THE GIPSY
BY
WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH

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CHAPTER I

A MORNING RIDE

Lay a garland on my hearse
Of the dismal yew;
Maidens, willow branches bear,
Say I died true.
My love was false, but I was firm
From my hour of birth;
Upon my buried body lie
Lightly, gentle earth.
Beaumont and Fletcher.

I had a sister, who among the race
Of gipsies was the fairest. Fair she was
In gentle blood, and gesture to her beauty.
Brome.

On quitting Lady Rookwood's chamber, Luke speeded along the gloomy corridor, descended the spiral stairs, and, swiftly traversing sundry other dark passages, issued from a door at the back of the house. Day was just beginning to break. His first object had been to furnish himself with means to expedite his flight; and, perceiving no one in the yard, he directed his hasty steps towards the stable. The door was fortunately unfastened; and, entering, he found a strong roan horse, which he knew, from description, had been his father's favorite hunter, and to the use of which he now considered himself fully entitled. The animal roused himself as he approached, shook his glossy coat, and neighed, as if he recognized the footsteps and voice.

"Thou art mistaken, old fellow," said Luke; "I am not he thou thinkest; nevertheless, I am glad thy instinct would have it so. If thou bearest my father's son as thou hast borne thy old master, o'er many a field for many a day, he need not fear the best mounted of his pursuers. Soho! come hither, Rook."

The noble steed turned at the call. Luke hastily saddled him, vaulted upon his back, and, disregarding every impediment in the shape of fence or ditch, shaped his course across the field towards the sexton's cottage, which he reached just as its owner was in the act

of unlocking his door. Peter testified his delight and surprise at the escape of his grandson, by a greeting of chuckling laughter.

"How?—escaped!" exclaimed he. "Who has delivered you from the hands of the Moabites? Ha, ha! But why do I ask? Who could it have been but Jack Palmer?"

"My own hands have set me free," returned Luke. "I am indebted to no man for liberty; still less to him. But I cannot tarry here; each moment is precious. I came to request you to accompany me to the gipsy encampment. Will you go, or not?"

"And mount behind you?" replied Peter; "I like not the manner of conveyance."

"Farewell, then." And Luke turned to depart.

"Stay; that is Sir Piers's horse, old Rook. I care not if I do ride him."

"Quick, then; mount."

"I will not delay you a moment," rejoined the sexton, opening his door, and throwing his implements into the cottage. "Back, Mole; back, sir," cried he, as the dog rushed out to greet him. "Bring your steed nigh this stone, grandson Luke—there—a little nearer—all's right." And away they galloped.

The sexton's first inquiries were directed to ascertain how Luke had accomplished his escape; and, having satisfied himself in this particular, he was content to remain silent; musing, it might be, on the incidents detailed to him.

The road Luke chose was a rough, unfrequented lane, that skirted, for nearly a mile, the moss-grown palings of the park. It then diverged to the right, and seemed to bear towards a range of hills rising in the distance. High hedges impeded the view on either hand; but there were occasional gaps, affording glimpses of the tract of country through which he was riding. Meadows were seen steaming with heavy dews, intersected by a deep channelled stream, whose course was marked by a hanging cloud of vapor, as well as by a row of melancholy pollard-willows, that stood like stripped, shivering urchins by the river side. Other fields succeeded, yellow with golden grain, or bright with flowering clover—the autumnal crop—colored with every shade, from the light green of the turnip to the darker verdure of the bean, the various products of the teeming land. The whole was backed by round drowsy masses of trees.

Luke spoke not, nor abated his furious course, till the road began to climb a steep ascent. He then drew in the rein, and from the heights of the acclivity surveyed the plain over which he had passed.

It was a rich agricultural district, with little picturesque beauty, but much of true English endearing loveliness to recommend it. Such a quiet, pleasing landscape, in short, as one views, at such a season of the year, from every eminence in every county of our merry isle. The picture was made up of a tract of land filled with corn ripe for the sickle, or studded with sheaves of the same golden produce, enlivened with green meadows, so deeply luxuriant as to claim the scythe for the second time; each divided from the other by thick hedgerows, the uniformity of which was broken ever and anon by some towering elm, tall poplar, or wide-branching oak. Many old farmhouses, with their broad barns and crowded haystacks—forming little villages in themselves—ornamented the landscape at different points, and by their substantial look evidenced the fertility of the soil, and the thriving condition of its inhabitants. Some three miles distant might be seen the scattered hamlet of Rookwood; the dark russet thatch of its houses scarcely perceptible amidst the embrowned foliage of the surrounding timber. The site of the village was, however, pointed out by the square tower of the antique church, that crested the summit of the adjoining hill; and although the hall was entirely hidden from view, Luke readily traced out its locality amidst the depths of the dark grove in which it was embosomed.

This goodly prospect had other claims to attention in Luke's eyes besides its agricultural or pictorial merit. It was, or he deemed it was, his own. Far as his eye ranged, yea, even beyond the line of vision, the estates of Rookwood extended.

"Do you see that house below us in the valley?" asked Peter of his companion.

"I do," replied Luke; "a snug old house—a model of a farm. Everything looks comfortable and well to do about it. There are a dozen lusty haystacks, or thereabouts; and the great barn, with its roof yellowed like gold, looks built for a granary; and there are stables, kine-houses, orchards, dovecots, and fishponds, and an old circular garden, with wall-fruit in abundance. He should be a happy man, and a wealthy one, who dwells therein."

"He dwells therein no longer," returned Peter; "he died last night."

"How know you that? None are stirring in the house as yet."

"The owner of that house, Simon Toft," replied Peter, "was last night struck by a thunderbolt. He was one of the coffin-bearers at your father's funeral. They are sleeping

within the house, you say. 'Tis well. Let them sleep on—they will awaken too soon, wake when they may—ha, ha!"

"Peace!" cried Luke; "you blight everything—even this smiling landscape you would turn to gloom. Does not this morn awaken a happier train of thoughts within your mind? With me it makes amends for want of sleep, effaces resentment, and banishes every black misgiving. 'Tis a joyous thing thus to scour the country at earliest dawn; to catch all the spirit and freshness of the morning; to be abroad before the lazy world is half awake; to make the most of a brief existence; and to have spent a day of keen enjoyment, almost before the day begins with some. I like to anticipate the rising of the glorious luminary; to watch every line of light changing, as at this moment, from shuddering gray to blushing rose! See how the heavens are dyed! Who would exchange yon gorgeous spectacle," continued he, pointing towards the east, and again urging his horse to full speed down the hill, endangering the sexton's seat, and threatening to impale him upon the crupper of the saddle—"who would exchange that sight, and the exhilarating feeling of this fresh morn, for a couch of eiderdown, and a headache in reversion?"

"I for one," returned the sexton, sharply, "would willingly exchange it for that, or any other couch, provided it rid me of this accursed crupper, which galls me sorely. Moderate your pace, grandson Luke, or I must throw myself off the horse in self-defence."

Luke slackened his charger's pace, in compliance with the sexton's wish.

"Ah! well," continued Peter, restored in a measure to comfort; "now I can contemplate the sunrise, which you laud, somewhat at mine ease. 'Tis a fine sight, I doubt not, to the eyes of youth; and, to the sanguine soul of him upon whom life itself is dawning, is, I dare say, inspiriting: but when the heyday of existence is past; when the blood flows sluggishly in the veins; when one has known the desolating storms which the brightest sunrise has preceded, the seared heart refuses to trust its false glitter; and, like the experienced sailor, sees oft in the brightest skies a forecast of the tempest. To such a one, there can be no new dawn of the heart; no sun can gild its cold and cheerless horizon; no breeze can revive pulses that have long since ceased to throb with any chance emotion. I am too old to feel freshness in this nipping air. It chills me more than the damps of night, to which I am accustomed. Night—midnight! is my season of delight. Nature is instinct then with secrets dark and dread. There is a language which he who sleepeth not, but will wake, and watch, may haply learn. Strange organs of speech hath the invisible world; strange language doth it talk; strange communion hold with him who would pry into its mysteries. It talks by bat and owl—by the grave-worm, and by each crawling thing—by the dust of graves, as well as by those that rot therein—but ever doth it discourse by night, and specially when the moon is at the full. 'Tis the

lore I have then learned that makes that season dear to me. Like your cat, mine eye expands in darkness. I blink at the sunshine, like your owl."

"Cease this forbidding strain," returned Luke; "it sounds as harshly as your own screech-owl's cry. Let your thoughts take a more sprightly turn, more in unison with my own and the fair aspect of nature."

"Shall I direct them to the gipsies' camp, then?" said Peter, with a sneer. "Do your own thoughts tend thither?"

"You are not altogether in the wrong," replied Luke. "I was thinking of the gipsies' camp, and of one who dwells amongst its tents."

"I knew it," replied Peter. "Did you hope to deceive me by attributing all your joyousness of heart to the dawn? Your thoughts have been wandering all this while upon one who hath, I will engage, a pair of sloe-black eyes, an olive skin, and yet withal a clear one—'black, yet comely, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon'—a mesh of jetty hair, that hath entangled you in its network—ripe lips, and a cunning tongue—one of the plagues of Egypt.—Ha, ha!"

"You have guessed shrewdly," replied Luke; "I care not to own that my thoughts were so occupied."

"I was assured of it," replied the sexton. "And what may be the name of her towards whom your imagination was straying?"

"Sibila Perez," replied Luke. "Her father was a Spanish Gitano. She is known amongst her people by her mother's name of Lovel."

"She is beautiful, of course?"

"Ay, very beautiful!—but no matter! You shall judge of her charms anon."

"I will take your word for them," returned the sexton; "and you love her?"

"Passionately."

"You are not married?" asked Peter, hastily.

"Not as yet," replied Luke; "but my faith is plighted."

"Heaven be praised! The mischief is not then irreparable. I would have you married—though not to a gipsy girl."

"And whom would you select?"

"One before whom Sybil's beauty would pale as stars at day's approach."

"There lives not such a one."

"Trust me there does. Eleanor Mowbray is lovely beyond parallel. I was merely speculating upon a possibility when I wished her yours—it is scarcely likely she would cast her eyes upon you."

"I shall not heed her neglect. Graced with my title, I doubt not, were it my pleasure to seek a bride amongst those of gentle blood, I should not find all indifferent to my suit."

"Possibly not. Yet what might weigh with others, would not weigh with her. There are qualities you lack which she has discovered in another."

"In whom?"

"In Ranulph Rookwood."

"Is he her suitor?"

"I have reason to think so."

"And you would have me abandon my own betrothed love, to beguile from my brother his destined bride? That were to imitate the conduct of my grandsire, the terrible Sir Reginald, towards his brother Alan."

The sexton answered not, and Luke fancied he could perceive a quivering in the hands that grasped his body for support. There was a brief pause in their conversation.

"And who is Eleanor Mowbray?" asked Luke, breaking the silence.

"Your cousin. On the mother's side a Rookwood. 'Tis therefore I would urge your union with her. There is a prophecy relating to your house, which seems as though it would be fulfilled in your person and in hers:

When the stray Rook shall perch on the topmost bough,

There shall be clamor and screaming, I trow;
But of right, and of rule, of the ancient nest,
The Rook that with Rook mates shall hold him possest."
"I place no faith in such fantasies," replied Luke; "and yet the lines bear strangely upon my present situation."

"Their application to yourself and Eleanor Mowbray is unquestionable," replied the sexton.

"It would seem so, indeed," rejoined Luke; and he again sank into abstraction, from which the sexton did not care to arouse him.

The aspect of the country had materially changed since their descent of the hill. In place of the richly-cultivated district which lay on the other side, a broad brown tract of waste land spread out before them, covered with scattered patches of gorse, stunted fern, and low brushwood, presenting an unvaried surface of unbaked turf. The shallow coat of sod was manifested by the stones that clattered under the horse's hoofs as he rapidly traversed the arid soil, clearing with ease to himself, though not without discomfort to the sexton, every gravelly trench, natural chasm, or other inequality of ground that occurred in his course. Clinging to his grandson with the tenacity of a bird of prey, Peter for some time kept his station in security; but, unluckily, at one dike rather wider than the rest, the horse, owing possibly to the mismanagement, intentional or otherwise, of Luke, swerved; and the sexton, dislodged from his "high estate," fell at the edge of the trench, and rolled incontinently to the bottom.

Luke drew in the rein to inquire if any bones were broken; and Peter presently upreared his dusty person from the abyss, and without condescending to make any reply, yet muttering curses, "not loud, but deep," accepted his grandson's proffered hand, and remounted.

While thus occupied, Luke fancied he heard a distant shout, and noting whence the sound proceeded—the same quarter by which he had approached the heath—he beheld a single horseman spurring in their direction at the top of his speed; and to judge from the rate at which he advanced, it was evident he was anything but indifferently mounted. Apprehensive of pursuit, Luke expedited the sexton's ascent; and that accomplished, without bestowing further regard upon the object of his solicitude, he resumed his headlong flight. He now thought it necessary to bestow more attention on his choice of road, and, perfectly acquainted with the heath, avoided all unnecessary hazardous passes. In spite of his knowledge of the ground, and the excellence of his horse, the stranger sensibly gained upon him. The danger, however, was no longer imminent.

"We are safe," cried Luke; "the limits of Hardchase are past. In a few seconds we shall enter Davenham Wood. I will turn the horse loose, and we will betake ourselves to flight amongst the trees. I will show you a place of concealment. He cannot follow us on horseback, and on foot I defy him."

"Stay," cried the sexton. "He is not in pursuit—he takes another course—he wheels to the right. By Heaven! it is the Fiend himself upon a black horse, come for Bow-legged Ben. See, he is there already."

The horseman had turned, as the sexton stated, careering towards a revolting object at some little distance on the right hand. It was a gibbet, with its grisly burden. He rode swiftly towards it, and, reining in his horse, took off his hat, bowing profoundly to the carcase that swung in the morning breeze. Just at that moment a gust of air catching the fleshless skeleton, its arms seemed to be waved in reply to the salutation. A solitary crow winged its flight over the horseman's head as he paused. After a moment's halt, he wheeled about, and again shouted to Luke, waving his hat.

"As I live," said the latter, "it is Jack Palmer."

"Dick Turpin, you mean," rejoined the sexton. "He has been paying his respects to a brother blade. Ha, ha! Dick will never have the honor of a gibbet; he is too tender of the knife. Did you mark the crow? But here he comes." And in another instant Turpin was by their side.

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CHAPTER II

A GIPSY ENCAMPMENT

I see a column of slow-rising smoke
O'ertop the lofty wood, that skirts the wild.
Cowper: The Task.

"The top of the morning to you, gem'men," said Turpin, as he rode up at an easy canter. "Did you not hear my halloo? I caught a glimpse of you on the hill yonder. I knew you both, two miles off; and so, having a word or two to say to you, Luke Bradley, before I leave this part of the country, I put Bess to it, and she soon brought me within hail. Bless her black skin," added he, affectionately patting his horse's neck, "there's not her match in these parts, or in any other; she wants no coaxing to do her work—no bleeders for her. I should have been up with you before this had I not taken a cross cut to look at poor Ben.

One night, when mounted on my mare.
To Bagshot Heath I did repair,
And saw Will Davies hanging there,
Upon the gibbet bleak and bare,
With a rustified, fustified, mustified air.
Excuse my singing. The sight of a gibbet always puts me in mind of the Golden Farmer. May I ask whither you are bound, comrades?"

"Comrades!" whispered the sexton to Luke; "you see he does not so easily forget his old friends."

"I have business that will not admit of delay," rejoined Luke; "and to speak plainly——"

"You want not my society," returned Turpin; "I guessed as much. Natural enough! You have got an inkling of your good fortune. You have found out you are a rich man's heir, not a poor wench's bastard. No offence; I'm a plain spoken man, as you will find, if you know it not already. I have no objection to your playing these fine tricks on others, though it won't answer your turn to do so with me."

"Sir!" exclaimed Luke, sharply.

"Sir to you," replied Turpin—"Sir Luke—as I suppose you would now choose to be addressed. I am aware of all. A nod is as good as a wink to me. Last night I learned the fact of Sir Piers's marriage from Lady Rookwood—ay, from her ladyship. You stare—and old Peter, there, opens his ogles now. She let it out by accident; and I am in possession of what can alone substantiate your father's first marriage, and establish your claims to the property."

"The devil!" cried the sexton; adding, in a whisper to Luke, "You had better not be precipitate in dropping so obliging an acquaintance."

"You are jesting," said Luke to Turpin.

"It is ill jesting before breakfast," returned Dick: "I am seldom in the mood for a joke so early. What if a certain marriage certificate had fallen into my hand?"

"A marriage certificate!" echoed Luke and the sexton simultaneously.

"The only existing proof of the union of Sir Piers Rookwood with Susan Bradley," continued Turpin. "What if I had stumbled upon such a document—nay more, if I knew where to direct you to it?"

"Peace!" cried Luke to his tormentor; and then addressing Turpin, "if what you say be true, my quest is at an end. All that I need, you appear to possess. Other proofs are secondary to this. I know with whom I have to deal. What do you demand for that certificate?"

"We will talk about the matter after breakfast," said Turpin. "I wish to treat with you as friend with friend. Meet me on those terms, and I am your man; reject my offer, and I turn my mare's head, and ride back to Rookwood. With me now rest all your hopes. I have dealt fairly with you, and I expect to be fairly dealt with in return. It were idle to say, now I have an opportunity, that I should not turn this luck to my account. I were a fool to do otherwise. You cannot expect it. And then I have Rust and Wilder to settle with. Though I have left them behind, they know my destination. We have been old associates. I like your spirit—I care not for your haughtiness; but I will not help you up the ladder to be kicked down myself. Now you understand me. Whither are you bound?"

"To Davenham Priory, the gipsy camp."

"The gipsies are your friends?"

"They are."

"I am alone."

"You are safe."

"You pledge your word that all shall be on the square. You will not mention to one of that canting crew what I have told you?"

"With one exception, you may rely upon my secrecy."

"Whom do you except?"

"A woman."

"Bad! never trust a petticoat."

"I will answer for her with my life."

"And for your granddad there?"

"He will answer for himself," said Peter. "You need not fear treachery in me. Honor among thieves, you know."

"Or where else should you seek it?" rejoined Turpin; "for it has left all other classes of society. Your highwayman is your only man of honor. I will trust you both; and you shall find you may trust me. After breakfast, as I said before, we will bring the matter to a conclusion. Tip us your daddle, Sir Luke, and I am satisfied. You shall rule in Rookwood, I'll engage, ere a week be flown; and then—— But so much parleying is dull work; let's make the best of our way to breakfast."

And away they cantered.

A narrow bridle-road conducted them singly through the defiles of a thick wood. Their route lay in the shade, and the air felt chilly amidst the trees, the sun not having attained sufficient altitude to penetrate its depths, while overhead all was warmth and light. Quivering on the tops of the timber, the horizontal sunbeams created, in their refraction, brilliant prismatic colorings, and filled the air with motes like golden dust. Our horsemen heeded not the sunshine or the shade. Occupied each with his own train of thought, they silently rode on.

Davenham Wood, through which they urged their course, had, in the olden time, been a forest of some extent. It was then an appendage to the domains of Rookwood, but had passed from the hands of that family to those of a wealthy adjoining landowner and lawyer, Sir Edward Davenham, in the keeping of whose descendants it had ever after continued. A noble wood it was, and numbered many patriarchal trees. Ancient oaks, with broad, gnarled limbs, which the storms of five hundred years had vainly striven to uproot, and which were now sternly decaying; gigantic beech trees, with silvery stems shooting smoothly upwards, sustaining branches of such size, that each, dissevered, would in itself have formed a tree, populous with leaves, and variegated with rich autumnal tints; the sprightly sycamore, the dark chestnut, the weird wych-elm, the majestic elm itself, festooned with ivy, every variety of wood, dark, dense, and intricate, composed the forest through which they rode; and so multitudinous was the timber, so closely planted, so entirely filled up with a thick, matted vegetation, which had been allowed to collect beneath, that little view was afforded, had any been desired by the parties, into the labyrinth of the grove. Tree after tree, clad in the glowing livery of the season, was passed, and as rapidly succeeded by others. Occasionally a bough projected over their path, compelling the riders to incline their heads as they passed; but, heedless of such difficulties, they pressed on. Now the road grew lighter, and they became at once sensible of the genial influence of the sun. The transition was as agreeable as instantaneous. They had opened upon an extensive plantation of full-grown pines, whose tall, branchless stems grew up like a forest of masts, and freely admitted the pleasant sunshine. Beneath those trees, the soil was sandy and destitute of all undergrowth, though covered with brown, hair-like fibres and dry cones, shed by the pines. The agile squirrel, that freest denizen of the grove, starting from the ground as the horsemen galloped on, sprang up the nearest tree, and might be seen angrily gazing at the disturbers of his haunts, beating the branches with his fore feet, in expression of displeasure; the rabbit darted across their path; the jays flew screaming amongst the foliage; the blue cushat, scared at the clatter of the horses' hoofs, sped on swift wing into quarters secure from their approach; while the parti-colored pies, like curious village gossips, congregated to peer at the strangers, expressing their astonishment by loud and continuous chattering. Though so gentle of ascent as to be almost imperceptible, it was still evident that the path they were pursuing gradually mounted a hill-side; and when at length they reached an opening, the view disclosed the eminence they had insensibly won. Pausing for a moment upon the brow of the hill, Luke pointed to a stream that wound through the valley, and, tracing its course, indicated a particular spot amongst the trees. There was no appearance of a dwelling house—no cottage roof, no white canvas shed, to point out the tents of the wandering tribe whose abode they were seeking. The only circumstance betokening that it had once been the haunt of man were a few gray monastic ruins, scarce distinguishable from the stony barrier by which they were surrounded; and the sole evidence that it was still frequented by human beings was

a thin column of pale blue smoke, that arose in curling wreaths from out the brake, the light-colored vapor beautifully contrasting with the green umbrage whence it issued.

"Our destination is yonder," exclaimed Luke, pointing in the direction of the vapor.

"I am glad to hear it," cried Turpin, "as well as to perceive there is some one awake. That smoke holds out a prospect of breakfast. No smoke without fire, as old Lady Scanmag said; and I'll wager a trifle that fire was not lighted for the fayter fellows to count their fingers by. We shall find three sticks, and a black pot with a kid seething in it, I'll engage. These gipsies have picked out a prettyish spot to quarter in—quite picturesque, as one may say—and but for that tell-tale smoke, which looks for all the world like a Dutch skipper blowing his morning cloud, no one need know of their vicinity. A pretty place, upon my soul."

The spot, in sooth, merited Turpin's eulogium. It was a little valley, in the midst of wooded hills, so secluded, that not a single habitation appeared in view. Clothed with timber to the very summits, excepting on the side where the party stood, which verged upon the declivity, these mountainous ridges presented a broken outline of foliage, variegated with tinted masses of bright orange, timber, and deepest green. Four hills hemmed in the valley. Here and there a gray slab of rock might be discerned amongst the wood, and a mountain-ash figured conspicuously upon a jutting crag immediately below them. Deep sunken in the ravine, and concealed in part from view by the wild herbage and dwarf shrubs, ran a range of precipitous rocks, severed, it would seem, by some diluvial convulsion, from the opposite mountain side, as a corresponding rift was there visible, in which the same dip of strata might be observed, together with certain ribbed cavities, matching huge bolts of rock which had once locked these stony walls together. Washing this cliff, swept a clear stream, well known and well regarded, as it waxed in width, by the honest brethren of the angle, who seldom, however, tracked it to its rise amongst these hills. The stream found its way into the valley through a chasm far to the left, and rushed thundering down the mountain side in a boiling cascade. The valley was approached in this direction from Rookwood by an unfrequented carriage-road, which Luke had, from prudential reasons, avoided. All seemed consecrated to silence—to solitude—to the hush of nature; yet this quiet scene was the chosen retreat of lawless depredators, and had erstwhile been the theatre of feudal oppression. We have said that no habitation was visible; that no dwelling tenanted by man could be seen; but following the spur of the furthest mountain hill, some traces of a stone wall might be discovered; and upon a natural platform of rock stood a stern square tower, which had once been the donjon of the castle, the lords of which had called the four hills their own. A watch-tower then had crowned each eminence, every vestige of which had, however, long since disappeared. Sequestered in the vale stood the Priory before alluded to—a Monastery of Gray Friars, of the Order of St. Francis—some of the venerable walls of

which were still remaining; and if they had not reverted to the bat and the owl, as is wont to be the fate of such sacred structures, their cloistered shrines were devoted to beings whose natures partook, in some measure, of the instincts of those creatures of the night—a people whose deeds were of darkness, and whose eyes shunned the light. Here the gipsies had pitched their tent; and though the place was often, in part, deserted by the vagrant horde, yet certain of the tribe, who had grown into years—over whom Barbara Lovel held queenly sway—made it their haunt, and were suffered by the authorities of the neighborhood to remain unmolested—a lenient piece of policy, which, in our infinite regard for the weal of the tawny tribe, we recommend to the adoption of all other justices and knights of the shire.

Bidding his grandsire have regard to his seat, Luke leaped a high bank; and, followed by Turpin, began to descend the hill. Peter, however, took care to provide for himself. The descent was so perilous, and the footing so insecure, that he chose rather to trust to such conveyance as nature had furnished him with, than to hazard his neck by any false step of the horse. He contrived, therefore, to slide off from behind, shaping his own course in a more secure direction.

He who has wandered amidst the Alps must have often had occasion to witness the wonderful surefootedness of that mountain pilot, the mule. He must have remarked how, with tenacious hoof, he will claw the rock, and drag himself from one impending fragment to another, with perfect security to his rider; how he will breast the roaring currents of air, and stand unshrinking at the verge of almost unfathomable ravines. But it is not so with the horse: fleet on the plain, careful over rugged ground, he is timid and uncertain on the hill-side, and the risk incurred by Luke and Turpin, in their descent of the almost perpendicular sides of the cliff, was tremendous. Peter watched them in their descent with some admiration, and with much contempt.

"He will break his neck, of a surety," said he; "but what matters it? As well now as hereafter."

So saying, he approached the verge of the precipice, where he could see them more distinctly.

The passage along which Luke rode had never before been traversed by horse's hoof. Cut in the rock, it presented a steep zigzag path amongst the cliffs, without any defence for the foot traveller, except such as was afforded by a casual clinging shrub, and no protection whatever existed for a horseman; the possibility of any one attempting the passage not having, in all probability, entered into the calculation of those who framed it. Added to this, the steps were of such unequal heights, and withal so narrow, that the danger was proportionately increased.

"Ten thousand devils!" cried Turpin, staring downwards, "is this the best road you have got?"

"You will find one more easy," replied Luke, "if you ride for a quarter of a mile down the wood, and then return by the brook side. You will meet me at the priory."

"No," answered the highwayman, boldly; "if you go, I go too. It shall never be said that Dick Turpin was afraid to follow where another would lead. Proceed."

Luke gave his horse the bridle, and the animal slowly and steadily commenced the descent, fixing his fore legs upon the steps, and drawing his hinder limbs carefully after him. Here it was that the lightness and steadiness of Turpin's mare was completely shown. No Alpine mule could have borne its rider with more apparent ease and safety. Turpin encouraged her by hand and word; but she needed it not. The sexton saw them, and, tracking their giddy descent, he became more interested than he anticipated. His attention was suddenly drawn towards Luke.

"He is gone," cried Peter. "He falls—he sinks—my plans are all defeated—the last link is snapped. No," added he, recovering his wonted composure, "his end is not so fated."

Rook had missed his footing. He rolled stumbling down the precipice a few yards. Luke's fate seemed inevitable. His feet were entangled in the stirrup, he could not free himself. A birch tree, growing in a chink of the precipice, arrested his further fall. But for this timely aid all had been over. Here Luke was enabled to extricate himself from the stirrup and to regain his feet; seizing the bridle, he dragged his faulty steed back again to the road.

"You have had a narrow escape, by Jove," said Turpin, who had been thunderstruck with the whole proceeding. "Those big cattle are always clumsy; devilish lucky it's no worse."

It was now comparatively smooth travelling; but they had not as yet reached the valley, and it seemed to be Luke's object to take a circuitous path. This was so evident that Turpin could not help commenting upon it.

Luke evaded the question. "The crag is steep there," said he; "besides, to tell you the truth, I want to surprise them."

"Ho, ho!" laughed Dick. "Surprise them, eh? What a pity the birch tree was in the way; you would have done it properly then. Egad, here's another surprise."

Dick's last exclamation was caused by his having suddenly come upon a wide gully in the rock, through which dashed a headlong torrent, crossed by a single plank.

"You must be mad to have taken this road," cried Turpin, gazing down into the roaring depths in which the waterfall raged, and measuring the distance of the pass with his eye. "So, so, Bess!—Ay, look at it, wench. Curse me, Luke, if I think your horse will do it, and, therefore, turn him loose."

But Dick might as well have bidden the cataract to flow backwards. Luke struck his heels into his horse's sides. The steed galloped to the brink, snorted, and refused the leap.

"I told you so—he can't do it," said Turpin. "Well, if you are obstinate, a wilful man must have his way. Stand aside, while I try it for you." Patting Bess, he put her to a gallop. She cleared the gulf bravely, landing her rider safely upon the opposite rock.

"Now then," cried Turpin, from the other side of the chasm.

Luke again urged his steed. Encouraged by what he had seen, this time the horse sprang across without hesitation. The next instant they were in the valley.

For some time they rode along the banks of the stream in silence. A sound at length caught the quick ears of the highwayman.

"Hist!" cried he; "some one sings. Do you hear it?"

"I do," replied Luke, the blood rushing to his cheeks.

"And could give a guess at the singer, no doubt," said Turpin, with a knowing look. "Was it to hear yon woodlark that you nearly broke your own neck, and put mine in jeopardy?"

"Prithee be silent," whispered Luke.

"I am dumb," replied Turpin; "I like a sweet voice as well as another."

Clear as the note of a bird, yet melancholy as the distant dole of a vesper-bell, arose the sound of that sweet voice from the wood. A fragment of a Spanish gipsy song it warbled: Luke knew it well. Thus ran the romance:

LA GITANILLA

By the Guadalquivir,
Ere the sun be flown,
By that glorious river
Sits a maid alone.
Like the sunset splendor
Of that current bright,
Shone her dark eyes tender
As its witching light.
Like the ripple flowing,
Tinged with purple sheen,
Darkly, richly glowing,
Is her warm cheek seen.
'Tis the Gitanilla
By the stream doth linger,
In the hope that eve
Will her lover bring her.
See, the sun is sinking;
All grows dim, and dies;
See, the waves are drinking
Glories of the skies.
Day's last lustre playeth
On that current dark;
Yet no speck betrayeth
His long looked-for bark.
'Tis the hour of meeting!
Nay, the hour is past;
Swift the time is fleeting!
Fleeteth hope as fast.
Still the Gitanilla
By the stream doth linger,
In the hope that night
Will her lover bring her.
The tender trembling of a guitar was heard in accompaniment of the ravishing melodist.

The song ceased.

"Where is the bird?" asked Turpin.

"Move on in silence, and you shall see," said Luke; and keeping upon the turf, so that his horse's tread became inaudible, he presently arrived at a spot where, through the

boughs, the object of his investigation could plainly be distinguished, though he himself was concealed from view.

Upon a platform of rock, rising to the height of the trees, nearly perpendicularly from the river's bed, appeared the figure of the gipsy maid. Her footstep rested on the extreme edge of the abrupt cliff, at whose base the water boiled in a deep whirlpool, and the bounding chamois could not have been more lightly poised. One small hand rested upon her guitar, the other pressed her brow. Braided hair, of the jettiest dye and sleekest texture, was twined around her brow in endless twisted folds:

Rowled it was in many a curious fret,
Much like a rich and curious coronet,
Upon whose arches twenty Cupids lay,
And were as tied, or loth to fly away.

And so exuberant was this rarest feminine ornament, that, after encompassing her brow, it was passed behind, and hung down in long thick plaits almost to her feet. Sparkling, as the sunbeams that played upon her dark yet radiant features, were the large, black, Oriental eyes of the maiden, and shaded with lashes long and silken. Hers was a Moorish countenance, in which the magnificence of the eyes eclipses the face, be it ever so beautiful—an effect to be observed in the angelic pictures of Murillo,—and the lovely contour is scarcely noticed in the gaze which those long, languid, luminous orbs attract. Sybil's features were exquisite, yet you looked only at her eyes—they were the loadstars of her countenance. Her costume was singular, and partook, like herself, of other climes. Like the Andalusian dame, her choice of color inclined towards black, as the material of most of her dress was of that sombre hue. A bodice of embroidered velvet restrained her delicate bosom's swell; a rich girdle, from which depended a silver chain, sustaining a short poniard, bound her waist; around her slender throat was twined a costly kerchief; and the rest of her dress was calculated to display her slight, yet faultless, figure to the fullest advantage.

Unconscious that she was the object of regard, she raised her guitar, and essayed to touch the chords. She struck a few notes, and resumed her romance:

Swift that stream flows on,
Swift the night is wearing,—
Yet she is not gone,
Though with heart despairing.

Her song died away. Her hand was needed to brush off the tears that were gathering in her large dark eyes. At once her attitude was changed. The hare could not have started more suddenly from her form. She heard accents well known concluding the melody:

Dips an oar-plash—hark!—
Gently on the river;
'Tis her lover's bark.
On the Guadalquivir.
Hark! a song she hears!
Every note she snatches;
As the singer nears,
Her own name she catches.
Now the Gitanilla
Stays not by the water,
For the midnight hour
Hath her lover brought her.

It was her lover's voice. She caught the sound at once, and, starting, as the roe would arouse herself at the hunter's approach, bounded down the crag, and ere he had finished the refrain, was by his side.

Flinging the bridle to Turpin, Luke sprang to her, and caught her in his arms. Disengaging herself from his ardent embrace, Sybil drew back, abashed at the sight of the highwayman.

"Heed him not," said Luke; "it is a friend."

"He is welcome here then," replied Sybil. "But where have you tarried so long, dear Luke?" continued she, as they walked to a little distance from the highwayman. "What hath detained you? The hours have passed wearily since you departed. You bring good news?"

"Good news, my girl; so good, that I falter even in the telling of it. You shall know all anon. And see, our friend yonder grows impatient. Are there any stirring? We must bestow a meal upon him, and that forthwith: he is one of those who brook not much delay."

"I came not to spoil a love meeting," said Turpin, who had good-humoredly witnessed the scene; "but, in sober seriousness, if there is a stray capon to be met with in the land of Egypt, I shall be glad to make his acquaintance. Methinks I scent a stew afar off."

"Follow me," said Sybil; "your wants shall be supplied."

"Stay," said Luke; "there is one other of our party whose coming we must abide."

"He is here," said Sybil, observing the sexton at a distance. "Who is that old man?"

"My grandsire, Peter Bradley."

"Is that Peter Bradley?" asked Sybil.

"Ay, you may well ask whether that old dried-up otomy, who ought to grin in a glass case for folks to stare at, be kith and kin of such a bang-up cove as your fancy man, Luke," said Turpin, laughing—"but i' faith he is."

"Though he is your grandsire, Luke," said Sybil, "I like him not. His glance resembles that of the Evil Eye."

And, in fact, the look which Peter fixed upon her was such as the rattlesnake casts upon its victim, and Sybil felt like a poor fluttering bird under the fascination of that venomous reptile. She could not remove her eyes from his, though she trembled as she gazed. We have said that Peter's orbs were like those of the toad. Age had not dimmed their brilliancy. In his harsh features you could only read bitter scorn or withering hate; but in his eyes resided a magnetic influence of attraction or repulsion. Sybil underwent the former feeling in a disagreeable degree. She was drawn to him as by the motion of a whirlpool, and involuntarily clung to her lover.

"It is the Evil Eye, dear Luke."

"Tut, tut, dear Sybil; I tell you it is my grandsire."

"The girl says rightly, however," rejoined Turpin; "Peter has a confounded ugly look about the ogles, and stares enough to put a modest wench out of countenance. Come, come, my old earthworm, crawl along, we have waited for you long enough. Is this the first time you have seen a pretty lass, eh?"

"It is the first time I have seen one so beautiful," said Peter; "and I crave her pardon if my freedom has offended her. I wonder not at your enchantment, grandson Luke, now I behold the object of it. But there is one piece of counsel I would give to this fair maid. The next time she trusts you from her sight, I would advise her to await you at the hill-top, otherwise the chances are shrewdly against your reaching the ground with neck unbroken."

There was something, notwithstanding the satirical manner in which Peter delivered this speech, calculated to make a more favorable impression upon Sybil than his previous conduct had inspired her with; and, having ascertained from Luke to what his

speech referred, she extended her hand to him, yet not without a shudder, as it was enclosed in his skinny grasp. It was like the fingers of Venus in the grasp of a skeleton.

"This is a little hand," said Peter, "and I have some skill myself in palmistry. Shall I peruse its lines?"

"Not now, in the devil's name!" said Turpin, stamping impatiently. "We shall have Old Ruffin himself amongst us presently, if Peter Bradley grows gallant."

Leading their horses, the party took their way through the trees. A few minutes' walking brought them in sight of the gipsy encampment, the spot selected for which might be termed the Eden of the valley. It was a small green plain, smooth as a well-shorn lawn, kept ever verdant—save in the spots where the frequent fires had scorched its surface—by the flowing stream that rushed past it, and surrounded by an amphitheatre of wooded hills. Here might be seen the canvas tent with its patches of varied coloring; the rude-fashioned hut of primitive construction; the kettle slung

Between two poles, upon a stick transverse;

the tethered beasts of burden, the horses, asses, dogs, carts, caravans, wains, blocks, and other movables and immovables belonging to the wandering tribe. Glimmering through the trees, at the extremity of the plain, appeared the ivy-mantled walls of Davenham Priory. Though much had gone to decay, enough remained to recall the pristine state of this once majestic pile, and the long, though broken line of Saxon arches, that still marked the cloister wall; the piers that yet supported the dormitory; the enormous horse-shoe arch that spanned the court; and, above all, the great marigold, or circular window, which terminated the chapel, and which, though now despoiled of its painted honors, retained, like the skeleton leaf, its fibrous intricacies entire,—all eloquently spoke of the glories of the past, while they awakened reverence and admiration for the still enduring beauty of the present.

Towards these ruins Sybil conducted the party.

"Do you dwell therein?" asked Peter, pointing towards the priory.

"That is my dwelling," said Sybil.

"It is one I should covet more than a modern mansion," returned the sexton.

"I love those old walls better than any house that was ever fashioned," replied Sybil.

As they entered the Prior's Close, as it was called, several swarthy figures made their appearance from the tents. Many a greeting was bestowed upon Luke, in the wild jargon of the tribe. At length an uncouth dwarfish figure, with a shock head of black hair, hopped towards them. He seemed to acknowledge Luke as his master.

"What ho! Grasshopper," said Luke, "take these horses, and see that they lack neither dressing nor provender."

"And hark ye, Grasshopper," added Turpin; "I give you a special charge about this mare. Neither dress nor feed her till I see both done myself. Just walk her for ten minutes, and if you have a glass of ale in the place, let her sip it."

"Your bidding shall be done," chirped the human insect, as he fluttered away with his charges.

A motley assemblage of tawny-skinned varlets, dark-eyed women and children, whose dusky limbs betrayed their lineage, in strange costume, and of wild deportment, checked the path, muttering welcome upon welcome into the ear of Luke as he passed. As it was evident he was in no mood for converse, Sybil, who seemed to exercise considerable authority over the crew, with a word dispersed them, and they herded back to their respective habitations.

A low door admitted Luke and his companions into what had once been the garden, in which some old moss-encrusted apple and walnut-trees were still standing, bearing a look of antiquity almost as venerable as that of the adjoining fabric.

Another open door gave them entrance to a spacious chamber, formerly the eating-room or refectory of the holy brotherhood, and a goodly room it had been, though now its slender lanceolated windows were stuffed with hay to keep out the air. Large holes told where huge oaken rafters had once crossed the roof, and a yawning aperture marked the place where a cheering fire had formerly blazed. As regarded this latter spot, the good old custom was not, even now, totally abrogated. An iron plate, covered with crackling wood, sustained a ponderous black caldron, the rich steam from which gratefully affected the olfactory organs of the highwayman.

"That augurs well," said he, rubbing his hands.

"Still hungering after the fleshpots of Egypt," said the sexton, with a ghastly smile.

"We will see what that kettle contains," said Luke.

"Handassah—Grace!" exclaimed Sybil, calling.

Her summons was answered by two maidens, habited not unbecomingly, in gipsy gear.

"Bring the best our larder can furnish," said Sybil, "and use despatch. You have appetites to provide for, sharpened by a long ride in the open air."

"And by a night's fasting," said Luke, "and solitary confinement to boot."

"And a night of business," added Turpin—"and plaguy perplexing business into the bargain."

"And the night of a funeral too," doled Peter; "and that funeral a father's. Let us have breakfast speedily, by all means. We have rare appetites."

An old oaken table—it might have been the self-same upon which the holy friars had broken their morning fast—stood in the middle of the room. The ample board soon groaned beneath the weight of the savory caldron, the unctuous contents of which proved to be a couple of dismembered pheasants, an equal proportion of poultry, great gouts of ham, mushrooms, onions, and other piquant condiments, so satisfactory to Dick Turpin, that, upon tasting a mouthful, he absolutely shed tears of delight. The dish was indeed the triumph of gipsy cookery; and so sedulously did Dick apply himself to his mess, and so complete was his abstraction, that he perceived not he was left alone. It was only when about to wash down the last drumstick of the last fowl with a can of excellent ale that he made this discovery.

"What! all gone? And Peter Bradley, too? What the devil does this mean?" mused he. "I must not muddle my brain with any more Pharaoh, though I have feasted like a king of Egypt. That will never do. Caution, Dick, caution. Suppose I shift yon brick from the wall, and place this precious document beneath it. Pshaw! Luke would never play me false. And now for Bess! Bless her black skin! she'll wonder where I've been so long. It's not my way to leave her to shift for herself, though she can do that on a pinch."

Soliloquizing thus, he arose and walked towards the door.

The Gipsy by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER III

SYBIL

The wiving vine, that round the friendly elm
Twines her soft limbs, and weaves a leafy mantle
For her supporting lover, dares not venture
To mix her humble boughs with the embraces
Of the more lofty cedar.
Glapthorne: Albertus Wallenstein.

Beneath a moldering wall, whither they had strayed, to be free from interruption, and upon a carpet of the greenest moss, sat Sybil and her lover.

With eager curiosity she listened to his tale. He recounted all that had befallen him since his departure. He told her of the awful revelations of the tomb; of the ring that, like a talisman, had conjured up a thousand brilliant prospects; of his subsequent perils; his escapes; his rencontre with Lady Rookwood; his visit to his father's body; and his meeting with his brother. All this she heard with a cheek now flushed with expectation, now made pale with apprehension; with palpitating bosom, and suppressed breath. But when taking a softer tone, love, affection, happiness inspired the theme, and Luke sought to paint the bliss that should be theirs in his new estate; when he would throw his fortune into her lap, his titles at her feet, and bid her wear them with him; when, with ennobled hand and unchanged heart, he would fulfil the troth plighted in his outcast days; in lieu of tender, grateful acquiescence, the features of Sybil became overcast, the soft smile faded away, and, as spring sunshine is succeeded by the sudden shower, the light that dwelt in her sunny orbs grew dim with tears.

"Why—why is this, dear Sybil?" said Luke, gazing upon her in astonishment, not unmingled with displeasure. "To what am I to attribute these tears? You do not, surely, regret my good fortune?"

"Not on your own account, dear Luke," returned she, sadly. "The tears I shed were for myself—the first, the only tears that I have ever shed for such cause; and," added she, raising her head like a flower surcharged with moisture, "they shall be the last."

"This is inexplicable, dear Sybil. Why should you lament for yourself, if not for me? Does not the sunshine of prosperity that now shines upon me gild you with the same beam?

Did I not even now affirm that the day that saw me enter the hall of my forefathers should dawn upon our espousals?"

"True; but the sun that shines upon you, to me wears a threatening aspect. The day of those espousals will never dawn. You cannot make me the Lady of Rookwood."

"What do I hear?" exclaimed Luke, surprised at this avowal of his mistress, sadly and deliberately delivered. "Not wed you! And wherefore not? Is it the rank I have acquired, or hope to acquire, that displeases you? Speak, that I may waste no further time in thus pursuing the shadows of happiness, while the reality fleets from me."

"And are they shadows; and is this the reality, dear Luke? Question your secret soul, and you will find it otherwise. You could not forego your triumph; it is not likely. You have dwelt too much upon the proud title which will be yours to yield it to another, when it may be won so easily. And, above all, when your mother's reputation, and your own stained name, may be cleared by one word, breathed aloud, would you fail to utter it? No, dear Luke, I read your heart; you would not."

"And if I could not forego this, wherefore is it that you refuse to be a sharer in my triumph? Why will you render my honors valueless when I have acquired them? You love me not."

"Not love you, Luke?"

"Approve it, then."

"I do approve it. Bear witness the sacrifice I am about to make of all my hopes, at the shrine of my idolatry to you. Bear witness the agony of this hour. Bear witness the horror of the avowal, that I never can be yours. As Luke Bradley, I would joyfully—oh, how joyfully!—have been your bride. As Sir Luke Rookwood"—and she shuddered as she pronounced the name—"I never can be so."

"Then, by Heaven! Luke Bradley will I remain. But wherefore—wherefore not as Sir Luke Rookwood?"

"Because," replied Sybil, with reluctance—"because I am no longer your equal. The gipsy's low-born daughter is no mate for Sir Luke Rookwood. Love cannot blind me, dear Luke. It cannot make me other than I am; it cannot exalt me in my own esteem, nor in that of the world, with which you, alas! too soon will mingle, and which will regard even me as—no matter what!—it shall not scorn me as your bride. I will not bring shame and reproach upon you. Oh! if for me, dear Luke, the proud ones of the earth were to

treat you with contumely, this heart would break with agony. For myself, I have pride sufficient—perchance too much. Perchance 'tis pride that actuates me now. I know not. But for you I am all weakness. As you were heretofore, I would have been to you the tenderest and truest wife that ever breathed; as you are now——"

"Hear me, Sybil."

"Hear me out, dear Luke. One other motive there is that determines my present conduct, which, were all else surmounted, would in itself suffice. Ask me not what that is. I cannot explain it. For your own sake; I implore you, be satisfied with my refusal."

"What a destiny is mine!" exclaimed Luke, striking his forehead with his clenched hand. "No choice is left me. Either way I destroy my own happiness. On the one hand stands love—on the other, ambition; yet neither will conjoin."

"Pursue, then, ambition," said Sybil, energetically, "if you can hesitate. Forget that I have ever existed; forget you have ever loved; forget that such a passion dwells within the human heart, and you may still be happy, though you are great."

"And do you deem," replied Luke, with frantic impatience, "that I can accomplish this; that I can forget that I have loved you; that I can forget you? Cost what it will, the effort shall be made. Yet by our former love, I charge you tell me what has wrought this change in you! Why do you now refuse me?"

"I have said you are Sir Luke Rookwood," returned Sybil, with painful emotion. "Does that name import nothing?"

"Imports it aught of ill?"

"To me, everything of ill. It is a fated house. Its line are all predestined."

"To what?" demanded Luke.

"To murder!" replied Sybil, with solemn emphasis. "To the murder of their wives. Forgive me, Luke, if I have dared to utter this. Yourself compelled me to it."

Amazement, horror, wrath, kept Luke silent for a few moments. Starting to his feet, he cried:

"And can you suspect me of a crime so foul? Think you, because I shall assume the name, that I shall put on the nature likewise of my race? Do you believe me capable of aught so horrible?"

"Oh, no, I believe it not. I am sure you would not do it. Your soul would reject with horror such a deed. But if Fate should guide your hand, if the avenging spirit of your murdered ancestress should point to the steel, you could not shun it then."

"In Heaven's name! to what do you allude?"

"To a tradition of your house," replied Sybil. "Listen to me, and you shall hear the legend." And with a pathos that produced a thrilling effect upon Luke, she sang the following ballad:

THE LEGEND OF THE LADY OF ROOKWOOD

Grim Ranulph home hath at midnight come, from the long wars of the Roses,
And the squire, who waits at his ancient gates, a secret dark discloses;
To that varlet's words no response accords his lord, but his visage stern
Grows ghastly white in the wan moonlight, and his eyes like the lean wolf's burn.
To his lady's bower, at that lonesome hour, unannounced, is Sir Ranulph gone;
Through the dim corridor, through the hidden door, he glides—she is all alone!
Full of holy zeal doth his young dame kneel at the meek Madonna's feet,
Her hands are pressed on her gentle breast, and upturned is her aspect sweet.
Beats Ranulph's heart with a joyful start, as he looks on her guiltless face;
And the raging fire of his jealous ire is subdued by the words of grace;
His own name shares her murmured prayers—more freely can he breathe;
But ah! that look! Why doth he pluck his poniard from its sheath?
On a footstool thrown, lies a costly gown of saye and of minevere
—A mantle fair for the dainty wear of a migniard cavalier,—
And on it flung, to a bracelet hung, a picture meets his eye;
"By my father's head!" grim Ranulph said, "false wife, thy end draws nigh."
From off its chain hath the fierce knight ta'en that fond and fatal pledge;
His dark eyes blaze, no word he says, thrice gleams his dagger's edge!
Her blood it drinks, and, as she sinks, his victim hears his cry:
"For kiss impure of paramour, adult'ress, dost thou die!"
Silent he stood, with hands embrued in gore, and glance of flame,
As thus her plaint, in accents faint, made his ill-fated dame:
"Kind Heaven can tell, that all too well, I've loved thee, cruel lord;
But now with hate commensurate, assassin, thou'rt abhorred.
"I've loved thee long, through doubt and wrong; I've loved thee and no other;

And my love was pure for my paramour, for alas! he was my brother!
The Red, Red Rose, on thy banner glows, on his pennon gleams the White,
And the bitter feud, that ye both have rued, forbids ye to unite.
"My bower he sought, what time he thought thy jealous vassals slept,
Of joy we dreamed, and never deemed that watch those vassals kept;
An hour flew by, too speedily!—that picture was his boon:
Ah! little thrift to me that gift: he left me all too soon!
"Wo worth the hour! dark fates did lower, when our hands were first united,
For my heart's firm truth, 'mid tears and ruth, with death hast thou requited:
In prayer sincere, full many a year of my wretched life I've spent;
But to hell's control would I give my soul to work thy chastisement!"
These wild words said, low drooped her head, and Ranulph's life-blood froze,
For the earth did gape, as an awful shape from out its depths arose:
"Thy prayer is heard, Hell hath concurred," cried the fiend, "thy soul is mine!
Like fate may dread each dame shall wed with Ranulph or his line!"
Within the tomb to await her doom is that hapless lady sleeping,
And another bride by Ranulph's side through the livelong night is weeping.
This dame declines—a third repines, and fades, like the rest, away;
Her lot she rues, whom a Rookwood woos—cursed is her Wedding Day!
"And this is the legend of my ancestress?" said Luke, as Sybil's strains were ended.

"It is," replied she.

"An idle tale," observed Luke, moodily.

"Not so," answered Sybil. "Has not the curse of blood clung to all your line? Has it not attached to your father—to Sir Reginald—Sir Ralph—Sir Ranulph—to all? Which of them has escaped it? And when I tell you this, dear Luke; when I find you bear the name of this accursed race, can you wonder if I shudder at adding to the list of the victims of that ruthless spirit, and that I tremble for you? I would die for you willingly—but not by your hand. I would not that my blood, which I would now pour out for you as freely as water, should rise up in judgment against you. For myself I have no tears—for you, a thousand. My mother, upon her death-bed, told me I should never be yours. I believed her not, for I was happy then. She said that we never should be united; or, if united——?"

"What, in Heaven's name?"

"That you would be my destroyer. How could I credit her words then? How can I doubt them now, when I find you are a Rookwood? And think not, dear Luke, that I am ruled by selfish fears in this resolution. To renounce you may cost me my life; but the deed will be my own. You may call me superstitious, credulous: I have been nurtured in

credulity. It is the faith of my fathers. There are those, methinks, who have an insight into futurity; and such boding words have been spoken, that, be they true or false, I will not risk their fulfilment in my person. I may be credulous; I may be weak; I may be erring; but I am steadfast in this. Bid me perish at your feet, and I will do it. I will not be your Fate. I will not be the wretched instrument of your perdition. I will love, worship, watch, serve, perish for you—but I'll not wed you."

Exhausted by the vehemence of her emotion, she would have sunk upon the ground, had not Luke caught her in his arms. Pressing her to his bosom, he renewed his passionate protestations. Every argument was unavailing. Sybil appeared inflexible.

"You love me as you have ever loved me?" said she, at length.

"A thousand-fold more fervently," replied Luke; "put it to the test."

"How if I dare to do so? Consider well: I may ask too much."

"Name it. If it be not to surrender you, by my mother's body I will obey you."

"I would propose an oath."

"Ha!"

"A solemn, binding oath, that; if you wed me not, you will not wed another. Ha! do you start? Have I appalled you?"

"I start? I will take it. Hear me—by——"

"Hold!" exclaimed a voice behind them. "Do not forswear yourself." And immediately afterwards the sexton made his appearance. There was a malignant smile upon his countenance. The lovers started at the ominous interruption.

"Begone!" cried Luke.

"Take not that oath," said Peter, "and I leave you. Remember the counsel I gave you on our way hither."

"What counsel did he give you, Luke?" inquired Sybil, eagerly, of her lover.

"We spoke of you, fond girl," replied Peter. "I cautioned him against the match. I knew not your sentiments, or I had spared myself the trouble. You have judged wisely. Were he to wed you, ill would come of it. But he must wed another."

"Must!" cried Sybil, her eyes absolutely emitting sparkles of indignation from their night-like depths; and, unsheathing as she spoke the short poniard which she wore at her girdle, she rushed towards Peter, raising her hand to strike.

"Must wed another! And dare you counsel this?"

"Put up your dagger, fair maiden," said Peter, calmly. "Had I been younger, your eyes might have had more terrors for me than your weapon; as it is, I am proof against both. You would not strike an old man like myself, and of your lover's kin?"

Sybil's uplifted hand fell to her side.

"'Tis true," continued the sexton, "I dared to give him this advice; and when you have heard me out, you will not, I am persuaded, think me so unreasonable as, at first, I may appear to be. I have been an unseen listener to your converse; not that I desire to pry into your secrets—far from it; I overheard you by accident. I applaud your resolution; but if you are inclined to sacrifice all for your lover's weal, do not let the work be incomplete. Bind him not by oaths which he will regard as spiders' webs, to be burst through at pleasure. You see, as well as I do, that he is bent on being lord of Rookwood; and, in truth, to an aspiring mind, such a desire is natural, is praiseworthy. It will be pleasant, as well as honorable, to efface the stain cast upon his birth. It will be an act of filial duty in him to restore his mother's good name; and I, her father, laud his anxiety on that score; though, to speak truth, fair maid, I am not so rigid as your nice moralists in my view of human nature, and can allow a latitude to love which their nicer scruples will not admit. It will be a proud thing to triumph over his implacable foe; and this he may accomplish——"

"Without marriage," interrupted Sybil, angrily.

"True," returned Peter; "yet not maintain it. May win it, but not wear it. You have said truly, the house of Rookwood is a fated house; and it hath been said likewise, that if he wed not one of his own kindred—that if Rook mate not with Rook, his possessions shall pass away from his hands. Listen to this prophetic quatrain:

When the stray Rook shall perch on the topmost bough,
There shall be clamor and screeching, I trow;
But of right to, and rule of the ancient nest,

The Rook that with Rook mates shall hold him possest.
You hear what these quaint rhymes say. Luke is, doubtless, the stray rook, and a fledgeling hath flown hither from a distant country. He must take her to his mate, or relinquish her and 'the ancient nest' to his brother. For my own part, I disregard such sayings. I have little faith in prophecy and divination. I know not what Eleanor Mowbray, for so she is called, can have to do with the tenure of the estates of Rookwood. But if Luke Rookwood, after he has lorded it for awhile in splendor, be cast forth again in rags and wretchedness, let him not blame his grandsire for his own want of caution."

"Luke, I implore you, tell me," said Sybil, who had listened, horror-stricken, to the sexton, shuddering, as it were, beneath the chilly influence of his malevolent glance, "is this true? Does your fate depend upon Eleanor Mowbray? Who is she? What has she to do with Rookwood? Have you seen her? Do you love her?"

"I have never seen her," replied Luke.

"Thank Heaven for that!" cried Sybil. "Then you love her not?"

"How were that possible?" returned Luke. "Do I not say I have not seen her?"

"Who is she, then?"

"This old man tells me she is my cousin. She is betrothed to my brother Ranulph."

"How?" ejaculated Sybil. "And would you snatch his betrothed from your brother's arms? Would you do him this grievous wrong? Is it not enough that you must wrest from him that which he has long deemed his own? And if he has falsely deemed it so, it will not make his loss the less bitter. If you do thus wrong your brother, do not look for happiness; do not look for respect; for neither will be your portion. Even this stony-hearted old man shrinks aghast at such a deed. His snake-like eyes are buried on the ground. See, I have moved even him."

And in truth Peter did appear, for an instant, strangely moved.

"'Tis nothing," returned he, mastering his emotion by a strong effort. "What is all this to me? I never had a brother. I never had aught—wife, child, or relative, that loved me. And I love not the world, nor the things of the world, nor those that inhabit the world. But I know what sways the world and its inhabitants; and that is, self! and self-interest! Let Luke reflect on this. The key to Rookwood is Eleanor Mowbray. The hand that grasps hers, grasps those lands; thus saith the prophecy."

"It is a lying prophecy."

"It was uttered by one of your race."

"By whom?"

"By Barbara Lovel," said Peter, with a sneer of triumph.

"Ha!"

"Heed him not," exclaimed Luke, as Sybil recoiled at this intelligence. "I am yours."

"Not mine! not mine!" shrieked she; "but, oh! not hers!"

"Whither go you?" cried Luke, as Sybil, half bewildered, tore herself from him.

"To Barbara Lovel."

"I will go with you."

"No! let me go alone. I have much to ask her; yet tarry not with this old man, dear Luke, or close your ears to his crafty talk. Avoid him. Oh, I am sick at heart. Follow me not; I implore you, follow me not."

And with distracted air she darted amongst the mouldering cloisters, leaving Luke stupefied with anguish and surprise. The sexton maintained a stern and stoical composure.

"She is a woman, after all," muttered he; "all her high-flown resolves melt like snow in the sunshine at the thought of a rival. I congratulate you, grandson Luke; you are free from your fetters."

"Free!" echoed Luke. "Quit my sight; I loathe to look upon you. You have broken the truest heart that ever beat in woman's bosom."

"Tut, tut," returned Peter; "it is not broken yet. Wait till we hear what old Barbara has got to say; and, meanwhile, we must arrange with Dick Turpin the price of that certificate. The knave knows its value well. Come, be a man. This is worse than womanish."

And at length he succeeded, half by force and half by persuasion, in dragging Luke away with him.

The Gipsy by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER IV

BARBARA LOVEL

Los Gitanos son encantadores, adivinos, magos, chyromanticos, que dicen por las rayas de las manos lo Futuro, que ellos llaman Buenaventura, y generalmente son dados à toda supersticion.

Doctor Sancho de Moncada.
Discurso sobre Espulsion de los Gitanos.

Like a dove escaped from the talons of the falcon, Sybil fled from the clutches of the sexton. Her brain was in a whirl, her blood on fire. She had no distinct perception of external objects; no definite notion of what she herself was about to do, and glided more like a flitting spirit than a living woman along the ruined ambulatory. Her hair had fallen in disorder over her face. She stayed not to adjust it, but tossed aside the blinding locks with frantic impatience. She felt as one may feel who tries to strain his nerves, shattered by illness, to the endurance of some dreadful, yet necessary pain.

Sybil loved her granddame, old Barbara; but it was with a love tempered by fear. Barbara was not a person to inspire esteem or to claim affection. She was regarded by the wild tribe which she ruled as their queen-elect, with some such feeling of inexplicable awe as is entertained by the African slave for the Obeah woman. They acknowledged her power, unhesitatingly obeyed her commands, and shrank with terror from her anathema, which was indeed seldom pronounced; but when uttered, was considered as doom. Her tribe she looked upon as her flock, and stretched her maternal hand over all, ready alike to cherish or chastise; and having already survived a generation, that which succeeded, having from infancy imbibed a superstitious veneration for the "cunning woman," as she was called, the sentiment could never be wholly effaced. Winding her way, she knew not how, through roofless halls, over disjointed fragments of fallen pillars, Sybil reached a flight of steps. A door, studded with iron nails, stayed her progress; it was an old, strong oaken frame, surmounted by a Gothic arch, in the keystone of which leered one of those grotesque demoniacal faces with which the fathers of the church delighted to adorn their shrines. Sybil looked up—her glance encountered the fantastical visage. It recalled the features of the sexton, and seemed to mock her—to revile her. Her fortitude at once deserted her. Her fingers were upon the handle of the door. She hesitated: she even drew back, with the intention of departing, for she felt then that she dared not face Barbara. It was too late—she had

moved the handle. A deep voice from within called to her by name. She dared not disobey that call—she entered.

The room in which Sybil found herself was the only entire apartment now existing in the priory. It had survived the ravages of time; it had escaped the devastation of man, whose ravages outstrip those of time. Octagonal, lofty, yet narrow, you saw at once that it formed the interior of a turret. It was lighted by a small oriel window, commanding a lovely view of the scenery around, and paneled with oak, richly wrought in ribs and groins; and from overhead depended a molded ceiling of honeycomb plaster-work. This room had something, even now, in the days of its desecration, of monastic beauty about it. Where the odor of sanctity had breathed forth, the fumes of idolatry prevailed; but imagination, ever on the wing, flew back to that period—and a tradition to that effect warranted the supposition—when, perchance, it had been the sanctuary and the privacy of the prior's self.

Wrapped in a cloak composed of the skins of various animals, upon a low pallet, covered with stained scarlet cloth, sat Barbara. Around her head was coiffed, in folds like those of an Asiatic turban, a rich, though faded shawl, and her waist was encircled with the magic zodiacal zone—proper to the sorceress—the Mago Cineo of the Cingara—whence the name Zingaro, according to Moncada—which Barbara had brought from Spain. From her ears depended long golden drops, of curious antique fashioning; and upon her withered fingers, which looked like a coil of lizards, were hooped a multitude of silver rings, of the purest and simplest manufacture. They seemed almost of massive unwrought metal. Her skin was yellow as the body of a toad; corrugated as its back. She might have been steeped in saffron from her finger tips, the nails of which were of the same hue, to such portions of her neck as were visible, and which was puckered up like the throat of a turtle. To look at her, one might have thought the embalmer had experimented her art upon herself. So dead, so bloodless, so blackened seemed the flesh, where flesh remained, leather could scarce be tougher than her skin. She seemed like an animated mummy. A frame so tanned, appeared calculated to endure for ages; and, perhaps, might have done so. But, alas! the soul cannot be embalmed. No oil can re-illumine that precious lamp! And that Barbara's vital spark was fast waning, was evident from her heavy, blood-shot eyes, once of a swimming black, and lengthy as a witch's, which were now sinister and sunken.

The atmosphere of the room was as strongly impregnated as a museum with volatile odors, emitted from the stores of drugs with which the shelves were loaded, as well as from various stuffed specimens of birds and wild animals. Barbara's only living companion was a monstrous owl, which, perched over the old gipsy's head, hissed a token of recognition as Sybil advanced. From a hook, placed in the plaster roof, was suspended a globe of crystal glass, about the size and shape of a large gourd, filled with a

pure pellucid liquid, in which a small snake, the Egyptian aspic, described perpetual gyrations.

Dim were the eyes of Barbara, yet not altogether sightless. The troubled demeanor of her grandchild struck her as she entered. She felt the hot drops upon her hand as Sybil stooped to kiss it; she heard her vainly-stifled sobs.

"What ails you, child?" said Barbara, in a voice that rattled in her throat, and hollow as the articulation of a phantom. "Have you heard tidings of Luke Bradley? Has any ill befallen him? I said you would either hear of him or see him this morning. He is not returned, I see. What have you heard?"

"He is returned," replied Sybil, faintly; "and no ill hath happened to him."

"He is returned, and you are here," echoed Barbara. "No ill hath happened to him, thou sayest—am I to understand there is—to you?"

Sybil answered not. She could not answer.

"I see, I see," said Barbara, more gently, her head and hand shaking with paralytic affection: "a quarrel, a lover's quarrel. Old as I am, I have not forgotten my feelings as a girl. What woman ever does, if she be woman? and you, like your poor mother, are a true-hearted wench. She loved her husband, as a husband should be loved, Sybil; and though she loved me well, she loved him better, as was right. Ah! it was a bitter day when she left me for Spain; for though, to one of our wandering race, all countries are alike, yet the soil of our birth is dear to us, and the presence of our kindred dearer. Well, well, I will not think of that. She is gone. Nay, take it not so to heart, wench. Luke has a hasty temper. 'Tis not the first time I have told you so. He will not bear rebuke, and you have questioned him too shrewdly touching his absence. Is it not so? Heed it not. Trust me, you will have him seek your forgiveness ere the shadows shorten 'neath the noontide sun."

"Alas! alas!" said Sybil, sadly, "this is no lover's quarrel, which may, at once, be forgotten and forgiven—would it were so!"

"What is it, then?" asked Barbara; and without waiting Sybil's answer, she continued, with vehemence, "has he wronged you? Tell me, girl, in what way? Speak, that I may avenge you, if your wrong requires revenge. Are you blood of mine, and think I will not do this for you, girl? None of the blood of Barbara Lovel were ever unrevenged. When Richard Cooper stabbed my first-born, Francis, he fled to Flanders to escape my wrath. But he did not escape it. I pursued him thither. I hunted him out; drove him back to his

own country, and brought him to the gallows. It took a power of gold. What matter? Revenge is dearer than gold. And as it was with Richard Cooper, so it shall be with Luke Bradley. I will catch him, though he run. I will trip him, though he leap. I will reach him, though he flee afar. I will drag him hither by the hair of his head," added she, with a livid smile, and clutching at the air with her hands, as if in the act of pulling some one towards her. "He shall wed you within the hour, if you will have it, or if your honor need that it should be so. My power is not departed from me. My people are yet at my command. I am still their queen, and woe to him that offendeth me!"

"Mother! mother!" cried Sybil, affrighted at the storm she had unwittingly aroused, "he has not injured me. 'Tis I alone who am to blame, not Luke."

"You speak in mysteries," said Barbara.

"Sir Piers Rookwood is dead."

"Dead!" echoed Barbara, letting fall her hazel rod. "Sir Piers dead!"

"And Luke Bradley——"

"Ha!"

"Is his successor."

"Who told you that?" asked Barbara, with increased astonishment.

"Luke himself. All is disclosed." And Sybil hastily recounted Luke's adventures. "He is now Sir Luke Rookwood."

"This is news, in truth," said Barbara; "yet not news to weep for. You should rejoice, not lament. Well, well, I foresaw it. I shall live to see all accomplished; to see my Agatha's child ennobled; to see her wedded; ay, to see her well wedded."

"Dearest mother!"

"I can endow you, and I will do it. You shall bring your husband not alone beauty, you shall bring him wealth."

"But, mother——"

"My Agatha's daughter shall be Lady Rookwood."

"Never! It cannot be."

"What cannot be?"

"The match you now propose."

"What mean you, silly wench? Ha! I perceive the meaning of those tears. The truth flashes upon me. He has discarded you."

"No, by the Heaven of Heavens, he is still the same—unaltered in affection."

"If so, your tears are out of place."

"Mother, it is not fitting that I, a gipsy born, should wed with him."

"Not fitting! Ha! and you my child! Not fitting! Get up, or I will spurn you. Not fitting! This from you to me! I tell you it is fitting; you shall have a dower as ample as that of any lady in the land. Not fitting! Do you say so, because you think that he derives himself from a proud and ancient line—ancient and proud—ha, ha! I tell you, girl, that for his one ancestor I can number twenty; for the years in which his lineage hath flourished, my race can boast centuries, and was a people—a kingdom!—ere the land in which he dwells was known. What! if, by the curse of Heaven, we were driven forth, the curse of hell rests upon his house."

"I know it," said Sybil; "a dreadful curse, which, if I wed him, will alight on me."

"No; not on you; you shall avoid that curse. I know a means to satisfy the avenger. Leave that to me."

"I dare not, as it never can be; yet, tell me—you saw the body of Luke's ill-fated mother. Was she poisoned? Nay, you may speak. Sir Piers's death releases you from your oath. How died she?"

"By strangulation," said the old gipsy, raising her palsied hand to her throat.

"Oh!" cried Sybil, gasping with horror. "Was there a ring upon her finger when you embalmed the body?"

"A ring—a wedding-ring! The finger was crookened. Listen, girl, I could have told Luke the secret of his birth long ago, but the oath imposed by Sir Piers sealed fast my lips. His

mother was wedded to Sir Piers; his mother was murdered by Sir Piers. Luke was entrusted to my care by his father. I have brought him up with you. I have affianced you together; and I shall live to see you united. He is now Sir Luke. He is your husband."

"Do not deceive yourself, mother," said Sybil, with a fearful earnestness. "He is not yet Sir Luke Rookwood; would he had no claim to be so! The fortune that has hitherto been so propitious may yet desert him. Bethink you of a prophecy you uttered."

"A prophecy? Ha!"

And with slow enunciation Sybil pronounced the mystic words which she had heard repeated by the sexton.

As she spoke, a gloom, like that of a thunder-cloud, began to gather over the brow of the old gipsy. The orbs of her sunken eyes expanded, and wrath supplied her frame with vigor. She arose.

"Who told you that?" cried Barbara.

"Luke's grandsire, Peter Bradley."

"How learnt he it?" said Barbara. "It was to one who hath long been in his grave I told it; so long ago, it had passed from my memory. 'Tis strange! old Sir Reginald had a brother, I know. But there is no other of the house."

"There is a cousin, Eleanor Mowbray."

"Ha! I see; a daughter of that Eleanor Rookwood who fled from her father's roof. Fool, fool. Am I caught in my own toils? Those words were words of truth and power, and compel the future and 'the will be' as with chains of brass. They must be fulfilled, yet not by Ranulph. He shall never wed Eleanor."

"Whom then shall she wed?"

"His elder brother."

"Mother!" shrieked Sybil. "Do you say so? Oh! recall your words."

"I may not; it is spoken. Luke shall wed her."

"Oh God, support me!" exclaimed Sybil.

"Silly wench, be firm. It must be as I say. He shall wed her—yet shall he wed her not. The nuptial torch shall be quenched as soon as lighted; the curse of the avenger shall fall—yet not on thee."

"Mother," said Sybil, "if sin must fall upon some innocent head, let it be on mine—not upon hers. I love him, I would gladly die for him. She is young—unoffending—perhaps happy. Oh! do not let her perish."

"Peace, I say!" cried Barbara, "and mark me. This is your birthday. Eighteen summers have flown over your young head—eighty winters have sown their snows on mine. You have yet to learn. Years have brought wrinkles—they have brought wisdom likewise. To struggle with Fate, I tell you, is to wrestle with Omnipotence. We may foresee, but not avert our destiny. What will be, shall be. This is your eighteenth birthday, Sybil: it is a day of fate to you; in it occurs your planetary hour—an hour of good or ill, according to your actions. I have cast your horoscope. I have watched your natal star; it is under the baleful influence of Scorpion, and fiery Saturn sheds his lurid glance upon it. Let me see your hand. The line of life is drawn out distinct and clear—it runs—ha! what means that intersection? Beware—beware, my Sybil. Act as I tell you, and you are safe. I will make another trial, by the crystal bowl. Attend."

Muttering some strange words, sounding like a spell, Barbara, with the bifurcate hazel staff which she used as a divining-rod, described a circle upon the floor. Within this circle she drew other lines, from angle to angle, forming seven triangles, the bases of which constituted the sides of a septilateral figure. This figure she studied intently for a few moments. She then raised her wand and touched the owl with it. The bird unfolded its wings, and arose in flight; then slowly circled round the pendulous globe. Each time it drew nearer, until at length it touched the glassy bowl with its flapping pinions.

"Enough!" ejaculated Barbara. And at another motion from her rod the bird stayed its flight and returned to its perch.

Barbara arose. She struck the globe with her staff. The pure lymph became instantly tinged with crimson, as if blood had been commingled with it. The little serpent could be seen within, coiled up and knotted, as in the struggles of death.

"Again I say, beware!" ejaculated Barbara, solemnly. "This is ominous of ill."

Sybil had sunk, from faintness, on the pallet. A knock was heard at the door.

"Who is without?" cried Barbara.

"'Tis I, Balthazar," replied a voice.

"Thou mayest enter," answered Barbara; and an old man with a long beard, white as snow, reaching to his girdle, and a costume which might be said to resemble the raiment of a Jewish high priest, made his appearance. This venerable personage was no other than the patrico, or hierophant of the Canting Crew.

"I come to tell you that there are strangers—ladies—within the priory," said the patrico, gravely. "I have searched for you in vain," continued he, addressing Sybil; "the younger of them seems to need your assistance."

"Whence come they?" exclaimed Barbara.

"They have ridden, I understand, from Rookwood," answered the patrico. "They were on their way to Davenham, when they were prevented."

"From Rookwood?" echoed Sybil. "Their names—did you hear their names?"

"Mowbray is the name of both; they are a mother and a daughter; the younger is called—"

"Eleanor?" asked Sybil, with an acute foreboding of calamity.

"Eleanor is the name, assuredly," replied the patrico, somewhat surprised. "I heard the elder, whom I guess to be her mother, so address her."

"Gracious God! She here!" exclaimed Sybil.

"Here! Eleanor Mowbray here," cried Barbara; "within my power. Not a moment is to be lost. Balthazar, hasten round the tents—not a man must leave his place—above all, Luke Bradley. See that these Mowbrays are detained within the abbey. Let the bell be sounded. Quick, quick; leave this wench to me; she is not well. I have much to do. Away with thee, man, and let me know when thou hast done it." And as Balthazar departed on his mission, with a glance of triumph in her eyes, Barbara exclaimed, "Soh, no sooner hath the thought possessed me, than the means of accomplishment appear. It shall be done at once. I will tie the knot. I will untie, and then retie it. This weak wench must be nerved to the task," added she, regarding the senseless form of Sybil. "Here is that will stimulate her," opening the cupboard, and taking a small phial; "this will fortify her; and this," continued she, with a ghastly smile, laying her hand upon another vessel, "this

shall remove her rival when all is fulfilled; this liquid shall constrain her lover to be her titled, landed husband. Ha, ha!"

The Gipsy by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER V

THE INAUGURATION

Beggar. Concert, sir! we have musicians, too, among us. True, merry beggars, indeed, that, being within the reach of the lash for singing libellous songs at London, were fain to fly into one cover, and here they sing all our poets' ditties. They can sing anything, most tunably, sir, but psalms. What they may do hereafter, under a triple tree, is much expected; but they live very civilly and genteelly among us.

Spring. But what is here—that solemn old fellow, that neither speaks of himself, or any for him?

Beggar. O, sir, the rarest man of all: he is a prophet. See how he holds up his prognosticating nose. He is divining now.

Spring. How, a prophet?

Beggar. Yes, sir; a cunning man, and a fortune-teller; a very ancient stroller all the world over, and has travelled with gipsies: and is a patrico.

The Merry Beggars.

In consequence of some few words which the sexton let fall in the presence of the attendants, during breakfast, more perhaps by design than accident, it was speedily rumored throughout the camp that the redoubted Richard Turpin was for the time its inmate. This intelligence produced some such sensation as is experienced by the inhabitants of a petty town on the sudden arrival of a prince of the blood, a commander-in-chief, or other illustrious and distinguished personage, whose fame has been vaunted abroad amongst his fellowmen by Rumor, "and her thousand tongues;" and who, like our highwayman, has rendered himself sufficiently notorious to be an object of admiration and emulation amongst his contemporaries.

All started up at the news. The upright man, the chief of the crew, arose from his chair, donned his gown of state, a very ancient brocade dressing-gown, filched, most probably, from the wardrobe of some strolling player, grasped his baton of office, a stout oaken truncheon, and sallied forth. The ruffler, who found his representative in a very magnificently equipped, and by no means ill-favored knave, whose chin was decorated

with a beard as lengthy and as black as Sultan Mahmoud's, together with the dexterous hooker, issued forth from the hovel which they termed their boozing ken, eager to catch a glimpse of the prince of the high-tobygloaks. The limping palliard tore the bandages from his mock wounds, shouldered his crutch, and trudged hastily after them. The whip-jack unbuckled his strap, threw away his timber leg, and "leapt exulting, like the bounding roe." "With such a sail in sight," he said, "he must heave to, like the rest." The dummerar, whose tongue had been cut out by the Algerines, suddenly found the use of it, and made the welkin ring with his shouts. Wonderful were the miracles Dick's advent wrought. The lame became suddenly active, the blind saw, the dumb spoke; nay, if truth must be told, absolutely gave utterance to "most vernacular execrations." Morts, autem morts, walking morts, dells, doxies, kinching morts, and their coes, with all the shades and grades of the Canting Crew, were assembled. There were, to use the words of Brome—

——Stark, errant, downright beggars. Ay,
Without equivocation, statute beggars,
Couchant and passant, guardant, rampant beggars;
Current and vagrant, stockant, whippant beggars!

Each sunburnt varlet started from his shed; each dusky dame, with her brown, half-naked urchins, followed at his heels; each "ripe young maiden, with the glossy eye," lingered but to sleek her raven tresses, and to arrange her straw bonnet, and then overtook the others; each wrinkled beldame hobbled as quickly after as her stiffened joints would permit; while the ancient patrico, the priest of the crew—who joined the couples together by the hedge-side, "with the nice custom of dead horse between"—brought up the rear; all bent on one grand object, that of having a peep at the "foremost man of all this prigging world!"

Dick Turpin, at the period of which we treat, was in the zenith of his reputation. His deeds were full blown; his exploits were in every man's mouth; and a heavy price was set upon his head. That he should show himself thus openly, where he might be so easily betrayed, excited no little surprise among the craftiest of the crew, and augured an excess of temerity on his part. Rash daring was the main feature of Turpin's character. Like our great Nelson, he knew fear only by name; and when he thus trusted himself in the hands of strangers, confident in himself and in his own resources, he felt perfectly easy as to the result. He relied also in the continuance of his good fortune, which had as yet never deserted him. Possessed of the belief that his hour was not yet come, he cared little or nothing for any risk he might incur; and though he might, undoubtedly, have some presentiment of the probable termination of his career, he never suffered it to militate against his present enjoyment, which proved that he was no despicable philosopher.

Turpin was the ultimus Romanorum, the last of a race, which—we were almost about to say we regret—is now altogether extinct. Several successors he had, it is true, but no name worthy to be recorded after his own. With him expired the chivalrous spirit which animated successively the bosoms of so many knights of the road; with him died away that passionate love of enterprise, that high spirit of devotion to the fair sex, which was first breathed upon the highway by the gay, gallant Claude Du-Val, the Bayard of the road—Le filou sans peur et sans reproche—but which was extinguished at last by the cord that tied the heroic Turpin to the remorseless tree. It were a subject well worthy of inquiry, to trace this decline and fall of the empire of the tobymen to its remoter causes; to ascertain the why and the wherefore, that with so many half-pay captains; so many poor curates; so many lieutenants, of both services, without hopes of promotion; so many penny-a-liners, and fashionable novelists; so many damned dramatists, and damning critics; so many Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviewers; so many detrimental brothers, and younger sons; when there are horses to be hired, pistols to be borrowed, purses to be taken, and mails are as plentiful as partridges—it were worth serious investigation, we repeat, to ascertain why, with the best material imaginable for a new race of highwaymen, we have none, not even an amateur. Why do not some of these choice spirits quit the salons of Pall-Mall, and take to the road? the air of the heath is more bracing and wholesome, we should conceive, than that of any "hell" whatever, and the chances of success incomparably greater. We throw out this hint, without a doubt of seeing it followed up. Probably the solution of our inquiry may be, that the supply is greater than the demand; that, in the present state of things, embryo highwaymen may be more abundant than purses; and then, have we not the horse-patrol? With such an admirably-organized system of conservation, it is vain to anticipate a change. The highwaymen, we fear, like their Irish brothers, the Rapparees, went out with the Tories. They were averse to reform, and eschewed emancipation.

Lest any one should think we have overrated the pleasures of the highwayman's existence, they shall hear what "the right villainous" Jack Hall, a celebrated tobyman of his day, has got to say on the subject. "His life—the highwayman's—has, generally, the most mirth and the least care in it of any man's breathing, and all he deals for is clear profit: he has that point of good conscience, that he always sells as he buys, a good pennyworth, which is something rare, since he trades with so small a stock. The fence and he are like the devil and the doctor, they live by one another; and, like traitors, 'tis best to keep each other's counsel. He has this point of honesty, that he never robs the house he frequents"—Turpin had the same scruples respecting the Hall of Rookwood in Sir Piers's lifetime—; "and perhaps pays his debts better than some others, for he holds it below the dignity of his employment to commit so ungenteel a crime as insolvency, and loves to pay nobly. He has another quality, not much amiss, that he takes no more than he has occasion for"—Jack, we think, was a little mistaken here—; "which he verifies this way: he craves no more while that lasts. He is a less nuisance in a

commonwealth than a miser, because the money he engrosses all circulates again, which the other hoards as though 'twere only to be found again at the day of judgment. He is the tithe-pig of his family, which the gallows, instead of the parson, claims as its due. He has reason enough to be bold in his undertakings, for, though all the world threaten him, he stands in fear of but one man in it, and that's the hangman; and with him, too, he is generally in fee: however, I cannot affirm he is so valiant that he dares look any man in the face, for in that point he is now and then, a little modest. Newgate may be said to be his country-house, where he frequently lives so many months in the year; and he is not so much concerned to be carried thither for a small matter, if 'twere only for the benefit of renewing his acquaintance there. He holds a petit larceny as light as a nun does auricular confession, though the priest has a more compassionate character than the hangman. Every man in this community is esteemed according to his particular quality, of which there are several degrees, though it is contrary often to public government; for here a man shall be valued purely for his merit, and rise by it too, though it be but to a halter, in which there is a great deal of glory in dying like a hero, and making a decent figure in the cart to the last two staves of the fifty-first psalm."

This, we repeat, is the plain statement of a practical man, and again we throw out the hint for adoption. All we regret is, that we are now degenerated from the grand tobyman to the cracksman and the sneak, about whom there are no redeeming features. How much lower the next generation of thieves will dive it boots not to conjecture:

Ætas parentum pejor avis tulit,
Nos nequiores; mox daturos,
Progeniem vitiosiorem.

"Cervantes laughed Spain's chivalry away," sang Byron; and if Gay did not extinguish the failing flame of our night errantry—unlike the "Robbers" of Schiller, which is said to have inflamed the Saxon youth with an irrepressible mania for brigandage—, the "Beggar's Opera" helped not to fan the dying fire. That laugh was fatal, as laughs generally are. Macheath gave the highwayman his coup de grâce.

The last of this race—for we must persist in maintaining that he was the last—, Turpin, like the setting sun, threw up some parting rays of glory, and tinged the far highways with a luster that may yet be traced like a cloud of dust raised by his horse's retreating heels. Unequalled in the command of his steed, the most singular feat that the whole race of the annals of horsemanship has to record, and of which we may have more to say hereafter, was achieved by him. So perfect was his jockeyship, so clever his management of the animal he mounted, so intimately acquainted was he with every cross-road in the neighborhood of the metropolis—a book of which he constructed, and carried constantly about his person—, as well as with many other parts of England, particularly the counties of Chester, York, and Lancaster, that he outstripped every pursuer, and baffled

all attempts at capture. His reckless daring, his restless rapidity—for so suddenly did he change his ground, and renew his attacks in other quarters, that he seemed to be endowed with ubiquity,—his bravery, his resolution, and, above all, his generosity, won for him a high reputation amongst his compatriots, and even elicited applauses from those upon whom he levied his contributions.

Beyond dispute, he ruled as master of the road. His hands were, as yet, unstained with blood; he was ever prompt to check the disposition to outrage, and to prevent, as much as lay in his power, the commission of violence by his associates. Of late, since he had possessed himself of his favorite mare, Black Bess, his robberies had been perpetrated with a suddenness of succession, and at distances so apparently impracticable, that the idea of all having been executed by one man, was rejected as an impossibility; and the only way of reconciling the description of the horse and rider, which tallied in each instance, was the supposition that these attacks were performed by confederates similarly mounted and similarly accoutred.

There was, in all this, as much of the "famæ sacra fames" as of the "auri;" of the hungering after distinction, as well as of the appetite of gain. Enamored of his vocation, Turpin delighted to hear himself designated as the Flying Highwayman; and it was with rapturous triumph that he found his single-handed feats attributed to a band of marauders. But this state of things could not long endure; his secret was blown; the vigilance of the police was aroused; he was tracked to his haunts; and, after a number of hairbreadth 'scapes, which he only effected by miracle, or by the aid of his wonder-working mare, he reluctantly quitted the heathy hills of Bagshot, the Pampas plains of Hounslow—over which like an archetype of the galloping Sir Francis Head, he had so often scoured,—the gorsy commons of Highgate, Hampstead, and Finchley, the marshy fields of Battersea, almost all of which he had been known to visit in a single night, and leaving these beaten tracks to the occupation of younger and less practised hands, he bequeathed to them, at the same time, his own reversionary interest in the gibbets thereupon erected, and betook himself to the country.

After a journey of more or less success, our adventurer found himself at Rookwood, whither he had been invited after a grand field-day by its hospitable and by no means inquisitive owner. Breach of faith and good fellowship formed no part of Turpin's character; he had his lights as well as his shades; and as long as Sir Piers lived, his purse and coffers would have been free from molestation, except, "so far," Dick said, "as a cog or two of dice went. My dice, you know, are longs for odd and even, a bale of bar'd cinque deuces," a pattern of which he always carried with him; beyond this, excepting a take-in at a steeple chase, Rookwood church being the mark, a "do" at a leap, or some such trifle, to which the most scrupulous could not raise an objection, Dick was all fair and above-board. But when poor Sir Piers had "put on his wooden surtout," to use

Dick's own expressive metaphor, his conscientious scruples evaporated into thin air. Lady Rookwood was nothing to him; there was excellent booty to be appropriated—

The wise convey it call.

He began to look about for hands; and having accidentally encountered his old comrades, Rust and Wilder, they were let into the business, which was imperfectly accomplished in the manner heretofore described.

To return from this digression. When Turpin presented himself at the threshold of the door, on his way to inquire after his mare, to his astonishment he found it closely invested. A cheering shout from the tawny throng, succeeded by a general clapping of hands, and attended by a buzzing susurration of applause, such as welcomes the entrance of a popular actor upon the stage, greeted the appearance of the highwayman. At the first sight of the crowd he was a little startled, and involuntarily sought for his pistols. But the demonstrations of admiration were too unequivocal to be for a moment mistaken; his hand was drawn from his pocket to raise his hat from his brow.

Thunders of applause.

Turpin's external man, we have before said, was singularly prepossessing. It was especially so in the eyes of the sex—fair we certainly cannot say upon the present occasion—, amongst whom not a single dissentient voice was to be heard. All concurred in thinking him a fine fellow; could plainly read his high courage in his bearing; his good breeding in his débonnaire deportment; and his manly beauty in his extravagant red whiskers. Dick saw the effect that he produced. He was at home in a moment. Your true highwayman has ever a passion for effect. This does not desert him at the gallows; it rises superior to death itself, and has been known to influence the manner of his dangling from the gibbet! To hear some one cry, "There goes a proper handsome man," saith our previously quoted authority, Jack Hall, "somewhat ameliorates the terrible thoughts of the meagre tyrant death; and to go in a dirty shirt were enough to save the hangman a labor, and make a man die with grief and shame at being in that deplorable condition." With a gracious smile of condescension, like a popular orator—with a look of blarney like that of O'Connell, and of assurance like that of Hume—he surveyed the male portion of the spectators, tipped a knowing wink at the prettiest brunettes he could select, and finally cut a sort of fling with his well-booted legs, that brought down another appeal of rapturous applause.

"A rank scamp!" cried the upright man; and this exclamation, however equivocal it may sound, was intended, on his part, to be highly complimentary.

"I believe ye," returned the ruffler, stroking his chin—"one may see that he's no half swell by the care with which he cultivates the best gifts of nature, his whiskers. He's a rank nib."

"Togged out to the ruffian, no doubt," said the palliard, who was incomparably the shabbiest rascal in the corps. "Though a needy mizzler mysel, I likes to see a cove vot's vel dressed. Jist twig his swell kickseys and pipes; if they ain't the thing, I'm done. Lame Harry can't dance better nor he—no, nor Jerry Juniper neither."

"I'm dumb founded," roared the dummerar, "if he can't patter romany as vel as the best on us! He looks like a rum 'un."

"And a rum 'un he be, take my word for it," returned the whip-jack, or sham sailor. "Look at his rigging—see how he flashes his sticks—those are the tools to rake a three-decker. He's as clever a craft as I've seen this many a day, or I'm no judge."

The women were equally enchanted—equally eloquent in the expression of their admiration.

"What ogles!" cried a mort.

"What pins!" said an autem mort, or married woman.

"Sharp as needles," said a dark-eyed dell, who had encountered one of the free and frolicsome glances which our highwayman distributed so liberally among the petticoats.

It was at this crisis Dick took off his hat. Cæsar betrayed his baldness.

"A thousand pities!" cried the men, compassionating his thinly covered skull, and twisting their own ringlets, glossy and luxuriant, though unconscious of Macassar. "A thousand pities that so fine a fellow should have a sconce like a cocoanut!"

"But then his red whiskers," rejoined the women, tired of the uniformity of thick black heads of hair; "what a warmth of coloring they impart to his face; and then only look how beautifully bushy they make his cheeks appear!"

La Fosseuse and the court of the Queen of Navarre were not more smitten with the Sieur de Croix's jolly pair of whiskers.

The hawk's eye of Turpin ranged over the whole assemblage. Amidst that throng of dark faces there was not one familiar to him.

Before him stood the upright man, Zoroaster—so was he called—, a sturdy, stalwart rogue, whose superior strength and stature—as has not unfrequently been the case in the infancy of governments that have risen to more importance than is likely to be the case with that of Lesser Egypt—had been the means of his elevation to his present dignified position. Zoroaster literally fought his way upwards, and had at first to maintain his situation by the strong arm; but he now was enabled to repose upon his hard-won laurels, to smoke "the calumet of peace," and quaff his tipple with impunity. For one of gipsy blood, he presented an unusually jovial, liquor-loving countenance: his eye was mirthful; his lip moist, as if from oft potations; his cheek mellow as an Orleans plum, which fruit, in color and texture, it mightily resembled. Strange to say, also, for one of that lithe race, his person was heavy and hebetudinous; the consequence, no doubt, of habitual intemperance. Like Cribb, he waxed obese upon the championship. There was a kind of mock state in his carriage, as he placed himself before Turpin, and with his left hand twisted up the tail of his dressing-gown, while the right thrust his truncheon into his hip, which was infinitely diverting to the highwayman.

Turpin's attention, however, was chiefly directed towards his neighbor, the ruffler, in whom he recognized a famous impostor of the day, with whose history he was sufficiently well acquainted to be able at once to identify the individual. We have before stated, that a magnificent coal-black beard decorated the chin of this worthy; but this was not all—his costume was in perfect keeping with his beard, and consisted of a very theatrical-looking tunic, upon the breast of which was embroidered, in golden wire, the Maltese cross; while over his shoulders were thrown the folds of an ample cloak of Tyrian hue. To his side was girt a long and doughty sword, which he termed, in his knightly phrase, Excalibur; and upon his profuse hair rested a hat as broad in the brim as a Spanish sombrero.

Exaggerated as this description may appear, we can assure our readers that it is not overdrawn; and that a counterpart of the sketch we have given of the ruffler certainly "strutted his hour" upon the stage of human life, and that the very ancient and discriminating city of Canterbury—to which be all honor—was his theatre of action. His history is so far curious, that it exemplifies, more strongly than a thousand discourses could do, how prone we are to be governed by appearances, and how easily we may be made the dupes of a plausible impostor. Be it remembered, however, that we treat of the eighteenth century, before the march of intellect had commenced; we are much too knowing to be similarly practised upon in these enlightened times. But we will let the knight of Malta, for such was the title assumed by the ruffler, tell his own story in his own way hereafter; contenting ourselves with the moral precepts we have already deduced from it.

Next to the knight of Malta stood the whip-jack, habited in his sailor gear—striped shirt and dirty canvas trousers; and adjoining him was the palliard, a loathsome tatterdemalion, his dress one heap of rags, and his discolored skin one mass of artificial leprosy and imposthumes.

As Turpin's eye shifted from one to another of these figures, he chanced upon an individual who had been long endeavoring to arrest his attention. This personage was completely in the background. All that Dick could discern of him was a brown curly head of hair, carelessly arranged in the modern mode; a handsome, impudent, sun-freckled face, with one eye closed, and the other occupied by a broken bottle-neck, through which, as a substitute for a lorgnette, the individual reconnoitered him. A cocked hat was placed in a very dégagée manner under his arm, and he held an ebony cane in his hand, very much in the style of a "fassionable," as the French have it, of the present day. This glimpse was sufficient to satisfy Turpin. He recognized in this whimsical personage an acquaintance.

Jerry Juniper was what the classical Captain Grose would designate a "gentleman with three outs," and, although he was not entirely without wit, nor, his associates avouched, without money, nor, certainly, in his own opinion, had that been asked, without manners; yet was he assuredly without shoes, without stockings, without shirt. This latter deficiency was made up by a voluminous cravat, tied with proportionately large bows. A jaunty pair of yellow breeches, somewhat faded; a waistcoat of silver brocade, richly embroidered, somewhat tarnished and lack-lustre; a murrey-colored velvet coat, somewhat chafed, completed the costume of this beggar Brummell, this mendicant macaroni!

Jerry Juniper was a character well known at the time, as a constant frequenter of all races, fairs, regattas, ship-launches, bull-baits, and prize-fights, all of which he attended, and to which he transported himself with an expedition little less remarkable than that of Turpin. You met him at Epsom, at Ascot, at Newmarket, at Doncaster, at the Roodee of Chester, at the Curragh of Kildare. The most remote as well as the most adjacent meeting attracted him. The cock-pit was his constant haunt, and in more senses than one was he a leg. No opera-dancer could be more agile, more nimble; scarcely, indeed, more graceful, than was Jerry, with his shoeless and stockingless feet; and the manner in which he executed a pirouette, or a pas, before a line of carriages, seldom failed to procure him "golden opinions from all sorts of dames." With the ladies, it must be owned, Jerry was rather upon too easy terms; but then, perhaps, the ladies were upon too easy terms with Jerry; and if a bright-eyed fair one condescended to jest with him, what marvel if he should sometimes slightly transgress the laws of decorum. These aberrations, however, were trifling; altogether he was so well known, and knew everybody else so well, that he seldom committed himself; and, singular to say, could on

occasions even be serious. In addition to his other faculties, no one cut a sly joke, or trolled a merry ditty, better than Jerry. His peculiarities, in short, were on the pleasant side, and he was a general favorite in consequence.

No sooner did Jerry perceive that he was recognized, than, after kissing his hand, with the air of a petit-maître, to the highwayman, he strove to edge his way through the crowd. All his efforts were fruitless; and, tired of a situation in the rear rank, so inconsistent, he conceived, with his own importance, he had recourse to an expedient often practised with success in harlequinades, and not unfrequently in real life, where a flying leap is occasionally taken over our heads. He ran back a few yards to give himself an impetus, returned, and, placing his hands upon the shoulders of a stalwart vagabond near to him, threw a summerset upon the broad cap of a palliard, who was so jammed in the midst that he could not have stirred to avoid the shock; thence, without pausing, he vaulted forwards, and dropped lightly upon the ground in front of Zoroaster, and immediately before the highwayman.

Dick laughed immoderately at Jerry's manœuvre. He shook his old chum cordially by the hand, saying, in a whisper, "What the devil brings you here, Jerry?"

"I might retort, and ask you that question, Captain Turpin," replied Jerry, sotto voce. "It is odd to see me here, certainly—quite out of my element—lost amongst this canaille—this Canting Crew—all the fault of a pair of gipsy eyes, bright as a diamond, dark as a sloe. You comprehend—a little affair, ha! Liable to these things. Bring your ear closer, my boy; be upon your guard—keep a sharp look out—there's a devil of a reward upon your head—I won't answer for all those rascals."

"Thank you for the hint, Jerry," replied Dick, in the same tone. "I calculated my chances pretty nicely when I came here. But if I should perceive any symptoms of foul play—any attempt to snitch or nose, amongst this pack of peddlers—I have a friend or two at hand, who won't be silent upon the occasion. Rest assured I shall have my eye upon the gnarling scoundrels. I won't be sold for nothing."

"Trust you for that," returned Juniper, with a wink. "Stay," added he; "a thought strikes me. I have a scheme in petto which may, perhaps, afford you some fun, and will, at all events, insure your safety during your stay."

"What is it?" asked Dick.

"Just amuse yourself with a flirtation for a moment or two with that pretty damsel, who has been casting her ogles at you for the last five minutes without success, while I effect a master-stroke."

And as Turpin, nothing loth, followed his advice, Jerry addressed himself to Zoroaster. After a little conference, accompanied by that worthy and the knight of Malta, the trio stepped forward from the line, and approached Dick, when Juniper, assuming some such attitude as our admirable Jones, the comedian, is wont to display, delivered himself of the following address. Turpin listened with the gravity of one of the distinguished persons alluded to, at the commencement of the present chapter, upon their receiving the freedom of the city at the hands of a mayor and corporation. Thus spoke Jerry:

"Highest of High-Tobymen! rummest of rum Padders, and most scampish of Scampsmen! We, in the name of Barbara, our most tawny queen; in the name of Zoroaster, our Upright Man, Dimber Damber, or Olli Campolli, by all which titles his excellency is distinguished; in our own respective names, as High Pads and Low Pads, Rum Gills and Queer Gills, Patricos, Palliards, Priggers, Whip-Jacks, and Jarkmen, from the Arch Rogue to the Needy Mizzler, fully sensible of the honor you have conferred upon us in gracing Stop-Hole Abbey with your presence; and conceiving that we can in no way evince our sense of your condescension so entirely as by offering you the freedom of our crew, together with the privileges of an Upright Man, which you may be aware are considerable, and by creating you an honorary member of the Vagrant Club, which we have recently established; and in so doing, we would fain express the sentiments of gratification and pride which we experience in enrolling among our members one who has extended the glory of roguery so widely over the land, and who has kicked up such a dust upon the highways of England, as most effectually to blind the natives—one who is in himself a legion—of highwaymen! Awaiting, with respectful deference, the acquiescence of Captain Richard Turpin, we beg to tender him the freedom of our crew."

"Really, gentlemen," said Turpin, who did not exactly see the drift of this harangue, "you do me a vast deal of honor. I am quite at a loss to conceive how I can possibly have merited so much attention at your hands; and, indeed, I feel myself so unworthy——" Here Dick received an expressive wink from Juniper, and therefore thought it prudent to alter his expression. "Could I suppose myself at all deserving of so much distinction," continued the modest speaker, "I should at once accept your very obliging offer; but——"

"None so worthy," said the upright man.

"Can't hear of a refusal," said the knight of Malta.

"Refusal—impossible!" reiterated Juniper.

"No; no refusal," exclaimed a chorus of voices. "Dick Turpin must be one of us. He shall be our dimber damber."

"Well, gentlemen, since you are so pressing," replied Turpin, "even so be it. I will be your dimber damber."

"Bravo! bravo!" cried the mob, not "of gentlemen."

"About it, pals, at once," said the knight of Malta, flourishing Excalibur. "By St. Thomas à Becket, we'll have as fine a scene as I myself ever furnished to the Canterbury lieges."

"About what?" asked Dick.

"Your matriculation," replied Jerry. "There are certain forms to be gone through, with an oath to be taken, merely a trifle. We'll have a jolly booze when all's over. Come bing avast, my merry pals; to the green, to the green: a Turpin! a Turpin! a new brother!"

"A Turpin! a Turpin! a new brother!" echoed the crew.

"I've brought you through," said Jerry, taking advantage of the uproar that ensued to whisper to his chum; "none of them will dare to lift a finger against you now. They are all your friends for life."

"Nevertheless," returned Turpin, "I should be glad to know what has become of Bess."

"If it's your prancer you are wanting," chirped a fluttering creature, whom Turpin recognized as Luke's groom, Grasshopper, "I gave her a fresh loaf and a stoup of stingo, as you bade me, and there she be, under yon tree, as quiet as a lamb."

"I see her," replied Turpin; "just tighten her girths, Grasshopper, and bring her after me, and thou shalt have wherewithal to chirp over thy cups at supper."

Away bounded the elfin dwarf to execute his behest.

A loud shout now rent the skies, and presently afterwards was heard the vile scraping of a fiddle, accompanied by the tattoo of a drum. Approaching Turpin, a host of gipsies elevated the highwayman upon their shoulders, and in this way he was carried to the centre of the green, where the long oaken table, which had once served the Franciscans for refection, was now destined for the stage of the pageant.

Upon this table three drums were placed; and Turpin was requested to seat himself on the central one. A solemn prelude, more unearthly than the incantation in the Freyschütz, was played by the orchestra of the band, conducted by the Paganini of the place, who elicited the most marvellous notes from his shell. A couple of shawms emitted sepulchral sounds, while the hollow rolling of a drum broke ever and anon upon the ear. The effect was prodigiously fine. During this overture the patrico and the upright man had ascended the rostrum, each taking his place; the former on the right hand of Turpin, the latter upon his left. Below them stood the knight of Malta, with Excalibur drawn in his hand, and gleaming in the sunshine. On the whole, Dick was amused with what he saw, and with the novel situation in which he found himself placed. Around the table were congregated a compact mass of heads; so compact, indeed, that they looked like one creature—an Argus, with each eye upturned upon the highwayman. The idea struck Turpin that the restless mass of parti-colored shreds and patches, of vivid hues and varied tintings, singularly, though accidentally, disposed to produce such an effect, resembled an immense tiger-moth, or it might be a Turkey carpet spread out upon the grass!

The scene was a joyous one. It was a brilliant sunshiny morning. Freshened and purified by the storm of the preceding night, the air breathed a balm upon the nerves and senses of the robber. The wooded hills were glittering in light; the brook was flowing swiftly past the edge of the verdant slope, glancing like a wreathed snake in the sunshine—its "quiet song" lost in the rude harmony of the mummers, as were the thousand twitterings of the rejoicing birds; the rocks bared their bosoms to the sun, or were buried in deep-cast gloom; the shadows of the pillars and arches of the old walls of the priory were projected afar, while the rose-like ramifications of the magnificent marigold window were traced, as if by a pencil, upon the verdant tablet of the sod.

The overture was finished. With the appearance of the principal figures in this strange picture the reader is already familiar. It remains only to give him some idea of the patrico. Imagine, then, an old superannuated goat, reared upon its hind legs, and clad in a white sheet, disposed in folds like those of a simar about its limbs, and you will have some idea of Balthazar, the patrico. This resemblance to the animal before mentioned was rendered the more striking by his huge, hanging, goat-like under lip, his lengthy white beard, and a sort of cap, covering his head, which was ornamented with a pair of horns, such as are to be seen in Michael Angelo's tremendous statue of Moses. Balthazar, besides being the patrico of the tribe, was its principal professor of divination, and had been the long-tried and faithful minister of Barbara Lovel, from whose secret instructions he was supposed to have derived much of his magical skill.

Placing a pair of spectacles upon his "prognosticating nose," and unrolling a vellum skin, upon which strange characters were written, Balthazar, turning to Turpin, thus commenced in a solemn voice:

Thou who wouldst our brother be,
Say how we shall enter thee?
Name the name that thou wilt bear
Ere our livery thou wear?
"I see no reason why I should alter my designation," replied the noviciate; "but as popes change their titles on their creation, there can be no objection to a scampsman following so excellent an example. Let me be known as the Night Hawk."

"The Night Hawk—good," returned the hierophant, proceeding to register the name upon the parchment. "Kneel down," continued he.

After some hesitation, Turpin complied.

"You must repeat the 'salamon,' or oath of our creed, after my dictation," said the patrico; and Turpin, signifying his assent by a nod, Balthazar propounded the following abjuration:

OATH OF THE CANTING CREW

I, Crank-Cuffin, swear to be
True to this fraternity;
That I will in all obey
Rule and order of the lay.
Never blow the gab, or squeak;
Never snitch to bum or beak;
But religiously maintain
Authority of those who reign
Over Stop-Hole Abbey Green,
Be they tawny king, or queen.
In their cause alone will fight;
Think what they think, wrong or right;
Serve them truly, and no other,
And be faithful to my brother;
Suffer none, from far or near,
With their rights to interfere;
No strange Abram, ruffler crack,
Hooker of another pack,

Rogue or rascal, frater, maunderer,
Irish toyle, or other wanderer;
No dimber damber, angler, dancer,
Prig of cackler, prig of prancer;
No swigman, swaddler, clapperdudgeon;
Cadge-gloak, curtal, or curmudgeon;
No whip-jack, palliard, patrico;
No jarkman, be he high or low;
No dummerar, or romany;
No member of "the Family;"
No ballad-basket, bouncing buffer,
Nor any other, will I suffer;
But stall-off now and for ever,
All outliers whatsoever:
And as I keep to the foregone,
So may help me Salamon!
"So help me Salamon!" repeated Turpin, with emphasis.

"Zoroaster," said the patrico to the upright man, "do thy part of this ceremonial."

Zoroaster obeyed; and, taking Excalibur from the knight of Malta, bestowed a hearty thwack with the blade upon the shoulders of the kneeling highwayman, assisting him afterwards to arise.

The inauguration was complete.

"Well," exclaimed Dick, "I'm glad it's all over. My leg feels a little stiffish. I'm not much given to kneeling. I must dance it off;" saying which, he began to shuffle upon the boards. "I tell you what," continued he, "most reverend patrico, that same 'salmon' of yours has a cursed long tail. I could scarce swallow it all, and it's strange if it don't give me an indigestion. As to you, sage Zory, from the dexterity with which you flourish your sword, I should say you had practised at court. His majesty could scarce do the thing better, when, slapping some fat alderman upon the shoulder, he bids him arise Sir Richard. And now, pals," added he, glancing round, "as I am one of you, let's have a booze together ere I depart, for I don't think my stay will be long in the land of Egypt."

This suggestion of Turpin was so entirely consonant to the wishes of the assemblage, that it met with universal approbation; and upon a sign from Zoroaster, some of his followers departed in search of supplies for the carousal. Zoroaster leaped from the table, and his example was followed by Turpin, and more leisurely by the patrico.

It was rather early in the day for a drinking bout. But the Canting Crew were not remarkably particular. The chairs were removed, and the jingling of glasses announced the arrival of the preliminaries of the matutine symposion. Poles, canvas, and cords were next brought; and in almost as short a space of time as one scene is substituted for another in a theatrical representation, a tent was erected. Benches, stools, and chairs appeared with equal celerity, and the interior soon presented an appearance like that of a booth at a fair. A keg of brandy was broached, and the health of the new brother quaffed in brimmers.

Our highwayman returned thanks. Zoroaster was in the chair, the knight of Malta acting as croupier. A second toast was proposed—the tawny queen. This was drunk with a like enthusiasm, and with a like allowance of the potent spirit; but as bumpers of brandy are not to be repeated with impunity, it became evident to the president of the board that he must not repeat his toasts quite so expeditiously. To create a temporary diversion, therefore, he called for a song.

The dulcet notes of the fiddle now broke through the clamor; and, in answer to the call, Jerry Juniper volunteered the following:

JERRY JUNIPER'S CHANT

In a box of the stone jug I was born,
Of a hempen widow the kid forlorn.
Fake away,
And my father, as I've heard say,
Fake away.
Was a merchant of capers gay,
Who cut his last fling with great applause,
Nix my doll pals, fake away.
Who cut his last fling with great applause,
To the tune of a "hearty choke with caper sauce."
Fake away.
The knucks in quod did my schoolmen play,
Fake away,
And put me up to the time of day;
Until at last there was none so knowing,
Nix my doll pals, fake away.
Until at last there was none so knowing,
No such sneaksman or buzgloak going.
Fake away.
Fogles and fawnies soon went their way,

Fake away,
To the spout with the sneezers in grand array.
No dummy hunter had forks so fly;
Nix my doll pals, fake away.
No dummy hunter had forks so fly,
No knuckler so deftly could fake a cly,
Fake away.
No slour'd hoxter my snipes could stay,
Fake away.
None knap a reader like me in the lay.
Soon then I mounted in swell-street high.
Nix my doll pals, fake away.
Soon then I mounted in swell-street high,
And sported my flashiest toggery,
Fake away.
Firmly resolved I would make my hay,
Fake away,
While Mercury's star shed a single ray;
And ne'er was there seen such a dashing prig,
Nix my doll pals, fake away.
And ne'er was there seen such a dashing prig,
With my strummel faked in the newest twig.
Fake away.
With my fawnied famms, and my onions gay,
Fake away;
My thimble of ridge, and my driz kemesa;
All my togs were so niblike and splash,
Nix my doll pals, fake away.
All my togs were so niblike and splash,
Readily the queer screens I then could smash;
Fake away.
But my nuttiest blowen, one fine day,
Fake away,
To the beaks did her fancy man betray,
And thus was I bowled out at last
Nix my doll pals, fake away.
And thus was I bowled out at last,
And into the jug for a lag was cast;
Fake away.
But I slipped my darbies one morn in May,
Fake away,

And gave to the dubsman a holiday.
And here I am, pals, merry and free,
A regular rollicking romany.
Nix my doll pals, fake away.

Much laughter and applause rewarded Jerry's attempt to please; and though the meaning of his chant, even with the aid of the numerous notes appended to it, may not be quite obvious to our readers, we can assure them that it was perfectly intelligible to the Canting Crew. Jerry was now entitled to a call; and happening, at the moment, to meet the fine dark eyes of a sentimental gipsy, one of that better class of mendicants who wandered about the country with a guitar at his back, his election fell upon him. The youth, without prelude, struck up a

GIPSY SERENADE

Merry maid, merry maid, wilt thou wander with me?
We will roam through the forest, the meadow, and lea;
We will haunt the sunny bowers, and when day begins to flee,
Our couch shall be the ferny brake, our canopy the tree.
Merry maid, merry maid, come and wander with me!
No life like the gipsy's, so joyous and free!
Merry maid, merry maid, though a roving life be ours,
We will laugh away the laughing and quickly fleeting hours;
Our hearts are free, as is the free and open sky above,
And we know what tamer souls know not, how lovers ought to love.
Merry maid, merry maid, come and wander with me!
No life like the gipsy's so joyous and free!

Zoroaster now removed the pipe from his upright lips to intimate his intention of proposing a toast.

A universal knocking of knuckles by the knucklers was followed by profound silence. The sage spoke:

"The city of Canterbury, pals," said he; "and may it never want a knight of Malta."

The toast was pledged with much laughter, and in many bumpers.

The knight, upon whom all eyes were turned, rose, "with stately bearing and majestic motion," to return thanks.

"I return you an infinitude of thanks, brother pals," said he, glancing round the assemblage; and bowing to the president, "and to you, most upright Zory, for the honor

you have done me in associating my name with that city. Believe me, I sincerely appreciate the compliment, and echo the sentiment from the bottom of my soul. I trust it never will want a knight of Malta. In return for your consideration, but a poor one you will say, you shall have a ditty, which I composed upon the occasion of my pilgrimage to that city, and which I have thought proper to name after myself."

THE KNIGHT OF MALTA

A Canterbury Tale

Come list to me, and you shall have, without a hem or haw, sirs,
A Canterbury pilgrimage, much better than old Chaucer's.
'Tis of a hoax I once played off upon that city clever,
The memory of which, I hope, will stick to it for ever.
With my coal-black beard, and purple cloak,
jack-boots, and broad-brimmed castor,
Hey-ho! for the knight of Malta!
To execute my purpose, in the first place, you must know, sirs,
My locks I let hang down my neck—my beard and whiskers grow, sirs;
A purple cloak I next clapped on, a sword lagged to my side, sirs,
And mounted on a charger black, I to the town did ride, sirs.
With my coal-black beard, &c.
Two pages were there by my side, upon two little ponies,
Decked out in scarlet uniform, as spruce as macaronies;
Caparisoned my charger was, as grandly as his master,
And o'er my long and curly locks, I wore a broad-brimmed castor.
With my coal-black beard, &c.
The people all flocked forth, amazed to see a man so hairy,
Oh I such a sight had ne'er before been seen in Canterbury!
My flowing robe, my flowing beard, my horse with flowing mane, sirs!
They stared—the days of chivalry, they thought, were come again, sirs!
With my coal-black beard, &c.
I told them a long rigmarole romance, that did not halt a
Jot, that they beheld in me a real knight of Malta!
Tom à Becket had I sworn I was, that saint and martyr hallowed,
I doubt not just as readily the bait they would have swallowed.
With my coal-black beard, &c.
I rode about, and speechified, and everybody gullied,
The tavern-keepers diddled, and the magistracy bullied;
Like puppets were the townsfolk led in that show they call a raree;
The Gotham sages were a joke to those of Canterbury.

With my coal-black beard, &c.
The theatre I next engaged, where I addressed the crowd, sirs,
And on retrenchment and reform I spouted long and loud, sirs;
On tithes and on taxation I enlarged with skill and zeal, sirs,
Who so able as a Malta knight, the malt tax to repeal, sirs.
With my coal-black beard, &c.
As a candidate I then stepped forth to represent their city,
And my non-election to that place was certainly a pity;
For surely I the fittest was, and very proper, very,
To represent the wisdom and the wit of Canterbury.
With my coal-black beard, &c.
At the trial of some smugglers next, one thing I rather queer did,
And the justices upon the bench I literally bearded;
For I swore that I some casks did see, though proved as clear as day, sirs,
That I happened at the time to be some fifty miles away, sirs.
With my coal-black beard, &c.
This last assertion, I must own, was somewhat of a blunder,
And for perjury indicted they compelled me to knock under;
To my prosperous career this slight error put a stop, sirs,
And thus crossed, the knight of Malta was at length obliged to hop, sirs.
With his coal-black beard, and purple cloak,
jack-boots, and broad-brimmed castor,
Good-by to the knight of Malta.
The knight sat down amidst the general plaudits of the company.

The party, meanwhile, had been increased by the arrival of Luke and the sexton. The former, who was in no mood for revelry, refused to comply with his grandsire's solicitation to enter, and remained sullenly at the door, with his arms folded, and his eyes fixed upon Turpin, whose movements he commanded through the canvas aperture. The sexton walked up to Dick, who was seated at the post of honor, and, clapping him upon the shoulder, congratulated him upon the comfortable position in which he found him.

"Ha, ha! Are you there, my old death's-head on a mop-stick?" said Turpin, with a laugh. "Ain't we merry mumpers, eh? Keeping it up in style. Sit down, old Noah—make yourself comfortable, Methusalem."

"What say you to a drop of as fine Nantz as you ever tasted in your life, old cove?" said Zoroaster.

"I have no sort of objection to it," returned Peter, "provided you will all pledge my toast."

"That I will, were it old Ruffin himself," shouted Turpin.

"Here's to the three-legged mare," cried Peter. "To the tree that bears fruit all the year round, and yet has neither bark nor branch. You won't refuse that toast, Captain Turpin?"

"Not I," answered Dick; "I owe the gallows no grudge. If, as Jerry's song says, I must have a 'hearty choke and caper sauce' for my breakfast one of these fine mornings, it shall never be said that I fell to my meal without appetite, or neglected saying grace before it. Gentlemen, here's Peter Bradley's toast: 'The scragging post—the three-legged mare,' with three times three."

Appropriate as this sentiment was, it did not appear to be so inviting to the party as might have been anticipated, and the shouts soon died away.

"They like not the thoughts of the gallows," said Turpin to Peter. "More fools they. A mere bugbear to frighten children, believe me; and never yet alarmed a brave man. The gallows, pshaw! One can but die once, and what signifies it how, so that it be over quickly. I think no more of the last leap into eternity than clearing a five-barred gate. A rope's end for it! So let us be merry, and make the most of our time, and that's true philosophy. I know you can throw off a rum chant," added he, turning to Peter. "I heard you sing last night at the hall. Troll us a stave, my antediluvian file, and, in the meantime, tip me a gage of fogus, Jerry; and if that's a bowl of huckle-my-butt you are brewing, Sir William," added he, addressing the knight of Malta, "you may send me a jorum at your convenience."

Jerry handed the highwayman a pipe, together with a tumbler of the beverage which the knight had prepared, which he pronounced excellent; and while the huge bowl was passed round to the company, a prelude of shawms announced that Peter was ready to break into song.

Accordingly, after the symphony was ended, accompanied at intervals by a single instrument, Peter began his melody, in a key so high, that the utmost exertions of the shawm-blower failed to approach its altitudes. The burden of his minstrelsy was

THE MANDRAKE

Μῶλύ δέ μιν καλέουσι θεοί, χαλνπὸν δέ τ' ὀρύσσειν
Ἀνδράσι γε θνητοισι θεοι, δέ τε πάντα δύνανται.
Homerus.

The mandrake grows 'neath the gallows-tree,
And rank and green are its leaves to see;
Green and rank, as the grass that waves
Over the unctuous earth of graves;
And though all around it lie bleak and bare,
Freely the mandrake flourisheth there.
Maranatha—Anathema!
Dread is the curse of mandragora!
Euthanasy!
At the foot of the gibbet the mandrake springs;
Just where the creaking carcase swings;
Some have thought it engendered
From the fat that drops from the bones of the dead;
Some have thought it a human thing;
But this is a vain imagining.
Maranatha—Anathema!
Dread is the curse of mandragora!
Euthanasy!
A charnel leaf doth the mandrake wear,
A charnel fruit doth the mandrake bear;
Yet none like the mandrake hath such great power,
Such virtue resides not in herb or flower;
Aconite, hemlock, or moonshade, I ween,
None hath a poison so subtle and keen.
Maranatha—Anathema!
Dread is the curse of mandragora!
Euthanasy!
And whether the mandrake be create
Flesh with the power incorporate,
I know not; yet, if from the earth 'tis rent,
Shrieks and groans from the root are sent;
Shrieks and groans, and a sweat like gore
Oozes and drops from the clammy core.
Maranatha—Anathema!
Dread is the curse of mandragora!
Euthanasy!
Whoso gathereth the mandrake shall surely die;
Blood for blood is his destiny.
Some who have plucked it have died with groans,
Like to the mandrake's expiring moans;
Some have died raving, and some beside—

With penitent prayers—but all have died.
Jesu! save us by night and day!
From the terrible death of mandragora!
Euthanasy!
"A queer chant that," said Zoroaster, coughing loudly, in token of disapprobation.

"Not much to my taste," quoth the knight of Malta. "We like something more sprightly in Canterbury."

"Nor to mine," added Jerry; "don't think it's likely to have an encore. 'Pon my soul, Dick, you must give us something yourself, or we shall never cry Euthanasy at the Triple Tree."

"With all my heart," replied Turpin. "You shall have—but what do I see, my friend Sir Luke? Devil take my tongue, Luke Bradley, I mean. What, ho! Luke—nay, nay, man, no shrinking—stand forward; I've a word or two to say to you. We must have a hob-a-nob glass together for old acquaintance sake. Nay, no airs, man; damme you're not a lord yet, nor a baronet either, though I do hold your title in my pocket; never look glum at me. It won't pay. I'm one of the Canting Crew now; no man shall sneer at me with impunity, eh, Zory? Ha, ha! here's a glass of Nantz; we'll have a bottle of black strap when you are master of your own. Make ready there, you gut-scrapers, you shawm-shavers; I'll put your lungs in play for you presently. In the meantime—charge, pals, charge—a toast, a toast! Health and prosperity to Sir Luke Rookwood! I see you are surprised—this, gemmen, is Sir Luke Rookwood, somewhile Luke Bradley, heir to the house of that name, not ten miles distant from this. Say, shall we not drink a bumper to his health?"

Astonishment prevailed amongst the crew. Luke himself had been taken by surprise. When Turpin discovered him at the door of the tent, and summoned him to appear, he reluctantly complied with the request; but when, in a half-bantering vein, Dick began to rally him upon his pretensions, he would most gladly have retreated, had it been in his power. It was then too late. He felt he must stand the ordeal. Every eye was fixed upon him with a look of inquiry.

Zoroaster took his everlasting pipe from his mouth.

"This ain't true, surely?" asked the perplexed Magus.

"He has said it," replied Luke; "I may not deny it."

This was sufficient. There was a wild hubbub of delight amongst the crew, for Luke was a favorite with all.

"Sir Luke Rookwood!" cried Jerry Juniper, who liked a title as much as Tommy Moore is said to dote upon a lord. "Upon my soul I sincerely congratulate you; devilish fortunate fellow. Always cursed unlucky myself. I could never find out my own father, unless it were one Monsieur des Capriolles, a French dancing-master, and he never left anything behind him that I could hear of, except a broken kit and a hempen widow. Sir Luke Rookwood, we shall do ourselves the pleasure of drinking your health and prosperity."

Fresh bumpers and immense cheering.

Silence being in a measure restored, Zoroaster claimed Turpin's promise of a song.

"True, true," replied Dick; "I have not forgotten it. Stand to your bows, my hearties."

THE GAME OF HIGH TOBY

Now Oliver puts his black nightcap on,
And every star its glim is hiding,
And forth to the heath is the scampsman gone,
His matchless cherry-black prancer riding;
Merrily over the common he flies,
Fast and free as the rush of rocket,
His crape-covered vizard drawn over his eyes,
His tol by his side, and his pops in his pocket.
CHORUS

Then who can name
So merry a game,
As the game of all games—high toby?
The traveller hears him, away! away!
Over the wide wide heath he scurries;
He heeds not the thunderbolt summons to stay,
But ever the faster and faster he hurries.
But what daisy-cutter can match that black tit?
He is caught—he must "stand and deliver;"
Then out with the dummy, and off with the bit,
Oh! the game of high toby for ever!
CHORUS

Then who can name
So merry a game,
As the game of all games—high toby?
Believe me, there is not a game, my brave boys,
To compare with the game of high toby;
No rapture can equal the tobyman's joys,
To blue devils, blue plumbs give the go-by;
And what if, at length, boys, he come to the crap!
Even rack punch has some bitter in it,
For the mare-with-three-legs, boys, I care not a rap,
'Twill be over in less than a minute.
GRAND CHORUS

Then hip, hurrah!
Fling care away!
Hurrah for the game of high toby!
"And now, pals," said Dick, who began to feel the influence of these morning cups, "I vote that we adjourn. Believe me I shall always bear in mind that I am a brother of your band. Sir Luke and I must have a little chat together ere I take my leave. Adieu!"

And taking Luke by the arm, he walked out of the tent. Peter Bradley rose, and followed them.

At the door they found the dwarfish Grasshopper with Black Bess. Rewarding the urchin for his trouble, and slipping the bridle of his mare over his hand, Turpin continued his walk over the green. For a few minutes he seemed to be lost in rumination.

"I tell you what, Sir Luke," said he; "I should like to do a generous thing, and make you a present of this bit of paper. But one ought not to throw away one's luck, you know—there is a tide in the affairs of thieves, as the player coves say, which must be taken at the flood, or else——no matter! Your old dad, Sir Piers—God help him!—had the gingerbread, that I know; he was, as we say, a regular rhino-cerical cull. You won't feel a few thousands, especially at starting; and besides, there are two others, Rust and Wilder, who row in the same boat with me, and must therefore come in for their share of the reg'lars. All this considered, you can't complain, I think if I ask five thousand for it. That old harridan, Lady Rookwood, offered me nearly as much."

"I will not talk to you of fairness," said Luke; "I will not say that document belongs of right to me. It fell by accident into your hands. Having possessed yourself of it, I blame you not that you dispose of it to the best advantage. I must, perforce, agree to your terms."

"Oh, no," replied Dick, "it's quite optional; Lady Rookwood will give as much, and make no mouths about it. Soho, lass! What makes Bess prick her ears in that fashion?—Ha! carriage-wheels in the distance! that jade knows the sound as well as I do. I'll just see what it's like!—you will have ten minutes for reflection. Who knows if I may not have come in for a good thing here?"

At that instant the carriage passed the angle of a rock some three hundred yards distant, and was seen slowly ascending the hill-side. Eager as a hawk after his quarry, Turpin dashed after it.

In vain the sexton, whom he nearly overthrew in his career, called after him to halt. He sped like a bolt from the bow.

"May the devil break his neck!" cried Peter, as he saw him dash through the brook; "could he not let them alone?"

"This must not be," said Luke; "know you whose carriage it is?"

"It is a shrine that holds the jewel that should be dearest in your eyes," returned Peter; "haste, and arrest the spoiler's hand."

"Whom do you mean?" asked Luke.

"Eleanor Mowbray," replied Peter. "She is there. To the rescue—away."

"Eleanor Mowbray!" echoed Luke—"and Sybil?——"

At this instant a pistol-shot was heard.

"Will you let murder be done, and upon your cousin?" cried Peter, with a bitter look. "You are not what I took you for."

Luke answered not, but, swift as the hound freed from the leash, darted in the direction of the carriage.

The Gipsy by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VI

ELEANOR MOWBRAY

——Mischiefs
Are like the visits of Franciscan friars,
They never come to prey upon us single.
Devil's Law Case.

The course of our tale returns now to Eleanor Mowbray. After she had parted from Ranulph Rookwood, and had watched him disappear beneath the arches of the church porch, her heart sank, and, drawing herself back within the carriage, she became a prey to the most poignant affliction. In vain she endeavored to shake off this feeling of desolation. It would not be. Despair had taken possession of her; the magic fabric of delight melted away, or only gleamed to tantalize, at an unreachable distance. A presentiment that Ranulph would never be hers had taken root in her imagination, and overshadowed all the rest.

While Eleanor pursued this train of reflection, the time insensibly wore away, until the sudden stoppage of the carriage aroused the party from their meditation. Major Mowbray perceived that the occasion of the halt was the rapid advance of a horseman, who was nearing them at full speed. The appearance of the rider was somewhat singular, and might have created some uneasiness as to the nature of his approach, had not the major immediately recognized a friend; he was, nevertheless, greatly surprised to see him, and turned to Mrs. Mowbray to inform her that Father Ambrose, to his infinite astonishment, was coming to meet them, and appeared, from his manner, to be the bearer of unwelcome tidings.

Father Ambrose was, perhaps, the only being whom Eleanor disliked. She had felt an unaccountable antipathy towards him, which she could neither extirpate nor control, during their long and close intimacy. It may be necessary to mention that her religious culture had been in accordance with the tenets of the Romish Church, in whose faith—the faith of her ancestry—her mother had continued; and that Father Ambrose, with whom she had first become acquainted during the residence of the family near Bordeaux, was her ghostly adviser and confessor. An Englishman by birth, he had been appointed pastor to the diocese in which they dwelt, and was, consequently, a frequent visitor, almost a constant inmate of the château; yet though duty and respect would have prompted her to regard the father with affection, Eleanor could never conquer the

feelings of dislike and distrust which she had at first entertained towards him; a dislike which was increased by the strange control in which he seemed to hold her mother, who regarded him with a veneration approaching to infatuation. It was, therefore, with satisfaction that she bade him adieu. He had, however, followed his friends to England under a feigned name as—being a recusant Romish priest, and supposed to have been engaged in certain Jesuitical plots, his return to his own country was attended with considerable risk—, and had now remained domesticated with them for some months. That he had been in some way, in early life, connected with a branch of the house of Rookwood, Eleanor was aware—she fancied he might have been engaged in political intrigue with Sir Reginald, which would have well accorded with his ardent, ambitious temperament—, and the knowledge of this circumstance made her doubly apprehensive lest the nature of his present communication should have reference to her lover, towards whose cause the father had never been favorable, and respecting whose situation he might have made some discovery, which she feared he might use to Ranulph's disadvantage.

Wrapped in a long black cloak, with a broad-brimmed hat drawn closely over his brows, it was impossible to distinguish further of the priest's figure and features beyond the circumstance of his height, which was remarkable, until he had reached the carriage window, when, raising his hat, he disclosed a head that Titian might have painted, and which, arising from the dark drapery, looked not unlike the visage of some grave and saturnine Venetian. There was a venerable expanse of forehead, thinly scattered with hair, towering over black pent-house-like brows, which, in their turn, shadowed keen penetrating eyes; the temples were hollow, and blue veins might be traced beneath the sallow skin; the cheek-bones were high, and there was something in the face that spoke of self-mortification; while the thin livid lips, closely compressed, and the austere and sinister expression of his countenance, showed that his self-abasement, if he had ever practised it, had scarcely prostrated the demon of pride, whose dominion might still be traced in the lines and furrows of his haughty physiognomy. The father looked at Mrs. Mowbray, and then glanced suspiciously at Eleanor. The former appeared to understand him.

"You would say a word to me in private," said Mrs. Mowbray; "shall I descend?"

The priest bowed assent.

"It is not to you alone that my mission extends," said he, gravely; "you are all in part concerned; your son had better alight with you."

"Instantly," replied the major. "If you will give your horse in charge to the postilion, we will attend you at once."

With a feeling of renewed apprehension, connected, she knew not why, with Ranulph, Eleanor beheld her relatives descend from the carriage; and, in the hope of gaining some clue from their gestures to the subject of their conversation, she watched their motions as narrowly as her situation permitted. From the earnest manner of the priest, and the interest his narrative seemed to excite in his hearers, it was evident that his communication was of importance.

Presently, accompanied by Father Ambrose, Mrs. Mowbray returned to the carriage, while the major, mounting the priest's horse, after bidding a hasty adieu to his sister, adding, with a look that belied the consolation intended to be conveyed by his words, that "all was well," but without staying to offer her any explanation of the cause of his sudden departure, rode back the way they had just traversed, and in the direction of Rookwood. Bereft of the only person to whom she could have applied for information, though dying with curiosity and anxiety to know the meaning of this singular interview and of the sudden change of plans which she felt so intimately concerned herself, Eleanor was constrained to preserve silence, as, after their entrance into the carriage, her mother again seemed lost in painful reflection, and heeded her not; and the father, drawing from his pocket a small volume, appeared intently occupied in its perusal.

"Dear mother," said Eleanor, at length, turning to Mrs. Mowbray, "my brother is gone——"

"To Rookwood," said Mrs. Mowbray, in a tone calculated to check further inquiry; but Eleanor was too anxious to notice it.

"And wherefore, mother?" said she. "May I not be informed?"

"Not as yet, my child—not as yet," replied Mrs. Mowbray. "You will learn all sufficiently early."

The priest raised his cat-like eyes from the book to watch the effect of this speech, and dropped them instantly as Eleanor turned towards him. She had been about to appeal to him, but having witnessed this look, she relinquished her scarce-formed purpose, and endeavored to divert her tristful thoughts by gazing through the glimmering medium of her tears upon the soothing aspect of external nature—that aspect which, in sunshine or in storm, has ever relief in store for a heart embittered by the stormy coldness of the world.

The road, meanwhile, led them through a long woody valley, and was now climbing the sides of a steep hill. They were soon in the vicinity of the priory, and of the gipsies'

encampment. The priest leaned forward, and whispered something in Mrs. Mowbray's ear, who looked towards the ruined shrine, part of the mouldering walls being visible from the road.

At the moment the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and the sound of a loud voice, commanding the postilion, in a menacing tone, to stop, accompanied by a volley of imprecations, interrupted the conference, and bespoke the approach of an unwelcome intruder, and one whom all, too truly, feared would not be readily dismissed. The postilion did his best to rid them of the assailant. Perceiving a masked horseman behind him, approaching at a furious rate, he had little doubt as to his intentions, and Turpin, for it was our highwayman, soon made his doubts certainties. He hallooed to him to stop; but the fellow paid no attention to his command, and disregarded even the pistol which he saw, in a casual glimpse over his near side, presented at his person. Clapping spurs into his horse's flanks, he sought succor in flight. Turpin was by his side in an instant. As the highwayman endeavored to catch his reins, the lad suddenly wheeled the carriage right upon him, and but for the dexterity of Turpin, and the clever conduct of his mare, would inevitably have crushed him against the roadside. As it was, his left leg was slightly grazed. Irritated at this, Turpin fired over the man's head, and with the butt-end of the pistol felled him from his seat. Startled by the sound, and no longer under the governance of their rider, the horses rushed with frantic violence towards a ditch that bounded the other side of the highway, down which the carriage was precipitated, and at once overturned. Turpin's first act, after he had ascertained that no mischief had been occasioned to those within, beyond the alarm incident to the shock, was to compel the postilion, who had by this time gained his legs, to release the horses from their traces. This done, with the best grace he could assume, and, adjusting his mask, he opened the carriage, and proceeded to liberate the captives.

"Beg pardon, ma'am," said he, as soon as he had released Mrs. Mowbray; "excessively sorry, upon my soul, to have been the cause of so much unnecessary alarm to you—all the fault, I assure you, of that rascal of a postilion; had the fellow only pulled up when I commanded him, this botheration might have been avoided. You will remember that, when you pay him—all his fault, I assure you, ma'am."

Receiving no reply, he proceeded to extricate Eleanor, with whose beauty the inflammable highwayman was instantly smitten. Leaving the father to shift for himself, he turned to address some observation of coarse gallantry to her; but she eluded his grasp, and flew to her mother's side.

"It is useless, sir," said Mrs. Mowbray, as Turpin drew near them, "to affect ignorance of your intentions. You have already occasioned us serious alarm; much delay and inconvenience. I trust, therefore, that beyond our purses, to which, though scantily

supplied, you are welcome, we shall sustain no molestation. You seem to have less of the ruffian about you than the rest of your lawless race, and are not, I should hope, destitute of common humanity."

"Common humanity!" replied Turpin: "bless you, ma'am, I'm the most humane creature breathing—would not hurt a fly, much less a lady. Incivility was never laid to my charge. This business may be managed in a few seconds; and as soon as we have settled the matter, I'll lend your stupid jack-boy a hand to put the horses to the carriage again, and get the wheels out of the ditch. You have a banker, ma'am, I suppose, in town—perhaps in the country; but I don't like country bankers; besides, I want a little ready cash in Rumville—beg pardon, ma'am, London I mean. My ears have been so stunned with those Romany patterers, I almost think in flash. Just draw me a check; I've pen and ink always ready: a check for fifty pounds, ma'am—only fifty. What's your banker's name? I've blank checks of all the best houses in my pocket; that and a kiss from the pretty lips of that cherry-cheeked maid," winking to Eleanor, "will fully content me. You see you have neither an exorbitant nor uncivil personage to deal with."

Eleanor shrank closer towards her mother. Exhausted by previous agitation of the night, greatly frightened by the shock which she had just sustained, and still more alarmed by the words and gestures of the highwayman, she felt that she was momentarily in danger of fainting, and with difficulty prevented herself from falling. The priest, who had succeeded in freeing himself from the carriage, now placed himself between Turpin and the ladies.

"Be satisfied, misguided man," said the father, in a stern voice, offering a purse, which Mrs. Mowbray hastily extended towards him, "with the crime you have already committed, and seek not to peril your soul by deeper guilt; be content with the plunder you now obtain, and depart; for, by my holy calling, I affirm to you, that if you advance one footstep towards the further molestation of these ladies, it shall be at the hazard of your life."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Turpin. "Now this is what I like; who would have thought the old autem-bawler had so much pluck in him? Sir, I commend you for your courage, but you are mistaken. I am the quietest man breathing, and never harm a human being; in proof of which, only look at your rascal of a postilion, whom any one of my friends would have sent post-haste to the devil for half the trouble he gave me. Easy as I am, I never choose to be balked in my humors. I must have the fifty and the buss, and then I'm off, as soon as you like; and I may as well have the kiss while the old lady signs the check, and then we shall have the seal as well as the signature. Poh—poh—no nonsense! Many a pretty lass has thought it an honor to be kissed by Turpin."

Eleanor recoiled with deepest disgust, as she saw the highwayman thrust aside the useless opposition of the priest, and approach her. He had removed his mask; his face, flushed with insolent triumph, was turned towards her. Despite the loathing, which curdled the blood within her veins, she could not avert her eyes. He drew near her; she uttered a shrill scream. At that moment a powerful grasp was laid upon Turpin's shoulder; he turned and beheld Luke.

"Save me! save me," cried Eleanor, addressing the new comer.

"Damnation!" said the highwayman, "what has brought you here? one would think you were turned assistant to all distressed damsels. Quit your hold, or, by the God above us, you will repent it."

"Fool!" exclaimed Luke, "talk thus to one who heeds you." And as he spoke he hurled Turpin backwards with so much force that, staggering a few yards, the highwayman fell to the ground.

The priest stood like one stunned with surprise at Luke's sudden appearance and subsequent daring action.

Luke, meanwhile, approached Eleanor. He gazed upon her with curiosity mixed with admiration, for his heart told him she was very fair. A deathlike paleness had spread over her cheeks; yet still, despite the want of color, she looked exquisitely beautiful, and her large blue eyes eloquently thanked her deliverer for her rescue. The words she wanted were supplied by Mrs. Mowbray, who thanked him in appropriate terms, when they were interrupted by Turpin, who had by this time picked himself up, and was drawing near them. His countenance wore a fierce expression.

"I tell you what," said he, "Luke Bradley, or Luke Rookwood, or whatever else you may call yourself, you have taken a damned unfair advantage of me in this matter, and deserve nothing better at my hands than that I should call you to instant account for it—and curse me, if I don't too."

"Luke Bradley!" interrupted Mrs. Mowbray—"are you that individual?"

"I have been so called, madam," replied Luke.

"Father Ambrose, is this the person of whom you spoke?" eagerly asked the lady.

"So I conclude," returned the priest, evasively.

"Did he not call you Luke Rookwood?" eagerly demanded Eleanor. "Is that also your name?"

"Rookwood is my name, fair cousin," replied Luke, "if I may venture to call you so."

"And Ranulph Rookwood is——"

"My brother."

"I never heard he had a brother," rejoined Eleanor, with some agitation. "How can that be?"

"I am his brother, nevertheless," replied Luke, moodily—"his elder brother!"

Eleanor turned to her mother and the priest with a look of imploring anguish; she saw a confirmation of the truth of this statement in their glances. No contradiction was offered by either to his statement; both, indeed, appeared in some mysterious manner prepared for it. This, then, was the dreaded secret. This was the cause of her brother's sudden departure. The truth flashed with lightning swiftness across her brain.

Chagrined and mortified, Luke remarked that glance of inquiry. His pride was hurt at the preference thus naturally shown towards his brother. He had been struck, deeply struck, with her beauty. He acknowledged the truth of Peter's words. Eleanor's loveliness was without parallel. He had seen naught so fair, and the instant he beheld her, he felt that for her alone could he cancel his vows to Sybil. The spirit of rivalry and jealousy was instantly aroused by Eleanor's exclamations.

"His elder brother!" echoed Eleanor, dwelling upon his words, and addressing Luke—"then you must be—but no, you are not, you cannot be—it is Ranulph's title—it is not yours—you are not——"

"I am Sir Luke Rookwood," replied Luke, proudly.

Ere the words were uttered Eleanor had fainted.

"Assistance is at hand, madam, if you will accept it, and follow me," said Luke, raising the insensible girl in his arms, and bearing her down the hill towards the encampment, whither he was followed by Mrs. Mowbray and the priest, between whom, during the hurried dialogue we have detailed, very significant glances had been exchanged. Turpin, who, as it may be supposed, had not been an incurious observer of the scene passing, burst into his usual loud laugh on seeing Luke bear away his lovely burden.

"Cousin! Ha, ha!" said he. "So the wench is his cousin. Damme, I half suspect he has fallen in love with his new-found cousin; and if so, Miss Sybil, or I'm mistaken, will look as yellow as a guinea. If that little Spanish devil gets it into her pretty jealous pate that he is about to bring home a new mistress, we shall have a tragedy-scene in the twinkling of a bed-post. However, I shan't lose sight of Sir Luke until I have settled my accounts with him. Hark ye, boy," continued he, addressing the postilion; "remain where you are; you won't be wanted yet awhile, I imagine. There's a guinea for you, to drink Dick Turpin's health."

Upon which he mounted his mare, and walked her easily down the hill.

"And so that be Dick Turpin, folks talk so much about," soliloquized the lad, looking curiously after him; "well, he's as civil-speaking a chap as need be, blow my boots if he ain't! and if I'd had a notion it were he, I'd have pulled up at first call, without more ado. Nothing like experience—I shall know better another time," added he, pocketing the douceur.

Rushing swiftly down the hill, Luke tarried at the river's brink, to sprinkle some of the cool element upon the pale brow of Eleanor. As he held her in his arms, thoughts which he fain would have stifled in their birth took possession of his heart. "Would she were mine!" murmured he. "Yet no! the wish is unworthy." But that wish returned unbidden.

Eleanor opened her eyes. She was still too weak to walk without support, and Luke, raising her once more in his arms, and motioning Mrs. Mowbray to follow, crossed the brook by means of stepping-stones, and conducted his charge along a bypath towards the priory, so as to avoid meeting with the crew assembled upon the green.

They had gained one of the roofless halls, when he encountered Balthazar. Astonished at the sight of the party, the patrico was about to address the priest as an acquaintance, when his more orthodox brother raised his finger to his lips, in token of caution. The action passed unobserved.

"Hie thee to Sybil," said Luke to the patrico. "Bid her haste hither. Say that this maiden—that Miss Mowbray is here, and requires her aid. Fly! I will bear her to the refectory."

As Balthazar passed the priest, he pointed with a significant glance towards a chasm in the wall, which seemed to be an opening to some subterraneous chamber. The father again made a gesture of silence, and Balthazar hastened upon his mission.

Luke led them to the refectory. He brought a chair for Eleanor's support; but so far from reviving, after such attention as could be afforded her, she appeared to become weaker. He was about to issue forth in search of Sybil, when to his surprise he found the door fastened.

"You cannot pass this way," said a voice, which Luke instantly recognized as that of the knight of Malta.

"Not pass!" echoed Luke. "What does this mean?"

"Our orders are from the queen," returned the knight.

At this instant the low tone of a muffled bell was heard.

"Ha!" exclaimed Luke; "some danger is at hand."

His heart smote him as he thought of Sybil, and he looked anxiously towards Eleanor.

Balthazar rushed into the room.

"Where is Sybil?" cried Luke. "Will she not come?"

"She will be here anon," answered the patrico.

"I will seek her myself, then," said Luke. "The door by which you entered is free."

"It is not free," replied Balthazar. "Remain where you are."

"Who will prevent my going forth?" demanded Luke, sternly.

"I will," said Barbara Lovel, as she suddenly appeared in the doorway. "You stir not, excepting at my pleasure. Where is the maiden?" continued she, looking around with a grim smile of satisfaction at the consternation produced by her appearance. "Ha! I see; she faints. Here is a cordial that shall revive her. Mrs. Mowbray, you are welcome to the gipsies' dwelling—you and your daughter. And you, Sir Luke Rookwood, I congratulate you upon your accession of dignity." Turning to the priest, who was evidently overwhelmed with confusion, she exclaimed, "And you too, sir, think you I recognize you not? We have met ere this, at Rookwood. Know you not Barbara Lovel? Ha, ha! It is long since my poor dwelling has been so highly honored. But I must not delay the remedy. Let her drink of this," said she, handing a phial to Mrs. Mowbray. "It will instantly restore her."

"It is poison," cried Luke. "She shall not drink it."

"Poison!" reiterated Barbara. "Behold!" and she drank of the liquid. "I would not poison your bride," added she, turning to Luke.

"My bride!" echoed Luke.

"Ay, your bride," repeated Barbara.

Luke recoiled in amazement. Mrs. Mowbray almost felt inclined to believe she was a dreamer, so visionary did the whole scene appear. A dense crowd of witnesses stood at the entrance. Foremost amongst them was the sexton. Suddenly a shriek was heard, and the crowd opening to allow her passage, Sybil rushed forward.

The Gipsy by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VII

MRS. MOWBRAY

Well, go thy ways, old Nick Machiavel, there will never be the peer of thee for wholesome policy and good counsel: thou took'st pains to chalk men out the dark paths and hidden plots of murther and deceit, and no man has the grace to follow thee. The age is unthankful, thy principles are quite forsaken, and worn out of memory.

Shakerley Marmion's Antiquary.

Sybil's sudden entrance filled the group that surrounded Miss Mowbray with new dismay. But she saw them not. Her soul seemed riveted by Eleanor, towards whom she rushed; and while her eye wandered over her beauty, she raised the braided hair from her brow, revealing the clear, polished forehead. Wonder, awe, devotion, pity, usurped the place of hatred. The fierce expression that had lit up her dark orbs was succeeded by tender commiseration. She looked an imploring appeal at Barbara.

"Ay, ay," returned the old gipsy, extending at the same time the phial; "I understand. Here is that will bring the blood once more into her pallid cheeks, and kindle the fire within her eyes. Give her of this."

The effect of the potion was almost instantaneous, amply attesting Barbara's skill in its concoction. Stifled respiration first proclaimed Eleanor's recovery. She opened her large and languid eyes; her bosom heaved almost to bursting; her pulses throbbed quickly and feverishly; and as the stimulant operated, the wild lustre of excitement blazed in her eyes.

Sybil took her hand to chafe it. The eyes of the two maidens met. They gazed upon each other steadfastly and in silence. Eleanor knew not whom she regarded, but she could not mistake that look of sympathy; she could not mistake the tremulous pressure of her hand; she felt the silent trickling tears. She returned the sympathizing glance, and gazed with equal wonder upon the ministering fairy, for such she almost seemed, that knelt before her. As her looks wandered from the kindly glance of Sybil to the withered and inauspicious aspect of the gipsy queen, and shifted thence to the dusky figures of her attendants, filled with renewed apprehension, she exclaimed, "Who are these, and where am I?"

"You are in safety," replied Luke. "This is the ruined priory of St. Francis; and those strange personages are a horde of gipsies. You need fear no injury from them."

"My deliverer!" murmured Eleanor; when all at once the recollection that he had avowed himself a Rookwood, and the elder brother of Ranulph, flashed across her memory. "Gipsies! did you not say these people were gipsies? Your own attire is the same as theirs. You are not, cannot be, the brother of Ranulph."

"I do not boast the same mother," returned Luke, proudly, "but my father was Sir Piers Rookwood, and I am his elder born."

He turned away. Dark thoughts swept across his brain. Maddened by the beauty of Eleanor, stung by her slights, and insensible to the silent agony of Sybil, who sought in vain to catch his eye, he thought of nothing but of revenge, and the accomplishment of his purposes. All within was a wild and fearful turmoil. His better principles were stifled by the promptings of evil. "Methinks," cried he, half aloud, "if the Tempter were near to offer the maiden to me, even at the peril of my soul's welfare, I could not resist it."

The Tempter was at hand. He is seldom absent on occasions like the present. The sexton stood beside his grandson. Luke started. He eyed Peter from head to foot, almost expecting to find the cloven foot, supposed to be proper to the fiend. Peter grinned in ghastly derision.

"Soh! you would summon hell to your aid; and lo! the devil is at your elbow. Well, she is yours."

"Make good your words," cried Luke, impatiently.

"Softly—softly," returned Peter. "Moderate yourself, and your wishes shall be accomplished. Your own desires chime with those of others; nay, with those of Barbara. She would wed you to Miss Mowbray. You stare. But it is so. This is a cover for some deeper plot; no matter. It shall go hard, despite her cunning, if I foil her not at her own weapons. There is more mischief in that old woman's brain than was ever hatched within the crocodile's egg; yet she shall find her match. Do not thwart her; leave all to me. She is about it now," added he, noticing Barbara and Mrs. Mowbray in conference together. "Be patient—I will watch her." And he quitted his grandson for the purpose of scanning more closely the manœuvres of the old gipsy.

Barbara, meanwhile, had not remained inactive.

"You need fear no relapse in your daughter; I will answer for that," said the old gipsy to Mrs. Mowbray; "Sybil will tend her. Quit not the maiden's side," continued she, addressing her grandchild, adding, in a whisper, "Be cautious—alarm her not—mine eye will be upon you—drop not a word."

So saying, she shuffled to a little distance with Mrs. Mowbray, keeping Sybil in view, and watching every motion, as the panther watches the gambols of a fawn.

"Know you who speaks to you?" said the old crone, in the peculiar low and confidential tone assumed by her tribe to strangers. "Have you forgotten the name of Barbara Lovel?"

"I have no distinct remembrance of it," returned Mrs. Mowbray.

"Think again," said Barbara; "and though years are flown, you may perchance recall the black gipsy woman, who, when you were surrounded with gay gallants, with dancing plumes, perused your palm, and whispered in your ear the favored suitor's name. Bide with me a moment, madam," said Barbara, seeing that Mrs. Mowbray shrank from the recollection thus conjured up; "I am old—very old; I have survived the shows of flattery, and being vested with a power over my people, am apt, perchance, to take too much upon myself with others." The old gipsy paused here, and then, assuming a more familiar tone, exclaimed, "The estates of Rookwood are ample——"

"Woman, what mean you?"

"They should have been yours, lady, and would have been, but for that marriage. You would have beseemed them bravely. Sir Reginald was wilful, and erased the daughter's name to substitute that of his son. Pity it is that so fair a creature as Miss Mowbray should lack the dower her beauty and her birth entitle her to expect. Pity that Ranulph Rookwood should lose his title, at the moment when he deemed it was dropping into his possession. Pity that those broad lands should pass away from you and your children, as they will do, if Ranulph and Eleanor are united."

"They never shall be united," replied Mrs. Mowbray, hastily.

"'Twere indeed to wed your child to beggary," said Barbara.

Mrs. Mowbray sighed deeply.

"There is a way," continued the old crone, in a deep whisper, "by which the estates might still be hers and yours."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Mowbray, eagerly.

"Sir Piers Rookwood had two sons."

"Ha!"

"The elder is here."

"Luke—Sir Luke. He brought us hither."

"He loves your daughter. I saw his gaze of passion just now. I am old now, but I have some skill in lovers' glances. Why not wed her to him? I read hands—read hearts, you know. They were born for each other. Now, madam, do you understand me?"

"But," returned Mrs. Mowbray, with hesitation, "though I might wish for—though I might sanction this, Eleanor is betrothed to Ranulph—she loves him."

"Think not of her, if you are satisfied. She cannot judge so well for herself as you can for her. She is a child, and knows not what she loves. Her affection will soon be Luke's. He is a noble youth—the image of his grandfather, your father, Sir Reginald; and if your daughter be betrothed to any one, 'twas to the heir of Rookwood. That was an essential part of the contract. Why should the marriage not take place at once, and here?"

"Here! How were that possible?"

"You are within sacred walls. I will take you where an altar stands. There is no lack of holy priest to join their hands together. Your companion, Father Ambrose, as you call him, will do the office fittingly. He has essayed his clerkly skill already on others of your house."

"To what do you allude, mysterious woman?" asked Mrs. Mowbray, with anxiety.

"To Sir Piers and Susan Bradley," returned Barbara. "That priest united them."

"Indeed! He never told me this."

"He dared not do so; he had an oath which bound him to concealment. The time is coming when greater mysteries will be revealed."

"'Tis strange I should not have heard of this before," said Mrs. Mowbray, musingly; "and yet I might have guessed as much from his obscure hints respecting Ranulph. I see it all now. I see the gulf into which I might have been plunged; but I am warned in time. Father Ambrose," continued she, to the priest, who was pacing the chamber at some little distance from them, "is it true that my brother was wedded by you to Susan Bradley?"

Ere the priest could reply the sexton presented himself.

"Ha, the very father of the girl!" said Mrs. Mowbray, "whom I met within our family vault, and who was so strangely moved when I spoke to him of Alan Rookwood. Is he here likewise?"

"Alan Rookwood!" echoed Barbara, upon whom a light seemed suddenly to break; "ha! what said he of him?"

"Ill-boding raven," interposed Peter, fiercely, "be content with what thou knowest of the living, and trouble not the repose of the dead. Let them rest in their infamy."

"The dead!" echoed Barbara, with a chuckling laugh; "ha! ha! he is dead, then; and what became of his fair wife—his brother's minion? 'Twas a foul deed, I grant, and yet there was expiation. Blood flowed—blood——"

"Silence, thou night hag!" thundered Peter, "or I will have thee burned at the stake for the sorcery thou practisest. Beware," added he, in a deep tone—"I am thy friend."

Barbara's withered countenance exhibited for an instant the deepest indignation at the sexton's threat. The malediction trembled on her tongue; she raised her staff to smite him, but she checked the action. In the same tone, and with a sharp, suspicious look, she replied, "My friend, sayest thou? See that it prove so, or beware of me."

And, with a malignant scowl, the gipsy queen slowly shuffled towards her satellites, who were stationed at the door.

The Gipsy by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VIII

THE PARTING

No marriage I esteem it, where the friends
Force love upon their children; where the virgin
Is not so truly given as betrayed.
I would not have betrothed people—for
I can by no means call them lovers—make
Their rites no wedlock, but a sacrifice.
Combat of Love and Friendship.

Eleanor Mowbray had witnessed her mother's withdrawal from her side with much uneasiness, and was with difficulty prevented by Sybil from breaking upon her conference with the gipsy queen. Barbara's dark eye was fixed upon them during the whole of the interview, and communicated an indefinite sense of dread to Eleanor.

"Who—who is that old woman?" asked Eleanor, under her breath. "Never, even in my wildest dreams, have I seen aught so terrible. Why does she look so at us? She terrifies me; and yet she cannot mean me ill, or my mother—we have never injured her?"

"Alas!" sighed Sybil.

"You sigh!" exclaimed Eleanor, in alarm. "Is there any real danger, then? Help us to avoid it. Quick, warn my mother; she seems agitated. Oh, let me go to her."

"Hush!" whispered Sybil, maintaining an unmoved demeanor under the lynx-like gaze of Barbara. "Stir not, as you value your life; you know not where you are, or what may befall you. Your safety depends upon your composure. Your life is not in danger; but what is dearer than life, your love, is threatened with a fatal blow. There is a dark design to wed you to another."

"Heavens!" ejaculated Eleanor, "and to whom?"

"To Sir Luke Rookwood."

"I would die sooner! Marry him? They shall kill me ere they force me to it!"

"Could you not love him?"

"Love him! I have only seen him within this hour. I knew not of his existence. He rescued me from peril. I would thank him. I would love him, if I could, for Ranulph's sake; and yet for Ranulph's sake I hate him."

"Speak not of him thus to me," said Sybil, angrily. "If you love him not, I love him. Oh! forgive me, lady; pardon my impatience—my heart is breaking, yet it has not ceased to beat for him. You say you will die sooner than consent to this forced union. Your faith shall not be so cruelly attested. If there must be a victim, I will be the sacrifice. God grant I may be the only one. Be happy! as happy as I am wretched. You shall see what the love of a gipsy can do."

As she spoke, Sybil burst into a flood of passionate tears. Eleanor regarded her with the deepest commiseration; but the feeling was transient; for Barbara, now advancing, exclaimed: "Hence to your mother. The bridegroom is waiting: to your mother, girl!" And she motioned Eleanor fiercely away. "What means this?" continued the old gipsy. "What have you said to that girl? Did I not caution you against speech with her? and you have dared to disobey me. You, my grandchild—the daughter of my Agatha, with whom my slightest wish was law. I abandon you! I curse you!"

"Oh, curse me not!" cried Sybil. "Add not to my despair."

"Then follow my advice implicitly. Cast off this weakness; all is in readiness. Luke shall descend into the vaulted chapel, the ceremony shall there take place—there also shall Eleanor die—and there again shall you be wedded. Take this phial, place it within the folds of your girdle. When all is over, I will tell you how to use it. Are you prepared? Shall we set out?"

"I am prepared," replied Sybil, in accents hollow as despair; "but let me speak with Luke before we go."

"Be brief, then—each moment is precious. Keep a guard upon your tongue. I will to Mrs. Mowbray. You have placed the phial in safety. A drop will free you from your troubles."

"'Tis in that hope I guard it," replied Sybil, as she departed in the direction of Luke. Barbara watched her join him, and then turned shortly towards Mrs. Mowbray and her daughter.

"You are ill, dear Luke," said Sybil, who had silently approached her faithless lover; "very ill."

"Ill!" echoed Luke, breaking into frantic laughter. "Ill! Ha, ha!—upon my wedding-day. No, I am well—well. Your eyes are jaundiced by jealousy."

"Luke, dear Luke, laugh not thus. It terrifies me. I shall think you insane. There, you are calmer—you are more like yourself—more human. You looked just now—oh God! that I should say it of you—as if you were possessed by demons."

"And if I were possessed, what then?"

"Horrible! hint not at it. You almost make me credit the dreadful tales I have heard, that on their wedding-day the Rookwoods are subject to the power of the 'Evil One.'"

"Upon their wedding-day—and I look thus?"

"You do—you do. Oh! cast this frenzy from you."

"She is mine—she is mine! I care not though fiends possess me, if it is my wedding-day, and Eleanor is my bride. And you say I look like a Rookwood. Ha, ha!"

"That wild laughter again. Luke, I implore you, hear me one word—my last——"

"I will not bear reproaches."

"I mean not to reproach you. I come to bless you—to forgive you—to bid you farewell. Will you not say farewell?"

"Farewell."

"Not so—not so. Mercy! my God! compassionate him and me! My heart will break with agony. Luke, if you would not kill me, recall that word. Let not the guilt of my death be yours. 'Tis to save you from that remorse that I die!"

"Sybil, you have said rightly, I am not myself. I know not what demons have possession of my soul, that I can behold your agonies without remorse; that your matchless affection should awaken no return. Yet so it is. Since the fatal moment when I beheld yon maid, I have loved her."

"No more. Now I can part with you. Farewell!"

"Stay, stay! wretch that I am. Stay, Sybil! If we must part—and that it must be so I feel—let me receive your pardon, if you can bestow it. Let me clasp you once more within my arms. May you live to happier days—may you——"

"Oh, to die thus!" sobbed Sybil, disengaging herself from his embrace. "Live to happier days, said you? When have I given you reason to doubt, for an instant, the sincerity of my love, that you should insult me thus?"

"Then live with me—live for me."

"If you can love me still, I will live as your slave, your minion, your wife; aught you will have me be. You have raised me from wretchedness. Oh!" continued she in an altered tone, "have I mistaken your meaning? Did you utter those words in false compassion for my sufferings?—Speak, it is not yet too late—all may be well. My fate—my life is in your hands. If you love me yet—if you can forsake Eleanor, speak—if not, be silent."

Luke averted his head.

"Enough!" continued Sybil, in a voice of agony; "I understand. May God forgive you! Fare you well! We shall meet no more."

"Do we part for ever?" asked Luke, without daring to regard her.

"For ever!" answered Sybil.

Before her lover could reply, she shot from his side, and plunging amidst the dark and dense assemblage near the door, disappeared from view. An instant after, she emerged into the open air. She stood within the roofless hall. It was filled with sunshine—with the fresh breath of morn. The ivied ruins, the grassy floor, the blue vault of heaven, seemed to greet her with a benignant smile. All was riant and rejoicing—all, save her heart. Amid such brightness, her sorrow seemed harsh and unnatural; as she felt the glad influence of day, she was scarcely able to refrain from tears. It was terrible to leave this beautiful world, that blue sky, that sunshine, and all she loved—so young, so soon.

Entering a low arch that yawned within the wall, she vanished like a ghost at the approach of morn.

The Gipsy by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER IX

THE PHILTER

Thou hast practised on her with foul charms—
Abused her delicate youth with drugs and minerals.
Shakspeare: Othello.

To return to Eleanor Mowbray. In a state of mind bordering upon distraction, she rushed to her mother, and, flinging her arms wildly round her neck, besought her to protect her. Mrs. Mowbray gazed anxiously upon the altered countenance of her daughter, but a few moments relieved her from much of her uneasiness.—The expression of pain gradually subsided, and the look of vacuity was succeeded by one of frenzied excitement. A film had, for an instant or two, dimmed her eyes; they now gleamed with unnatural lustre. She smiled—the smile was singular; it was not the playful, pleasurable lighting up of the face that it used to be; but it was a smile, and the mother's heart was satisfied.

Mrs. Mowbray knew not to what circumstance she could attribute this wondrous change. She looked at the priest. He was more apt in divining the probable cause of the sudden alteration in Eleanor's manner.

"What if she has swallowed a love-powder?" said he, approaching Mrs. Mowbray, and speaking in a whisper. "I have heard of such abominable mixtures; indeed, the holy St. Jerome himself relates an instance of similar sorcery, in his life of Hilarius; and these people are said to compound them."

"It may be so," replied Mrs. Mowbray, in the same tone. "I think that the peculiar softness in the eye is more than natural."

"I will at least hazard an experiment, to attest the truth or fallacy of my supposition," returned the father. "Do you see your destined bridegroom yonder?" continued he, addressing Eleanor.

She followed with her eyes in the direction which Father Ambrose pointed. She beheld Luke. We know not how to describe the sensations which now possessed her. She thought not of Ranulph; or, if she did, it was with vague indifference. Wrapped in a kind of mental trance, she yielded to the pleasurable impulse that directed her unsettled

fancies towards Luke. For some moments she did not take her eyes from him. The priest and Mrs. Mowbray watched her in silence.

Nothing passed between the party till Luke joined them. Eleanor continued gazing at him, and the seeming tenderness of her glance emboldened Luke to advance towards her. The soft fire that dwelt in those orbs was, however, cold as the shining wing of the luciola.

Luke approached her; he took her hand—she withdrew it not. He kissed it. Still she withdrew it not, but gazed at him with gently-glimmering eyes.

"My daughter is yours, Sir Luke Rookwood," exclaimed Mrs. Mowbray.

"What says the maid herself?" asked Luke.

Eleanor answered not. Her eyes were still fixed on him.

"She will not refuse me her hand," said Luke.

The victim resisted not.

"To the subterranean shrine," cried Barbara. And she gave the preconcerted signal to the band.

The signal was repeated by the gipsy crew. We may here casually note, that the crew had been by no means uninterested or silent spectators of passing events, but had, on the contrary, indulged themselves in a variety of conjectures as to their probable issue. Several bets were pending as to whether it would be a match or not after all. Zoroaster took long odds that the match was off—offering a bean to half-a-quid—in other words, a guinea to a half-guinea—that Sybil would be the bride. His offer was taken at once by Jerry Juniper, and backed by the knight of Malta.

"Ha! there's the signal," cried the knight; "I'll trouble you for the bean."

"And I," added Jerry Juniper, "for another."

"See 'em fairly spliced first," replied the Magus; "that's vot I betted."

"Vell, vell, a few minutes will settle that. Come, pals, to the autem ken. Avay. Mind and obey orders."

"Ay, ay," answered the crew.

"Here's a torch for the altar of Hymen," said the knight, flashing his torch in the eyes of the patrico as he passed him.

"For the halter of Haman, you might say," returned Balthazar, sulkily. "It's well if some of us don't swing for it."

"You don't say," rejoined the perplexed Magus, "swing! Egad I fear it's a ticklish business. But there's no fighting shy, I fear, with Barbara present; and then there's that infernal autem-bawler; it will be so cursedly regular. If you had done the job, Balty, it would not have signified a brass farden. Luckily there will be no vitnesses to snitch upon us. There will be no one in the vault besides ourselves."

"There will be a silent and a solemn witness," returned Balthazar, "and one whom you expect not."

"Eh! Vot's that you say? a spy?"

But the patrico was gone.

"Make way there—make way, pals, for the bride and bridegroom," cried the knight of Malta, drawing Excalibur, and preparing to lead the way to the vault.

The train began to move. Eleanor leaned upon the arm of her mother. Beside them stalked Barbara, with an aspect of triumph. Luke followed with the priest. One by one the assemblage quitted the apartment.

The sexton alone lingered. "The moment is at hand," said he, musingly, "when all shall be consummated."

A few steps brought him into the court. The crowd was there still. A brief delay had taken place. The knight of Malta then entered the mouth of the vault. He held his torch so as to reveal a broken flight of steps, conducting, it would seem, to regions of perpetual night. So thought Eleanor, as she shudderingly gazed into the abyss. She hesitated; she trembled; she refused. But her mother's entreaties, and Barbara's threatening looks, induced, in the end, reluctant compliance. At length the place was empty. Peter was about to follow, when the sound of a horse's hoofs broke upon his ear. He tarried for an instant, and the mounted figure of the highwayman burst within the limits of the court.

"Ha, ha! old earthworm," cried Dick, "my Nestor of the churchyard, alone! Where the devil are all the folks gone? Where's Sir Luke and his new-found cousin, eh?"

Peter hastily explained.

"A wedding under ground? famous! the thing of all others I should like to see. I'll hang Bess to this ivy tod, and grub my way with you thither, old mole."

"You must stay here, and keep guard," returned Peter.

"May I be hanged if I do, when such fun is going on."

"Hanged, in all probability, you will be," returned Peter; "but I should not, were I you, desire to anticipate my destiny. Stay here you must, and shall—that's peremptory. You will be the gainer by it. Sir Luke will reward you nobly. I will answer for him. You can serve him most effectually. Ranulph Rookwood and Major Mowbray are expected here."

"The devil they are. But how, or why——"

"I have not time to explain. In case of a surprise, discharge a pistol; they must not enter the vault. Have you a whistle? for you must play a double part, and we may need your assistance below."

"Sir Luke may command me. Here's a pipe as shrill as the devil's own cat-call."

"If it will summon you to our assistance below, 'tis all I need. May we rely on you?"

"When did Dick Turpin desert his friends? Anywhere on this side the Styx the sound of that whistle will reach me. I'll ride about the court, and stand sentry."

"Enough," replied the sexton, as he dived under ground.

"Take care of your shins," shouted Dick. "That's a cursed ugly turn, but he's used to the dark. A surprise, eh! I'll just give a look to my snappers—flints all safe. Now I'm ready for them, come when they like." And, having made the circuit of the place, he halted near the mouth of the subterranean chapel, to be within hearing of Peter's whistle, and, throwing his right leg lazily over his saddle, proceeded coolly to light a short pipe—the luxury of the cigar being then unknown,—humming the while snatches of a ballad, the theme of which was his own calling.

Quis verè rex?

Seneca.

There is not a king, should you search the world round,
So blithe as the king of the road to be found;
His pistol's his sceptre, his saddle's his throne,
Whence he levies supplies, or enforces a loan.
Derry down.
To this monarch the highway presents a wide field,
Where each passing subject a tribute must yield;
His palace—the tavern!—receives him at night,
Where sweet lips and sound liquor crown all with delight.
Derry down.
The soldier and sailor, both robbers by trade,
Full soon on the shelf, if disabled, are laid;
The one gets a patch, and the other a peg,
But, while luck lasts, the highwayman shakes a loose leg!
Derry down.
Most fowl rise at dawn, but the owl wakes at e'en,
And a jollier bird can there nowhere be seen;
Like the owl, our snug scampsman his snooze takes by day,
And, when night draws her curtain, scuds after his prey!
Derry down.
As the highwayman's life is the fullest of zest,
So the highwayman's death is the briefest and best;
He dies not as other men die, by degrees!
But at once! without wincing, and quite at his ease!
Derry down.
And thus, for the present, we leave him. O rare Dick Turpin!

The Gipsy by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER X

SAINT CYPRIAN'S CELL

Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch' entrate.

Dante.

Cyprian de Mulverton, fifth prior of the monastery of Saint Francis, a prelate of singular sanctity, being afflicted, in his latter days, with a despondency so deep that neither penance nor fasting could remove it, vowed never again to behold, with earthly eyes, the blessed light of heaven, nor to dwell longer with his fellowmen; but, relinquishing his spiritual dignity, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot," to immure himself, while living, within the tomb.

He kept his vow. Out of the living rock that sustained the saintly structure, beneath the chapel of the monastery, was another chapel wrought, and thither, after bidding an eternal farewell to the world, and bestowing his benediction upon his flock, whom he committed to the care of his successor, the holy man retired.

Never, save at midnight, and then only during the performance of masses for his soul's repose, did he ascend from his cell: and as the sole light allowed within the dismal dungeon of his choice was that of a sepulchral lamp, as none spoke with him when in his retreat, save in muttered syllables, what effect must the lustre emanating from a thousand tapers, the warm and pungent odors of the incense-breathing shrine, contrasted with the earthy vapors of his prison-house, and the solemn swell of the Sanctus, have had upon his excited senses? Surely they must have seemed like a foretaste of the heaven he sought to gain!

Ascetic to the severest point to which nature's endurance could be stretched, Cyprian even denied himself repose. He sought not sleep, and knew it only when it stole on him unawares. His couch was the flinty rock; and long afterwards, when the zealous resorted to the sainted prior's cell, and were shown those sharp and jagged stones, they marvelled how one like unto themselves could rest, or even recline upon their points without anguish, until it was explained to them that, doubtless, He who tempereth the wind to the shorn lamb had made that flinty couch soft to the holy sufferer as a bed of down. His limbs were clothed in a garb of horsehair of the coarsest fabric; his drink was the dank drops that oozed from the porous walls of his cell; and his sustenance, such

morsels as were bestowed upon him by the poor—the only strangers permitted to approach him. No fire was suffered, where perpetual winter reigned. None were admitted to his nightly vigils; none witnessed any act of penance; nor were any groans heard to issue from that dreary cave; but the knotted, blood-stained thong, discovered near his couch, too plainly betrayed in what manner those long lone nights were spent. Thus did a year roll on. Traces of his sufferings were visible in his failing strength. He could scarcely crawl; but he meekly declined assistance. He appeared not, as had been his wont, at the midnight mass; the door of his cell was thrown open at that hour; the light streamed down like a glory upon his reverend head; he heard the distant reverberations of the deep Miserere; and breathed odors as if wafted from Paradise.

One morn it chanced that they who sought his cell found him with his head upon his bosom, kneeling before the image of the virgin patroness of his shrine. Fearing to disturb his devotions, they stood reverently looking on; and thus silently did they tarry for an hour; but, as in that space he had shown no signs of motion, fearing the worst, they ventured to approach him. He was cold as the marble before which he knelt. In the act of humblest intercession—it may be, in the hope of grace—had Cyprian's spirit fled.

"Blessed are they who die in the Lord," exclaimed his brethren, regarding his remains with deepest awe. On being touched, the body fell to the ground. It was little more than a skeleton.

Under the cloisters of the holy pile were his bones interred, with a degree of pomp and ostentation that little accorded with the lowliness and self-abasement of this man of many sorrows.

This chapel, at the time of which we treat, was pretty much in the same condition as it existed in the days of its holy inmate. Hewn out of the entrails of the rock, the roof, the vaults, the floor, were of solid granite. Three huge cylindrical pillars, carved out of the native rock, rough as the stems of gnarled oak-trees, lent support to the ceiling. Support, however, was unneeded; an earthquake would scarce have shaken down those solid rafters. Only in one corner, where the water welled through a crevice of the rock, in drops that fell like tears, was decay manifest. Here the stone, worn by the constant dripping, had, in some places, given way. In shape, the vault was circular. The integral between each massive pillar formed a pointed arch. Again, from each pillar sprang other arches, which, crossed by diagonal, ogive branches, weaving one into the other, and radiating from the centre, formed those beautifully intricate combinations upon which the eye of the architectural enthusiast loves to linger. Within the ring formed by these triple columns, in which again the pillars had their own web of arches, was placed an altar of stone, and beside it a crucifix of the same rude material. Here also stood the sainted image of her who had filled the prior with holy aspirations, now a shapeless

stone. The dim lamp, that, like a star struggling with the thick gloom of a wintry cell, had shed its slender radiance over the brow of the Virgin Thecla, was gone. But around the keystone of the central arches, whence a chain had once depended, might be traced in ancient characters, half effaced by time, the inscription:

STA. THECLA ORA PRO NOBIS.

One outlet only was there from the chapel—that which led by winding steps to the monastery; one only recess—the prior's cell. The former faced the altar; the latter yawned like the mouth of a tomb at its back. Altogether it was a dreary place. Dumb were its walls as when they refused to return the murmured orisons of the anchorite. One uniform sad coloring prevailed throughout. The gray granite was grown hoar with age, and had a ghostly look; the columns were ponderous, and projected heavy shadows. Sorrow and superstition had their tale, and a moral gloom deepened the darkness of the spot. Despair, which had inspired its construction, seemed to brood therein. Hope shunned its inexorable recesses.

Alone, within this dismal sanctuary, with hands outstretched towards the desecrated image of its tutelar saint, knelt Sybil. All was darkness. Neither the heavy vapors that surrounded her, nor the shrine before which she bent, were visible; but, familiar with the dreary spot, she knew that she had placed herself aright. Her touch had satisfied her that she bowed before the altar of stone; that her benighted vision was turned towards the broken image of the saint, though now involved in gloom the most profound; and with clasped hands and streaming eyes, in low and mournful tones, she addressed herself in the following hymn to the tutelar saint of the spot:

HYMN TO SAINT THECLA

In my trouble, in my anguish,
In the depths of my despair,
As in grief and pain I languish,
Unto thee I raise my prayer.
Sainted virgin! martyr'd maiden!
Let thy countenance incline
Upon one with woes o'erladen,
Kneeling lowly at thy shrine;
That in agony, in terror,
In her blind perplexity,
Wandering weak in doubt and error,
Calleth feebly upon thee.
Sinful thoughts, sweet saint, oppress me,

Thoughts that will not be dismissed;
Temptations dark possess me,
Which my strength may not resist.
I am full of pain, and weary
Of my life; I fain would die:
Unto me the world is dreary;
To the grave for rest I fly.
For rest!—oh! could I borrow
Thy bright wings, celestial dove!
They should waft me from my sorrow,
Where peace dwells in bowers above.
Upon one with woes o'erladen,
Kneeling lowly at thy shrine;
Sainted virgin! martyr'd maiden!
Let thy countenance incline!
Mei miserere Virgo,
Requiem æternam dona!
By thy loveliness, thy purity,
Unpolluted, undefiled,
That in serene security
Upon earth's temptations smiled;—
By the fetters that constrain'd thee,
By thy flame-attested faith,
By the fervor that sustain'd thee,
By thine angel-ushered death;—
By thy soul's divine elation,
'Mid thine agonies assuring
Of thy sanctified translation
To beatitude enduring;—
By the mystic interfusion
Of thy spirit with the rays,
That in ever bright profusion
Round the Throne Eternal blaze;—
By thy portion now partaken,
With the pain-perfected just;
Look on one of hope forsaken,
From the gates, of mercy thrust.
Upon one with woes o'erladen,
Kneeling lowly at thy shrine,
Sainted virgin! martyr'd maiden!
Let thy countenance incline!

Ora pro me mortis horâ!
Sancta Virgo, oro te!
Kyrie Eleison!
The sweet, sad voice of the singer died faintly away. The sharpness of her sorrow was assuaged. Seldom, indeed, is it that fervent supplication fails to call down solace to the afflicted. Sybil became more composed. She still, however, trembled at the thoughts of what remained to be done.

"They will be here ere my prayer is finished," murmured she—"ere the end is accomplished for which I came hither alone. Let me, oh! let me make my peace with my Creator, ere I surrender my being to His hands, and then let them deal with me as they will." And she bowed her head in lowly prayer.

Again raising her hands, and casting her eyes towards the black ceiling, she implored, in song, the intercession of the saintly man who had bequeathed his name to the cell.

HYMN TO SAINT CYPRIAN

Hear! oh! hear me, sufferer holy,
Who didst make thine habitation
'Mid these rocks, devoting wholly
Life to one long expiation
Of thy guiltiness, and solely
By severe mortification
Didst deliver thee. Oh! hear me!
In my dying moments cheer me.
By thy penance, self-denial,
Aid me in the hour of trial.
May, through thee, my prayers prevailing
On the Majesty of Heaven,
O'er the hosts of hell, assailing
My soul, in this dark hour be driven!
So my spirit, when exhaling,
May of sinfulness be shriven,
And His gift unto the Giver
May be rendered pure as ever!
By thy own dark, dread possession,
Aid me with thine intercession!
Scarcely had she concluded this hymn, when the torch of the knight of Malta in part dissipated the gloom that hung around the chapel.

The Gipsy by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XI
THE BRIDAL

Cari. I will not die; I must not. I am contracted
To a young gentleman.
Executioner. Here's your wedding-ring.
Duchess of Malfy.

Slowly did the train descend; solemnly and in silence, as if the rites at which they were about to assist had been those of funereal, and not of nuptial, solemnization. Indeed, to look upon those wild and fierce faces by the ruddily-flashing torchlight, which lent to each a stern and savage expression; to see those scowling visages surrounding a bride from whose pallid cheeks every vestige of color, and almost of animation, had fled; and a bridegroom, with a countenance yet more haggard, and demeanor yet more distracted—the beholder must have imagined that the spectacle was some horrible ceremonial, practised by demons rather than human beings. The arched vault, the pillars, the torchlight, the deep shadows, and the wild figures, formed a picture worthy of Rembrandt or Salvator.

"Is Sybil within the chapel?" asked Barbara.

"I am here," returned a voice from the altar.

"Why do we tarry?" said the gipsy queen. "We are all assembled. To the altar."

"To the altar!" shrieked Eleanor. "Oh! no—no——"

"Remember my threat, and obey," muttered Barbara. "You are in my power now."

A convulsive sob was all the answer Eleanor could make.

"Our number is not complete," said the priest, who had looked in vain for the sexton. "Peter Bradley is not with us."

"Ha!" exclaimed Barbara. "Let him be sought for instantly."

"Their search need not extend beyond this spot," said Peter, stepping forward.

The knight of Malta advanced towards the altar. The torchlight reddened upon the huge stone pillars. It fell upon the shrine, and upon the ghastly countenance of Sybil, who stood beside it. Suddenly, as the light approached her, an object, hitherto hidden from view, was revealed. Sybil uttered a prolonged and fearful shriek; the knight recoiled likewise in horror; and a simultaneous cry of astonishment burst from the lips of the foremost of the group. All crowded forwards, and universal consternation prevailed amongst the assemblage. Each one gazed at his neighbor, anxious to learn the occasion of this tumult, and vague fears were communicated to those behind, from the terrified glances, which were the only answers returned by their comrades in front.

"Who has dared to bring that body here?" demanded Barbara, in a tone in which anger struggled with apprehension, pointing at the same time to the ghastly corpse of a female, with streaming hair, at the altar's feet. "Who has dared to do this, I say? Quick! remove it. What do you stare at? Cravens! is this the first time you have looked upon a corpse, that you should shrink aghast—that you tremble before it? It is a clod—ay, less than a clod. Away with it! away, I say."

"Touch it not," cried Luke, lifting a cloud of black hair from off the features; "it is my mother's body."

"My daughter!" exclaimed the sexton.

"What!" vociferated Barbara, "is that your daughter—is that the first Lady Rookwood? Are the dead arisen to do honor to these nuptials? Speak! you can, perchance, explain how she came hither."

"I know not," returned Peter, glancing fiercely at Barbara; "I may, anon, demand that question of you. How came this body here?"

"Ask of Richard Checkley," said Barbara, turning to the priest. "He can, perchance, inform you. Priest," added she, in a low voice, "this is your handiwork."

"Checkley!" screamed Peter. "Is that Richard Checkley? is that——"

"Peace!" thundered Barbara; "will none remove the body? Once more I ask you, do you fear the dead?"

A murmur arose. Balthazar alone ventured to approach the corpse.

Luke started to his feet as he advanced, his eyes glaring with tiger fury.

"Back, old man," cried he, "and dare not, any of you, to lay a sacrilegious finger on her corse, or I will stretch him that advances as lowly as lies my mother's head. When or how it came hither matters not. Here, at the altar, has it been placed, and none shall move it hence. The dead shall witness my nuptials. Fate has ordained it—my fate! o'er which the dead preside. Her ring shall link me to my bride. I knew not, when I snatched it from her death-cold finger, to what end I preserved it. I learn it now. It is here." And he held forth a ring.

"'Tis a fatal boon, that twice-used ring," cried Sybil; "such a ring my mother, on her death-bed, said should be mine. Such a ring she said should wed me——"

"Unto whom?" fiercely demanded Luke.

"Unto Death!" she solemnly rejoined.

Luke's countenance fell. He turned aside, deeply abashed, unable further to brook her gaze; while in accents of such wildly touching pathos as sank into the hearts of each who heard her—hearts, few of them framed of penetrable stuff—the despairing maiden burst into the following strain:

THE TWICE-USED RING

"Beware thy bridal day!"
On her death-bed sighed my mother;
"Beware, beware, I say,
Death shall wed thee, and no other.
Cold the hand shall grasp thee,
Cold the arms shall clasp thee,
Colder lips thy kiss shall smother!
Beware thy bridal kiss!
"Thy wedding ring shall be
From a clay-cold finger taken;
From one that, like to thee,
Was by her love forsaken.
For a twice-used ring
Is a fatal thing;
Her griefs who wore it are partaken—,
Beware that fatal ring!
"The altar and the grave
Many steps are not asunder;
Bright banners o'er thee wave,

Shrouded horror lieth under.
Blithe may sound the bell,
Yet 'twill toll thy knell;
Scathed thy chaplet by the thunder—
Beware that blighted wreath!"
Beware my bridal day!
Dying lips my doom have spoken;
Deep tones call me away;
From the grave is sent a token.
Cold, cold fingers bring
That ill-omen'd ring;
Soon will a second heart be broken;
This is my bridal day.

There was a deep, profound silence as the last melancholy cadence died away, and many a rugged heart was melted, even to tears. Eleanor, meanwhile, remained in a state of passive stupefaction, vacantly gazing at Sybil, upon whom alone her eyes were fixed, and appearing indistinctly to apprehend the meaning of her song.

"This is my bridal day," murmured she, in a low tone, when Sybil had finished. "Said not that sweet voice so? I know 'tis my bridal day. What a church you have chosen, mother! A tomb—a sepulchre—but 'tis meet for such nuptials as mine—and what wedding guests! Was that pale woman in her shroud-like dress invited here by you? Tell me that, mother."

"My God, her senses are gone!" cried Mrs. Mowbray. "Why did I venture into this horrible place?"

"Ask not why now, madam," rejoined the priest. "The hour for consideration is past. We must act. Let the marriage proceed, at all hazards; we will then take means to extricate ourselves from this accursed place."

"Remove that horrible object," said Mrs. Mowbray; "it fascinates the vision of my child."

"Lend me your hand, Richard Checkley," said Peter, sternly regarding the priest.

"No, no," replied the priest, shuddering; "I will not, cannot touch it. Do you alone remove it."

Peter approached Luke. The latter now offered no further opposition, and the body was taken away. The eyes of Eleanor followed it into the dark recesses of the vault; and when she could no longer distinguish the white flutter of the cereclothes, her laboring bosom

seemed torn asunder with the profound sigh that burst from it, and her head declined upon her shoulder.

"Let me see that ring," said the priest, addressing Luke, who still held the wedding-ring between his fingers.

"I am not naturally superstitious," said Mrs. Mowbray; "whether my mind be affected with the horrors of this place, I know not; but I have a dread of that ring. She shall not use it."

"Where no other can be found," said the priest, with a significant and peculiar look at Mrs. Mowbray, "I see no reason why this should be rejected. I should not have suspected you, madam, of such weakness. Grant there were evil spell, or charm, attached to it, which, trust me, there is not—as how should there be, to a harmless piece of gold?—my benediction, and aspersion with holy lymph, will have sufficient power to exorcise and expel it. To remove your fears it shall be done at once."

A cup containing water was brought, together with a plate of salt—which condiment the devil is said to abhor, and which is held to be a symbol of immortality and of eternity; in that, being itself incorruptible, it preserves all else from corruption,—and, with the customary Romish formula of prayer and exorcism, the priest thrice mingled the crystal particles with the pure fluid; after which, taking the ring in his hand with much solemnity, he sprinkled it with a few drops of the water which he had blessed; made the sign of the cross upon the golden circlet; uttered another and more potent exorcism to eradicate and expel every device of Satan, and delivered it back to Luke.

"She may wear it now in safety," said the sexton, with strong contempt. "Were the snake himself coiled round that consecrated bauble, the prayers of the devout Father Checkley would unclasp his lithest folds. But wherefore do we tarry now? Naught lies between us and the altar. The path is clear. The bridegroom grows impatient."

"And the bride?" asked Barbara.

"Is ready," replied the priest. "Madam, delay not longer. Daughter, your hand."

Eleanor gave her hand. It was clammy and cold. Supported by her mother, she moved slowly towards the altar, which was but a few steps from where they stood. She offered no resistance, but did not raise her head. Luke was by her side. Then for the first time did the enormity of the cruel, dishonorable act he was about to commit, strike him with its full force. He saw it in its darkest colors. It was one of those terrible moments when the headlong wheel of passion stands suddenly still.

"There is yet time," groaned he. "Oh! let me not damn myself perpetually! Let me save her; save Sybil; save myself."

They were at the altar—that wild wedding train. High over head the torch was raised. The red light flashed on bridegroom and on bride, giving to the pale features of each an almost livid look; it fell upon the gaunt aspect of the sexton, and lit up the smile of triumphant malice that played upon his face; it fell upon the fantastical habiliments of Barbara, and upon the haughty but perturbed physiognomy of Mrs. Mowbray; it fell upon the salient points of the Gothic arches; upon one molded pillar; upon the marble image of the virgin Thecla; and on the scarcely less marble countenance of Sybil who stood behind the altar, silent, statue-like, immovable. The effect of light and shade on other parts of the scene, upon the wild drapery, and harsh lineaments of many of the group, was also eminently striking.

Just as the priest was about to commence the marriage service, a yelling chorus, which the gipsies were accustomed to sing at the celebration of the nuptials of one of their own tribe, burst forth. Nothing could be more horribly discordant than their song.

WEDDING CHORUS OF GIPSIES

Scrape the catgut! pass the liquor!
Let your quick feet move the quicker.
Ta-ra-la!
Dance and sing in jolly chorus,
Bride and bridegroom are before us,
And the patrico stands o'er us.
Ta-ra-la!
To unite their hands he's ready;
For a moment, pals, be steady;
Cease your quaffing,
Dancing, laughing;
Leave off riot,
And be quiet,
While 'tis doing.
'Tis begun,
All is over!
Two are one!
The patrico has link'd 'em;
Daddy Hymen's torch has blink'd 'em.
Amen!

To 't again!
Now for quaffing,
Now for laughing,
Stocking-throwing,
Liquor flowing;
For our bridals are no bridles, and our altars never alter;
From the flagon never flinch we, in the jig we never falter.
No! that's not our way, for we
Are staunch lads of Romany.
For our wedding, then, hurrah!
Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!
This uncouth chorus ended, the marriage proceeded. Sybil had disappeared. Had she fled? No! she was by the bride. Eleanor mechanically took her place. A faint voice syllabled the responses. You could scarcely have seen Miss Mowbray's lips move. But the answers were given, and the priest was satisfied.

He took the ring, and sprinkled it once again with the holy water, in the form of the cross. He pronounced the prayer: "Benedic, Domine, annulum hunc, quem nos in tuo nomine benedicimus, ut quæ eum gestaverit, fidelitatem integram suo sponso tenens, in pace et voluntate tua permaneat atque in mutua charitate semper vivat."

He was about to return the ring to Luke, when the torch, held by the knight of Malta, was dashed to the ground by some unseen hand, and instantly extinguished. The wild pageant vanished as suddenly as the figures cast by a magic-lantern upon a wall disappear when the glass is removed. A wild hubbub succeeded. Hoarsely above the clamor arose the voice of Barbara.

"To the door, quickly!—to the door! Let no one pass, I will find out the author of this mishap anon. Away!"

She was obeyed. Several of the crew stationed themselves at the door.

"Proceed now with the ceremony," continued Barbara. "By darkness, or by light, the match shall be completed."

The ring was then placed upon the finger of the bride; and as Luke touched it, he shuddered. It was cold as that of the corpse which he had clasped but now. The prayer was said, the blessing given, the marriage was complete.

Suddenly there issued from the darkness deep dirge-like tones, and a voice solemnly chanted a strain, which all knew to be the death-song of their race, hymned by wailing women over an expiring sister. The music seemed to float in the air.

THE SOUL-BELL

Fast the sand of life is falling,
Fast her latest sigh exhaling,
Fast, fast, is she dying.
With death's chills her limbs are shivering,
With death's gasp the lips are quivering,
Fast her soul away is flying.
O'er the mountain-top it fleeteth,
And the skyey wonders greeteth,
Singing loud as stars it meeteth
On its way.
Hark! the sullen Soul-bell tolling,
Hollowly in echoes rolling,
Seems to say—
"She will ope her eyes—oh, never!
Quenched their dark light—gone for ever!
She is dead."

The marriage group yet lingered near the altar, awaiting, it would seem, permission from the gipsy queen to quit the cell. Luke stirred not. Clasped in his own, the cold hand of his bride detained him; and when he would have moved, her tightened grasp prevented his departure.

Mrs. Mowbray's patience was exhausted by the delay. She was not altogether free from apprehension. "Why do we linger here?" she whispered to the priest. "Do you, father, lead the way."

"The crowd is dense," replied Checkley. "They resist my effort."

"Are we prisoners here?" asked Mrs. Mowbray, in alarm.

"Let me make the attempt," cried Luke, with fiery impatience. "I will force a passage out."

"Quit not your bride," whispered Peter, "as you value her safety. Heed not aught else. She alone is in danger. Suffer her not to be withdrawn from your hand, if you would not lose her. Remain here. I will bring the matter to a speedy issue."

"Enough," replied Luke; "I stir not hence." And he drew his bride closer towards him. He stooped to imprint a kiss upon her lips. A cold shudder ran through her frame as he touched them, but she resisted not his embrace.

Peter's attempt to effect an egress was as unsuccessful as that of the priest. Presenting Excalibur at his bosom, the knight of Malta challenged him to stand.

"You cannot pass," exclaimed the knight; "our orders are peremptory."

"What am I to understand by this?" said Peter, angrily. "Why are we detained?"

"You will learn all anon," returned Barbara. "In the meantime you are my prisoners—or, if you like not the phrase, my wedding guests."

"The wedding is complete," returned the sexton; "the bride and bridegroom are impatient to depart, and we, the guests—albeit some of us may be no foes to darkness—desire not to hold our nuptial revels here."

"Sybil's wedding has not taken place," said Barbara; "you must tarry for that."

"Ha! now it comes," thought Peter. "And who, may I ask," said he, aloud, "amongst this goodly company, is to be her bridegroom?"

"The best amongst them," returned Barbara—"Sir Luke Rookwood."

"He has a bride already," replied Peter.

"She may be removed," said Barbara, with bitter and peculiar emphasis. "Dost understand my meaning now?"

"I will not understand it," said Peter. "You cannot mean to destroy her who now stands at the altar?"

"She who now stands at the altar must make way for a successor. She who grasps the bridegroom's hand shall die. I swear it by the oath of my tribe."

"And think you, you will be allowed to execute your murderous intention with impunity?" shrieked Mrs. Mowbray, in an agony of terror. "Think you that I will stand by and see my child slaughtered before my face; that my friends will suffer it? Think you that even your own tribe will dare to execute your horrible purpose? They will not. They

will side with us. Even now they murmur. What can you hope to gain by an act so wild and dreadful? What object can you have?"

"The same as your own," reiterated Barbara—"the advancement of my child. Sybil is as dear to me as Eleanor is to you. She is my child's child, the daughter of my best beloved daughter. I have sworn to marry her to Sir Luke Rookwood. The means are in my power. I will keep my vow; I will wed her to him. You did not hesitate to tear your daughter from the man she loved, to give her to the man she hated; and for what? For gold—for power—for rank. I have the same motive. I love my child, and she loves Sir Luke—has loved him long and truly; therefore shall she have him. What to me is your child, or your feelings, except they are subservient to my wishes? She stands in my way. I remove her."

"Who placed her in your path?" asked the sexton. "Did you not lend a helping hand to create that obstacle yourself?"

"I did," replied Barbara. "Would you know wherefore? I will tell you. I had a double motive for it. There is a curse upon the house of Rookwood, that kills the first fair bride each generation leads to the altar. Have you never heard of it?"

"I have! And did that idle legend sway you?"

"And do you call it idle? You! Well—I had another motive—a prophecy."

"By yourself uttered," replied Peter.

"Even so," replied Barbara. "The prophecy is fulfilled. The stray rook is found. The rook hath with rook mated. Luke hath wedded Eleanor. He will hold possession of his lands. The prophecy is fulfilled."

"But how?" asked Peter; "will your art tell you how and why he shall now hold possession? Can you tell me that?"

"My art goes not so far. I have predicted the event. It has come to pass. I am satisfied. He has wedded her. Be it mine to free him from that yoke." And Barbara laughed exultingly.

The sexton approached the old crone, and laid his hand with violence upon her shoulder.

"Hear me," cried he, "and I will tell you that which your juggling art refuses to reveal. Eleanor Mowbray is heir to the lands of Rookwood! The estates are hers! They were bequeathed to her by her grandsire, Sir Reginald."

"She was unborn when he died," cried Mrs. Mowbray.

"True," replied Peter; "but the lands were left to your issue female, should such issue be born."

"And did Sir Piers, my brother, know of this? did he see this will," asked Mrs. Mowbray, with trembling impatience.

"He did; and withheld the knowledge of it from you and yours."

"Ah! why knew I not this before? Why did you not tell me ere that was done which cannot be undone? I have sacrificed my child."

"Because it did not chime with my purposes to tell you," replied Peter, coldly.

"It is false—it is false," cried Mrs. Mowbray, her anger and vexation getting the better of her fears. "I will not believe it. Who are you, that pretend to know the secrets of our house?"

"One of that house," replied the sexton.

"Your name?"

"Would you know my name?" answered Peter, sternly. "The time is come when I will no longer conceal it. I am Alan Rookwood."

"My father's brother!" exclaimed Mrs. Mowbray.

"Ay, Alan Rookwood. The sworn enemy of your father—of you—of all of ye: your fate—your destiny—your curse. I am that Alan Rookwood whose name you breathed in the vault. I am he, the avenger—the avenged. I saw your father die. I heard his groans—his groans!—ha, ha! I saw his sons die: one fell in battle—I was with him there. The other expired in his bed. I was with Sir Piers when he breathed his last, and listened to his death agonies. 'Twas I who counselled him to keep the lands from you and from your child, and he withheld them. One only amongst the race, whose name I have cast off, have I loved; and him—because," added he, with something like emotion—"because he was my daughter's child—Luke Rookwood. And even he shall minister to my vengeance.

He will be your curse—your daughter's curse—for he loves her not. Yet he is her husband, and hath her land;—ha, ha!" And he laughed till he became convulsed with the paroxysm of fiendish exultation.

"Mine ears are stunned," cried Mrs. Mowbray.

"The bride is mine; relinquish her to me," said Barbara. "Advance and seize her, my children."

Alan Rookwood—for so we shall henceforth denominate the sexton—suddenly grew calm: he raised the whistle to his lips, and blew a call so loud and shrill, that those who were advancing hung back irresolute.

There was a rush at the door of the vault. The sentinels were struck down; and with pistols in each hand, and followed by two assistants, Dick Turpin sprang into the thick of the crew.

"Here we are," cried he, "ready for action. Where is Sir Luke Rookwood? where my churchyard pal, Peter?"

"Here," cried the sexton and Luke simultaneously.

"Then stand aside," cried Dick, pushing in the direction of the sounds, and bearing down all opposition. "Have a care there—these triggers are ticklish. Friend or foe, he who touches me shall have a bullet in his gizzard. Here I am, pal Peter; and here are my two chums, Rust and Wilder. Cut the whid."

"Have we license to pass scathless now?" asked the sexton; "or shall we make good our way?"

"You shall not pass," cried Barbara, furiously. "Think you to rob me of my prey? What, cowards! do you hesitate? Ha!"

"Kindle the torches," cried several voices. "We fight not in the dark."

A pistol was flashed. The torch again blazed. Its light fell upon a tumultuous group.

"Seize the bride," cried Barbara.

"Hold!" exclaimed a voice from the altar. The voice was that of Sybil.

Her hand was clasped in that of Luke. Eleanor had fainted in the arms of the gipsy girl Handassah.

"Are you my bride?" ejaculated Luke, in dismay.

"Behold the ring upon my finger! Your own hand placed it there."

"Betrayed!" screamed Alan, in a voice of anguish. "My schemes annihilated—myself undone—my enemies triumphant—lost! lost! All is destroyed—all!"

"Joy! joy!" exclaimed Mrs. Mowbray: "my child is saved."

"And mine destroyed," groaned Barbara. "I have sworn by the cross to slay the bride—and Sybil is that bride."

The Gipsy by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XII

ALAN ROOKWOOD

The wolf shall find her grave, and scrape it up;
Not to devour the corse, but to discover
The horrid murther.
Webster.

"Bravo! capital!" cried Turpin, laughing loud and long as an Olympian deity; "has this simple wench outwitted you all; turned the tables upon the whole gang of plotters, eh? Excellent! ha, ha, ha! The next time you wed, Sir Luke, let me advise you not to choose a wife in the dark. A man should have all his senses about him on these occasions. Make love when the liquor's in; marry when it's out, and, above all, with your eyes open. This beats cock-fighting—ha, ha, ha!—you must excuse me; but, upon my soul, I can't help it." And his laughter seemed inextinguishable.

"Take your men without," whispered Alan Rookwood; "keep watch as before, and let the discharge of a pistol bespeak the approach of danger as agreed upon; much yet remains to be done here."

"How so?" asked Dick; "it seems to me the job's entirely settled—if not to your satisfaction. I'm always ready to oblige my friend, Sir Luke; but curse me if I'd lend my help to any underhand work. Steer clear of foul play, or Dick Turpin holds no hand with you. As to that poor wench, if you mean her any harm, curse me if I will——"

"No harm is intended her," replied Alan. "I applaud your magnanimity," added he, sarcastically; "such sentiments are, it must be owned, in excellent keeping with your conduct."

"In keeping or not," replied Turpin, gravely, "cold-blooded murder is altogether out of my line, and I wash my hands of it. A shot or two in self defence is another matter; and when——"

"A truce to this," interrupted Alan; "the girl is safe. Will you mount guard again?"

"If that be the case, certainly," replied Dick. "I shall be glad to get back to Bess. I couldn't bring her with me into this black hole. A couple of shots will tell you 'tis Ranulph

Rookwood. But mind, no harm to the gipsy girl—to Lady Rookwood, I should say. She's a jewel, take my word for it, which Sir Luke must be mad to throw away." And calling his companions, he departed.

Alan Rookwood bent his steps towards the gipsy queen. Dark thoughts gathered quickly o'er his brow. He smiled as he drew nigh to Barbara—a smile it was

That wrinkled up his skin even to the hair.

Barbara looked at him at first with distrust; but as he developed his secret purposes, that smile became reflected upon her own features. Their conference took place apart. We willingly leave them to return to the altar.

Mrs. Mowbray and the priest were still there. Both were occupied in ineffectual endeavors to restore Eleanor to consciousness. She recovered from her swoon; but it was evident her senses still wandered; and vainly did Mrs. Mowbray lavish her tenderest caresses upon her child. Eleanor returned them not.

Luke, meanwhile, had given vent to the wildest fury. He shook away Sybil's grasp; he dashed her from him; he regarded her with withering glances; he loaded her with reproaches. She bore his violence with meekest submission; she looked imploringly—but she replied not to his taunts. Again she clung to the hem of his garment when cast aside. Luke appeared unmoved; what passed within we pause not to examine. He grew calmer; his calmness was more terrible to Sybil than his previous wrath had been.

"You are my wife," said he; "what then? By fraud, by stratagem, you have obtained that title, and, perforce, must keep it. But the title only shall you retain. No rights of wife shall ever be yours. It will be in your power to call yourself Lady Rookwood—you will be so in name—in nothing else."

"I shall not bear it long," murmured Sybil.

Luke laughed scornfully, "So you said before," replied he; "and yet I see not why you are likely to abandon it. The event will show. Thus far you have deceived me, and I place no further faith in your assertions. My hand was yours; you refused it. When I would give it to another, you grasp it clandestinely. Am I to believe you now? The wind will change—the vane veer with it."

"It will not veer from you," she meekly answered.

"Why did you step between me and my bride?"

"To save her life; to lay down mine for hers."

"An idle subterfuge. You know well that you run no risk of being called upon to do so. Your life is in no danger. The sacrifice was unnecessary. I could have dispensed with your assistance; my own arm would have sufficed to protect Eleanor."

"Your single arm would not have prevailed against numbers: they would have killed you likewise."

"Tush!" said Luke, fiercely. "Not only have you snatched from me my bride, you have robbed me of my fair estates, of all, save of my barren title, and that, even that, you have tarnished."

"True, true," sighed Sybil. "I knew not that the lands were hers, else had I never done it."

"False, false," cried Luke; "false as the rest. They will be Ranulph's. She will be Ranulph's. I shall still be an outcast, while Ranulph will riot in my halls—will press her to his bosom. Cling not to me. Hence! or I will spurn you from me. I am undone, undone by you, accursed one."

"Oh, curse me not! your words cut deep enough."

"Would they could kill you," cried Luke, with savage bitterness. "You have placed a bar between me and my prospects, which nothing can now remove—nothing but—ha!" and his countenance assumed a deadly hue and fearful expression. "By Heaven, you almost rouse the fell spirit which it is said dwells within the breast of my devoted race. I feel as if I could stab thee."

"No, no!" shrieked Sybil; "for mercy's sake, for your own sake, do not stab me. It is not too late. I will repair my wrong!"

"Ever deceiving! you would again delude me. You cannot repair it. One way alone remains, and that——"

"I will pursue," responded Sybil, sadly, but firmly.

"Never!" cried Luke; "you shall not. Ha!" exclaimed he, as he found his arms suddenly pinioned behind him. "What new treachery is this? By whose orders am I thus fettered?"

"By mine," said Alan Rookwood, stepping forward.

"By yours?" echoed Luke. "And wherefore? Release me."

"Be patient," replied Alan. "You will hear all anon. In the meantime you must be content to remain my prisoner. Quit not your hold," added he, addressing the gipsies, who kept charge of Luke.

"Their lives shall answer for their obedience," said Barbara.

Upon a further signal from Alan, Eleanor was torn from her mother's arms, and a bandage passed so suddenly over Mrs. Mowbray's face, that, before she could raise a cry of alarm, all possibility of utterance was effectually prevented. The priest alone was left at liberty.

Barbara snatched the hand of Eleanor. She dragged her to Sybil.

"You are Lady Rookwood," whispered she; "but she has your domains. I give her to you."

"She is the only bar between thy husband and his rights," whispered Alan Rookwood, in a tone of horrible irony; "it is not too late to repair your wrong."

"Away, tempter!" cried Sybil, horror-stricken. "I know you well. Yet," continued she, in an altered tone, "I will risk all for him. I have done him wrong. One mode of atonement remains; and, horrible though it be, I will embrace it. Let me not pause. Give her to me." And she seized upon the unresisting hand of Eleanor.

"Do you need my aid?" asked Barbara.

"No," replied Sybil; "let none approach us. A clapping of hands will let you know when all is over." And she dragged her passive victim deeper into the vault.

"Sybil, Sybil!" cried Luke, struggling with frantic violence to liberate himself; "hurt her not. I was rash. I was mad. I am calmer now. She hears me not—she will not turn. God of heaven! she will murder her. It will be done while I speak. I am the cause of all. Release me, villains! Would that I had died ere I had seen this day."

At a signal from the sexton, Luke also was blindfolded. He ceased to struggle. But his laboring breast told of the strife within.

"Miscreants!" exclaimed the priest, who had hitherto witnessed the proceedings in horror. "Why do not these rocks fall in, and crush you and your iniquities? Save her! oh, save her! Have you no pity for the innocent?"

"Such pity have we," replied Alan Rookwood, "as you showed my daughter. She was as innocent as Eleanor Mowbray, and yet you did not pity her."

"Heaven is my witness," exclaimed the priest, "that I never injured her."

"Take not Heaven's name in vain," cried Alan. "Who stood by while it was doing? Whose firmer hand lent aid to the murderer's trembling efforts? Whose pressure stifled her thrilling screams, and choked her cries for mercy? Yours—yours; and now you prate to me of pity—you, the slayer of the sleeping and the innocent!"

"'Tis false!" exclaimed the priest, in extremity of terror.

"False!" echoed Alan. "I had Sir Piers's own confession. He told me all. You had designs upon Sir Piers, which his wife opposed; you hated her; you were in the confidence of both—how did you keep that confidence? He told me how, by awakening a spirit of jealousy and pride, that o'ermastered all his better feelings. False! He told me of your hellish machinations; your Jesuitical plots; your schemes. He was too weak, too feeble an instrument to serve you. You left him, but not before she had left him. False! ha, I have that shall instantly convict you. The corpse is here, within this cell. Who brought it hither?"

The priest was silent: he seemed confounded by Alan's violence.

"I will answer that question," said Barbara. "It was brought hither by that false priest. His agent, Balthazar, has betrayed him. It was brought hither to prevent the discovery of Sir Luke Rookwood's legitimacy. He meant to make his own terms about it. It has come hither to proclaim his guilt—to be a fearful witness against him." Then, turning to Checkley, she added, "You have called Heaven to witness your innocence: you shall attest it by oath upon that body; and should aught indicate your guilt, I will hang you as I would a dog, and clear off one long score with justice. Do you shrink from this?"

"No," replied the priest, in a voice hollow and broken. "Bring me to the body."

"Seize each an arm," said Barbara, addressing Zoroaster and the knight of Malta, "and lead him to the corse."

"I will administer the oath," said Alan Rookwood, sternly.

"No, not you," stammered the priest.

"And wherefore not?" asked Alan. "If you are innocent, you need fear nothing from her."

"I fear nothing from the dead," replied Checkley; "lead on."

We will now return to Sybil. She was alone with her victim. They were near the mouth of the cell which had been Prior Cyprian's flinty dormitory, and were almost involved in darkness. A broken stream of light glanced through the pillars. Eleanor had not spoken. She suffered herself to be dragged thither without resistance, scarcely conscious, it would seem, of her danger. Sybil gazed upon her for some minutes with sorrow and surprise. "She comprehends not her perilous situation," murmured Sybil. "She knows not that she stands upon the brink of the grave. Oh! would that she could pray. Shall I, her murderess, pray for her? My prayers would not be heard. And yet, to kill her unshriven will be a twofold crime. Let me not look on her. My hand trembles. I can scarce grasp the dagger. Let me think on all he has said. I have wronged him. I am his bane, his curse! I have robbed him of all: there is but one remedy—'tis this!—Oh, God! she recovers. I cannot do it now."

It was a fearful moment for Eleanor's revival, when the bright steel flashed before her eyes. Terror at once restored her. She cast herself at Sybil's feet.

"Spare, spare me!" cried she. "Oh! what a dream I have had. And to waken thus, with the dagger's point at my breast. You will not kill me—you, gentle maid, who promised to preserve me. Ah, no, I am sure you will not."

"Appeal no more to me," said Sybil, fiercely. "Make your peace with Heaven. Your minutes are numbered."

"I cannot pray," said Eleanor, "while you are near me."

"Will you pray if I retire and leave you?"

"No, no. I dare not—cannot," shrieked Eleanor, in extremity of terror. "Oh! do not leave me, or let me go."

"If you stir," said Sybil, "I stab you to the heart."

"I will not stir. I will kneel here forever. Stab me as I kneel—as I pray to you. You cannot kill me while I cling to you thus—while I kiss your hands—while I bedew them with my tears. Those tears will not sully them like my blood."

"Maiden," said Sybil, endeavoring to withdraw her hand, "let go your hold—your sand is run."

"Mercy!"

"It is in vain. Close your eyes."

"No, I will fix them on you thus—you cannot strike then. I will cling to you—embrace you. Your nature is not cruel—your soul is full of pity. It melts—those tears—you will be merciful. You cannot deliberately kill me."

"I cannot—I cannot!" said Sybil, with a passionate outburst of grief. "Take your life on one condition."

"Name it."

"That you wed Sir Luke Rookwood."

"Ah!" exclaimed Eleanor, "all rushes back upon me at that name; the whole of that fearful scene passes in review before me."

"Do you reject my proposal?"

"I dare not."

"I must have your oath. Swear by every hope of eternity that you will wed none other than him."

"By every hope, I swear it."

"Handassah, you will bear this maiden's oath in mind, and witness its fulfilment."

"I will," replied the gipsy girl, stepping forward from a recess, in which she had hitherto remained unnoticed.

"Enough. I am satisfied. Tarry with me. Stir not—scream not, whatever you may see or hear. Your life depends upon your firmness. When I am no more——"

"No more?" echoed Eleanor, in horror.

"Be calm," said Sybil. "When I am dead, clap your hands together. They will come to seek you—they will find me in your stead. Then rush to him—to Sir Luke Rookwood. He will protect you. Say to him hereafter that I died for the wrong I did him—that I died, and blessed him."

"Can you not live, and save me?" sobbed Eleanor.

"Ask it not. While I live, your life is in danger. When I am gone, none will seek to harm you. Fare you well! Remember your oath, and you, too, remember it, Handassah. Remember also—ha! that groan!"

All started, as a deep groan knelled in their ears.

"Whence comes that sound?" cried Sybil. "Hist!—a voice?"

"It is that of the priest," cried Eleanor. "Hark! he groans. They have murdered him! Kind Heaven, receive his soul!"

"Pray for me," cried Sybil: "pray fervently; avert your face; down on your knees—down—down! Farewell, Handassah!" And breaking from them, she rushed into the darkest recesses of the vault.

We must now quit this painful scene for another scarcely less painful, and return to the unfortunate priest.

Checkley had been brought before the body of Susan Rookwood. Even in the gloom, the shimmer of the white cereclothes, and the pallid features of the corpse, were ghastly enough. The torchlight made them terrible.

"Kneel!" said Alan Rookwood. The priest complied. Alan knelt beside him.

"Do you know these features?" demanded he. "Regard them well. Fix your eyes full upon them. Do you know them?"

"I do."

"Place your hand upon her breast. Does not the flesh creep and shrink beneath your touch? Now raise your hand—make the cross of your faith upon her bosom. By that faith you swear you are innocent."

"I do," returned the priest; "are you now satisfied?"

"No," replied Alan. "Let the torch be removed. Your innocence must be more deeply attested," continued he, as the light was withdrawn. "This proof will not fail. Entwine your fingers round her throat."

"Have I not done enough?"

"Your hesitation proves your guilt," said Alan.

"That proof is wanting, then?" returned the priest; "my hand is upon her throat—what more?"

"As you hope for mercy in your hour of need, swear that you never conspired against her life, or refused her mercy."

"I swear it."

"May the dead convict you of perjury if you have forsworn yourself," said Alan; "you are free. Take away your hand!"

"Ha! what is this?" exclaimed the priest. "You have put some jugglery upon me. I cannot withdraw my hand. It sticks to her throat, as though 'twere glued by blood. Tear me away. I have not force enough to liberate myself. Why do you grin at me? The corpse grins likewise. It is jugglery. I am innocent. You would take away my life. Tear me away, I say: the veins rise; they blacken; they are filling with new blood. I feel them swell; they coil like living things around my fingers. She is alive."

"And you are innocent?"

"I am—I am. Let not my ravings convict me. For Jesu's sake, release me."

"Blaspheme not, but arise. I hold you not."

"You do," groaned the priest. "Your grasp tightens round my throat; your hard and skinny fingers are there—I strangle—help!"

"Your own fears strangle you. My hand is at my side," returned Alan calmly.

"Villain, you lie. Your grasp is like a vice. The strength of a thousand devils is in your hand. Will none lend help? I never pressed so hard. Your daughter never suffered this torture—never—never. I choke—choke—oh!" And the priest rolled heavily backwards.

There was a deep groan; a convulsive rattle in the throat; and all was still.

"He is dead—strangled," cried several voices, holding down the torch. The face of the priest was blackened and contorted; his eyeballs protruded from their sockets; his tongue was nearly bitten through in the desperate efforts he had made to release himself from Alan's gripe; his hair was erect with horror. It was a ghastly sight.

A murmur arose amongst the gipsies. Barbara deemed it prudent to appease them.

"He was guilty," cried she. "He was the murderer of Susan Rookwood."

"And I, her father, have avenged her," said Alan, sternly.

The dreadful silence that followed this speech was broken by the report of a pistol. The sound, though startling, was felt almost as a relief.

"We are beset," cried Alan. "Some of you fly to reconnoitre."

"To your posts," cried Barbara.

Several of the crew flocked to the entrance.

"Unbind the prisoners," shouted Alan.

Mrs. Mowbray and Luke were accordingly set free.

Two almost simultaneous reports of a pistol were now heard.

"'Tis Ranulph Rookwood," said Alan; "that was the preconcerted signal."

"Ranulph Rookwood," echoed Eleanor, who caught the exclamation: "he comes to save me."

"Remember your oath," gasped a dying voice. "He is no longer yours."

"Alas! alas!" sobbed Eleanor, tremblingly.

A moment afterwards a faint clapping of hands reached the ears of Barbara.

"All is over," muttered she.

"Ha!" exclaimed Alan Rookwood, with a frightful look. "Is it done?"

Barbara motioned him towards the further end of the vault.

The Gipsy by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XIII

MR. COATES

Grimm. Look, captain, here comes one of the bloodhounds of justice.
Schw. Down with him. Don't let him utter a word.
Moor. Silence, I will hear him.
Schiller: The Robbers.

Gladly do we now exchange the dank atmosphere of Saint Cyprian's cell, and the horrors which have detained us there so long, for balmy air, genial sunshine, and the boon companionship of Dick Turpin. Upon regaining the verdant ruins of the ancient priory, all appeared pretty much as our highwayman had left it. Dick wended towards his mare. Black Bess uttered an affectionate whinnying sound as he approached her, and yielded her sleek neck to his caresses. No Bedouin Arab ever loved his horse more tenderly than Turpin.

"'Twill be a hard day when thou and I part!" murmured he, affectionately patting her soft and silky cheeks. Bess thrust her nose into his hand, biting him playfully, as much as to say, "That day will never arrive." Turpin, at least, understood the appeal in that sense; he was skilled in the language of the Houyhnhnms. "I would rather lose my right hand than that should happen," sighed he; "but there's no saying: the best of friends must part; and thou and I may be one day separated: thy destination is the knacker—mine, perhaps, the gibbet.—We are neither of us cut out for old age, that's certain. Curse me if I can tell how it is; since I've been in that vault, I've got some queer crotchet into my head. I can't help likening thee to that poor gipsy wench, Sybil; but may I be scragged if I'd use thee as her lover has used her. Ha!" exclaimed he, drawing a pistol with a suddenness that made his companions, Rust and Wilder, start, "we are watched. See you not how yon shadow falls from behind the wall?"

"I do," replied Rust.

"The varmint shall be speedily unearthed," said Wilder, rushing to the spot.

In another instant the shadow manifested itself in a substantial little personage, booted, spurred, and mud-bespattered. He was brought before our highwayman, who had, meanwhile, vaulted into his saddle.

"Mr. Coates!" cried Dick, bursting into a loud laugh at the ridiculous figure presented to his view, "or the mud deceives me."

"It does not deceive you, Captain Turpin," replied the attorney; "you do, indeed, behold that twice unfortunate person."

"What brings you here?" asked Dick. "Ah! I see, you are come to pay me my wager."

"I thought you gave me a discharge for that," rejoined Coates, unable, even in his distress, to resist the too-tempting quibble.

"True, but it was in blank," replied Turpin readily; "and that don't hold good in law, you know. You have thrown away a second chance. Play or pay, all the world over. I shan't let you off so easily this time, depend upon it. Come, post the pony, or take your measure on that sod. No more replications or rejoinders, sir, down with the dust. Fake his clies, pals. Let us see what he has about him."

"In the twinkling of a bed-post," replied Rust. "We'll turn him inside out. What's here?" cried he, searching the attorney's pockets. "A brace of barkers," handing a pair of pistols to Turpin, "a haddock, stuffed with nothing, I'm thinking; one quid, two coach-wheels, half a bull, three hogs, and a kick; a d—d dicky concern, captain."

"Three hogs and a kick," muttered Coates; "the knave says true enough."

"Is there nothing else?" demanded Dick.

"Only an old snuffy fogle and a pewter sneezer."

"No reader? Try his hoxter."

"Here's a pit-man, captain."

"Give it me. Ah! this will do," cried Dick, examining the contents of the pocket-book. "This is a glorious windfall indeed; a bill of exchange for l., payable on demand, eh, Mr. Coates? Quick! indorse it, sir. Here's pen and ink. Rascal! if you attempt to tear the bill, I'll blow your brains out. Steady, sir, sign. Good!" added he, as Coates most reluctantly indorsed the bill. "Good! good! I'll be off with this bill to London to-night, before you can stop it. No courier can beat Bess—ha, ha! Eh! what's this?" continued Dick, as, unfolding another leaf of the pocket-book, he chanced upon a letter; "My Lady Rookwood's superscription! Excuse me, Mr. Coates, I must have a peep at her ladyship's

billet-doux. All's safe with me—man of honor. I must detain your reader a moment longer."

"You should take charge of yourself, then," replied Coates, sulkily. "You appear to be my reader."

"Bravo!" cried Turpin. "You may jest now with impunity, Mr. Coates. You have paid dear enough for your jokes; and when should a man be allowed to be pleasant, if not at his own expense?—ha, ha! What's this?" exclaimed he, opening the letter. "A ring, as I'm awake! and from her ladyship's own fair finger, I'll be sworn, for it bears her cipher, ineffaceably impressed as your image upon her heart—eh, Coates? Egad! you are a lucky dog, after all, to receive such a favor from such a lady—ha, ha! Meantime, I'll take care of it for you," continued Dick, slipping the ring on his little finger.

Turpin, we have before remarked, had a turn for mimicry; and it was with an irresistible feeling of deferential awe creeping over him that Coates heard the contents of Lady Rookwood's epistle delivered with an enunciation as peremptory and imperious as that of her ladyship's self. The letter was hastily indited, in a clear, firm hand, and partook of its writer's decision of character. Dick found no difficulty in deciphering it. Thus ran the missive:

"Assured of your devotion and secrecy, I commit my own honor, and that of my son, to your charge. Time will not permit me to see you, or I would not write. But I place myself entirely in your hands. You will not dare to betray my confidence. To the point:—A Major Mowbray has just arrived here with intelligence that the body of Susan Bradley—you will know to whom I allude—has been removed from our family vault by a Romish priest and his assistants. How it came there, or why it has been removed, I know not; it is not my present purpose to inquire. Suffice it, that it now lies in a vault beneath the ruins of Davenham Priory. My son, Sir Ranulph, who has lent a credulous ear to the artful tales of the impostor who calls this woman mother, is at present engaged in arming certain of the household, and of the tenantry, to seize upon and bring away this body, as resistance is apprehended from a horde of gipsies who infest the ruins. Now, mark me. That body must not be found! Be it your business to prevent its discovery. Take the fleetest horse you can procure; spare neither whip nor spur. Haste to the priory; procure by any means, and at any expense, the assistance of the gipsies. Find out the body; conceal it, destroy it—do what you will, so my son find it not. Fear not his resentment; I will bear you harmless of the consequences with him. You will act upon my responsibility. I pledge my honor for your safety. Use all despatch, and calculate upon due requital from

"Maud Rookwood.

"Haste, and God speed you!"

"God speed you!" echoed Dick, in his own voice, contemptuously. "The devil drive you! would have been a fitter postscript. And it was upon this precious errand you came, Mr. Coates?"

"Precisely," replied the attorney; "but I find the premises preoccupied. Fast as I have ridden, you are here before me."

"And what do you now propose to do?" asked Turpin.

"Bargain with you for the body," replied Coates, in an insinuating tone.

"With me!" said Dick; "do you take me for a resurrection cove; for a dealer in dead stock, eh! sirrah?"

"I take you for one sufficiently alive, in a general way, to his own interests," returned Coates. "These gentlemen may not, perhaps, be quite so scrupulous, when they hear my proposals."

"Be silent, sir," interrupted Turpin. "Hist! I hear the tramp of horses' hoofs without. Hark! that shout."

"Make your own terms before they come," said Coates. "Leave all to me. I'll put 'em on a wrong scent."

"To the devil with your terms," cried Turpin; "the signal!" And he pulled the trigger of one of Coates's pistols, the shot of which rang in the ears of the astounded attorney as it whizzed past him. "Drag him into the mouth of the vault," thundered Turpin: "he will be a capital cover in case of attack. Look to your sticks, and be on the alert;—away!"

Vainly did the unfortunate attorney kick and struggle, swear and scream; his hat was pushed over his eyes; his bob-wig thrust into his mouth; and his legs tripped from under him. Thus blind, dumb, and half-suffocated, he was hurried into the entrance of the cell.

Dick, meanwhile, dashed to the arched outlet of the ruin. He there drew in the rein, and Black Bess stood motionless as a statue.

The Gipsy by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XIV

DICK TURPIN

Many a fine fellow with a genius extensive enough to have effected universal reformation has been doomed to perish by the halter. But does not such a man's renown extend through centuries and tens of centuries, while many a prince would be overlooked in history were it not the historian's interest to increase the number of his pages? Nay, when the traveller sees a gibbet, does he not exclaim, "That fellow was no fool!" and lament the hardship of the times?—Schiller: The Robbers.

Turpin's quick eye ranged over the spreading sward in front of the ancient priory, and his brow became contracted. The feeling, however, was transient. The next instant saw him the same easy, reckless being he had been before. There was a little more paleness in his cheek than usual; but his look was keener, and his knees involuntarily clasped the saddle more firmly. No other symptom of anxiety was perceptible. It would be no impeachment to Dick's valor were it necessary to admit that a slight tremor crossed him as he scanned the formidable array of his opponents. The admission is needless. Dick himself would have been the last man to own it; nor shall we do the memory of our undaunted highwayman any such injustice. Turpin was intrepid to a fault. He was rash; apt to run into risks for the mere pleasure of getting out of them: danger was his delight, and the degree of excitement was always in proportion to the peril incurred. After the first glance, he became, to use his own expressive phrase, "as cool as a cucumber;" and continued, as long as they permitted him, like a skilful commander, calmly to calculate the numerical strength of his adversaries, and to arrange his own plan of resistance.

This troop of horsemen, for such it was, might probably amount in the aggregate to twenty men, and presented an appearance like that of a strong muster at a rustic fox-chase, due allowance being made for the various weapons of offence; to-wit: naked sabers, firelocks, and a world of huge horse-pistols, which the present field carried along with them. This resemblance was heightened by the presence of an old huntsman and a gamekeeper or two, in scarlet and green jackets, and a few yelping hounds that had followed after them. The majority of the crew consisted of sturdy yeomen; some of whom, mounted upon wild, unbroken colts, had pretty lives of it to maintain their seats, and curvetted about in "most admired disorder;" others were seated upon more docile, but quite as provoking specimens of the cart-horse breed, whose sluggish sides, reckless alike of hobnailed heel or ash sapling, refused to obey their riders' intimations to move; while others again, brought stiff, wrong-headed ponies to the charge—obstinate,

impracticable little brutes, who seemed to prefer revolving on their own axis, and describing absurd rotatory motions, to proceeding in the direct and proper course pointed out to them. Dick could scarcely forbear laughing at these ridiculous manœuvres; but his attention was chiefly attracted towards three individuals, who were evidently the leaders of this warlike expedition. In the thin, tall figure of the first of these he recognized Ranulph Rookwood. With the features and person of the second of the group he was not entirely unacquainted, and fancied—nor incorrectly fancied—that his military bearing, or, as he would have expressed it, "the soldier-like cut of his jib," could belong to no other than Major Mowbray, whom he had once eased of a purse on Finchley Common. In the round, rosy countenance and robustious person of the last of the trio he discovered his ancient ally, Titus Tyrconnel.

"Ah, Titus, my jewel, are you there?" exclaimed Dick, as he distinguished the Irishman. "Come, I have one friend among them whom I may welcome. So, they see me now. Off they come, pell-mell. Back, Bess, back!—slowly, wench, slowly—there—stand!" And Bess again remained motionless.

The report of Turpin's pistol reached the ears of the troop; and as all were upon the alert, he had scarcely presented himself at the gateway, when a loud shout was raised, and the whole cavalcade galloped towards him, creating, as may be imagined, the wildest disorder; each horseman yelling, as he neared the arch, and got involved in the press occasioned by the unexpected concentration of forces at that point, while oaths and blows, kicks and cuffs, were reciprocated with such hearty good-will, that, had Turpin ever read Ariosto or Cervantes, or heard of the discord of King Agramante's camp, this mêlée must have struck him as its realization. As it was, entertaining little apprehension of the result, he shouted encouragement to them. Scarcely, however, had the foremost horseman disentangled himself from the crowd, and, struggling to the door, was in the act of levelling his pistol at Turpin's head, when a well-directed ball pierced the brain of his charger, and horse and man rolled to the ground. Vowing vengeance, a second succeeded, and was in like manner compelled to bite the dust.

"That will let Old Peter know that Ranulph Rookwood is at hand," exclaimed Dick. "I shan't throw away another shot."

The scene at the archway was now one of complete confusion. Terrified by the shots, some of the boors would have drawn back, while others, in mid career, advanced, and propelled them forwards. It was like the meeting of two tides. Here and there, regardless of the bit, and scared by the firing, a wild colt broke all bounds, and, hurling his rider in the air, darted off into the green; or, in another case, rushed forward, and encountering the prostrate cattle cumbering the entrance to the priory hall, stumbled, and precipitated his master neck-over-heels at the very feet of his enemy. During all this

tumult, a few shots were fired at the highwayman, which, without doing him a jot of mischief, tended materially to increase their own confusion.

The voice of Turpin was now heard above the din and turmoil to sound a parley; and as he appeared disposed to offer no opposition, some of his antagonists ventured to raise themselves from the ground, and to approach him.

"I demand to be led to Sir Ranulph Rookwood," said Turpin.

"He is here," said Ranulph, riding up. "Villain, you are my prisoner."

"As you list, Sir Ranulph," returned Dick, coolly; "but let me have a word in private with you ere you do aught you may repent hereafter."

"No words, sir—deliver up your arms, or——"

"My pistols are at your service," replied Dick. "I have just discharged them."

"You may have others. We must search you."

"Hold!" cried Dick; "if you will not listen to me, read that paper." And he handed Ranulph his mother's letter to Mr. Coates. It was without the superscription, which he had thrown aside.

"My mother's hand!" exclaimed Ranulph, reddening with anger, as he hastily perused its contents. "And she sent this to you? You lie, villain—'tis a forgery."

"Let this speak for me," returned Dick, holding out the finger upon which Lady Rookwood's ring was placed. "Know you that cipher?"

"You have stolen it," retorted Ranulph. "My mother," added he, in a deep, stern whisper, articulated only for Turpin's hearing, "would never have entrusted her honor to a highwayman's keeping."

"She has entrusted more—her life," replied Dick, in a careless tone. "She would have bribed me to do murder."

"Murder!" echoed Ranulph, aghast.

"Ay, to murder your brother," returned Dick; "but let that pass. You have read that note. I have acted solely upon your mother's responsibility. Lady Rookwood's honor is pledged for my safety. Of course her son will set me free."

"Never!"

"Well, as you please. Your mother is in my power. Betray me, and you betray her."

"No more!" returned Ranulph, sternly. "Go your ways. You are free."

"Pledge me your word of honor I am safe." Ranulph had scarcely given his pledge, when Major Mowbray rode furiously up. A deep flush of anger burnt upon his cheeks; his sword was drawn in his hand. He glanced at Turpin, as if he would have felled him from his saddle.

"This is the ruffian," cried the major, fiercely, "by whom I was attacked some months ago, and for whose apprehension the reward of three hundred pounds is offered by his majesty's proclamation, with a free pardon to his accomplices. This is Richard Turpin. He has just added another crime to his many offences. He has robbed my mother and sister. The postboy knew him the moment he came up. Where are they, villain? Whither are they gone?—answer!"

"I know not," replied Turpin, calmly. "Did not the lad tell you they were rescued?"

"Rescued!—by whom?" asked Ranulph, with great emotion.

"By one who calls himself Sir Luke Rookwood," answered Turpin, with a meaning smile.

"By him!" ejaculated Ranulph. "Where are they now?"

"I have already answered that question," said Dick. "I repeat, I know not."

"You are my prisoner," cried the major, seizing Turpin's bridle.

"I have Sir Ranulph's word for my safety," rejoined Turpin. "Let go my rein."

"How is this?" asked Major Mowbray, incredulously.

"Ask me not. Release him," replied Ranulph.

"Ranulph," said the major, "you ask an impossibility. My honor—my duty—is implicated in this man's capture."

"The honor of all of us is involved in his deliverance," returned Ranulph, in a whisper. "Let him go. I will explain all hereafter. Let us search for them—for Eleanor. Surely, after this, you will help us to find them," added he, addressing Turpin.

"I wish, with all my soul, I could do so," replied the highwayman.

"I see'd the ladies cross the brook, and enter these old ruins," interposed the postboy, who had now joined the party. "I see'd 'em from where I stood on the hill-side; and as I kept a pretty sharp look-out, and have a tolerably bright eye of my own, I don't think as how they ever comed out again."

"Some one is hidden within yon fissure in the wall," exclaimed Ranulph; "I see a figure move."

And he flung himself from his horse, rushing towards the mouth of the cell. Imitating his example, Major Mowbray followed his friend, sword in hand.

"The game begins now in right earnest," said Dick to himself; "the old fox will be soon unearthed. I must look to my snappers." And he thrust his hand quietly into his pocket in search of a pistol.

Just as Ranulph and the major reached the recess they were startled by the sudden apparition of the ill-fated attorney.

"Mr. Coates!" exclaimed Ranulph, in surprise. "What do you here, sir?"

"I—I—that is—Sir Ranulph—you must excuse me, sir—particular business—can't say," returned the trembling attorney; for at this instant his eye caught that of Turpin, and the ominous reflexion of a polished-steel barrel, held carelessly towards him. He was aware, also, that on the other hand he was, in like manner, the mark of Rust and Wilder; those polite gentlemen having threatened him with a brace of slugs in his brain if he dared to betray their hiding-place. "It is necessary that I should be guarded in my answers," murmured he.

"Is there any one within that place besides yourself?" said the major, making a movement thither.

"No, sir, nobody at all," answered Coates, hastily, fancying at the same time that he heard the click of the pistol that was to be his death-warrant.

"How came you here, sir?" demanded Ranulph.

"Do you mean in this identical spot?" replied Coates, evasively.

"You can have no difficulty in answering that question," said the major, sternly.

"Pardon me, sir. I find considerable difficulty in answering any question, situated as I am."

"Have you seen Miss Mowbray?" asked Ranulph, eagerly.

"Or my mother?" said the major, in the same breath.

"Neither," replied Coates, rather relieved by these questions.

"I suspect you are deceiving us, sir," said the major. "Your manner is confused. I am convinced you know more of this matter than you choose to explain; and if you do not satisfy me at once, fully and explicitly, I vow to Heaven——" and the major's sword described a glittering circle round his head.

"Are you privy to their concealment?" asked Ranulph. "Have you seen aught of them, or of Luke Bradley?"

"Speak, or this moment is your last," said the major.

"If it is my last, I cannot speak," returned Coates. "I can make neither head nor tail of your questions, gentlemen."

"And you positively assure me you have not seen Mrs. Mowbray and her daughter?" said Ranulph.

Turpin here winked at Coates. The attorney understood him.

"I don't positively assert that," faltered he.

"How!—you have seen them?" shouted Ranulph.

"Where are they?—in safety—speak!" added the major.

Another expressive gesture from the highwayman communicated to the attorney the nature of his reply.

"Without, sir—without—yonder," he replied. "I will show you myself. Follow, gentlemen, follow." And away scampered Coates, without once venturing to look behind him.

In an instant the ruined hall was deserted, and Turpin alone left behind. In the excitement of the moment his presence had been forgotten. In an instant afterwards the arena was again occupied by a company equally numerous. Rust and Wilder issued from their hiding-places, followed by a throng of the gipsy crew.

"Where is Sir Luke Rookwood?" asked Turpin.

"He remains below," was the answer returned.

"And Peter Bradley?"

"Stays there likewise."

"No matter. Now make ready, pals. Give 'em one shout—Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" replied the crowd, at the top of their voices.

Ranulph Rookwood and his companions heard this shout. Mr. Coates had already explained the stratagem practised upon them by the wily highwayman, as well as the perilous situation in which he himself had been placed; and they were in the act of returning to make good his capture, when the loud shouts of the crew arrested them. From the clamor, it was evident that considerable reinforcement must have arrived from some unlooked-for quarter; and, although burning to be avenged upon the audacious highwayman, the major felt it would be a task of difficulty, and that extreme caution could alone ensure success. With difficulty restraining the impatience of Ranulph, who could scarcely brook these few minutes of needful delay, Major Mowbray gave particular instructions to each of the men in detail, and caused several of them to dismount. By this arrangement Mr. Coates found himself accommodated with a steed and a pair of pistols, with which latter he vowed to wreak his vengeance upon some of his recent tormentors. After a short space of time occupied in this manner, the troop slowly advanced towards the postern, in much better order than upon the previous occasion; but the stoutest of them quailed as they caught sight of the numerous gipsy-gang drawn out in battle array within the abbey walls. Each party scanned the other's movements in silence and wonder, anxiously awaiting, yet in a measure dreading, their leader's signal

to begin. That signal was not long delayed. A shot from the ranks of Rookwood did instant and bitter execution. Rob Rust was stretched lifeless upon the ground. Nothing more was needed. The action now became general. Fire arms were discharged on both sides, without much damage to either party. But a rush being made by a detachment of horse, headed by Major Mowbray, the conflict soon became more serious. The gipsies, after the first fire, threw aside their pistols, and fought with long knives, with which they inflicted desperate gashes, both on men and horses. Major Mowbray was slightly wounded in the thigh, and his steed receiving the blow intended for himself, stumbled and threw his rider. Luckily for the major, Ranulph Rookwood was at hand, and with the butt-end of a heavy-handled pistol felled the ruffian to the earth, just as he was upon the point of repeating the thrust.

Turpin, meanwhile, had taken comparatively a small share in the conflict. He seemed to content himself with acting upon the defensive, and except in the case of Titus Tyrconnel, whom, espying amidst the crowd, he had considerably alarmed by sending a bullet through his wig, he did not fire a single shot. He also succeeded in unhorsing Coates, by hurling, with great dexterity, the empty pistol at his head. Though apparently unconcerned in the skirmish, he did not flinch from it, but kept his ground unyieldingly. "A charmed life" he seemed to bear; for amid the shower of bullets, many of which were especially aimed at himself, he came off unhurt.

"He that's born to be hanged will never be drowned, that's certain," said Titus. "It's no use trying to bring him down. But, by Jasus! he's spoiled my best hat and wig, anyhow. There's a hole in my beaver as big as a crown piece."

"Your own crown's safe, and that's some satisfaction," said Coates; "whereas mine has a bump on it as large as a swan's egg. Ah! if we could only get behind him."

The strife continued to rage without intermission; and though there were now several ghastly evidences of its fury, in the shape of wounded men and slaughtered or disabled horses, whose gaping wounds flooded the turf with gore, it was still difficult to see upon which side victory would eventually declare herself. The gipsies, though by far the greater sufferers of the two, firmly maintained their ground. Drenched in the blood of the horses they had wounded, and brandishing their long knives, they presented a formidable and terrific appearance, the effect of which was not at all diminished by their wild yells and savage gesticulations. On the other hand, headed by Major Mowbray and Ranulph, the troop of yeomen pressed on undauntedly; and where the sturdy farmers could get a firm gripe of their lithe antagonists, or deliver a blow with their ox-like fists, they seldom failed to make good the advantages which superior weight and strength gave them. It will thus be seen that as yet they were pretty well matched. Numbers were in favor of the gipsies, but courage was equally distributed, and, perhaps, what is

emphatically called "bottom," was in favor of the rustics. Be this as it may, from what had already occurred, there was every prospect of a very serious termination to the fray.

From time to time Turpin glanced to the entrance of the cell, in the expectation of seeing Sir Luke Rookwood make his appearance; and, as he was constantly disappointed in his expectation, he could not conceal his chagrin. At length he resolved to despatch a messenger to him, and one of the crew accordingly departed upon this errand. He returned presently with a look of blank dismay.

In our hasty narrative of the fight we have not paused to particularize, neither have we enumerated, the list of the combatants. Amongst them, however, were Jerry Juniper, the knight of Malta, and Zoroaster. Excalibur, as may be conceived, had not been idle; but that trenchant blade had been shivered by Ranulph Rookwood in the early stage of the business, and the knight left weaponless. Zoroaster, who was not merely a worshipper of fire, but a thorough milling-cove, had engaged to some purpose in a pugilistic encounter with the rustics; and, having fought several rounds, now "bore his blushing honors thick upon him." Jerry, like Turpin, had remained tolerably quiescent. "The proper moment," he said, "had not arrived." A fatality seemed to attend Turpin's immediate companions. Rust was the first who fell; Wilder also was now among the slain. Things were precisely in this condition when the messenger returned. A marked change was instantly perceptible in Turpin's manner. He no longer looked on with indifference. He seemed angry and distrustful. He gnawed his lip, ever a sign with him of vexation. Addressing a few words to those about him, he then spoke more loudly to the rest of the crew. Being in the jargon of the tawny tribe, his words were not intelligible to the opposite party; but their import was soon made known by the almost instant and total relinquishment of the field by the gipsies. They took to their heels at once, to a man, leaving only a few desperately wounded behind them; and, flying along the intricate ruins of the priory, baffled all pursuit, wherever it was attempted. Jerry Juniper was the last in the retreat; but, upon receiving a hint from Dick, he vaulted like a roe over the heads of his adversaries, and made good his escape. Turpin alone remained. He stood like a lion at bay, quietly regarding the huntsmen hurtling around him. Ranulph Rookwood rode up and bade him surrender.

"Detain me not," cried he, in a voice of thunder. "If you would save her who is dear to you, descend into that vault. Off, I say."

And Turpin shook away, with ease, the grasp that Ranulph had laid upon him.

"Villain! you do not escape me this time," said Major Mowbray, interposing himself between Turpin and the outlet.

"Major Mowbray, I would not have your blood upon my head," said Dick. "Let me pass," and he levelled a pistol.

"Fire, if you dare!" said the major, raising his sword. "You pass not. I will die rather than allow you to escape. Barricade the door. Strike him down if he attempts to pass. Richard Turpin, I arrest you in the king's name. You hear, my lads, in his majesty's name. I command you to assist me in this highwayman's capture. Two hundred pounds for his head."

"Two hundred devils!" exclaimed Dick, with a laugh of disdain. "Go, seek your mother and sister within yon vault, Major Mowbray; you will find employment enough there."

Saying which, he suddenly forced Bess to back a few yards; then, striking his heels sharply into her sides, ere his purpose could be divined by the spectators, charged, and cleared the lower part of the mouldering priory walls. This feat was apparently accomplished with no great effort by his admirable and unequalled mare.

"By the powers!" cried Titus, "and he's given us the slip after all. And just when we thought to make sure of him, too. Why, Mr. Coates, that wall must be higher than a five-barred gate, or any stone wall in my own country. It's just the most extraordinary lepp I ever set eyes on!"

"The devil's in the fellow, certainly, or in his mare," returned Coates; "but if he escapes me, I'll forgive him. I know whither he's bound. He's off to London with my bill of exchange. I'll be up with him. I'll track him like a bloodhound, slowly and surely, as my father, the thief-taker, used to follow up a scent. Recollect the hare and the tortoise. The race is not always to the swift. What say you? 'Tis a match for five hundred pounds; nay, for five thousand: for there is a certain marriage certificate in the way—a glorious golden venture! You shall go halves, if we win. We'll have him, dead or alive. What say you for London, Mr. Tyrconnel? Shall we start at once?"

"With all my sowl," replied Titus. "I'm with you." And away this par nobile scoured.

Ranulph, meantime, plunged into the vault. The floor was slippery, and he had nigh stumbled. Loud and deep lamentations, and a wailing sound, like that of a lament for the dead, resounded in his ears. A light at the further extremity of the vault attracted his attention. He was filled with terrible forebodings; but the worst reality was not so terrible as suspense. He rushed towards the light. He passed the massive pillars, and there, by the ruddy torch flame, discovered two female figures. One was an old woman, fantastically attired, wringing her hands, and moaning, or gibbering wild strains in broken, discordant, yet pathetic tones. The other was Mrs. Mowbray. Both were images

of despair. Before them lay some motionless object. He noticed not that old woman; he scarcely saw Mrs. Mowbray; he beheld only that object of horror. It was the lifeless body of a female. The light fell imperfectly upon the face; he could not discern the features, but the veil in which it was swathed: that veil was Eleanor's! He asked no more.

With a wild cry he rushed forward. "Eleanor, my beloved!" shrieked he.

Mrs. Mowbray started at his voice, but appeared stunned and helpless.

"She is dead," said Ranulph, stooping towards the body. "Dead—dead!"

"Ay," echoed the old woman, in accents of equal anguish—"dead—dead!"

"But this is not Eleanor," exclaimed he, as he viewed the features more closely. "This face, though beautiful, is not hers. This dishevelled hair is black. The long lashes that shade her cheek are of the same hue. She is scarce dead. The hand I clasp is yet warm—the fingers are pliant."

"Yet she is dead," said the old woman, in a broken voice, "she is slain."

"Who hath slain her?" asked Ranulph.

"I—I—her mother, slew her."

"You!" exclaimed Ranulph, horror-stricken. "And where is Eleanor?" asked he. "Was she not here?"

"Better she were here now, even though she were as that poor maid," groaned Mrs. Mowbray, "than where she is."

"Where is she, then?" asked Ranulph, with frantic eagerness.

"Fled. Whither I know not."

"With whom?"

"With Sir Luke Rookwood—with Alan Rookwood. They have borne her hence. Ranulph, you are too late."

"Gone!" cried Ranulph, fiercely springing to his feet. "How escaped they? There appears to be but one entrance to this vault. I will search each nook and cranny."

"'Tis vain," replied Mrs. Mowbray. "There is another outlet through yon cell. By that passage they escaped."

"Too true, too true," shouted Ranulph, who flew to examine the cell. "And wherefore followed you not?"

"The stone rolled to its mouth, and resisted my efforts. I could not follow."

"Torture and death! She is lost to me for ever!" cried Ranulph, bitterly.

"No!" exclaimed Barbara, clutching his arm. "Place your trust in me, and I will find her for you."

"You!" ejaculated Ranulph.

"Even I," replied Barbara. "Your wrongs shall be righted—my Sybil be avenged."


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