were hurrying out of Saint Faith's in the utmost trepidation. By-and-by, these were gone, and they were alone—alone within that vast structure, and at such a moment. Their situation, though perilous, was one that awakened thrilling and sublime emotions. The cries of the multitude, coupled with the roaring of the conflagration, resounded from without, while the fierce glare of the flames lighted up the painted windows at the head of the choir with unwonted splendour. Overhead was heard a hollow rumbling noise like that of distant thunder, which continued for a short time, while fluid streams of smoke crept through the mighty rafters of the roof, and gradually filled the whole interior of the fabric with vapour. Suddenly a tremendous cracking was heard, as if the whole pile were tumbling in pieces. So appalling was this sound, that Leonard and his companion would have fled, but they were completely transfixed by terror.

While they were in this state, the flames, which had long been burning in secret, burst through the roof at the other end of the choir, and instantaneously spread over its whole expanse. At this juncture, a cry of wild exultation was heard in the great northern gallery, and looking up, Leonard beheld Solomon Eagle, hurrying with lightning swiftness around it, and shouting in tones of exultation, "My words have come to pass—it burns—it burns—and will be utterly consumed!"

The vociferations of the enthusiast were answered by a piercing cry from below, proceeding from Blaize, who at that moment rushed from the entrance of Saint Faith's. On seeing the porter, Leonard shouted to him, and the poor fellow hurried towards him. At this juncture, a strange hissing sound was heard, as if a heavy shower of rain were descending upon the roof, and through the yawning gap over the choir there poured a stream of molten lead of silvery brightness. Nothing can be conceived more beautiful than this shining yet terrible cascade, which descended with momentarily increasing fury, sparkling, flashing, hissing, and consuming all before it. All the elaborately carved woodwork and stalls upon which it fell were presently in flames. Leonard and his companions now turned to fly, but they had scarcely moved a few paces when another fiery cascade burst through the roof near the great western entrance, for which they were making, flooding the aisles and plashing against the massive columns. At the same moment, too, a third stream began to fall over the northern transept, not far from where Blaize stood, and a few drops of the burning metal reaching him, caused him to utter the most fearful outcries. Seriously alarmed, Leonard and Wingfield now rushed to one of the monuments in the northern aisle, and hastily clambering it, reached a window, which they burst open. Blaize followed them, but not without receiving a few accidental plashes from the fiery torrents, which elicited from him the most astounding yells.

Having helped him to climb the monument, Leonard pushed him through the window after Wingfield, and then cast his eye round the building before he himself descended. The sight was magnificent in the extreme. Prom the flaming roof three silvery cascades descended. The choir was in flame, and a glowing stream like lava was spreading over the floor, and slowly trickling down the steps leading to the body of the church. The transepts and the greater part of the nave were similarly flooded. Above the roar of the flames and the hissing plash of the descending torrents, was heard the wild laughter of Solomon Eagle. Perceiving him in one of the arcades of the southern gallery, Leonard shouted to him to descend, and make good his escape while there was yet time, adding that in a few moments it would be too late.

"I shall never quit it more," rejoined the enthusiast, in a voice of thunder, "but shall perish with the fire I have kindled. No monarch on earth ever lighted a nobler funeral pyre."

And as Leonard passed through the window, he disappeared along the gallery. Breaking through the crowd collected round Wingfield and Blaize, and calling to them to follow him, Leonard made his way to the north-east of the churchyard, where he found a large assemblage of persons, in the midst of which were the king, the Duke of York, Rochester, Arlington, and many others. As Leonard advanced, Charles discerned him amid the crowd, and motioned him to come forward. A passage was then cleared, for him, through which Wingfield and Blaize, who kept close beside him, were permitted to pass.

"I am glad to find no harm has happened to you, friend," said Charles, as he approached. "Rochester informed me you were gone to Newgate, and as the gaol had been burnt down, I feared you might have met with the same mishap. I now regret that I did not adopt your plan, but it may not be yet too late."

"It is not too late to save a portion of your city, sire," replied
Leonard; "but, alas! how much is gone!"
"It is so," replied the king, mournfully.

Further conversation was here interrupted by the sudden breaking out of the fire from the magnificent rose window of the cathedral, the effect of which, being extraordinarily fine, attracted the monarch's attention. By this time Solomon Eagle had again ascended the roof, and making his way to the eastern extremity, clasped the great stone cross that terminated it with his left hand, while with his right he menaced the king and his party, uttering denunciations that were lost in the terrible roar prevailing around him. The flames now raged with a fierceness wholly inconceivable, considering the material they had to work upon. The molten lead poured down in torrents, and not merely flooded the

whole interior of the fabric, but ran down in a wide and boiling stream almost as far as the Thames, consuming everything in its way, and rendering the very pavements red-hot. Every stone, spout, and gutter in the sacred pile, of which there were some hundreds, added to this fatal shower, and scattered destruction far and wide; nor will this be wondered at when it is considered that the quantity of lead thus melted covered a space of no less than six acres. Having burned with incredible fury and fierceness for some time, the whole roof of the sacred structure fell in at once, and with a crash heard at an amazing distance. After an instant's pause, the flames burst forth from every window in the fabric, producing such an intensity of heat, that the stone pinnacles, transom beams, and mullions split and cracked with a sound like volleys of artillery, shivering and flying in every direction. The whole interior of the pile was now one vast sheet of flame, which soared upwards, and consumed even the very stones. Not a vestige of the reverend structure was left untouched—its bells—its plate—its woodwork—its monuments—its mighty pillars—its galleries—its chapels—all, all were destroyed. The fire raged throughout all that night and the next day, till it had consumed all but the mere shell, and rendered the venerable cathedral—"one of the most ancient pieces of piety in the Christian world"—to use the words of Evelyn, a heap of ruin and ashes.

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VIII.

HOW LEONARD RESCUED THE LADY ISABELLA.

The course of events having been somewhat anticipated in the last chapter, it will now be necessary to return to an earlier stage in the destruction of the cathedral, namely, soon after the furious bursting forth of the flames from the great eastern windows. While Leonard, in common with the rest of the assemblage, was gazing at this magnificent spectacle, he heard a loud cry of distress behind him, and turning at the sound, beheld Doctor Hodges rush forth from an adjoining house, the upper part of which was on fire, almost in a state of distraction. An elderly man and woman, and two or three female servants, all of whom were crying as loud as himself, followed him. But their screams fell on indifferent ears, for the crowd had become by this time too much accustomed to such appeals to pay any particular attention to them. Leonard, however, instantly rushed towards the doctor, and anxiously inquired what was the matter; the latter was so bewildered that he did not recognise the voice of the speaker, but gazing up at the house with an indescribable anguish, cried, "Merciful God! the flames have by this time reached her room—she will be burned—horror!"

"Who will be burned?" cried Leonard, seizing his arm, and gazing at him with a look of apprehension and anguish equal to his own—"Not the Lady Isabella?"

"Yes, Isabella," replied Hodges, regarding the speaker, and for the first time perceiving by whom he was addressed. "Not a moment is to be lost if you would save her from a terrible death. She was left in a fainting state in one of the upper rooms by a female attendant, who deserted her mistress to save herself. The staircase is on fire, or I myself would have saved her."

"A ladder! a ladder!" cried Leonard.

"Here is one," cried Wingfield, pointing to one propped against an adjoining house. And in another moment, by the combined efforts of the crowd, the ladder was brought and placed against the burning building.

"Which is the window?" cried Leonard.

"That on the right, on the second floor," replied Hodges. "Gracious
Heaven! the flames are bursting from it."

But Leonard's foot was now on the ladder, and rushing up with inconceivable swiftness, he plunged through the window regardless of the flame. All those who witnessed this daring deed, regarded his destruction as certain, and even Hodges gave him up for lost. But the next moment he appeared at the window, bearing the fainting female form in his arms, and with extraordinary dexterity obtaining a firm footing and hold of the ladder, descended in safety. The shout that burst from such part of the assemblage as had witnessed this achievement, and its successful termination, attracted the king's attention, and he inquired the cause of the clamour.

"I will ascertain it for your majesty," replied Rochester, and proceeding to the group, he learnt, to his great satisfaction, what had occurred. Having gained this intelligence, he flew back to the king, and briefly explained the situation of the parties. Doctor Hodges, it appeared, had just removed to the house in question, which belonged to one of his patients, as a temporary asylum, and the Lady Isabella had accompanied him. She was in the upper part of the house when the fire broke out, and was so much terrified that she swooned away, in which condition her attendant left her; nor was the latter so much to blame as might appear, for the stairs were burning at the time, and a moment's delay would have endangered her own safety.

"Fate, indeed, seems to have brought these young persons together," replied Charles, as he listened to Rochester's recital, who took this opportunity of acquainting him with Lord Argentine's dying injunctions, "and it would be a pity to separate them."

"I am sure your majesty has no such intention," said Rochester.

"You will see," rejoined the monarch. And, as he spoke, he turned his horse's head, and moved towards the spot where Leonard was kneeling beside Isabella, and supporting her. Some restoratives having been applied by Doctor Hodges, she had regained her sensibility, and was murmuring her thanks to her deliverer.

"She has not lost her beauty, I perceive," cried Charles, gazing at her with admiration, and feeling something of his former passion revive within his breast.

"Your majesty, I trust, will not mar their happiness," said Rochester, noticing the monarch's libertine look with uneasiness. "Remember, you owe your life to that young man."

"And I will pay the debt royally," replied Charles; "I will give him permission to marry her."

"Your majesty's permission is scarcely needed," muttered Rochester.

"There you are wrong, my lord," replied the king. "She is now my ward, and I can dispose of her in marriage as I please; nor will I so dispose of her except to her equal in rank."

"I discern your majesty's gracious intentions," replied Rochester, gratefully inclining his head.

"I almost forget my deliverer's name," whispered Charles, with a smile, "but it is of no consequence, since he will so speedily change it."

"His name is Leonard Holt," replied Rochester, in the same tone.

"Ah!—true," returned the king. "What ho! good Master Leonard Holt," he added, addressing the young man, "commit the Lady Isabella Argentine to the care of our worthy friend Doctor Hodges for a moment, and stand up before me." His injunctions being complied with, he continued, "The Lady Isabella Argentine and I owe our lives to you, and we must both evince our gratitude—she by devoting that life, which, if I am not misinformed, she will be right willing to do, to you, and I by putting you in a position to unite yourself to her. The title of Argentine has been this day extinguished by most unhappy circumstances; I therefore confer the title on you, and here in this presence create you Baron Argentine, of Argentine, in Staffordshire. Your patent shall be made out with all convenient despatch, and with it you shall receive the hand of the sole representative of that ancient and noble house."

"Your majesty overwhelms me," replied Leonard, falling on his knee and pressing the king's hand, which was kindly extended towards him, to his lips. "I can scarcely persuade myself I am not in a dream."

"You will soon awaken to the sense of the joyful reality," returned the king. "Have I not now discharged my debt?" he added to Rochester.

"Right royally, indeed, my liege," replied the earl, in a tone of unaffected emotion. "My lord," he added, grasping Leonard's hand, "I sincerely congratulate you on your newly-acquired dignities, nor less in the happiness that awaits you there."

"If I do not answer you fittingly, my lord," replied the new-made peer, "it is not because I do not feel your kindness. But my brain reels. Pray Heaven my senses may not desert me."

"You must not forget the document you obtained this morning, my lord," replied Rochester, endeavouring to divert his thoughts into a new channel. "The proper moment for consulting it may have arrived."

Lord Argentine, for we shall henceforth give him his title, thrust his hand into his doublet, and drew forth the parchment. He opened it, and endeavoured to read it, but a mist swam before his eyes.

"Let me look at it," said Rochester, taking it from him. "It is a deed of gift," he said, after glancing at it for a moment, "from the late Lord Argentine—I mean the elder baron—of a large estate in Yorkshire, which he possessed in right of his wife, to you, my lord, here described as Leonard Holt, provided you shall marry the Lady Isabella Argentine. Another piece of good fortune. Again and again, I congratulate you."

"And now," said Charles, "other and less pleasing matters claim our attention. Let the Lady Isabella be removed, under the charge of Doctor Hodges, to Whitehall, where apartments shall be provided for her at once, together with fitting attendants, and where she can remain till this terrible conflagration is over which, I trust, soon will be, when I will no longer delay her happiness, but give her away in person. Chiffinch," he added to the chief page, "see all this is carried into effect."

"I will, my liege, and right willingly," replied Chiffinch.

"I would send you with her, my lord," pursued Charles to Argentine, "but I have other duties for you to fulfil. The plan you proposed of demolishing the houses with gunpowder shall be immediately put into operation, under your own superintendence."

A chair was now brought, and the Lady Isabella, after a tender parting with her lover, being placed within it, she was thus transported, under the charge of Hodges and Chiffinch, to Whitehall, where she arrived in safety, though not without having sustained some hindrance and inconvenience.

She had not been gone many minutes, when the conflagration of the cathedral assumed its most terrific character; the whole of the mighty roof falling in, and the flames soaring upwards, as before related. Up to this time, Solomon Eagle had maintained his position at the eastern end of the roof, and still grasped the stone cross. His situation now attracted universal attention, for it was evident he must speedily perish.

"Poor wretch!" exclaimed the king, shuddering, "I fear there is no way of saving him."

"None, whatever my liege," replied Rochester, "nor do I believe he would consent to it if there were. But he is again menacing your majesty."

As Rochester spoke, Solomon Eagle shook his arm menacingly at the royal party, raising it aloft, as if invoking the vengeance of Heaven. He then knelt down upon the sloping ridge of the roof, as if in prayer, and his figure, thus seen relieved against the mighty sheet of flame, might have been taken for an image of Saint John the Baptist carved in stone. Not an eye in the vast crowd below but was fixed on him. In a few moments he rose again, and tossing his arms aloft, and shrieking, in a voice distinctly heard above the awful roar around him, the single word "Resurgam!" flung himself headlong into the flaming abyss. A simultaneous cry of horror rose from the whole assemblage on beholding this desperate action.

"The last exclamation of the poor wretch may apply to the cathedral, as well as to himself," remarked the monarch, to a middle-aged personage, with a pleasing and highly intellectual countenance, standing near him: "for the old building shall rise again, like a phoenix from its fires, with renewed beauty, and under your superintendence, Doctor Christopher Wren."

The great architect bowed. "I cannot hope to erect such another structure," he said, modestly; "but I will endeavour to design an edifice that shall not disgrace your majesty's city."

"You must build me another city at the same time, Doctor Wren," sighed the king. "Ah!" he added, "is not that Mr. Lilly, the almanac-maker, whom I see among the crowd?"

"It is," replied Rochester.

"Bid him come to me," replied the king. And the order being obeyed, he said to the astrologer, "Well, Mr. Lilly, your second prediction has come to pass. We have had the Plague, and now we have the Fire. You may thank my clemency that I do not order you to be cast into the flames, like the poor wretch who has just perished before our eyes, as a wizard and professor of the black art. How did you obtain information of these fatal events?"

"By a careful study of the heavenly bodies, sire," replied Lilly, "and by long and patient calculations, which, if your majesty or any of your attendants had had leisure or inclination to make, would have afforded you the same information. I make no pretence to the gift of prophecy, but this calamity was predicted in the last century."

"Indeed! by whom?" asked the king.

"By Michael Nostradamus," replied Lilly; "his prediction runs thus:—

'La sang du juste à Londres fera faute,
Bruslez par feu, le vingt et trois, les Six;
La Dame antique cherra de place haute,
De même secte plusieurs seront occis.'[1]

And thus I venture to explain it. The 'blood of the just' refers to the impious and execrable murder of your majesty's royal father of blessed memory. 'Three-and-twenty and six' gives the exact year of the calamity; and it may likewise give us, as will be seen by computation hereafter, the amount of habitations to be destroyed. The 'Ancient Dame' undoubtedly refers to the venerable pile now burning before us, which, as it stands in the most eminent spot in the city, clearly 'falls from its high place.' The expression 'of the same sect' refers not to men, but churches, of which a large number, I grieve to say it, are already destroyed."

"The prophecy is a singular one," remarked Charles, musingly "and you have given it a plausible interpretation." And for some moments he appeared lost in reflection. Suddenly rousing himself, he took forth his tablets, and hastily tracing a few lines upon a leaf, tore it out, and delivered it with his signet-ring to Lord Argentine. "Take this, my lord," he said, "to Lord Craven. You will find him at his post in Tower-street. A band of my attendants shall go with you. Embark at the nearest stairs you can—those at Blackfriars I should conceive the most accessible. Bid the men row for their lives. As soon as you join Lord Craven, commence operations. The Tower must be preserved at all hazards. Mark me!—at all hazards."

"I understand your majesty," replied Argentine—"your commands shall be implicitly obeyed. And if the conflagration has not gone too far, I will answer with my life that I preserve the fortress." And he departed on his mission.

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IX

WHAT BEFEL CHOWLES AND JUDITH IN THE VAULTS OF SAINT FAITH'S.

Having now seen what occurred outside Saint Paul's, we shall proceed to the vaults beneath it. Chowles and Judith, it has been mentioned, were descried by Leonard, just before the outbreak of the fire, stealing into Saint Faith's, and carrying a heavy chest between them. This chest contained some of the altar-plate, which they had pillaged from the Convocation House. As they traversed the aisles of Saint Faith's, which were now filled with books and paper, they could distinctly hear the raging of the fire without, and Judith, who was far less intimidated than her companion, observed, "Let it roar on. It cannot injure us."

"I am not so sure of that," replied Chowles, doubtfully, "I wish we had taken our hoards elsewhere."

"There is no use in wishing that now," rejoined Judith. "And it would have been wholly impossible to get them out of the city. But have no fear. The fire, I tell you, cannot reach us. It could as soon burn into the solid earth as into this place."

"It comforts me to hear you say so," replied Chowles. "And when I think of those mighty stone floors above us, I feel we are quite safe. No, no, it can never make its way through them."

Thus discoursing, they reached the charnel at the further end of the church, where Chowles struck a light, and producing a flask of strong waters, took a copious draught himself and handed the flask to Judith, who imitated his example. Their courage being thus stimulated, they opened the chest, and Chowles was so enraptured with its glittering contents that he commenced capering round the vault. Recalled to quietude by a stern reproof from Judith, he opened a secret door in the wall, and pushed the chest into a narrow passage beyond it. Fearful of being discovered in their retreat, they took a basket of provisions and liquor with them, and then closed the door. For some time, they proceeded along the passage, pushing the chest before them, until they came to a descent of a few steps, which brought them to a large vault, half-filled with bags of gold, chests of plate, caskets, and other plunder. At the further end of this vault was a strong wooden door. Pushing the chest into the middle of the chamber, Chowles seated himself upon it, and opening the basket of provisions, took out the bottle of spirits, and again had recourse to it.

"How comfortable and secure we feel in this quiet place," he said; "while all above us is burning. I declare I feel quite merry, ha! ha!" And he forced a harsh and discordant laugh.

"Give me the bottle," rejoined Judith, sternly, "and don't grin like a death's head. I don't like to see the frightful face you make."

"It's the first time you ever thought my face frightful," replied
Chowles, "and I begin to think you are afraid."
"Afraid!" echoed Judith, forcing a derisive laugh in her turn; "afraid—of what?"

"Nay, I don't know," replied Chowles; "only I feel a little uncomfortable. What if we should not be able to breathe here? The very idea gives me a tightness across the chest."

"Silence!" cried Judith, with a fierceness that effectually insured obedience to her command.

Chowles again had recourse to the bottle, and deriving a false courage from it, as before, commenced skipping about the chamber in his usual fantastical manner. Judith, did not attempt to check him, but remained with her chin resting upon her hand gazing at him.

"Do you remember the Dance of Death, Judith?" he cried, executing some of the wildest flourishes he had then performed, "and how I surprised the Earl of Rochester and his crew?"

"I do," replied Judith, sternly, "and I hope we may not soon have to perform that dance together in reality."

"It was a merry night," rejoined Chowles, who did not hear what she said, "a right merry night—and so to-night shall be, in spite of what is occurring overhead. Ha! ha!" And he took another long pull at the flask. "I breathe freely now." And he continued his wild flourishes until he was completely exhausted. He then sat down by Judith, and would have twined his bony arms round her neck, but she roughly repulsed him.

With a growl of displeasure, he then proceeded to open and examine the various bags, chests, and caskets piled upon the floor, and the sight of their contents so excited Judith, that shaking off her misgivings, she joined him, and they continued opening case after case, glutting their greedy eyes, until Chowles became aware that the vault was filled with smoke. As soon as he perceived this, he started to his feet in terror.

"We are lost—we shall be suffocated!" he cried! Judith likewise arose, and her looks showed that she shared in his apprehensions.

"We must not stay here," cried Chowles; "and yet," he added, with an agonised look at the rich store before him, "the treasure! the treasure!"

"Ay, let us, at least, take something with us," rejoined Judith, snatching up two or three of the most valuable caskets.

While Chowles gazed at the heap before him, hesitating what to select, the smoke grew so dense around them, that Judith seized his arm, and dragged him away. "I come—I come!" he cried, snatching up a bag of gold.

They then threaded the narrow passage, Judith leading the way and bearing the light. The smoke grew thicker and thicker as they advanced; but regardless of this, they hurried to the secret door leading to the charnel. Judith touched the spring, but as she did so, a sheet of flame burst in and drove her back. Chowles dashed passed her, and with great presence of mind shut the door, excluding the flame. They then hastily retraced their steps, feeling that not a moment was to be lost if they would escape. The air in the vault, thickened by the smoke, had become so hot that they could scarcely breathe; added to which, to increase their terror, they heard the most awful cracking of the walls overhead, as if the whole fabric were breaking asunder to its foundation.

"The cathedral is tumbling upon us! We shall be buried alive!" exclaimed
Chowles, as he listened with indescribable terror to the noise overhead!
"I owe my death to you, wretch!" cried Judith, fiercely. "You persuaded me to come hither."

"I!" cried Chowles. "It is a lie! You were the person who proposed it. But for you I should have left our hoards here, and come for them after the fire was over."

"It is you who lie!" returned Judith, with increased fury, "that was my proposal."

"Hold your tongue, you she-devil," cried Chowles, "it is you who have brought me into this strait—and if you do not cease taunting me, I will silence you for ever."

"Coward and fool!" cried Judith, "I will at least have the satisfaction of seeing you die before me."

And as she spoke, she rushed towards him, and a desperate struggle commenced. And thus while the walls were cracking overhead, threatening them with instant destruction,

the two wretches continued their strife, uttering the most horrible blasphemies and execrations. Judith, being the stronger of the two, had the advantage, and she had seized her opponent by the throat with the intention of strangling him, when a most terrific crash was heard causing her to loose her gripe. The air instantly became as hot as the breath of a furnace, and both started to their feet. "What has happened?" gasped Chowles.

"I know not," replied Judith, "and I dare not look down the passage."

"Then I will," replied Chowles, and he advanced a few paces up it, and then hastily returned, shrieking, "it is filled with boiling lead, and the stream is flowing towards us."

Scarcely able to credit the extent of the danger, Judith gazed down the passage, and there beheld a glowing silvery stream trickling slowly onwards. She saw too well, that if they could not effect their retreat instantly, their fate was sealed.

"The door of the vault!" she cried, pointing towards it, "where is the key? where is the key?"

"I have not got it," replied Chowles, distractedly, "I cannot tell where to find it."

"Then we are lost!" cried Judith, with a terrible execration.

"Not so," replied Chowles, snatching up a pickaxe, "if I cannot unlock the door, I can break it open."

With this, he commenced furiously striking against it, while Judith, who was completely horror-stricken, and filled with the conviction that her last moments were at hand, fell on her knees beside him, and gazing down the passage, along which she could see the stream of molten lead, now nearly a foot in depth, gradually advancing, and hissing as it came, shrieked to Chowles to increase his exertions. He needed no incitement to do so, but nerved by fear, continued to deal blow after blow against the door, until at last he effected a small breach just above the lock. But this only showed him how vain were his hopes, for a stream of fire and smoke poured through the aperture. Notwithstanding this, he continued his exertions, Judith shrieking all the time, until the lock at last yielded. He then threw open the door, but finding the whole passage involved in flame, was obliged to close it. Judith had now risen, and their looks at each other at this fearful moment were terrible in the extreme. Retreating to either side of the cell, they glared at each other like wild beasts. Suddenly, Judith casting her eyes to the entrance of the vault, uttered a yell of terror, that caused her companion to look in that direction, and he perceived that the stream of molten lead had gained it, and was descending the steps.

He made a rush towards the door at the same time with Judith, and another struggle ensued, in which he succeeded in dashing her upon the floor. He again opened the door, but was again driven backwards by the terrific flame, and perceived that the fiery current had reached Judith, who was writhing and shrieking in its embrace. Before Chowles could again stir, it was upon him. With a yell of anguish, he fell forward, and was instantly stifled in the glowing torrent, which in a short time flooded the whole chamber, burying the two partners in iniquity, and the whole of their ill-gotten gains, in its burning waves.

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X

CONCLUSION

Lord Argentine proceeded, as directed by the king, to the eastern end of Tower-street, where he found Lord Craven, and having delivered him the king's missive, and shown him the signet, they proceeded to the western side of the Tower Dock, and having procured a sufficient number of miners and engineers, together with a supply of powder from the fortress, commenced undermining the whole of the row of habitations called Tower-bank, on the edge of the dock, having first, it is scarcely necessary to state, taken care to clear them of their inhabitants. The powder deposited, the trains were fired, and the buildings blown into the air. At this time the whole of the western side of the Tower Moat was covered with low wooden houses and sheds, and, mindful of the king's instructions, Lord Argentine suggested to Lord Craven that they should be destroyed. The latter acquiescing, they proceeded to their task, and in a short time the whole of the buildings of whatever description, from the bulwark-gate to the city postern, at the north of the Tower, and nearly opposite the Bowyer Tower, were destroyed. Long before this was accomplished they were joined by the Duke of York, who lent his utmost assistance to the task, and when night came on, a clear space of at least a hundred yards in depth, had been formed between the ancient fortress and the danger with which it was threatened.

Meantime the conflagration continued to rage with unabated fury. It burnt throughout the whole of Monday night, and having destroyed Saint Paul's, as before related, poured down Ludgate-hill, consuming all in its way, and, crossing Fleet Bridge, commenced its ravages upon the great thoroughfare adjoining it. On Tuesday an immense tract was on fire. All Fleet-street, as far as the Inner Temple, Ludgate-hill, and the whole of the city eastwards, along the banks of the Thames, up to the Tower Dock, where the devastation was checked by the vast gap of houses demolished, were in flames. From thence the boundary of the fire extended to the end of Mark-lane, Lime-street, and Leadenhall, the strong walls of which resisted its fury. Ascending again by the Standard on Cornhill, Threadneedle-street, and Austin Friars, it embraced Drapers' Hall, and the whole mass of buildings to the west of Throgmorton-street. It next proceeded to the then new buildings behind Saint Margaret's, Lothbury, and so on westward to the upper end of Cateaton-street, whence it spread to the second postern in London Wall, and destroying the ramparts and suburbs as far as Cripplegate, consumed Little Wood-street, Mungwell-street, and the whole of the city wall on the west as far as Aldersgate. Passing a little to the north of Saint Sepulchre's, which it destroyed, it crossed Holborn Bridge,

and ascending Saint Andrew's-hill, passed the end of Shoe-lane, and so on to the end of Fetter-lane. The whole of the buildings contained within this boundary were now on fire, and burning with terrific fury. And so they continued till the middle of Wednesday, when the wind abating, and an immense quantity of houses being demolished according to Lord Argentine's plan, the conflagration was got under; and though it broke out in several places after that time, little mischief was done, and it may be said to have ceased on the middle of that day.

On Saturday morning in that week, soon after daybreak, a young man, plainly yet richly attired in the habiliments then worn by persons of high rank, took his way over the smouldering heaps of rubbish, and along the ranks of ruined and blackened walls denoting the habitations that had once constituted Fleet-street. It was with no little risk, and some difficulty, that he could force his way, now clambering over heaps of smouldering ashes, now passing by some toppling wall, which fell with a terrific crash after he had just passed it—now creeping under an immense pile of blackened rafters; but he at length reached Fleet Bridge, where he paused to gaze at the scene of devastation around him.

It was indeed a melancholy sight, and drew tears to his eyes. The ravages of the fire were almost inconceivable. Great beams were burnt to charcoal—stones calcined, and as white as snow, and such walls and towers as were left standing were so damaged that their instant fall was to be expected. The very water in the wells and fountains was boiling, and even the muddy Fleet sent forth a hot steam. The fire still lingered in the lower parts of many habitations, especially where wine, spirits, or inflammable goods had been kept; and these "voragos of subterranean cellars," as Evelyn terms them, still emitted flames, together with a prodigious smoke and stench. Undismayed by the dangers of the path he had to traverse, the young man ascended Ludgate-hill, still encountering the same devastation, and passing through the ruined gateway, the end of which remained perfect, approached what had once been Saint Paul's Cathedral. Mounting a heap of rubbish at the end of Ludgate street, he gazed at the mighty ruin, which looked more like the remains of a city than those of a single edifice.

The solid walls and buttresses were split and rent asunder; enormous stones were splintered and calcined by the heat; and vast flakes having scaled from off the pillars, gave them a hoary and almost ghostly appearance. Its enormous extent was now for the first time clearly seen, and, strange to say it looked twice as large in ruins as when entire. The central tower was still standing, but chipped, broken, and calcined, like the rest of the structure, by the vehement heat of the flames. Part of the roof, in its fall, broke through the solid floor of the choir, which was of immense thickness, into Saint Faith's, and destroyed the magazine of books and paper deposited there by the booksellers. The portico, erected by Inigo Jones, and which found so much favour in

Evelyn's eyes, that he describes it as "comparable to any in Europe," and particularly deplores its loss, shared the fate of the rest of the building—the only part left uninjured being the architrave, the inscription on which was undefaced.

Having satiated himself with this sad but striking prospect, the young man, with some toil and trouble, crossed the churchyard, and gained Cheapside, where a yet more terrific scene of devastation than that which he had previously witnessed burst upon him. On the right of London Bridge, which he could discern through the chasms of the houses, and almost to the Tower, were nothing but ruins, while a similar waste lay on the left. Such was the terrible change that had been wrought in the aspect of the ruined city, that if the young man had not had some marks to guide him, he would not have known where he was. The tower and ruined walls of Saint Peter's Church pointed out to him the entrance to Wood-street, and, entering it, he traversed it with considerable difficulty—for the narrow thoroughfares were much fuller of rubbish, and much less freed from smoke and fiery vapour, than the wider—until he reached a part of it with which he had once been well acquainted. But, alas! how changed was that familiar spot. The house he sought was a mere heap of ruins. While gazing at them, he heard a voice behind him, and turning, beheld Mr. Bloundel and his son Stephen, forcing their way through what had once been Maiden-lane. A warm greeting passed between them, and Mr. Bloundel gazed for some time in silence upon the wreck of his dwelling. Tears forced themselves into his eyes, and his companions were no less moved. As he turned to depart, he observed to the young man with some severity:

"How is it, Leonard, that I see you in this gay apparel? Surely, the present is not a fitting season for such idle display."

Lord Argentine, for such it was, now explained to the wonder-stricken grocer all that had occurred to him, adding that he had intended coming to him that very day, if he had not been thus anticipated, to give him the present explanation.

"And where are Farmer Wingfield and Blaize?" asked Mr. Bloundel. "We have been extremely uneasy at your prolonged absence."

"They are both at the palace," replied Lord Argentine, "and have both been laid up with slight injuries received during the conflagration; but I believe—nay, I am sure—they will get out to-day."

"That is well," replied Mr. Bloundel; "and now let me congratulate you, Leonard—that is, my lord—how strange such a title sounds!—on your new dignity.

"And accept my congratulations, too, my lord," said Stephen.

"Oh! do not style me thus," said Argentine. "With you, at least, let me be ever Leonard Holt."

"You are still my old apprentice, I see," cried the grocer, warmly grasping his hand.

"And such I shall ever continue in feeling," returned the other, cordially returning the pressure.

Three days after this, Lord Argentine was united to the Lady Isabella.—the king, as he had promised, giving away the bride. The Earl of Rochester was present, together with the grocer and his wife, and the whole of their family. Another marriage also took place on the same day between Blaize and Patience. Both unions, it is satisfactory to be able to state, were extremely happy, though it would be uncandid not to mention, that in the latter case, to use a homely but expressive phrase, "the grey mare proved the better horse." Blaize, however, was exceedingly content under his government. He settled at Willesden with his wife, where they lived to a good old age, and where some of his descendants may still be found.

Mr. Bloundel sustained only a trifling loss by the fire. Another house was erected on the site of the old habitation, where he carried on his business as respectably and as profitably as before, until, in the course of nature, he was gathered to his fathers, and succeeded by his son Stephen, leaving an unblemished character behind him as a legacy to his family. Nor was it his only legacy, in a worldly sense, for his time had not been misspent, and he had well-husbanded his money. All his family turned out well, and were successful in the world. Stephen rose to the highest civic dignities, and the younger obtained great distinction. Their daughter Christiana became Lady Argentine, being wedded to the eldest son of the baron and baroness.

Mike Macascree, the piper, and Bell, found a happy asylum with the same noble family.

As to Lord and Lady Argentine, theirs was a life of uninterrupted happiness. Devotedly attached to her lord, the Lady Isabella seemed only to live for him, and he well repaid her affection. By sedulously cultivating his talents and powers, which were considerable, he was enabled to reflect credit upon the high rank to which it had pleased a grateful sovereign to elevate him. He lived to see the new cathedral completed by Sir Christopher Wren, and often visited it with feelings of admiration, but never with the same sentiments of veneration and awe that he had experienced when, in times long gone by, he had repaired to OLD SAINT PAUL'S.

THE END


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