

THE LEAGUER OF
LATHOM

BY

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The Leaguer of Lathom

BOOK I. — THE SIEGE OF MANCHESTER

CHAPTER I

A Presage of Ill

LATE one night, in the disastrous year 1642, soon after the commencement of the Civil War, as Lord Strange was alone in his closet at Knowsley Hall, reading a treatise by Cardan, blood fell suddenly upon the book. Being in a very melancholy frame of mind at the time, he was powerfully affected by the occurrence, and could not help regarding it as a presage of ill.

As soon as he had recovered his composure, he addressed a prayer to Heaven for the safety and welfare of the king, and his own preservation from sudden and violent death, and had not long risen from his knees, when a tap at the door was heard, and next moment, a grave-looking person-age, whose dress proclaimed him a divine, entered the closet.

This was Doctor Samuel Rutter, Archdeacon of Man, and Lord Strange's domestic chaplain. He had been absent for some months, having duties to perform in the Isle of Man, and had only returned on that very evening. He had seen his noble patron on his arrival at Knowsley Hall, and thought him looking very unwell, but little passed between them at the time. After they had separated for the night, an unaccountable uneasiness came over him, and being unable to shake off the feeling, he repaired to his lordship's study, being aware that he had not retired to rest, and was much relieved by finding him seated composedly in his chair.

"Now Heaven be praised that I find your lord-ship well!" exclaimed the archdeacon. "I have been much troubled concerning you, and could not seek my couch till I had satisfied my mind that you had not been seized by some sudden illness."

Thanking him for his solicitude, Lord Strange said, "In truth, I have not been well, but am now somewhat better. Sit down, I pray you, my good friend. I shall be glad to have some converse with you."

As Doctor Rutter placed his taper on the table, his eye fell upon the blood-stained book, and he uttered an exclamation of astonishment and horror.

"Has this just happened, my lord?" he asked.

"Scarce half an hour ago," replied Lord Strange. "Shut the book, I pray you, and put it aside."

Doctor Rutter obeyed, and remarked, as he sat down:

"This portent must not be disregarded, my lord. Be warned, I entreat you. Take no further part in the conflict between the king and the rebellious Parliament, but live in quiet and retirement till the struggle is over. I know my counsel will be unpalatable, but it is prompted by duty to your lord-ship. After the spectacle I have just beheld, I cannot hold my tongue. Be warned, I repeat. Advance not on this path of danger, or it may lead to your destruction. You may share the fate of Strafford."

"It may be so," replied Lord Strange; "but I shall go on. I would not desert the king at this juncture, even if I were certain that the direful consequences you predict would ensue."

"I would your fidelity and devotion were better appreciated by his majesty, my lord. All the great efforts you have made for him appear to have been counteracted by his advisers, several of whom are evidently inimical to you."

"You are right," said Lord Strange. "They have persuaded the king that I am ambitious, and have pretensions to the crown like my uncle Ferdinando, and they say I shall desert him as my ancestor, Lord Stanley, deserted, Richard the Third at Bosworth Field, when he gave the crown to his son-in-law, the Earl of Richmond. His majesty, therefore, views my conduct with jealousy and suspicion. When I joined him at York, I met with a cold reception, but soon discovered why I was so treated, and strove to disabuse his mind of his unjust and unfounded suspicions. 'Sire,' I said, 'if it were true that I am plotting against you, I should merit death. Let him who dares charge me with treason stand forth, and I will pick the calumny from his lips with the point of my sword.' Lord Goring, Lord Digby, and Lord Jermyn were present at the time—but not one of them answered the challenge."

"And what said the king?" asked Doctor Rutter.

"He prayed me to have patience; adding, 'this is not a time, when the rebels are marching against me, to quarrel amongst ourselves.'"

"Methinks the rebels themselves must have seen their own advantage in the unworthy treatment thus shown you, my lord," remarked Rutter, "and have sought to win you over."

"You have guessed right," said Lord Strange. "A despatch was shortly afterwards sent me by Colonel Holland, commander of the garrison in Manchester, stating that he was aware of the great indignity put upon me by the king's evil counsellors, who were the enemies of the nation, and that if I would engage in the cause of the Parliament, I should have a command equal to my own greatness, or to that of any of my ancestors. My reply to the insolent proposition was prompt and decisive. I bade the messenger tell Colonel Holland, that when he heard I had turned traitor, I would listen to his offers. Till then, if I received such another despatch it would be at the peril of him who brought it."

"The answer was worthy of you, my lord," said the chaplain; "and well calculated to put to shame the king's advisers. Surely, after this, his majesty could entertain no suspicion of you?"

"An idea once fixed upon the king's mind is not easily removed. My motives have been misrepresented throughout. Thus, when I assembled upwards of sixty thousand efficient men on the moors near Bury, Ormskirk, and Preston, I was authoritatively forbidden to take the command of the force, and these potent auxiliaries were lost to the king, because they would serve no other leader but myself. Many of them went over to the rebels. Had this large force been retained, and augmented as it could have been, the king might have marched on in triumph to London, and have effectually crushed the rebellion."

"'Tis lamentable," remarked Doctor Rutter. "But his majesty's eyes have been blinded."

"Though deeply hurt by the treatment I have experienced," pursued Lord Strange, "I did not desist from my efforts, but without delay raised three troops of horse, and three regiments of foot, which I armed and equipped, and prepared to join the king at Warrington, where it had been agreed that the royal standard should be reared. Once more the counsels of my enemies prevailed, and to the king's disadvantage. Warrington, where I am omnipotent,

as I need not tell you, was abandoned, and Nottingham chosen, where I have no influence whatever. At the same time, without any reason assigned for the step, I was deprived of the lieutenancy of Cheshire and North Wales, and Lord Rivers was joined in commission with me for Lancashire."

"I marvel your lordship could forgive the affront. But I know your loyalty is unchangeable."

"I shall not cease to serve the king faithfully, even though he should continue to requite me with ingratitude," said Lord Strange; "nor shall I abate my zeal, even though his cause should become hopeless. I am now awaiting his majesty's orders to attack Manchester. I could easily have taken the place two months ago, when I seized upon the magazine, and carried off the powder stored within it by Colonel Holland, but I had no orders at the time, and might have been blamed for precipitancy. Since then the town has been fortified by an engineer named Rosworm, and it can now stand a siege."

"Your lordship surprises me," observed Rutter. "Who is this Rosworm, of whom you speak? I have not heard of him."

"A very skilful German engineer, who has had plenty of experience in his own country, where he served under Wallenstein," replied Lord Strange. "He has been in Ireland, but on the outbreak of the rebellion of the Roman Catholics there, he came to England, and found his way to Manchester, where he has been engaged by Colonel Holland and the other rebel leaders to fortify the town. And he has done his work well. When I first heard of his arrival I sent messengers to offer him double pay if he would serve the king, but he refused to break his engagement with the rebels."

"That speaks well for his honesty at all events," remarked Doctor Rutter.

"Ay, he is a brave fellow, and very skilful, as I have just said," rejoined Lord Strange. "The Manchester men are lucky in securing him. That he will make a good defence of the town I do not doubt, but I shall take it nevertheless. The difficulty will be to hold it when taken. Manchester is the most important Parliamentary stronghold in the North of England, and every effort will be made by the rebels to recover it. And now, since I have said so much, I will detain you for a few minutes longer while I explain why I have sent for you from the Isle of Man. I did not mean to enter upon the matter till to-morrow, but it

seems to me that I had better mention it now while my mind is full of the subject."

"I am prepared to listen to all you may tell me, my lord," observed Doctor Rutter.

"In a word, then," said Lord Strange, "since it is certain the Civil War has begun in Lancashire, and no one can tell how long it may last, or how it may terminate, it is my intention to garrison Lathom House, so that if driven to extremities, I can hold it for six months or longer against an enemy. The house is as strong as a castle, as you know—indeed, few castles in England are so strong—and from its position, size, fortifications, and broad deep moat, I am confident it will stand a lengthened siege, if provided with sufficient men, ammunition, and ordnance. I shall therefore place three hundred experienced musketeers within the hall, plant cannon of large size on the walls and towers, and provision it for six months. Should I be absent, as may chance, its custody will be committed to my noble and high-spirited wife, in whose veins flows the blood of the Nassaus, and whose courage well fits her for the charge."

"That I will answer for, my lord," said the archdeacon. "A braver-hearted lady than Charlotte de la Trémoille, Lady Strange, does not exist. I am impatient to learn whether your lordship requires me to take any part in the preparations for the defence of Lathom House."

"Thus much, my good friend," replied Lord Strange. "You will aid her ladyship with your councils, and act for her as may be needful and as she may require. On no man's judgment can I place greater reliance than on yours, my good Rutter; and while you are at Lathom, I feel certain all my plans will be fully carried out. Of necessity, I shall be often absent, for I shall have much to do. Her ladyship, as you are aware, is now at Lathom, and will remain there altogether for the present. To-morrow you will join her, and I wish you fully to explain my designs. If I do not receive the order I have been expecting from his majesty to attack Manchester, it is my intention to go to Chester to see my father the Earl of Derby, who has been very unwell for the last week."

"His lordship, I trust, is not dangerously ill?" observed Doctor Rutter.

"I hope not," said Lord Strange, gravely. "His physician, Doctor Gerard, from whom I hear daily, tells me I need not feel anxious about him, and that he is

doing well, but in spite of these assurances, I am uneasy—very uneasy—for he is old and feeble, and might quickly sink."

"It is satisfactory to reflect that the earl has long been prepared to quit this world," observed Rutter, "and having relinquished all his great estates and power has nothing to tie him to earth."

"No, he has long done with the world and its vanities," said Lord Strange. "My beloved mother's death was a severe blow to him, and he has never recovered from it. I marvel not at it, for a better wife and better mother than Elizabeth Vere, Countess of Derby, never existed. The earl, my father, has never been himself since he lost her. His interest in life was gone—his sole desire being to join her in heaven. No recluse could dwell in greater retirement than he has done, ever since this sad bereavement in his house on the banks of the Dee near Chester. But his sorrows seem now drawing to a close."

"Where grief is incurable, the grave appears the only refuge," said Rutter. "Under such circumstances prolongation of life is scarcely to be desired."

"True," said Lord Strange. "But we must await the fatal stroke without impatience, and my father, amid all his sufferings, has been perfectly resigned to the will of Heaven. His motive for surrendering his estates to me during his lifetime was that he might pass the remainder of his days in solitude and prayer. He then firmly believed that his life would not be long, and though he was mistaken, he has never regretted the step. Had he done so, I would have restored everything to him. But he had formed a resolution, like that of the Emperor Charles the Fifth, when he chose a retreat in the monastery of Saint Just, and entirely renounced the world, its business, pleasures, and troubles."

"But he did not, like Charles the Fifth, practise all the rigours of a monastic life," observed Doctor Rutter.

"He has performed no act of penance, for that is no part of his faith," replied Lord Strange; "but he has spent much of his time in religious meditation and prayer. I would I were as well prepared for eternity as my father."

"Your lordship has not much cause for self-reproach," said Doctor Rutter.

"I strive to do right, but I often fall short in my endeavours," replied Lord Strange. "It may be that some day I shall retire altogether from the world like my father."

"That day, I hope, is far distant, my lord," said Doctor Rutter.

Just then footsteps were heard in the adjoining gallery, and immediately afterwards a serving-man made his appearance.

"What wouldst thou, Cuthbert?" demanded Lord Strange.

"An it please your lordship," replied the servant, "a messenger has just arrived from Chester—from the Earl of Derby."

"A messenger from the earl, my father—at this hour!" exclaimed Lord Strange, uneasily. "What news brings he?"

"I cannot say, my lord," replied the man. "He did not deliver his message to me. But I fear he does not bring good news."

"You alarm me, Cuthbert," cried Lord Strange. "Where is the messenger?"

"Without—in the gallery, my lord. 'Tis Captain Standish."

"Captain Standish! Bid him come in at once."

The order was obeyed, and next moment a tall and remarkably handsome young man, about two or three and twenty, was ushered into the closet.

The new-comer wore a buff coat embroidered with lace, a short cloak, funnel-topped boots of supple leather ascending above the knee, and carried in his hand a broad-leaved Flemish beaver hat, adorned with a rich band and a plume of feathers.

The long dark locks falling upon his shoulders at once proclaimed him a Cavalier—the Puritans being already distinguished by their closely cropped hair. His manner and looks were highly prepossessing. Though he had ridden far and fast, he did not seem fatigued by the journey.

On the entrance of Captain Standish, Lord Strange rose to greet him, and looking inquiringly into his face, said:

"Keep me not in suspense, Frank. How is the earl, my father? Does he still live?"

"He does, my lord," replied Captain Standish. "At all events, he was alive when I left him some three hours ago, and Doctor Gerard assured me that he is in no immediate danger, though he cannot last long."

"Did you see him?" inquired Lord Strange, eagerly and anxiously. "How looked he? Was he sensible?"

"Perfectly sensible, my lord," replied Standish. "His sole desire seemed to be to behold your lordship once more ere he died, and bid you a last farewell. I offered to set off forthwith and convey his dying wishes to your lordship, and he thanked me much, but added, 'If my son has aught to do for the king that demands his presence, bid him not mind me. I know he will come if he can. Should aught hinder him, or should he not arrive in the time, I shall die content.'"

"Heaven grant I may not be too late!" cried Lord Strange. "I will start as soon as horses can be got ready. You have done me a great service, Frank, and I shall not forget it. While you refresh yourself after your ride, a bed shall be got ready for you."

"I will drink a cup of wine in the hall, and snatch a mouthful of food," replied Standish; "but if your lordship will furnish me with a fresh horse, for mine is somewhat jaded, I will go back with you to Chester."

"You had best go to bed," said Lord Strange. "You have done work enough for to-night."

"I pray your lordship to let me have my way," said the young man. "I shall not feel that I have fulfilled my promise to the earl, your father, unless I bring you back to him. Besides, I have done nothing. I could ride thirty more miles before day-break, and not be the worse for it. I only require a fresh horse."

"And that you shall have," said Lord Strange. "Since you are bent upon going with me, I will not hinder you. Hark, thee, Cuthbert," he added to the manservant, who remained in the closet waiting his noble master's orders; "let refreshments be got ready instantly by some of thy fellows for Captain Standish, and while this is being done, go to the stables, and cause my best hunter to be saddled for me. Another strong horse will be required for Captain Standish. Two grooms will go with me, and half a dozen armed attendants. And mark me well!—the utmost expedition must be used."

"In less than quarter of the hour the horses shall be at the hall-door, my lord," replied Cuthbert, preparing to depart.

"Go with him, Frank," said Lord Strange, "and make the best supper you can. I will join you in the dining-hall anon."

And as Captain Standish quitted the closet, his lordship turned to the archdeacon, who had listened to the foregoing discourse in silence.

"Only a few minutes ago we were talking of my father," he said. "I little thought that I should so soon receive this sad intelligence respecting him. Yet it does not surprise me, for I have long been expecting the summons. I must now prepare for my departure; but before doing so, I will write a brief letter to Lady Strange, which you will deliver to her on the morrow. The news will afflict her much, for she loved my father tenderly."

"I will offer her all the consolation in my power," said Doctor Rutter. And adding that he would await his lordship in the hall, he quitted the closet.

Left alone, Lord Strange fastened the door that he might not be interrupted, and then knelt down and prayed fervently for his dying father, imploring Heaven that he might be permitted to see him again while life remained.

CHAPTER II

Lord Strange

THIS supplication made, Lord Strange arose, and wrote a few lines full of tenderness and affection to his wife. Having sealed the letter, he proceeded to his dressing-room.

Hastily exchanging his loose gown for a black velvet doublet embroidered with silver and pantoufles for riding-boots, he slipped a rich baldrick over his right shoulder, while his sword, his black plumed hat, and gloves were brought him by a valet who was in attendance.

Thus attired, he presented a noble figure.

Lord Strange was then in the full perfection of manhood, being in his thirty-eighth year. Though not above the middle height, he possessed a strong and well-proportioned frame. His features were handsome, the nose prominent but well formed, and the eyes large and black. His complexion was dark, and the habitual expression of his countenance grave and somewhat melancholy.

A face full of intelligence and power. One peculiarity must be noticed, as shown in Vandyke's fine portrait. The brow was almost hidden by the dark hair brought over it; but, perhaps, the arrangement suited the physiognomy. Certainly the long dark locks falling upon the shoulders became the wearer well.

Lord Strange had a proud and martial bearing. Trained as a soldier, he was well qualified for a command. What he lacked was experience, since he had not yet served in a regular campaign. Brave, yet not rash, he was somewhat fiery, but generous and chivalrous. As already intimated, he carried devotion to the king to its utmost extent. Though studious, Lord Strange was exceedingly active and fond of all manly sports—hunting and hawking were his delight. Ordinarily his manner was haughty and reserved, but towards his dependents and retainers he was very affable. So popular was he with the common folk, that they were wont to say of him in after days, as had been said of his fathers before him, "God bless the King and the Earl of Derby!"

James Stanley, Lord Strange, eldest son of William, sixth Earl of Derby, who was great-grandson of Mary, daughter of Henry the Seventh, claimed kindred with the Lancasters, Plantagenets, Tudors and Stuarts, and it was his royal

descent, vast possessions, and great territorial influence that had excited the jealousy of Charles the First—a jealousy, kept alive and heightened by that monarch's ill-chosen favourites and councillors, most of whom were hostile to Lord Strange.

When a very young man, being on his travels, Lord Strange visited the Hague, where Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia, daughter of James the First, held her court, and he then first beheld his destined bride, the beautiful and accomplished Charlotte de la Trémoille, whose family was as illustrious as his own. Daughter of Claude Duke de Thouars, by Charlotte Brabantine de Nassau, daughter of William Prince of Orange, Charlotte de la Trémoille was likewise grand-daughter of Charlotte de Bourbon, of the royal house of Montpensier, and was therefore in every respect a suitable match for the heir of the great house of Stanley. The nuptial ceremony, conducted with great magnificence, took place in a palace of the Prince of Orange at the Hague, in the presence of the King and Queen of Bohemia and other royal and noble personages.

Shortly afterwards, the young lord brought his lovely bride to London, and she appeared as one of the chief ornaments of the court of Queen Henrietta Maria.

At this time, Lord Strange lived with great splendour—his father, the Earl of Derby, disconsolate at the loss of his wife, having surrendered his estates to him—gave sumptuous entertainments, and became a patron of artists, men of science and letters. Vandyke, whom he had known in Holland, received most flattering attention from him. But the king looked coldly upon the powerful noble, and unable to brook this treatment, Lord Strange retired to his seats in Lancashire.

Lady Strange, who was devotedly attached to her lord, and whose good sense equalled her personal attractions, expressed no regret at quitting the court, though she stood very high in the queen's favour, and was greatly admired for her beauty and wit. Indeed, she found herself a person of far more importance at Lathom House and Knowsley, than she had been at Whitehall, and at Castle Rushen, in the Isle of Man, of which her husband was supreme lord, she was a queen.

Both at Lathom House and Knowsley, Lord Strange kept up princely establishments, and revived the magnificent doings of his ancestor, Edward, the third Earl of Derby, of whom it was said by Camden, "that with his death,

the glory of hospitality seemed to fall asleep." This almost regal mode of life, which was represented as a sort of rivalry, greatly offended the king.

Completely neglected by the Court, but still practising the extraordinary hospitality just described, Lord Strange continued to reside in Lancashire, or at his castle in the Isle of Man, for several years, during which his power and influence underwent no diminution, but rather increased.

Unquestionably, he was the most powerful nobleman in the North of England at the outbreak of the Civil War. Banishing all thought of the treatment he had experienced, he listened only to the dictates of loyalty and devotion, by which his breast had been ever animated, and at once offered his services to the king. How his motives were misconstrued, and his efforts paralysed, has been shown.

As Lord Strange marched along the great gallery, preceded by a servant bearing a light, his eye fell upon the portraits of his ancestors lining the walls.

There was Thomas Lord Stanley, first Earl of Derby, who married the widow of the Earl of Richmond, and mother of Henry the Seventh; Thomas, grandson of the first earl, and perhaps the most distinguished of the illustrious line; Edward, third earl, lord high steward at the coronation of Mary, and chamberlain of Chester in Elizabeth's time, who married a daughter of the Duke of Norfolk; Henry, fourth earl, who espoused the granddaughter of Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, and Mary, widow of Louis the Twelfth of France, and Sister to Henry the Eighth; Ferdinando, fifth earl, said to be poisoned by the Jesuits; and, lastly, William, sixth earl, who succeeded his brother Ferdinando, and had married Elizabeth de Vere, daughter of the Earl of Oxford.

Lord Strange paused for a moment before the portrait of his sire, a stately-looking personage in the costume of Elizabeth's time, and wearing the order of the Garter. Well-nigh half a century had elapsed since that portrait was painted, and the earl was young and handsome then.

How looked he now? Lord Strange could not help asking himself the question. Beside Earl William was his countess, whose marvellous beauty explained his incurable grief at her loss.

It might be fancy—nay, it must have been!—but as Lord Strange contemplated these portraits, they seemed to gaze mournfully at him, and to follow him with their looks as he went on.

Descending the great oak staircase, he reached the hall, where he found Archdeacon Rutter, and gave him the letter for Lady Strange, charging him with some further affectionate messages to her.

By this time Captain Standish had finished his hasty repast, and was quite ready to attend upon his lordship.

In another part of the hall, and not far from the entrance, stood the porter, with some half-dozen serving-men in rich liveries, and they now threw open the great door.

But Lord Strange could not depart without a word to old Randal Fermor, the steward, who had risen from his couch to receive his lordship's parting commands.

The old man now approached. Having filled the same office in the time of Earl Ferdinando, he had been continued in it ever since. He was greatly attached to Earl William, and the tidings just received of his lordship's critical condition had greatly grieved him.

As he drew near, he said to Lord Strange:

"Had I been able to ride so far, I would have prayed your lordship to allow me to accompany you to Chester. I should like to have seen my old master once more ere he goes hence."

"Willingly would I have granted thy request, Randal, hadst thou been equal to the journey," said Lord Strange. "But I will mention thy wish to my father, should he be living when I arrive. He had ever a great regard for thee."

"I know it—I feel it!" cried the old steward, scarcely able to repress his emotion. "There was no one whom I loved and honoured so much as my old master—your lordship excepted. May he meet his reward in heaven, and his portion be with the blessed! He was the kindest and best of men, as well as the most noble-hearted."

"Thou say'st truly, Randal," observed Lord Strange, much moved. "Nor can we rightly estimate his loss. But we are speaking of him as if he was gone—whereas, it may please the Almighty to spare him yet awhile."

"He is too good for this wicked world, my lord," cried old Randal, fairly bursting into tears, "and is better out of it!"

"At any rate, he is well prepared for his departure," said Lord Strange. "And now fare thee well! I commit all to thy charge during my absence, and I do so with perfect confidence, for thou hast ever been a faithful steward to me and mine. He who is going will bear witness for thee above!"

The old steward pressed his lips to the hand extended to him.

The servants formed themselves into two lines as Lord Strange went forth followed by Captain Standish. A powerful steed, held by a groom, was standing close by the steps, and his lordship had no sooner mounted than another horse was brought for Standish.

A bright moonlight night. Where the beams fell every object could be clearly discerned. A large portion of the courtyard, however, buried in shade. Still, the picturesque outline of the mansion, with its gables and large bay windows, was fully revealed.

The armed escort was in attendance, and at the head of this little troop Lord Strange rode out of the court-yard, and proceeded towards the park, through which he meant to shape his course.

On this side the palatial mansion was seen to the greatest advantage, and it could not have looked better than it did on that lovely night. So exquisite was the scene, that it extorted Frank Standish's admiration.

Knowsley Hall was then a large irregular pile, additions to the original structure having been made at various times, but its very irregularity gave it a charm. Open at the front, it had two large wings, and at the rear beyond the inner court were extensive out-buildings. On the left of the main building was a chapel, that might almost be described as a church, since it was very lofty, and had large windows filled with the richest stained glass.

On this side were the gardens laid out in the old-fashioned style, with terraces—each terrace being bordered by a row of clipped yew-trees—very

formal, but very beautiful. At the foot of these slopes was a large sheet of water—almost a lake—that materially added to the beauty of the place.

Beyond was the park—then full of magnificent old timber, the growth of centuries, and abounding in deer.

The turrets and walls of the ancient mansion were now bathed in moonlight, and the surface of the miniature lake glittered in the silvery beams.

Lord Strange had just entered the park, and was about to quicken his pace, when a groom, who had ridden on in advance, came back to say that a party of horsemen was approaching; and in another minute the little troop came in sight.

It consisted of a small detachment of dragoons, with an officer at their head, whose splendid accoutrements showed he belonged to the royal guard. As he drew nearer, Lord Strange recognised him as Captain Galliard, with whom he was well acquainted, and halted to greet him. "Your lordship is fortunately encountered," said Captain Galliard. "I was coming to Knowsley. I have a despatch for you from his majesty."

And with these words he presented a letter to Lord Strange.

"Can you tell me the purport of his missive, colonel?" demanded his lordship.

"I can, my lord," replied Galliard; "and I might have delivered the message verbally, but his majesty deemed it more fitting to write. Your lordship is commanded to attend the king without delay at Nottingham Castle."

"I would instantly obey the command, colonel," said Lord Strange; "but I have just received another summons, that cannot be neglected."

"How, my lord!" exclaimed Galliard. "The king's commands are paramount to all other—or should be so."

"I am ready at all times to sacrifice life and fortune for the king, but there are appeals to which even his majesty's commands must give way. Such is mine, as you yourself, I am sure, will admit, when I tell you I have just been summoned to my father's death-bed."

"I have just arrived from Chester, colonel," interposed Standish. "The Earl of Derby will scarce depart in peace unless he beholds his son."

"No more need be said," remarked Captain Galliard, feelingly. "I will report what I have heard to the king. His majesty, I am certain, will deeply sympathise with your lordship."

"I will join him at Nottingham as soon as I can," said Lord Strange. "Having rendered this explanation I must now press on to Chester, or I may arrive too late. Proceed to Knowsley, I pray you, colonel, and take a few hours' rest after your long journey. My steward will see to all your wants."

"I will take advantage of your lordship's offer," said Captain Galliard. "In good truth, we all—men and horses—need rest and refreshment."

"Farewell, then," said Lord Strange. "I hope we may meet again under happier circumstances."

With this, he galloped off, followed by Captain Standish and his attendants, while Captain Galliard and his men proceeded to Knowsley Hall, where they were very hospitably received by old Randal Fermor.

CHAPTER III

The Dying Earl

PASSING through Prescott, and crossing the old bridge over the Mersey at Warrington, built by the first Earl of Derby, Lord Strange and his attendants rode on at a rapid pace through Daresbury to Frodsham, where they roused the host of the Bear's Paw, and halted for a few minutes to refresh their steeds.

This done, they galloped off again, and skirting the wide marshes between them and the Mersey, kept as near as they could to a range of lofty hills; then tracking the boundaries of Delamere Forest, they speeded on through Plemston and Mickle Trafford.

Day was just breaking as they approached Chester, and the castle and cathedral, with some of the loftier buildings, could be seen overtopping the walls of the ancient and picturesque city.

Shut and guarded during the night, the gates were not opened at that early hour, but it was not Lord Strange's intention to enter the city.

Turning off on the right, he crossed the Roodee, where for upwards of a century races had been run, and jousts and other chivalrous sports held, and rode on till he came to a large mansion, situated on the banks of the river Dee.

"Is the earl, my father, still alive, Hyde?" cried Lord Strange to the porter, who came forth to meet him, as he rode up to the gateway.

"He is, my lord," replied Hyde; "but I fear he is rapidly sinking."

"Heaven be thanked I am in time," exclaimed his lordship.

And, springing from his horse, he entered the house.

Few of the household had retired to rest on that night, and Lord Strange found Warburton, the butler, and three or four other servants, collected in the hall, expecting his arrival.

Warburton gave the same report of the earl's condition that Hyde, the porter, had done, stating that he had just been in his lordship's room with some chicken broth, but he would not touch it.

"Doctor Gerard, the physician, and Mr. Hargrave, the chaplain, are now with him, my lord," said the butler; "and I could tell what they thought by their looks."

"Take me at once to the chamber, Warburton," said Lord Strange.

In a large carved oak bedstead, with heavy hangings, propped up by pillows, lay the dying earl.

His countenance still retained its noble outline, but the features were thin and sharpened and of a deathly hue.

His hands were clasped upon his breast, his eyes turned upwards, and he was evidently repeating a prayer, which Mr. Hargrave, the chaplain, an elderly man, seated near the bedside, was reading to him.

The tapers that had been burning throughout the night had only just been extinguished, and the window curtains drawn back, so as to admit the light of day, but the early sunbeams that fell upon the arras and oak panels gave no cheerfulness to the room. On the contrary, they made the picture even more painful by force of contrast.

In a large easy-chair sat Doctor Gerard, apparently dozing, but ever and anon he opened his eyes to look towards the bed.

The entrance of Lord Strange was so quiet that it did not attract the earl's notice, and he remained for some moments gazing at his father.

During this interval, Doctor Gerard, receiving a sign to that effect, did not quit his seat, and Mr. Hargrave went on with the prayer.

At length Lord Strange advanced towards the bed, and taking the earl's hand said:

"Father, I am here."

Something like a smile lighted up the dying nobleman's pallid countenance.

"I knew you would come, my son," he murmured.

"Shall we leave the room, my lord?" inquired the chaplain, addressing Lord Strange. "The earl has something to say to you in private."

"I pray you do so, good Master Hargrave," said, Lord Strange. "But remain without with Doctor Gerard," he added in a lower tone.

The chaplain bowed and went out with the physician.

"We are alone, father," said Lord Strange.

"Come as near to me as you can, or you will not hear my words," said the earl, placing his arm over his son's neck, and regarding him with a loving and pitying look. "I am much troubled in mind concerning you. It seems to me that I can look into the future, and I have a sad foreboding that all your possessions will be taken from you, and that a tragical death awaits you."

"Let not that trouble you, father," said Lord Strange. "If such is my destiny, it cannot be avoided. I trust I shall be able to meet death firmly in whatever shape it may come. Be sure I shall never die dishonoured."

"But why pursue a course that appears certain to lead to this end, my son? Why sacrifice yourself for a king who rewards you with ingratitude? Retire to the Isle of Man, where you can dwell securely till this struggle is over. By taking a prominent part in it, you will gain nothing, and may lose all."

"I cannot follow your counsel, father," replied Lord Strange. "Be the consequences what they may, I will not desert the king. I should tarnish my name were I to withdraw from him now."

"Not so, my son," rejoined the earl. "The course I point out is the only one left you. The king trusts you not, but listens to your enemies, and will never believe in your professions of loyalty. 'Tis in vain, therefore, that you attempt to serve him. You have nothing but mortification and disappointment to expect. Why throw away life for one who treats you thus? Fight not against him, but fight not for him."

"I can make no promise, my lord. His majesty has just sent for me, and what he commands I shall do."

"Make any excuses rather than go to him," said the earl. "You will not disobey my dying injunctions!"

"I ought to be with his majesty now, my lord—but I am here," replied Lord Strange, somewhat evasively.

"Remain here, I charge you, my son—at least for some days after my death," said the earl, solemnly and authoritatively.

"Ask me not more than I am able to perform, father," rejoined Lord Strange, evidently a prey to conflicting emotions. "Enjoin aught I can do, and your wishes shall be fulfilled."

"My wishes have been expressed," said the earl, somewhat reproachfully; "and since you refuse to comply with them, there is no need of further speech. Oh! that you could see into the future as plainly as I can!"

"If I have offended you, father, I humbly crave your pardon," said Lord Strange.

"Nay, I have nothing to pardon, my dear son," said the dying nobleman. "My sole desire is to preserve you from danger. Take my blessing. Say farewell for me to your wife and children. Fain would I have seen them once more—but it may not be! We shall all meet in heaven."

While he uttered these words, a change came over the earl's countenance that could not be mistaken. He sank back upon the pillow and immediately expired.

Half an hour had elapsed, when the door was opened, and those outside were invited to enter the chamber of death. With the chaplain and physician were Frank Standish and Warburton, the butler. None were surprised to find that all was over.

"Let me be first to salute your lordship as Earl of Derby," said Standish, bowing deeply as he came in.

"I do not desire the title in this presence," rejoined the new earl. "Approach the bed, I pray you, good Master Hargrave, and you will see how calm my father looks. He might be in a placid slumber."

"He has died the death of the righteous," said the chaplain. "His life has been a long preparation for the final hour, and it has found him prepared."

Bending down he took the hand of the departed, and pressed his lips to it. His example was followed by the others, but no one seemed so profoundly affected as Warburton.

The new earl witnessed this touching scene in silence, and then giving some needful orders to the butler, and directing that the household should be admitted to view the body of their deceased lord, he withdrew to an adjoining chamber, where he penned a despatch to the king, acquainting him with the sad event, and adding that he hoped to join his majesty at Nottingham on the morrow.

He then wrote a few lines to his wife, and having sent off messengers with the letters, threw himself upon a couch, quite worn out with anxiety and fatigue.

After a few hours' slumber, the new Earl of Derby arose, and had an immediate conference with Mr. Hargrave.

"I am compelled to attend the king at Nottingham," he said, "and must therefore commit the management of my father's funeral to you. The body will lie in state for four days, and should I not return in that interval, you will cause it to be conveyed, without pomp or ceremony, according to the wishes of the departed, to the church of Ormskirk, there to be deposited in our family vault beneath the Derby chapel by the side of my angelic mother."

"Your lordship may rely on me," replied the chaplain. "On the fifth day, the interment shall take place at Ormskirk, as you have directed."

CHAPTER IV

Prince Rupert

BEFORE setting out for Nottingham, the Earl of Derby again visited the chamber of the dead, and looked his last upon his father's face.

With a mournful heart he then mounted his steed, and rode off, accompanied by Captain Standish and the armed attendants he had brought with him.

For more than an hour he spoke not a word, and seemed occupied in painful reflections. He then made an effort to rouse himself, but speedily relapsed into silence, and continued in the same melancholy mood till they reached Mansfield, where they halted for the night.

Next morning, the earl resumed his journey, and the sight of Nottingham Castle, seated on a precipitous rock, overlooking the portion of Sherwood Forest across which he was riding, filled him with emotions very different from those he had experienced on the previous day, and in some degree dispelled his gloom.

Above the fortress could be seen the royal standard. Proudly it floated now, but an ill omen had attended its first display. Reared on the castle during a storm, it was speedily blown down; nor could it be set up again till the fury of the storm had abated, when it was placed on the keep.

The Earl of Derby did not forget this inauspicious circumstance, and it surprised him to find that the castle was not more strongly fortified, since he was aware the Parliament had a body of five hundred infantry and fifteen hundred horse at Coventry. There were no cannon on the walls, and very few musketeers.

While he mounted the steep ascent leading to the gateway, trumpets were sounded and drums beaten, and a troop of horse came forth, their helmets and cuirasses glittering in the sun. They were a remarkably fine body of men, and very well mounted.

Their leader was a very striking personage, and instantly attracted Lord Derby's attention, who knew him at a glance.

The Cavalier in question was very tall, and possessed a spare but well-knit and vigorous frame. His dark stern visage was lighted up by eyes that seemed capable of the fiercest expression. He had a thoroughly military bearing, and no one could look at him without seeing that, young as he was, he had served in many a campaign.

He wore a richly-embroidered buff coat, encircled by a crimson scarf, and crossed by a magnificent baldrick, from which a long sword depended. Riding-boots ascending above the knee, and a broad-leaved Spanish hat, ornamented with a plume of white feathers, completed his costume. His fiery steed seemed proud of his rider.

In this haughty Cavalier Lord Derby instantly recognised Prince Rupert, the king's nephew, and the brother of the Elector-Palatine. Prince Rupert had been appointed general-in-chief of the royal cavalry quartered at Leicester.

As the prince's quick eye alighted on the earl, he checked his impatient steed in order to speak to him. Hitherto they had seen little of each other, though Rupert was a relative of the countess; but Lord Derby had a genuine admiration of the prince, whose daring and military skill he fully appreciated; while Rupert, though sharing the king's belief that Lord Derby nourished ambitious designs, did full justice to his noble qualities.

Courteous salutations passed between them; but Prince Rupert's manner was necessarily grave, as he thus addressed the earl:

"I have to offer your lordship my sincere condolence on the death of the noble earl your father. Intelligence of the sad event was received by his majesty this morning, and he immediately communicated it to me. I own that I scarcely thought your lordship would come hither at a season of such heavy affliction; but I did not estimate aright your devotion to the king. In truth, he has great need of your services. 'Tis not too much to say that you alone can put down the rebels in Lancashire, and I doubt not you will quickly do it."

"Two months ago I could have crushed the rebellion in that county without difficulty, your highness," replied the earl; "but now things are changed. Manchester and Bolton are both strongly fortified and well garrisoned."

"I know it, my lord," replied Prince Rupert. "But neither town can hold out long against you, if you are resolved to take it."

"Manchester will make an obstinate resistance," remarked the earl.

"If it should be so, put the whole garrison to the sword," said the prince, sternly. "Spare none. Too much leniency has been shown the rebels. But you will receive your orders from the king. You will find Lord Molineux and Sir Thomas Tyldesley with him. I am going to Leicester. Farewell, my lord. Remember me, I pray you, to my cousin, the countess. I hope soon to hear you are master of Manchester."

As Prince Rupert rode down the hill, Lord Derby and his followers, passed through the gateway of the castle.

CHAPTER V

Charles the First

THE Earl of Derby expected to find the court thronged with musketeers and pike-men, but very few soldiers were to be seen. Half a dozen yeomen of the guard, bearing partisans, were stationed at the entrance to that part of the castle occupied by the king and his suite.

Having dismounted, the earl proceeded thither followed by Frank Standish, and was ceremoniously conducted by a groom of the chambers and some other officers of the household to the royal apartments.

Frank Standish remained in the guard-chamber, where several other persons were waiting, but the earl was at once taken to the king's cabinet.

At a table covered with papers and despatches sat Charles. Why attempt to depict the features of the unfortunate monarch, since all are familiar with them, and can summon up his image at will? Suffice it to say, that although the king looked grave and melancholy, his countenance did not want the placidity that habitually characterised it.

His habiliments were of black velvet, and a falling band, deeply edged with lace, served to set off his noble head.

With the king were the two persons referred to by Prince Rupert—both of whom were friends of Lord Derby.

Viscount Molineux of Maryborough was a fine-looking young man, and had quite the air of a Cavalier. Sir Thomas Tyldesley of Mierscough Lodge, near Lancaster, and the representative of an old Lancashire family, was likewise a handsome man, but somewhat older and more robust than his companion. Both were accoutred in steel breastplates and tassets, and each had a long sword suspended from a baldrick.

As the Earl of Derby went to kiss the king's hand, his majesty said earnestly:

"My lord, I thank you for coming to me now. I take it as a proof of your devotion."

"Your majesty is well aware that I am ever ready to obey your behests," replied the earl. "In staying to receive my father's last sigh, I felt sure I should not incur your majesty's displeasure."

"I should have been sorry if you had done otherwise, my lord," said Charles; "and if you had tarried to lay your father in the tomb, I should not have blamed you, however much I might regret your absence. I have urgent need of your services. The rebellion is making rapid progress in Lancashire, and must be checked. No one can accomplish this so effectually as yourself, since no one has such power and influence as you have in the county. I have been consulting with Lord Molineux and Sir Thomas Tyldesley, and they entirely agree with me that to your lordship alone ought the task to be entrusted."

"Such is our opinion, sire," observed Lord Molineux. "No one can raise so large a force in Lancashire as the Earl of Derby."

"That is quite certain," added Sir Thomas Tyldesley. "Your majesty will recollect that his lordship once raised sixty thousand men, and what has been done before may be done again."

"Not now, Sir Thomas," said the earl. "I doubt if a third of the number may be got together. Had your majesty deigned to follow my advice, and raised your standard at Warrington instead of here, at Nottingham, you would now have a large army. Instead of this, I fear that very few have responded to your proclamation."

"Few, indeed," said the king. "I have only three hundred infantry and some militia brought me by the Sheriff of Nottinghamshire."

"Not more, sire?" exclaimed the earl, startled.

"At Leicester I have eight hundred horse," pursued the king. "Prince Rupert has just been here, and urges me strongly to quit this castle, representing to me that I am in great danger from the Parliamentary forces at Coventry. But I cannot retire from Nottingham."

"I observe there is no cannon on the wall," said Lord Derby. "Should an attack be made on the castle how can you resist it? I beseech your majesty to retire in time, or you may fall into the hands of the enemy. Lathom House is fortified, and would stand a siege. Take possession of it, sire. I will undertake to raise

you two thousand foot and a thousand horse. With these you can hold out against the rebels till you can get together an army, and give them battle."

"I have planted my standard at Nottingham," replied the king; "and at Nottingham I will remain. I will not trust myself in Lancashire—unless at the head of an army, and it seems you cannot muster six thousand men."

"The large force I had mustered has dwindled away," said Lord Derby.

"Most of them have joined the rebels," observed Lord Molineux.

The Earl of Derby looked grave.

"I have come here in obedience to your summons, sire," he said. "How can I serve you?"

"I may ask more than your lordship can perform," said the king. "My desire is, that you should crush the rebellion in Lancashire, and begin with Manchester. Can you do this?"

"I have every confidence that I can carry out your wishes, sire," replied the earl. "But I doubt not the garrison at Manchester will be strongly reinforced by the Parliament. I may not, therefore, be able to accomplish the task as quickly as you expect. I believe the town is fully prepared for a siege."

"Lord Molineux and Sir Thomas Tyldesley have just told me so, but I can scarcely credit it," remarked the king.

"A German engineer, named Rosworm, has thoroughly fortified the town, sire," said Sir Thomas Tyldesley.

"There will be this advantage in the siege, sire, that it will distract the attention of the enemy from Nottingham," observed the Earl of Derby. "What I most dread is that your majesty should be attacked. Once more I beg you to let me bring you all the aid I can."

"I will send to you, if it should be necessary," said Charles. "Lord Southampton, Culpepper, and others of my council suggest that I should propose terms of peace in order to gain time—but I like not the plan."

"'Tis good advice, my liege," rejoined the Earl of Derby. "Much may be done while the question is discussed, and if some successes are gained in Lancashire, the present posture of affairs may be wholly changed."

"I will not revoke my proclamation, or lower my tone," said the king.

"It is not necessary to do so, sire," rejoined the earl. "But if the overtures of peace should be rejected by the Parliament, the indignation of the people will be roused, and troops will be more easily raised."

"You convince me by your reasoning, my lord," said Charles.

"And now I must pray your majesty to permit my immediate departure," said the earl. "Since active measures are resolved upon, no time should be lost in putting them in execution. Ere long, I trust to give you a good account of my proceedings."

"I am with you, my lord, unless his majesty has aught more to say to me," observed Lord Molineux.

"And I," added Sir Thomas Tyldesley. "I must not be absent when Manchester is to be besieged."

"I am sorry to part with you, my lord," said Charles. "But I will not detain you."

With a profound reverence, Lord Derby quitted the cabinet followed by Lord Molineux, and Sir Thomas Tyldesley.

In the ante-chamber they found Frank Standish, who easily perceived from the earl's looks that he was far from satisfied with his reception by the king; and the impression was confirmed when he learnt that Lord Derby intended to depart forthwith.

Without a moment's needless delay, the earl quitted Nottingham Castle with his friends, who accompanied him to Chester.

Since the opportunity was offered Lord Derby of attending his father's funeral, he caused the ceremonial to be performed on the following day, and laid the late earl's remains in the vault beneath the Stanley Chapel in Ormskirk Church.

CHAPTER VI

Colonel Rosworm

IN an inner room of an old black and white timber and plaster house situated in a street near the Collegiate Church in Manchester, were two persons.

One of them, whose accoutrements proclaimed him an officer of rank in the Parliamentary army, was Colonel Richard Holland, commander of the garrison and governor of the town. He had strongly marked features, and an authoritative manner, though on the present occasion he had somewhat relaxed his importance.

His companion, unmistakably a foreigner, was no other than the redoubted German engineer, of whom mention has been previously made.

Colonel Rosworm was about fifty, and had served under Wallenstein during the Thirty Years' War. But he appeared none the worse for the hardships he had undergone. His cheeks had been gashed at the battle of Lutzen, but this circumstance only heightened the manly character of his physiognomy, and indeed the scar was almost hidden by a bushy red beard. Though his look was determined and somewhat stern, his manner was distinguished by military frankness.

He could not be called handsome but his features were well formed, and his figure strong and well-proportioned. He did not exceed the middle height, but bore himself so well that he looked tall.

Such was the famous German engineer, to whom the defence of Manchester against the Royalists and malignants, as they were termed, had been entrusted by those belonging to the Puritan faction. That he was equal to the task seemed now conclusively proved by the effectual manner in which he had fortified the town—surrounding it entirely with mud walls, and protecting the entrances with stout posts, chains, and barricades. Colonel Rosworm's plan was entirely satisfactory to the Parliamentary governor of the town, and he gave it his unqualified commendation.

The house in which we find the engineer and the governor belonged to the former. He had occupied it ever since he arrived in the town from Ireland. It was a small habitation, but quite large enough for himself and his daughter. Colonel Rosworm was a widower, having lost his wife some years ago. But she

had left him a most lovely girl, whom he guarded with as much vigilance as he would have done a fortress.

Gertrude Rosworm, at the period of our story, was just nineteen, and remarkable for her personal attractions. Her profuse flaxen locks, summer blue eyes, delicately fair complexion, and graceful figure won her many admirers among the youth of the town, but none of them were allowed by her jealous father to approach her. However, further description of her must be deferred till she appears on the scene.

Colonel Rosworm was closeted with the governor in a small room opening from the house place, which enjoyed the advantage of a bay window looking into the street.

The walls were garnished with pikes, swords, muskets, and petronels, and several pieces of armour and steel caps were hung up ready for use.

Colonel Rosworm wore a buff coat and boots, but had relieved himself of his sword and pistols. On the table beside them was a flask of claret and a couple of tall glasses.

They were talking of a banquet given some six weeks ago by a gentleman of Manchester to Lord Derby—then Lord Strange—at which time a tumult occurred in the town when several persons were killed.

"This disastrous affair may be regarded as the commencement of the Civil War in Manchester," observed the governor. "But I do not think Lord Strange altogether in fault. The provocation came from our side, and I am thankful to say I had nothing to do with it."

"The occurrence took place just before my arrival," remarked Colonel Rosworm, who spoke the language perfectly, though with a strong German accent; "but it does not appear that Lord Strange had any designs upon the town."

"He merely came to attend a grand banquet given in his honour," replied the governor. "Sir Richard Grlington, sheriff of the county, Lord Molineux, Sir Gilbert Hoghton, Sir Alexander Radcliffe, Sir Thomas Prestwich, Sir Edward Mosley, of Alport Lodge, Sir Thomas Tyldesley, Mr. Farrington, of Worden, and several other Royalist gentlemen were present, but all might have passed off quietly if Colonel Holcroft and Colonel Birch had not marched into the town

with a large party of men, armed with pikes and muskets, and struck up their drums in the market-place to call out the militia."

"That was certain to cause an affray," remarked Rosworm. "Perhaps they merely meant to disturb the party at the banquet."

"I suspect they had a deeper design," said the governor. "But be that as it may, they were interrupted by the sheriff, who quitted the banquet, and suddenly appeared in the market-place with a few followers, and ordered them in the king's name to lay down their arms, and keep the peace. They refused, and the sheriff was unable to enforce compliance. Meanwhile Lord Strange, with Lord Molineux, Sir Thomas Tyldesley, and the rest of the gentlemen likewise quitted the banquet, and came to the sheriff's assistance. A sharp conflict took place in the streets, during which several men were killed on both sides, but it ended in the discomfiture of Holcroft and Birch. The latter would have been shot, had he not taken refuge under a cart. Lord Strange and his friends were highly incensed, and declared it was a treacherous design to assassinate them. Next morning the chief persons of the town waited upon his lordship, who was a guest of Sir Alexander Radcliffe, of Ordsall Hall, to express their great regret at the occurrence."

"Had Lord Strange chosen, he could easily have taken the town at that time, and carried off the magazine," observed Rosworm. "But now we are secure from attack."

"We shall not be left long in peace," said the governor. "Lord Strange has just succeeded his father and is now Earl of Derby. I hear he is raising a large body of men."

"Most probably he will march to the king's assistance," rejoined Rosworm.

"If I am rightly informed he has received orders from his majesty to besiege this town," said Colonel Holland. "We may therefore expect a visit from him shortly."

"Come when he may he will find us prepared," said Rosworm. "But if your excellency apprehends an immediate attack it may be well to provision the town, and get in all the men you can from Bury, Rochdale, and the neighbouring places."

"I have sent scouts to Warrington where the earl now is," said the governor, "and expect to receive precise information to-morrow. Meanwhile, no precautions must be neglected."

"Strict watch shall be kept to-night on the ramparts and at the gates," rejoined Rosworm. "I myself will visit the sentinels, and see that they do not neglect their duty. If aught occurs alarm bells shall be rung, and a light displayed from the church tower."

"You have not served under the great Wallenstein without learning something, colonel," observed the governor, with a smile.

"I have learnt that he who guards a fortress must not sleep at night," said Rosworm. "Depend upon it the enemy shall not take us unawares."

At this moment the door was partly opened, and a pleasant voice inquired:

"May I come in, father?"

Rosworm answered in the affirmative, and Gertrude entered.

CHAPTER VII

Gertrude Rosworm

HER presence seemed to light up the little room. A lovely blonde with the fairest tresses, and the tenderest blue eyes imaginable. A glance from those blue eyes possessed an almost resistless witchery. Figure slight and symmetrical. She was simply, yet very becomingly attired. On her head she wore a coverchief, her flaxen locks were wholly unconfined, and allowed to flow over her shoulders. A kerchief covered her neck; a girdle, totally destitute of ornament, spanned her slender waist; and her gown, worn long enough to conceal her small feet, was made of the plainest stuff. No ornament whatever.

As she entered the room, the governor rose to salute her. Though he passed no compliments upon her looks, he did not attempt to conceal his admiration.

"What dost thou want with me, child?" inquired Rosworm, regarding her with a look of affection, not unmingled with pride—for the engineer was very proud of his lovely daughter.

"There is a young man without, father, who desires to speak with you, when you are at leisure," replied Gertrude.

"Dost know him?" demanded Rosworm.

"I neither know him, nor did he tell me his business, father," she replied. "He is a stranger. But he looks a gentle youth."

"Hum!" exclaimed Rosworm. "I warrant me he hath a simpering smile like some of the lack-brains who haunt my door."

"He does not resemble the young men of Manchester, father," replied Gertrude.

At this rejoinder the governor laughed heartily.

"Did he not give thee his name?"

"No, father," she replied. "He said he was merely a messenger."

"Bid him be seated. I will speak with him anon," rejoined Rosworm.

"He will not be displeased to wait if you will bear him company, fair damsel," laughed the governor, as Gertrude went forth.

Decidedly, the messenger was a very handsome young man, and could not be a Roundhead, since his long brown locks fell upon his shoulders; nor was it easy to determine his rank from his plain riding-dress, but it must be owned that he had the air of a Cavalier.

"Pray be seated, sir," said Gertrude. "My father will see you presently. The governor of the town is with him."

"I can wait his leisure," replied the messenger.

And he then made a few remarks calculated to engage her in conversation; his manner being so respectful that she could not fail to be pleased with him.

"You are from Germany, I conclude—nay, I am certain," he said. "How do you like this town after the fine old cities of your own country?"

"Not much," she replied. "And I should be glad to go back to Nuremberg, where I was born, but I must remain here with my father."

"Then you will not care if the town is besieged?" remarked the young man.

"No, I am a soldier's daughter, and accustomed to fighting. I have been taught to fire a musket, and can hit the target as well as most marksmen. Besides, I am not altogether unskilled in the use of the sword."

"Being thus accomplished, 'tis a pity you cannot serve the king," observed the messenger.

"My father has entered into an engagement with the Parliament," she replied.

"But your own sympathies are with the Royalists?" he cried quickly. "I am sure of it."

"It is not prudent, or proper, to make such observations in this house," she remarked with some significance.

"I will trust you," he said. "Nay, more, I think you will aid me. Listen, I pray you," he said, altering his tone. "I am sent to purchase your father's services at

any price for the king. You will understand that I have full authority to make this offer when I tell you that I am one of Lord Derby's officers—Frank Standish."

"I counsel you not to make the offer to my father," said Gertrude. "He will regard it as an affront. His own feelings are in favour of the king, but he will never desert the Parliament."

"Cannot you induce him to do so, fair damsel?" besought Standish.

"I shall not make the attempt," she replied. "Take my advice and leave the town as quickly as you can. Colonel Holland, the governor, is with my father, and should he discover who you are, he will infallibly cause your arrest. Ah! here they come! You are too late."

This exclamation was uttered as the door of the inner room opened, and Rosworm came forth with the governor.

"Is this the young man who desires to speak with me?" demanded Rosworm.

"It is, father," replied Gertrude, with some hesitation.

"Do you know who he is?" remarked Colonel Holland.

Rosworm shook his head.

"Then I will tell you," replied the governor. "It is one of the Earl of Derby's officers—Captain Standish. You cannot hold any communication with him."

"Certainly not," replied Rosworm. "You have come here on a bootless errand, sir," he added to Standish. "I can receive no message from the Earl of Derby."

"Then I need trouble you no further," replied the other, preparing to depart.

"Stay!" exclaimed Colonel Holland. "Have you a safe-conduct?"

"I have, sir," replied Standish, producing a paper.

"Let me look at it," said the governor.

The young man handed it to him.

After glancing at the passport, Colonel Holland returned it, and said in a stern tone:

"You are free to depart. But quit the town at once, or you will be treated as a spy."

"When I next appear, it will be to summon you in the king's name to surrender," said Standish.

And with a haughty bow to the governor he quitted the house.

"I think I ought to have ordered his arrest," observed Colonel Holland.

"You did better to let him go," rejoined Rosworm. "He will tell Lord Derby that we are prepared. Besides, he had a safe-conduct."

"True," said the governor.

Gertrude made no remark, but she was evidently well pleased that the young man had got off.

Meanwhile, Frank Standish pursued his way along a narrow street that skirted the churchyard, and led him to the top of Smithy Bank, whence he could distinguish the bridge across the Irwell, and noticed that it was strongly defended by posts and chains. He also remarked that a guard was stationed at the upper end of the bridge.

He did not stop to make any further observations; perceiving that his movements were watched, and that he was an object of suspicion to several of the townspeople whom he encountered.

As he proceeded towards Deansgate, he caught sight of the mud-walls with which Colonel Rosworm had surrounded the town. The ramparts were about ten or twelve feet high, and proportionately thick, and no doubt would completely shelter the musketeers stationed behind them.

At the bottom of Market-street Lane, there was an outlet to Acres Fields, and this was protected by posts and chains. In Deansgate a barricade was erected. Externally, the fortifications ran round this part of the town.

Frank Standish having already exhibited his safe-conduct from Sir Edward Mosley to the guard stationed at the barricade, was permitted to quit the town without any hindrance.

CHAPTER VIII

Alport Lodge

ON this side of Manchester, at the period in question, and at no great distance from the town, stood Alport Lodge, a mansion belonging to Sir Edward Mosley. Situated in the midst of a large park that extended nearly to Castlefield, and ran down to the left bank of the Irwell, the house was almost concealed by trees.

As Sir Edward Mosley was a staunch Royalist, the proximity of his mansion to the town was by no means agreeable to the Roundheads, who often threatened to despoil the park, and knock the house about his ears; but no attempt had been made to execute their threats, probably because Sir Edward kept a considerable number of armed retainers, and would undoubtedly have made a vigorous resistance.

The park gates were within a few hundred yards of the town, and were always kept shut and guarded. Frank Standish, however, passed through them, and proceeded to the lodge.

Nothing indicated that the house was occupied by a troop of horse belonging to Sir Thomas Tyldesley, who had arrived there late on the previous night, and had taken up their quarters so quickly, that their presence was not suspected by the neighbouring Parliamentarians.

Every precaution was taken to prevent discovery. No troopers were seen in Alport park, and when Frank Standish visited the town, as just described, he was wholly unattended.

On reaching the mansion, Standish found Sir Edward Mosley and Sir Thomas Tyldesley in the entrance hall, and at once informed them that his errand had proved unsuccessful.

"Nothing is to be done with Rosworm," he said. "He is incorruptible. I could not even obtain a word with him in private; but I had some converse with his daughter, and she quite satisfied me that her father will not listen to any proposition. Rosworm would have preferred the king to the Parliament in the first instance, but since he has engaged with the latter, he will remain firm."

"I am sorry for it," said Sir Thomas Tyldesley. "He would have been of infinite use to us. But how looks the town? I suppose he has thoroughly fortified it?"

"So far as I could discern, I think he has put it into a good state of defence," replied Standish. "But I did not see any of the militia, and there were few armed men in the market-place and streets."

"All the entrances are guarded, are they not?" remarked Sir Edward Mosley. "The garrison cannot have relaxed in vigilance?"

"The watch did not seem to me very strictly kept," replied Standish. "But it is clear the governor has received no intelligence of Lord Derby's approach."

"His lordship would not leave Warrington with his company of horse and foot till this morning," said Sir Thomas Tyldesley; "but the march of nigh three thousand men cannot be kept concealed. The news of their advance will reach Manchester before night."

"It will then be too late to make any further preparations for defence, or obtain assistance from the rebels in the neighbourhood," observed Standish.

"I fear not," said Sir Edward Mosley. "From all I have heard, a very considerable force can be quickly collected. Many of the neighbouring gentlemen, well affected to the Parliament, have promised aid, and are holding themselves in readiness for a summons—General Peter Egerton of Shaw, Colonel Duckenfield, Captain John Arderne of Harden, Captain Edward Butterworth of Belfield, Captain John Booth of Dunham, Captain Robert Hyde, Captain Robert Bradshaw, and several others."

"A goodly list, in sooth," said Sir Thomas Tyldesley. "Most of them are old friends of my own. 'Tis sad to think that gentlemen of good family should turn rebels and traitors. Heaven grant that Lord Derby may arrive here before they can bring succour to the town!"

Here their discourse was interrupted by the arrival of a messenger from Lord Derby, who had reached Ashton-upon-Mersey, where he was detained at the ford in consequence of an accident to one of the carriages of his artillery.

The messenger brought word that his lordship had left Warrington at an early hour that morning, with the whole of his force—namely, two thousand foot and

six hundred horse, of whom two hundred were dragoons. He had with him ten large pieces of ordnance.

The force had marched in two bodies, the larger division, commanded by the Earl of Derby, who had with him Sir Gilbert Hoghton, Sir Alexander Radcliffe, Sir Gilbert Gerard, Mr. Charles Townley, Captain Windebank, Mr. Farrington of Worden, Mr. Tarbock of Tarbock, and several others, marched along the left bank of the Mersey to Ashton, where they were detained as already mentioned.

The other and lesser division, commanded by Sir John Girlington, high sheriff of Lancashire, who was accompanied by Lord Molineux, Mr. Byrom of Byrom, and other gentlemen of note, meant to take its way through Wolston and Rixton, between Chat Moss and the right bank of the Irwell, through Barton and Eccles, to Salford. The arrival of Lord Molineux with his division, added the messenger, might soon be looked for.

Scarcely had the message been delivered, when it was made evident that information of the approach of the Royalists had reached the town—the bells from the church-tower and other buildings being rung loudly and continuously to summon aid.

Anxious to see what was doing, Sir Thomas Tyldesley ordered out a party of horse, and accompanied by Sir Robert Mosley and Captain Standish, both of whom had mounted their steeds, rode towards the town to reconnoitre.

They did not approach within musket-shot—their object not being to commence the attack. But when they descried any men on horseback sallying forth from the various outlets, they pursued them and drove them back.

Meanwhile, the bells continued their clamour, and ere long numbers of countrymen armed with bills, pikes, clubs, and other weapons, appeared; and began to flock towards the town.

Some of these could have been intercepted, but as they were speedily followed by parties of well-armed horsemen, it was deemed expedient not to molest them.

After some time spent in these observations, Sir Thomas Tyldesley retired with his party. They did not, however, return to Alport Lodge, but proceeded in the direction of Stretford, with the intention of riding on to the ford over the Mersey at Ashton.

They had not got beyond Old Trafford, when they perceived a company of horsemen, and at once comprehending that the troop belonged to Lord Derby, hastened forward to meet them.

As they expected, this was the advanced guard of the earl's division, and was commanded by Sir Gilbert Hoghton, from whom they learnt that the whole force, together with the artillery, had safely crossed the ford. In another minute, the main body came in sight, headed by the Earl of Derby, Sir Alexander Radcliffe, and others, and a meeting took place between them and their friends.

Save for the accident to the gun-carriage, nothing untoward had happened during Lord Derby's march from Warrington, and all his men, both horse and foot, were in good order.

It now became necessary to find quarters for them for the night; but this was easily managed, since there was no lack of barns and farm-houses near Hulme and Chorlton.

A strong guard, that remained under arms all night, was placed opposite Deansgate, and another strong guard stationed at the upper end of Market-street Lane.

As a matter of course, quarters were provided for the Earl of Derby and some of the Royalist gentlemen with him, while others were lodged at Hulme Hall and Rusholme Place.

Wishing to confer with Lord Molineux and Sir John Girlington, Lord Derby had no sooner given all needful orders, than he set out for Salford, taking with him Captain Standish and half a dozen dragoons.

To reach Salford it was needful to cross the river Irwell by the ferry, situated about a quarter of a mile below Castle Field, and to this point the earl rode with his attendants, and quickly gained the opposite bank, for the ferry-boat had been previously secured, and was waiting for him.

Night had now come on, but Lord Derby was well acquainted with the road, and the lights glimmering in Salford served to guide him.

Salford was full of soldiers, every house being occupied, and a good deal of drinking and merry-making going on.

Totally different from Manchester, from which town it was only separated by the river, Salford remained faithful to the king. Lord Molineux and Sir John Girlington had been warmly welcomed by the inhabitants, who heartily wished them success. The two leaders had taken up their quarters in a large house situated in the street leading to the bridge, and there Lord Derby found them.

The march from Warrington had been accomplished without difficulty, and without the loss of a single man. Already, Lord Molineux had posted three companies of musketeers in sheltered spots, and had raised a battery with three pieces of cannon near the foot of the bridge. Unluckily, the bridge was barricaded by Rosworm and strongly fortified. Moreover, the banks on the Manchester side of the Irwell were steep and rocky, and considerably higher than those on the Salford side, while the walls of the churchyard on the left, at which a party of musketeers were stationed, completely commanded the bridge and its approaches, as well as the opposite houses.

In this advantageous position a small piece of artillery had been planted by the skilful German engineer.

Through the gloom could be dimly distinguished the noble Collegiate Church. On the summit of the lofty square tower that faced the river, a dozen musketeers were now stationed, while, if necessary, a beacon could be instantly lighted.

On the left of the churchyard, a dark mass of buildings indicated the position of the college, while, on the right of the bridge, the precipitous banks were covered with ancient habitations.

Such was the sombre picture presented to the Earl of Derby as he stood with Lord Molineux and Sir John Girlington at the lower end of the old bridge.

He was still gazing at it, when a shot, fired from the walls of the churchyard, struck a building near them. The earl did not change his position, nor would he allow the shot to be returned.

After such an inspection as could be made under the circumstances, Lord Derby left Salford and proceeded with Sir Alexander Radcliffe to Ordsall Hall, where he remained for a short time discussing his plans for the morrow.

He then re-crossed the river by the ferry, and returned to Alport Lodge.

CHAPTER IX

A View of Old Manchester from the Tower of the Collegiate Church

Great anxiety prevailed among the townspeople of Manchester, when they awoke next morning, and found themselves invested by the forces of the Earl of Derby.

Except on the north-west, the approaches to the town were cut off by the besiegers. A battery had been reared by the earl, on which five large pieces of ordnance were mounted, destined to rake the centre of Deansgate; another small piece of artillery, called a drake, was likewise placed opposite the mount in Acres Field.

Throughout the whole of the night Rosworm had been on the watch, and had frequently made the round of the fortifications to see that the sentinels were at their posts. Just as it began to get light, he ascended to the summit of the church-tower, whence he could survey the whole scene, and note the exact position of the besiegers.

Placed in an elevated position in the very centre of the town, which it completely overlooked, as well as the adjacent country for miles round, the noble old church, now raised into a cathedral, could not fail to play an important part in the defence against the threatened attack of the Royalists.

The ancient fabric, as we have intimated, was surrounded by a large churchyard, extending on one side to the very edge of the precipitous banks of the Irwell, from which it was defended by a low stone wall, that offered a most advantageous position for the musketeers, and combined with the lofty church-tower rising behind it to render an attack upon the bridge exceedingly perilous. Indeed, no part of the town was so strong as that adjacent to the church. Protected by high precipitous banks, by walls which could be turned into fortifications, and by buildings that could be occupied by musketeers, it really presented a very formidable aspect.

At the back of the church, and running along Hunt's Bank, which likewise faced the Irwell, were the high stone walls bounding a large court-yard belonging to the college. Beyond was the college itself, a large stone structure reared on the banks of the river Irk, near its confluence with the Irwell.

At this point there was a small bridge over the Irk, now strongly barricaded, and having an outpost in advance, so as completely to defend the approach to the town on this side.

On the other side of the churchyard was an avenue, terminated by the Mill Gate, which was likewise strongly barricaded, but since this side of the town had not been invested, communication could be kept up with the neighbourhood.

Viewed from the summit of the lofty church-tower, which, as we have said, commanded the whole scene, the town and its environs presented a very curious picture.

The morning was bright and clear, so that every detail could be perfectly examined. Composed, as already mentioned, of black and white timber and plaster habitations, the town was almost quadrangular in form, being strongest on the north-west, where it was bounded by the Irwell and the Irk, the banks of both rivers being steep and rocky, especially near the church.

On the north-east were Shude Hill and Mill Lane, then little more than fields, partially enclosed, and on the south-east was an avenue conducting to the market-place. This, with Deansgate on the south, formed the principal approach to the town. Except on the side protected by the high banks of the Irwell and the Irk, as above mentioned, the whole of the town was surrounded by mud walls and bulwarks raised by the indefatigable Rosworm.

Commencing on the left bank of the Irwell on the south-west, these fortifications passed Deansgate, at the further extremity of which there was a barricade, enclosed the whole of Acres Field, and Pool Fold, where Radcliffe Hall was situated, passed on to the upper end of Market-street Lane, and skirting the fields between that thoroughfare and Shude Hill, terminated at the bottom of Mill Lane, where, as already mentioned, there was a strong barricade.

In Acres Field and at no great distance from Radcliffe Hall—a picturesque old mansion, occupied by Captain Richard Radcliffe—a mount had been reared, whereon two small pieces of cannon were planted. Here, also, was a large building in which the troops composing the garrison were quartered, and where the magazine was kept. Various outbuildings were used as stables by the cavalry.

Very striking was the appearance of the town, as beheld on that morning from the summit of the church-tower.

Outside the walls on the south, near Alport Lodge, above which floated the royal banner, a battery had been reared by the Earl of Derby, the large guns of which commanded the centre of Deansgate. Behind this battery several companies of infantry were drawn up; while a formidable display of well-equipped cavalry was likewise made.

But the spectators of this scene were chiefly interested by a party of horsemen who were slowly making the circuit of the fortifications.

At the head of the troop was the Earl of Derby, easily to be distinguished by his war-horse and accoutrements. He was attended by Sir Thomas Tyldesley, Sir Edward Mosley, Sir Alexander Radcliffe, Sir Gilbert Gerard, Mr. Farrington of Worden, Mr. Roger Nowell of Read, Mr. Windebank, Mr. Prestwich of Hulme, and several other gentlemen of distinction, who made a goodly show. Each had an officer with him. Captain Standish acted as Lord Derby's aide-de-camp.

Though the party rode slowly on, not a shot was fired from the walls, orders having been given by the governor of the town to await the attack of the enemy. Various small parties of horsemen were galloping round the fortifications.

The spectacle presented by the besieging force stationed in Salford was not so striking as that offered by the troops in Alport Park, but the preparations for attack were equally formidable.

A battery of five large pieces of ordnance had been reared at the foot of the bridge. Several troops of musketeers were stationed in the gardens on the banks of the river. Others could likewise be seen at the open windows of the houses, and a few had climbed the roofs, and ensconced themselves behind the tall stacks of chimneys.

After carefully noting all the preparations of the besiegers both in Alport Park and Salford, and giving some instructions to the musketeers, Rosworm descended from the church-tower.

As he issued into the churchyard, he perceived a large body of men, completely armed, who must have entered the town during the night, since he had not seen them before.

On inquiry, he learnt they were tenants of Mr. Ralph Assheton of Middleton, and commanded by Captain Robert Bradshaw from Bolton.

Shortly afterwards Colonel Holland made his appearance with Colonel Egerton, Colonel Robert Duckenfield, Captain John Booth, Captain Birch, and Sergeant-Major Radcliffe of Radcliffe Hall, who had the command of the town forces.

A war council was then held on the spot by these leaders, assisted by Rosworm, at which it was decided that Captain Bradshaw, with his company of a hundred and fifty men, should take up a position in Deansgate against the battery raised by the Earl of Derby near Alport Lodge; that Market-street Lane should be guarded by Major Radcliffe, the Mill Gate by Captain Booth, and Shude Hill by Captain Birch. The defence of the bridge was entrusted to Colonel Rosworm, who undertook to prevent the enemy from crossing it.

These arrangements concluded, Captain Bradshaw marched off to take up his perilous position in Deansgate, and Major Radcliffe proceeded to Radcliffe Hall to collect his men, but Captain Booth and Captain Birch were still conferring with Colonel Holland and Rosworm, when two divines, as their clerical garb proclaimed them, entered the churchyard.

CHAPTER X

Warden Heyrick and Mr. Bourne

ONE of these was the Reverend Richard Heyrick, warden of the Collegiate Church.

His deportment and features indicated a proud and overbearing character. He had become extremely popular among the Puritanical faction in the town by his determined enmity to the Papists, and his opposition to all the movements of the Royalists.

Warden Heyrick was a man of great eloquence, and unsparing in his denunciations of Papacy, as an extract from one of his intolerant exhortations will suffice to show. "Whence is it, men and brethren," he exclaimed, "that Popery so far prevails at this day—that Popery so much increases among us? I beseech you that are armed with authority go to the utmost of your authority! You that have power to punish, punish! to indict, indict! to present, present! Let not Papists rest in peace, in security by you! If the chiefest and greatest men of a parish be Papists, their children, their servants, their tenants, their poor neighbours, their rich kindred and friends, are all in danger by them. My lord will have his followers as well of his vices as of his person. If he leave his friend at the church door, he turns not back without his attendants. If his honour please to be idolatrous, they will wait on him to mass. You that keep back the sword from doing justice when Heaven calls for it, you may yourselves die by the sword, and the blood of all that perish by your neglect shall lie upon your heads. *Crudelitas pro Christo pietas est.* Cruelty for Christ is godliness."

Again, in a sermon delivered in the Collegiate Church just before the outbreak of the Civil War, he said: "War is only sweet to them that are ignorant of it. Our kingdom hath enjoyed a longer time of peace than some kingdoms have. Our age hath not been roused with the barking of uncouth wolves; the midnight drum hath not frightened our sleep; the sounding trumpet has not deafened our ears; our beacons have not been fired, our ships arrested, or our walls manned; our towns have not been ransacked, our houses ruined; we have not sowed and the stranger reaped; we have not built, and the enemy possessed; we have not been confounded with strange languages; but peace hath been within our walls, and plenteousness within our dwellings;—Peace, the daughter of the Gospel of Peace—Plenty, the daughter of Peace—Peace, the glory of Heaven, the joy of the whole world."

That Warden Heyrick had become friendly to Puritanism, is made manifest in a passage of one of his sermons which runs thus:—"Of late, I have heard them much branded with the name of Puritan that would not yield up their souls and consciences to the chair of bishops, with their estates, liberties, and lives to the will of their superiors. The name is very large and very reproachful. A bishop affirmed he could as well fetch one from the guilt of felony as from the imputation of Puritanism. My humble notion is, make us all Puritans, or leave no Puritan among us!"

That the warden foresaw the consequences of his infuriated discourses we do not believe, but they did infinite mischief.

Warden Heyrick was a very striking-looking personage—tall, erect, and dignified in deportment, but easily excited, when his gestures were scarcely under his command, and his eyes seemed to flash fire. At one time the Earl of Derby had entertained a very high opinion of him, but he looked upon him latterly as a mischievous bigot.

With the warden was Mr. Bourne, a fellow of the Collegiate Church, but quite as puritanical in his opinions as Heyrick himself. He had become a professed Presbyterian, and has been styled from his efforts to reform the church, the John Knox of Manchester. Mr. Bourne was aged and infirm, and for some weeks had been confined to his bed, but he roused himself to encourage the townspeople to resist the Popish besiegers, as he designated the force under Lord Derby.

A miracle seemed to have been wrought in his favour. Up to that morning, he appeared almost incapable of exertion, but his strength suddenly returned, and he now walked about almost without assistance. However, he was accompanied by the two chaplains, Mr. Hollingworth, and Mr. Walker, who were likewise professed Presbyterians. By the Puritans Mr. Bourne was regarded with the highest respect, and they declared he had long been a blessing to the town. His countenance bore traces of the severe illness he had endured, but his hoary locks and beard gave him a very venerable appearance.

While the warden and Mr. Bourne were conversing with Colonel Holland and Colonel Egerton, voices were heard singing a psalm, and presently a large body of men, belonging to the town guard, entered the churchyard. Some of them were provided with muskets, and others armed with bills and clubs. Their sober apparel, grave looks, and short lank hair proclaimed them Roundheads.

Their captain was a stalwart personage with a very moody countenance. Over a stout buff coat he wore a steel breast-plate, and his closely cropped locks were covered by a steel head-piece. He had pistols in his belt and a long sword by his side. The name of this individual, who had been a butcher, was Joshua Cranage. He was an Anabaptist, and was accompanied by the Reverend Shimrath Stonehouse, a minister of that sect, who was very warlike in his sentiments. They entered the churchyard, singing, Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder, and when the psalm was ended, and a halt made, the Reverend Shimrath addressed a few words to the men, and said:

"Fear not, but fight valiantly. The Lord is on our side, and will lend us aid against our enemies. They have compassed us about, but in the Lord's name will we destroy them."

On seeing Colonel Holland, Rosworm, and the warden, Captain Cranage marched up to them, attended by the Anabaptist minister, and was very well received.

As a morning service was about to take place in the church, the warden invited them to attend it, and no objection being made by the Anabaptist minister, the whole party repaired to the sacred fabric followed by the town guard.

Already, as it turned out, a great number of persons were assembled in the church, and to this large congregation Warden Heyrick addressed a fiery discourse.

Rosworm, whose duties called him to the bridge, did not attend the service, but when he had satisfied himself that all his men were at their posts, and that no immediate danger of attack was to be apprehended, he returned.

By this time, the service was over, and Captain Cranage and his men had marched on to the Cross, where they waited for orders. Thither Rosworm followed with the governor and Colonel Egerton, and they had scarcely reached the market- place, when they learnt that a messenger had been sent by the Earl of Derby, but was detained by Captain Bradshaw till Colonel Holland's pleasure was known.

Thereupon the governor mounted his horse, and rode to the barricade at Deansgate, where he found the messenger, who proved to be Captain Standish.

Courteously saluting him, Colonel Holland bade him deliver his message, and he would answer it at once.

"I am sent by the Earl of Derby," replied Standish, "to demand an immediate entrance to the town in order that he may take possession of it, and all the stores within it, in the king's name. What answer shall I deliver to his lordship?"

"Say to the Earl of Derby," replied the other, "that I, Colonel Richard Holland, Governor of Manchester, hold the town for the Parliament, and peremptorily refuse his lordship entrance—neither will I deliver it up to him on his insolent demand."

"Is this answer final?" said Standish, "or has your excellency any further terms to propose? If so, I am willing to submit them to the Earl of Derby, who, I may state, is very desirous to prevent effusion of blood. If the town is quietly surrendered, his lordship will treat the inhabitants kindly, but in the event of an obstinate and useless resistance, fearful destruction will ensue."

"I laugh at these idle threats," rejoined the governor, contemptuously. "When Lord Derby learns that we are fully prepared to withstand an attack, and are certain to receive large reinforcements, he may deem it prudent to withdraw from before the town."

"Think it not," said Standish. "One more question, and I have done. Does your excellency require any delay?"

"None," replied the governor, in a tone calculated to put an end to the interview.

Standish was then conducted to the barriers at the end of Deansgate by Captain Bradshaw; and passing out with the trooper who had attended him, rode back to Alport Lodge, where he found the Earl of Derby with Sir Alexander Radcliffe and Sir Thomas Tyldesley.

"The governor refuses to surrender the town, my lord, and does not require any time for negotiation," he cried, as he sprang from the saddle, and advanced to the earl.

"Tis as I expected," said Lord Derby. "But my conscience is now easy. Let the trumpets at once sound to the assault."

CHAPTER XI

The Assault

IN obedience to the earl's commands, the trumpets were then blown, and the battery facing Deans-gate immediately opened fire.

The cannonade was continued for some time; but no material damage was done, nor were the defenders driven from their position.

An attempt was next made by Sir Thomas Tyldesley with a party of horse to force the barricade, but it proved unsuccessful. Captain Bradshaw reserved his fire till the assailants were within a short distance of the barrier. He then poured a sharp volley upon them, by which several men were wounded and unhorsed, and the rest turned back.

Another attack was made by Sir Gilbert Hoghton against the barrier at the end of Market-street Lane, and was successfully resisted by Captain Radcliffe. Several fruitless attempts were likewise made to scale the ramparts, but in every instance the assailants were repulsed.

Simultaneously with these attacks on the barriers and walls, a very vigorous and determined effort was made by Lord Molineux and Sir John Girlington to force the defences of the bridge; but Colonel Rosworm with his musketeers kept up such a constant fire upon them from the walls of the churchyard, that they could not advance. The small piece of ordnance planted by Rosworm on Smithy Bank did considerable execution. Moreover, the marksmen posted on the church-tower rendered good service.

Thus far fortune had favoured the besieged, who were in high spirits at their success, and many of the religious enthusiasts firmly believed that Heaven fought on their side. This notion was encouraged by their ministers. The Reverend Shimrath Stonehouse called out with a loud voice:

"Go on courageously. Through the name of the Lord, we shall destroy them. They fall down flat, but we do rise and stand up steadfastly through the Lord."

The appearance of the besieged town was very singular and totally different from its ordinary aspect. Very little business was done, most of the shops being closed as on the Sabbath, but all the taverns were open and full of customers, and a good deal of ale and wine was consumed. All classes were full of warlike

excitement, and breathed vengeance against the malignants and Papists, whom they coupled together.

Most of the Puritans and Roundheads, who could everywhere be distinguished by their cropped hair, tall hats, and sober habiliments, were armed in one way or other—some with muskets and pistols—some with swords, and others with pikes. But it was evident they were all earnest in the cause—all ready and eager to fight. Crowds assembled in the market-place, where psalms were sung, or gathered round the Cross to listen to the Reverend Shimrath Stonehouse.

A multitude of strangers were now in the town. Several gentlemen, residing in the neighbourhood, staunch adherents of the Parliament, had come to the assistance of the place, and brought with them their armed retainers. These with the militia, which mustered some four or five hundred, amounted in all to nearly two thousand men.

The country people were animated by the same strong religious feeling as the townsfolk, and had the same hatred of the malignants and Papists. It was this religious feeling that made Manchester so strong, because it bound together all classes of the community.

A few of the inhabitants continued loyal and well disposed towards the king, but being in so great a minority, they did not dare to show themselves. Hoping and praying the Earl of Derby might be successful and subdue the town, they meant to rise to his assistance, as soon as they could do so with safety.

To those who really believe themselves under the protection of Heaven nothing can cause alarm; and even when cannon shot was falling in the streets, or demolishing houses, no misgiving was felt by the inhabitants.

As to the soldiers, the preachers were with them everywhere—on the walls—at the gates—exposing themselves to the fire of the enemy—solacing the wounded—cheering on their friends.

Nor was this zeal confined to sectarian ministers, for Warden Heyrick, Mr. Bourne, and their chaplains were equally zealous.

Above all, the greatest reliance was placed on Rosworm, who was looked upon as the chief defender of the town, and since he escaped all injury, it was thought he was under the special protection of Heaven.

Throughout the siege, the inhabitants continued their religious meetings, their public preachings in the market-place, at the Cross, and elsewhere—their constant psalm-singing. Every one lent aid, fearing to be treated as a malignant if he stayed at home. Gentlemen employed themselves in casting bullets, and preparing matches for firelocks. Gentlewomen rendered all the assistance in their power, and brought meat and drink for the soldiers.

When Sir Thomas Tyldesley and his dragoons were driven back from Deansgate by Captain Bradshaw—when Sir Gilbert Hoghton was repulsed by Captain Radcliffe—there was great rejoicing among the saints, and their confidence, shaken for the moment, was fully restored.

When Lord Molineux and Sir John Girlington were determined to pass the bridge, and were driven back by the marksmen on the walls of the churchyard, there was again great rejoicing among the saints, and Rosworm was hailed as their deliverer. Shouts of triumph everywhere resounded throughout the town, and hymns were sung, but Rosworm was not to be deceived. He felt that some successes had been gained, but he knew that far more must be done, ere the town could be effectually delivered from its powerful foe.

Once more he ascended the church-tower to see how matters stood.

On looking towards Alport Lodge, he could easily perceive that preparations for a general assault were being actively made. For the moment the artillerymen at the battery had ceased firing, but it was evident they would recommence very shortly.

In Salford it was the same thing. There the besiegers were preparing for a fresh attack. Having obtained possession of a couple of houses at the foot of the bridge that afforded them shelter, they could cover the advance of the assailing party.

At length the designs of the Earl of Derby became manifest. Determined not to be baffled, he sent off a party of men under the command of Captain Windebank to set fire to two large barns standing at no great distance from the walls.

At the same time another party was despatched to set fire to eight or ten houses at the end of Deansgate. This was done in spite of the efforts of the besieged to prevent it, and the houses soon burst into flames. As the wind was

blowing at the time from the south-west, the flames and smoke were driven upon Bradshaw and his men, and almost blinded them. Moreover, it was feared that the conflagration would extend to the town, and such would undoubtedly have been the case, had not the wind suddenly changed—a circumstance not unnaturally regarded as a special providence.

While the fire was raging, a large party of Royalists, under the command of Sir Gilbert Gerard, made another attempt to enter the town, but were baffled by the bravery of Captain Bradshaw and his men, supported by a band of musketeers sent to their assistance by Rosworm. After a sharp encounter the Royalists were driven back with considerable loss.

No further attack was made at the time on the barrier and walls, but the besiegers having possessed themselves of a house at the foot of the bridge, as previously stated, kept up a constant fire throughout the night.

CHAPTER XII

Captain Cranage

IN the conflict at the barrier in Deansgate, Frank Standish, who accompanied Sir Gilbert Gerard, had his horse shot under him, and while on the ground received a thrust from a pike in the arm, that prevented him from using his sword, and he was therefore obliged to surrender.

Taken to the college, where his wound was dressed, he was still in the surgeon's hands, when Rosworm came into the room with some other prisoners, and recognising him, asked if he was badly hurt.

"Not much," replied the young man.

"You look very faint," said the engineer. "My house is close by; go there and get a cup of wine. My daughter will attend to you. I shall return shortly. I will be answerable for him," he added to the guard.

This was enough. As soon as the surgeon had finished his task, Standish was allowed to depart, and at once repaired to Rosworm's dwelling.

He found Gertrude in the houseplace, examining a musket, which she had been cleaning. She seemed greatly surprised to see him.

He told her he was a prisoner and wounded, and added that her father had sent him to the house to be cared for.

"In that case you are welcome," she said. "Sit down, I pray you."

He gladly complied, and opening a cupboard, she filled a drinking-cup with wine and set it before him.

"You have been unlucky," she remarked, as he emptied the cup. "Your lord has not found it so easy to take the town as he expected."

"No," he replied. "The inhabitants may thank your father for the defence they have been able to make. Had he not been here to aid the rebels, Lord Derby would now be master of the town. But I see you have just laid down a musket. Have you used it?"

"Not yet," she replied. "My father will not allow me to go forth, or I should have done."

"He is quite right," said Standish. "You are better at home."

"I do not think so," she rejoined. "I cannot hear the thunder of the cannon or the rattle of musketry without longing to mix in the fray. Where were you wounded?"

"In an attack on the Deansgate barrier," he replied. "My horse was shot under me, and I received a thrust from a pike ere I could rise. For a moment I thought all was over with me."

"Would I had been there to help you!" she exclaimed.

"I wish you had," he rejoined. "I met with bad usage. Although I had surrendered, the leader of the town-guard, Captain Cranage, would have cut me down, if Captain Bradshaw had not prevented him."

"That was a base act," she cried. "I do not like these Roundheads, but their cause is just."

"Do not mistake," cried Standish. "Their cause is not just. They are rebels, and have thrown the whole kingdom into confusion. It grieves me to think that your father has joined with them. Ah! there the psalm-singing knaves are at work again," he added, as voices were heard outside singing a hymn.

As the hymn ceased, the door opened, and the stalwart figure of Captain Cranage was seen.

"That is the man who would have slain me when I had surrendered," remarked Standish.

"What do I behold?" cried Cranage. "Has a Papist and a malignant taken refuge here. My men shall drag him forth, and put him to death."

"I will resist!" cried Standish, springing to his feet.

Then recollecting that he was disabled, and without a sword, he looked confounded.

"He must not be molested," interposed Gertrude. "My father has sent him."

"This is the second time since I have surrendered that you have threatened to take my life," said Standish. "I am a prisoner on parole."

"Thou hast richly deserved death," said Cranage; "and had I been in command at the Deansgate barrier, thou shouldst have died. Thou wert present when the houses were set on fire."

"What of that?" cried Gertrude. "The men had received their orders from Lord Derby. Did you think this officer would prevent them?"

"I know not," said Cranage. "But since you plead for him, fair damsel, I will spare him."

"I would not owe my life to thee," said Standish, contemptuously.

"If you take him hence, you will greatly offend my father," remarked Gertrude.

"Then I will abide his coming," said Cranage, seating himself. "Give me a cup of wine, I pray you, fair damsel. I have had much hard work, and would fain recruit my forces."

Gertrude again repaired to the cupboard and set a flask before him.

"I drink to your health, fair damsel," he said, eyeing her tenderly as he filled his glass. "You are aware that we have gained a complete victory over the malignants. We have beaten them off in every attack, and their cannon have not done us any hurt."

"It is not well to exult," said Gertrude. "The fight is not over yet."

"The Lord is with us, therefore we cannot fail," said Cranage. "Ere many days, the town will be delivered from the enemy."

"Should it be so, it will have been preserved by Colonel Rosworm alone," said Standish. "To him the entire credit of the defence is due."

"Humph!" exclaimed Cranage. "Methinks we have done our part."

And he was proceeding with some further self-laudation, when Rosworm himself came in, accompanied by Colonel Holland.

Standish bowed to the governor, who courteously returned the salutation.

"I have some intelligence that will be satisfactory to you, Captain Standish," he said. "The Earl of Derby has just sent an officer to propose an exchange of prisoners. I have agreed to the proposition. You will, therefore, be exchanged for Captain Booth, who was captured in a sally that he made yesterday.

"I rejoice to hear it, colonel," replied Standish. "I have been very well treated since I have fallen into your hands—still I shall be glad to get back."

"You will be able to inform Lord Derby as to our condition," said the governor.

"I shall give his lordship a correct report, rest assured, colonel," replied Standish.

"That is all I desire," said the governor. "Captain Cranage," he continued, turning to that personage, who had risen on his entrance, "I notice that you have a small party of men outside."

"I have, colonel," replied the other. "Have you any orders?"

"Conduct Captain Standish to the Deansgate barrier, where he will be exchanged for Captain Booth. At the same time, his sword must be restored to him."

"It shall be done, colonel," replied Cranage. "Come with me, sir," he added to Standish.

"Adieu, captain," said Rosworm. "You have not had a long captivity to endure."

"Nor has it been disagreeable," replied Standish, glancing at Gertrude. "I am much beholden both to you and your daughter."

Formally saluting the governor, and bowing to Rosworm and Gertrude, he went forth with Cranage, who did not like the task imposed upon him, but could not decline it.

Many a scowling look was fixed upon Standish as he passed through the streets with his guard, and many a deep malediction reached his ear.

As usual, crowds were collected in the marketplace, singing hymns, or listening to preachers. The triumphant looks of these persons showed they were exulting in their success.

As the firing from the enemy's battery had ceased, Deansgate was full of soldiers, but they readily made way for Cranage and his party. On arriving at the barrier, they found Captain Bradshaw, with a guard drawn up beside him. In the midst of the guard were half a dozen Royalists—officers and men.

On the further side of the barrier was Captain Windebank, on horseback, attended by a small party of dragoons. He had brought Captain Booth and Captain Hyde, with five Parliamentary soldiers to be exchanged.

All the prisoners on either side being now assembled, the exchange was promptly effected.

The Republican officers and men were welcomed with shouts, while the Royalists, attended by the escort, marched on to the battery, where they were greeted in like manner by the artillerymen. Here Standish received Captain Windebank's hearty congratulations on his release.

CHAPTER XIII

Rosworm proposes to burn Alport Lodge

AFTER Standish had been taken away, Colonel Holland and Rosworm continued for a short time in consultation.

Since they did not retire to the inner room, but remained in the houseplace, Gertrude, who was occupied in some household matters, necessarily overheard their discourse.

"I fear our ammunition may run short," said the governor. "We have not more powder than will suffice for to-morrow, and the match is nearly exhausted."

"We must obtain a fresh supply of both from the enemy," replied Rosworm. "That must be the main object of the sally to be made to-night. We may not be able to carry off any of the cannon from the battery, but we can secure some powder and match."

"That will be a great help to us," said the governor. "The supplies we expected from An-coats Hall have been cut off."

"Hitherto we have done well," said Rosworm. "But, to-morrow, our good fortune may desert us."

"I trust not," said Colonel Holland. "But wherefore these misgivings?"

"I have no misgivings," replied Rosworm. "I am confident as ever. But I feel certain the Earl of Derby meditates a grand attack, and most probably will put his plan in execution to-morrow—if he be not prevented."

"How can we prevent him?" asked Colonel Holland.

"By striking a heavy blow to-night," replied Rosworm. "He tried to burn down the town. We must retaliate."

"You do not propose to set fire to Salford?" cried the governor. "Such a step would be highly prejudicial to our cause. We have many partisans in the place."

"No, I do not design to fire Salford," said Rosworm. "I propose to attack the earl in his head-quarters, and burn down Alport Lodge."

"That would be a heavy blow, indeed," rejoined the governor. "But a courageous man is needed to strike it."

"Captain Bradshaw is the man," said Rosworm. "I would execute the project myself, but I cannot quit my post. This is my plan: A sortie must take place at midnight. The night will be dark, so that it will favour the design. Bradshaw must sally forth with a party of fifty men, and make his way, as best he can, to the lodge. He may not succeed in passing the sentinels unobserved, but he must try to do so. Should he reach the house, he must throw combustibles into it and into the out-buildings. This done, he must hurry back to attack the battery and seize upon the ammunition."

"But he may want aid in this bold attempt," observed the governor.

"True," replied Rosworm. "Captain Radcliffe and Captain Booth must hold themselves in readiness; and as soon as they perceive that Alport Lodge is on fire, must sally forth—each with a party of fifty men—and make for the battery, to render aid in case of need."

"The plan is excellent, and cannot fail," said Colonel Holland. "I will go at once, and give the necessary orders to Bradshaw and the others."

"Impress upon them the necessity of caution," observed Rosworm. "If the plan is betrayed it is ruined."

"No imprudence need be feared on their part," said Colonel Holland. "I may have to consult with you again. Shall I find you here?"

"You will find me in the churchyard, with the marksmen," replied Rosworm.

The governor then departed on his errand.

"Give me a cup of wine, child," said Rosworm to his daughter.

"Father," said Gertrude, as she brought him the wine. "I should like to witness this nocturnal sortie."

"Thou may'st see it from the church-tower," he replied. "But there will be nothing visible till the hall is fired."

"I mean I should like to go with Captain Bradshaw's party," she remarked.

"Nonsense," he cried. "They will run great risk."

"I do not care for the risk," she rejoined. "Let me accompany them."

"Thou art mad to make such a foolish request."

"Nay, I am quite serious, father!"

"Then I should be more mad to grant it," he rejoined.

"I will put on male attire," she said. "I have a doublet that would fit me, and you yourself have taught me how to fire a pistol, and use a sword."

"But I never meant thee to join in a midnight sortie," he cried sharply. "Dismiss the notion at once."

"I have made up my mind to go, father," she rejoined. "And you know I am very self-willed."

"Bah! thou art only jesting. If I thought you were in earnest, I would lock you in your chamber."

"That wouldn't prevent me from going," she exclaimed, with a laugh. "I could easily get out of the window."

"Enough of this," he cried, rising from his seat. "I know you too well to believe you capable of such folly. Do as you will, I shall not control you."

"Then you give your consent?"

"Assuredly not," he rejoined. "If you are really curious to witness the sortie, you can accompany me when I make my rounds. But I ought to mention that a great thanksgiving meeting will be held at the church to-night. Thou hadst best attend it."

"I will—but I must not lose the sortie."

"Well! well! thou art wilful, and must be humoured. Go to the Trafford Chapel—on the south side of the nave—thou know'st it—I will come to thee there."

"At what hour does the service commence?"

"Not till late—but it will be over long before midnight," he rejoined.

"That is all I wanted to know," she returned. "You will find me in the Trafford Chapel."

Her father looked as if he had something more to say by way of caution, but he left it unsaid, and kissing her on the brow, took up his musket, and went forth.

No sooner was he gone than Gertrude went to the door of the kitchen, which was situated at the back of the house, and called out:

"Justine—come here—I want to speak to you."

The summons was immediately answered by an elderly and decently attired woman, who acted as Rosworm's housekeeper.

"What think you, Justine?" cried Gertrude, clapping her hands with delight. "At length, I have my wish. My father has promised to take me with him to see the sortie to-night."

"But not to let you join it," remarked Justine.

"No, but I may do so, for all that," said Gertrude, with a singular look.

"I hope not," observed the housekeeper, in a severe tone. "You quite astound me! A young damsel join a midnight sortie—I never heard of such a thing. Why, you are certain to be killed."

"Not till I have killed half a dozen of the enemy, Justine."

"Then, indeed, you would deserve to be shot. But I know your good father won't allow you to expose yourself to any such risk."

"We shall see, Justine. I mean to put on my military dress."

"That dress has put this whim in your head," observed Justine. "I thought mischief would come of it, when your father gave it you. But he meant it to serve for a different purpose."

"He meant me to wear it, or he would never have given it me, Justine—and so I will—this very night."

"Then Heaven protect you!" exclaimed the housekeeper, with a groan. "I see it is vain to reason with you."

And she returned to the kitchen.

For a few minutes Gertrude looked irresolute.

She then went up-stairs to her own room, and opened a chest that contained some martial equipments—buff jerkin, baldrick, boots, and head- piece—all of light make, and small size. She knew they would fit her, for she had often tried them on.

The sight of these accoutrements decided her.

CHAPTER XIV

The Nocturnal Thanksgiving

THAT night the interior of the fine old Collegiate Church presented a most singular spectacle.

The broad nave and aisles were filled with armed men, for all who came thither to offer thanksgiving had brought their weapons with them—muskets, pikes, and halberts.

The place was imperfectly lighted, but the gloom heightened the effect of the scene. A lamp fixed here and there against the pillars partially illumined the aisles, and revealed the stern visages of those grouped around.

The majority of the congregation were Presbyterians, but there were a great number of Round-heads present, easily distinguishable by their habiliments, and sour looks. These belonged to various sects, but they had come together on that night, which had been appointed for a general thanksgiving. Differences there might be among them on certain religious points, but they were all united against the common enemy—they were all violently opposed to the malignants and Papists. Among the assemblage thronging the nave were a large number of the militia, and several of their officers were with them. All the town guards—except those on duty—were present—Captain Cranage being conspicuous among them.

Every portion of the sacred structure was invaded—the chapels were full, the choir was as crowded as the nave, and the stalls were occupied by the fiercest enemies of the Established Church, who would gladly have destroyed them.

The service commenced with the psalm—O Lord, arise, and scatter thine enemies—and from the many earnest voices that joined in it, a fine effect was produced, but the sacred song lost much of its solemnity, since no organ accompanied it.

The noble instrument which, until lately, had resounded in the church, its strains rolling along the roof, and filling every part of the pile, had been silenced by the rigorous Puritans.

Amid the deep silence that followed the cessation of the singing, the impressive accents of Mr. Bourne were heard reading prayers, and the venerable figure of the divine could be seen in the pulpit.

Mr. Bourne was listened to with the greatest attention, and when he had finished reading, another hymn was sung by the whole congregation.

Then followed a fiery sermon by Warden Heyrick, that excited his hearers to the highest point, as was shown by the agitation pervading them.

The warden had just ceased, when Rosworm entered the sacred edifice from the south porch, and made his way as quickly as he could along the crowded aisle to the Trafford Chapel.

Here, among a number of armed men, he perceived a youthful soldier, accoutred in a buff coat and steel head-piece, and holding a musket in his hand. The features of this youth, so far as they could be discerned, were almost feminine, and his figure looked too slight for the martial task he had undertaken. Still, he seemed full of spirit.

On receiving a sign from Rosworm he left the corner where he was standing, and joined him, and they quitted the church together.

There was no moon, but the night was clear, and the stars shining brightly. Rosworm led his young companion across the churchyard towards the low stone wall that overlooked the river. Here were the best marksmen, and occasionally a shot was fired. On looking from the wall the dark outline of the bridge could be discerned, and the river glimmered as they approached it.

The besiegers, as already mentioned, had now taken possession of a house at the foot of the bridge, and kept up a constant fire against the guard at the barrier, but without doing much damage.

Satisfied with this inspection, Rosworm retraced his steps. The service was not yet over in the church, and the lights gleaming from the painted windows of the massive pile produced a very striking effect.

"Thou hadst best go home," said Rosworm, to his daughter. "I am about to mount the tower. Thou wilt find the ascent fatiguing."

But Gertrude would not be dissuaded, and entering by a low door at which a sentinel was stationed, they began to mount a circular stone staircase, that brought them to the belfry. A small lamp here and there fixed against the walls showed them the way.

The scene in the belfry was exceedingly curious, the place being filled with musketeers, several of whom were seated on benches, and making a hearty supper of cold meat and bread. The room was lighted up by a couple of lamps. Telling the men not to disturb themselves, Rosworm mounted with his daughter to the summit of the tower. Only a couple of musketeers were on the watch, but the others could be instantly summoned, if required.

From this elevated position, of course, the bridge could be discerned through the gloom, and the firing of the besiegers distinctly seen and heard. Looking towards the town, the buildings and fortifications could be imperfectly distinguished, but nothing was visible beyond the walls.

After contemplating this curious prospect for a few minutes, and pointing out the different barriers to his daughter, Rosworm bade the musketeers keep strict watch, and telling them he should return as soon as he had made his rounds, he descended with Gertrude to the belfry, and thence to the churchyard.

The congregation were then issuing from the church, but Rosworm hurried on with Gertrude through the dark and silent streets, through the now deserted market-place, and halted not till they reached the walls. Everywhere the sentinels were at their posts.

Turning off on the right, Rosworm next bent his course towards Deansgate, but halted before he got to the barrier. The post he had chosen commanded the end of the street, and looked towards Alport Lodge. All was buried in obscurity in that direction, and the mansion was quite undistinguishable.

"You will be able to witness the sortie from this point," said Rosworm. "I must leave you for a short time, but you will be perfectly safe here. Do not quit the spot on any account."

And committing her to the care of a sentinel, he moved off.

CHAPTER XV

The Sortie

QUARTER of an hour elapsed, and Gertrude began to feel uneasy, but the sentinel reassured her, and shortly afterwards, while looking towards the park, she discerned a number of armed men issue from the gate, and move stealthily and silently towards Alport Lodge.

Feeling certain this must be Captain Bradshaw and his party, she would fain have joined them, but the sentinel would not let her stir.

The party quickly disappeared in the gloom, and for a few minutes all continued quiet.

A loud discharge of musketry then broke the stillness. At the same time, a bright light showed that the party had succeeded in setting Alport Lodge on fire. Whatever efforts were made to extinguish the conflagration proved unsuccessful. Built almost entirely of timber, the old hall burnt with the greatest rapidity. By this light the Royalist soldiers and their leaders could be seen actively, but unavailingly employed in trying to save the mansion from the entire destruction that threatened it.

Meanwhile, Bradshaw and his party having successfully accomplished their purpose without any loss, hurried back as fast as they could, and acting upon Rosworm's instructions, made an attack upon the battery. But being hotly pursued by a company of dragoons headed by Frank Standish, they were compelled to beat a hasty retreat, and several of them were cut down, or made prisoners before they could reach the barrier at the end of Deansgate.

Standish attempted to follow them, but was driven back. Resolved, however, to gain an entrance at some other point, he rode further on, and then dismounting with a dozen men, scaled the walls and killed the sentinel who opposed him. He might have succeeded in his purpose, had not Rosworm appeared at the juncture with a party of musketeers, and forced him to retire.

All Standish gained by the exploit was a prisoner. Having captured a young soldier on the walls, he carried him off in his retreat.

Little did he suspect at the time that the prisoner he had made was no other than Gertrude Rosworm.

CHAPTER XVI

The Burning of Alport Lodge

ON that night, Lord Derby, whose head-quarters were at Alport Lodge, retired early to rest, being greatly fatigued.

Since the hall was well guarded he did not for a moment imagine it would be attacked, or if any such rash attempt should be made, he never dreamed it would prove successful.

Conceiving himself, therefore, in perfect security, he slept soundly, but was roused from his slumbers by shouts and the loud beating of a drum, followed by the discharge of musketry.

These alarming sounds announced that the foe was upon them, and springing from his couch, he proceeded hastily to attire himself, and had nearly completed his toilette, when Frank Standish rushed into the room, with dismay depicted on his countenance.

"You look scared," said the earl. "What has happened? Speak!"

"A sortie has been made from the town, my lord," replied Standish.

"But no harm has been done?" interrupted the earl.

"Much mischief, I grieve to say, has been done, my lord," rejoined Standish. "We have been taken by surprise. The enemy contrived to pass the sentinels unperceived."

"But they have been driven off?" cried the earl.

"They have, my lord. But they have succeeded in their aim. They have set fire to the hall."

"Set fire to the hall!" exclaimed the earl, rushing to the window, and looking forth. "Gracious heaven, it is so!"

"Every effort, I fear, to extinguish the fire will be unavailing, my lord," said Standish.

"I hope not," cried the earl. "'Twill be grievous, indeed, if this fine old mansion should be destroyed. That calamity must be prevented if possible. I will see to the work myself. Do not tarry here. Pursue the foe, and bring back all the prisoners you can."

Standish required no further orders, but hurrying off, mounted his horse, and accompanied by a party of troopers, rode swiftly towards the town—with what result has already been shown.

On descending to the lower part of the house, Lord Derby found the whole place in confusion.

Already the fire had made considerable progress, and the entrance-hall and passages were filled with smoke. Serving-men and soldiers were hurrying hither and thither; removing various articles under the direction of Sir Edward Mosley, who maintained the greatest composure at this trying juncture. When Lord Derby expressed his belief that the hall might yet be preserved, Sir Edward shook his head.

"Alas! no," he said. "The place is doomed."

The earl then went forth into the courtyard, where he found Sir Thomas Tyldesley, Sir Gilbert Gerard, Sir Alexander Radcliffe, Sir Gilbert Hoghton, Mr. Prestwich, and others, who were encouraging the soldiers in their efforts to extinguish the fire.

But it was evidently impossible to arrest the progress of destruction. The fire burnt swiftly, the building being old and dry, and constructed, as we have already explained, of wood and plaster.

The incendiaries had done their work well. They had set fire to some outbuildings, which quickly communicated with the mansion. One side of the quadrangle was entirely on fire, and the flames were extending rapidly. Unfortunately, no water could be procured.

By command of the Earl of Derby an attempt was made to pull down a portion of the building, but the flames advanced with such rapidity that it could not be accomplished. They had now reached the roof, and bursting forth, soared aloft, lighting up a portion of the park, and even illuminating the walls of the town, and the lofty tower of the Collegiate Church.

Viewed from the south walls, the spectacle of the burning mansion was exceedingly fine, and was contemplated by several hundreds of the inhabitants who looked upon it as an interposition of Heaven in their behalf. Even the Royalists themselves felt dismayed.

A new source of alarm now arose. Sir Edward Mosley suddenly recollected that a couple of barrels of powder were stowed away in a cellar beneath the house, and he gave orders that they should be immediately removed. Several soldiers were willing to make the hazardous attempt. But it was now too late. The fire had got so near the entrance that no one could descend into the cellar with safety. The only hope was that the barrels might escape the sparks.

However, since the risk was imminent, all the persons assembled in the courtyard, or on the terrace in front of the house, including the servants, men and women, were ordered to withdraw at once to a certain distance from the burning mansion.

The order was promptly obeyed. Everybody hurried off, and they had only just reached a place of safety when a tremendous explosion took place, completely destroying the house, scattering the burning fragments in every direction, and seeming to shake the very ground.

A grand, but terrible sight, it powerfully affected all the beholders. Lord Derby, who with Sir Edward Mosley, Sir Thomas Tyldesley, and the others, was standing at a distance, expressed his great concern.

"You will now have to seek a lodging elsewhere, my lord," observed Sir Edward Mosley.

"Come with me to Ordsall," said Sir Alexander Radcliffe.

"No, I shall not leave the spot," rejoined the earl, in a sombre voice. "As soon as it is dark I will attack the town."

"I am glad to hear it," remarked Sir Thomas Tyldesley.

The destruction of Alport Lodge was witnessed with exultation from the walls, where, as we have said, a great number of the townspeople were now gathered. Their rejoicing found expression in a hymn, in which so many voices joined, that it reached the ears of the Royalists.

Amongst those on the walls was Rosworm. But he was greatly troubled. His beloved daughter had disappeared, and no doubt had been carried off as a prisoner.

CHAPTER XVII

Whither Gertrude was taken

NEXT morning, as soon as it became light, the blackened ruins of the fine old hall presented a dismal spectacle, and inspired all the Royalists who gazed upon them with a fierce desire of vengeance.

Soon afterwards, the ordnance at the battery began to play upon the town, and the firing was continued without intermission for nearly three hours, but without doing any material damage.

An attack was likewise made by the Earl of Derby in person on the battery at the end of Deans-gate, but the defence of Captain Bradshaw and his men was so determined that an entrance could not be gained, and the earl, to his great mortification, was compelled to retire.

Sir Thomas Tyldesley attacked the barrier in Market-street Lane, but with equal ill success, and the constant attempts by the Royalist soldiers to scale the walls at various points, resulted in failure.

The same ill fortune attended Lord Molineux and Sir John Girlington in Salford. The bridge was so stoutly defended by Rosworm that they could not cross it, and sustained heavy loss in the attempt.

Finding that no impression could be made upon the town, and apprehensive that another sortie might be made at night by Captain Bradshaw, Lord Derby caused a deep trench to be digged at the end of Deansgate, and though the engineers were protected by a large party of musketeers, three or four were shot before the work could be completed.

During the greater part of the morning, Frank Standish had been so much occupied that he had no time to attend to the prisoners, but committed their charge to a sergeant, by whom they were placed in a farm-house, about a quarter of a mile off, a guard being stationed near the building to prevent their escape.

Later in the day, Standish rode to this farmhouse, and dismounting at the door entered the building.

While he was looking about, the farmer's wife, a middle-aged woman, came to him, and said:

"We have made a strange discovery. One of the prisoners who was brought from the town last night proves to be a young damsel."

Standish uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"What is more, pursued the woman, she is the daughter of Colonel Rosworm, the German engineer, who has fortified the town. My daughter Joan recognised her at once."

"This is strange, indeed!" cried Standish. "Where is she?"

"In an inner room," replied the woman. "Joan is with her. She persuaded her to lay aside her soldier's dress she had put on, and has lent her a gown that fits her exactly."

"Take me to her at once, I pray you," said Standish.

The good woman complied, and ushered him into a small room, where he found Gertrude and the rustic maiden, who was really very pretty.

"Little did I dream what a prize I had made," said Standish. "But you will not have to endure a long captivity. Before night you shall be exchanged."

"I have nothing to complain of," said Gertrude. "Good Mistress Bancroft and her daughter Joan have been exceedingly kind to me. But, I fear, my father will be uneasy about me."

At this juncture, a noise was heard outside the cottage, and it presently appeared that it was caused by the arrival of the Earl of Derby, who came to look after the prisoners. His lordship was greatly surprised to learn that Rosworm's daughter was a captive.

"I have just caused a parley to be sounded," he said, and am about to send a messenger to the governor. You shall go with him. Tell your father that, but for him, I should long since have taken the town. Had he served the King as well as he has served the Parliament, the rebellion would soon have been crushed."

"I will not fail to tell him what your lordship says," replied Gertrude.

"Methinks, my lord," said Standish, "since we have obtained this prize, we ought not to part with her. Let her remain with these good folks. Her father ought to pay a heavy ransom. If he wants her, let him come for her."

"I am quite willing to take charge of her," said Mistress Bancroft.

"And I will attend upon her," added Joan.

"Be it so," said the earl. "You must be content to remain a prisoner for a short time longer, fair damsel," he added. "But be not alarmed. You are in no danger here."

"I have no fear, my lord," she rejoined. "But I pray that my father may be informed that I am in safety."

"It shall be done," said the earl. "Captain Standish will deliver your message to him."

And followed by Standish, he quitted the room.

A troop of horse was drawn up in the farmyard. Giving a paper to Standish, he bade him ride to the town, and present it to the governor.

"A parley has been sounded," said the earl, "so that admittance to the town will be granted you. The missive is a summons to surrender. Bring back an answer if you can. But I am willing to grant a delay of twelve hours, should it be required, during which truce all acts of hostility must cease on either side."

CHAPTER XVIII

The Earl of Derby has an Interview with Rosworm

STANDISH then rode towards the town attended by a trumpeter, who blew a loud blast as they approached the Deansgate barrier.

As soon as Captain Bradshaw learnt his errand, he allowed his advance, and sent on a couple of troopers with him to the market-place, where he found Colonel Holland on horseback, with Rosworm.

"I bring your excellency another message from the Earl of Derby," said Standish. "His lordship summons you once more in the king's name to surrender the town—to lay down your arms, and deliver them up to him."

"Aught more?" inquired Colonel Holland, exchanging a look with Rosworm, who smiled sternly.

"He demands that a thousand pounds be delivered to him; and he further requires three hundred muskets, in addition to those which you will give up."

"We are more likely to demand muskets than to yield up ours," observed the governor, dryly.

"If his lordship's demands are agreed to he will raise the siege," said Standish.

"We shall force him to raise the siege," remarked Rosworm.

"Then you refuse the terms offered you?" said Standish.

"Peremptorily," said the governor. "We have no fear of his lordship. We can certainly hold out against him till we are reinforced by the Parliament. Nevertheless, we agree to the proposed truce, and will suspend hostilities for twelve hours. You shall then have our final answer."

The interview being ended, Standish was about to ride off, but Rosworm stopped him.

"A word with you, sir, ere you depart," he said. "My daughter is a prisoner—will she be delivered up?"

"I have no authority to make any promise respecting her," replied Standish. "But I doubt not she will be restored to you to-morrow. Meantime, you may rest assured she will be well cared for."

"Lord Derby will do an act worthy of his name, by restoring her at once," observed Rosworm.

"I will tell his lordship what you say; but I can make no promise," rejoined Standish.

And saluting the governor, he rode off.

It being announced that a short suspension of arms had been agreed upon by both sides, firing entirely ceased, and perfect tranquillity reigned within the town.

But the greatest vigilance was exercised by the besiegers in order to prevent any provisions from being brought into the town, and all the entrances were strictly watched. No supplies could, therefore, be obtained by the inhabitants. But they did not feel uneasy; for although their ammunition was well-nigh exhausted, and their provisions were running low, they believed Heaven would aid them.

As usual, a nocturnal service was held in the Collegiate Church, and it was attended by an immense number of persons. Amongst the congregation was Rosworm, and as he was quitting the building, his eye fell upon a figure in the throng.

The individual in question was a stranger to him, but the countenance was so remarkable, that he could not fail to be struck by it. The attire of the person, and his long dark locks, showed he was not a Roundhead. Yet who could he be? A strange suspicion crossed him that it was the Earl of Derby, but he dismissed the notion as soon as formed, and proceeded to his own dwelling, which we have already mentioned adjoined the church. He had reached the door, and was about to enter, when the mysterious individual, who must have followed him at a distance, came up.

"Can I have a few words with you, Colonel Rosworm?" said the person.

Rosworm answered in the affirmative, and as soon as the stranger had entered, he barred the door.

A lamp was burning on the table, and taking it up, he threw its light on a stately figure. He could not doubt that the Earl of Derby stood before him.

"My lord," he said, "you have done rashly in entering the town in this fashion."

"I have no fear that you will betray me," rejoined the earl—for it was he.

"Hum!" cried Rosworm. "Your lordship has voluntarily placed yourself in my hands. I should not be doing my duty were I to allow you to depart."

"You will not hinder me," said the earl.

"Wherefore not, my lord?" rejoined Rosworm.

"Because a promise has been given me," said the earl.

"By whom?" demanded Rosworm.

"By me," responded Gertrude, rushing from the inner room, and throwing herself into his arms.

For a few moments emotion kept Rosworm silent. He then asked:

"Didst thou bring Lord Derby here?"

"I did, father," she replied. "I enabled him to enter the town, and brought him to this house. Moreover, I promised him in your name that he should return in safety."

Rosworm made no remark, and she went on.

"I could not do otherwise, since his lordship desired it. He had set me free."

"I wished to have some talk with you," said the earl, "and took this means of obtaining my wish."

"My lord," said Rosworm, gravely, "if you design to make any proposition to me, understand that I cannot listen to it."

"I do not wish to shake your fidelity," said the earl. "But this siege cannot last long. When it is over, will you enter into my service? You know Lathom House?"

"I have heard of it, my lord. 'Tis a strong place."

"I mean to garrison it for the king," said the earl. "Will you aid the Countess of Derby to defend it? I will make it worth your while to do so."

For a few minutes Rosworm made no reply, and seemed debating the matter within himself.

"Accept the offer, I entreat you, father!" said Gertrude.

"I do not wish you to desert your present post," said the Earl of Derby. "If I understand aright, you have not a permanent engagement with the Governor of Manchester."

"Your lordship has been correctly informed," rejoined Rosworm.

"When this siege is ended, you will be free?" pursued the earl.

"I shall, my lord," replied Rosworm.

"Then you can join with me?" said Lord Derby.

"The Manchester men might calumniate me, and say that I had been bought," rejoined Rosworm.

"Heed them not!" cried Gertrude. "You will have fully discharged your engagement to them."

"Not till then do I ask you to join me," said the earl. "I recognise the honourable principles by which you are actuated."

"My lord," said Rosworm, "I am a mercenary soldier, but I am, also, a man of honour. If the Manchester men desire to retain me, I shall continue with them. If not, I will come to your lordship. I can make no other promise."

"I must own that I am grievously disappointed," observed the earl. "I persuaded myself you would be proud to serve the Countess of Derby."

"The countess, I know, is one of the noblest ladies in the land," rejoined Rosworm; "and her courage, I doubt not, is equal to her high rank—but I must abide by my engagement."

"Enough!" cried the earl. "I deem your scruples idle—but will say no more. I am sorry on your account, fair damsel," he added to Gertrude. "The countess would have been glad to have you with her."

"And I should have been delighted to serve her ladyship," cried Gertrude, eagerly.

"You shall do so, if your father will part with you," said the earl.

"May I accept the offer, father?" cried Gertrude, imploringly.

"E'en as thou wilt," rejoined Rosworm. "I will not hinder thee."

"Then come to Lathom when this siege is ended," said the earl. "Perchance, your father may bring you."

"I hope so, my lord," she replied.

"I make no promise," said Rosworm. "But I repeat thou art free to do as thou wilt."

"Are you in earnest, father?" she asked.

"Quite in earnest," he replied. "You have my full consent to the step."

"Then we shall expect you at Lathom ere long," said the earl.

"I will come, my lord, joyfully," she replied.

"My business here is done," said the earl. "Colonl Rosworm, you must see me safely out of the town."

"I will, my lord," replied the other. "'Tis lucky the night is dark. But you had best pull your hat over your brows, and hide your face with your cloak, or you may be discovered. I am ready to attend your lordship," he added, unbarring the door.

"Good-night, fair damsel," said the earl. "Our next meeting will be at Lathom."

And he quitted the house with Rosworm.

CHAPTER XIX

How Rosworm got the Earl out of the Town

IT wanted but an hour of midnight as Rosworm and the earl sallied forth, and the street was almost deserted at that time.

Crossing the churchyard, they proceeded along Cateaton-street, and had reached Smithy Door, when they encountered a patrol. It consisted of a dozen men belonging to the town-guard, and was headed by Captain Cranage, who commanded them to halt in a loud authoritative tone.

Rosworm immediately gave the counter-sign, but Cranage did not appear entirely satisfied, and turning to Lord Derby demanded his name.

The earl made no reply, whereupon Rosworm interposed, and said:

"'T is sufficient he is with me."

"I do not like his appearance," said Cranage. "He must give an account of himself to the governor. Come with me," he added to the earl.

Lord Derby, however, did not move, and the order being repeated, he put his hand to his sword.

The action did not pass unnoticed by Cranage, who ordered two of his men to seize him and bring him along.

"Off!" cried the earl, fiercely, as they advanced to execute the order. "You will touch me at your peril."

Rosworm now deemed it necessary to interpose.

"Meddle not with him," he said. "I will answer for him."

"He has the appearance of a malignant," said Cranage. "If he is a Parliamentarian he will not object to come before the governor."

"It is needless, I tell you," cried Rosworm. "I have already said I will answer for him. Would you set up your authority against mine? Stand aside, and let us pass."

Cranage did not venture to offer any further resistance, for he feared he might be reprimanded by the governor. He therefore allowed Rosworm and his companion to proceed; but when they had got to a certain distance, he quitted his men and followed them.

He saw them proceed to Saint Mary's Gate, and fancied they halted near the conduit, but on arriving at this spot he could see nothing of them. No one was near who could give him any information.

He hurried to the end of Market-street Lane, and then to Deansgate, but seeing nothing of them in either thoroughfare, he mounted the walls, and addressing a sentinel, asked whether he had seen Colonel Rosworm?

"He was here not five minutes ago," replied the man. "He was making his rounds, and came from Deansgate."

"Was he alone?" inquired Cranage, eagerly.

"I cannot tell," rejoined the sentinel. "I thought I saw some one with him at a distance. But if it were so, the person must have left him suddenly."

"He has escaped," muttered Cranage. "I believe it to be the Earl of Derby himself!"

CHAPTER XX

How the Siege was Raised by Command of the King

NEXT day, a council of war was held by Lord Derby and the chief Royalist gentlemen at Hulme Hall, the seat of Mr. Thomas Prestwich.

At this meeting, Lord Molineux and Sir John Girdlington assisted, and it was unanimously resolved that, if the terms offered should be refused by Colonel Holland and the Parliament officers, the siege should be vigorously carried on.

Sir Thomas Tyldesley thought it would be better to burn down the town without delay than allow the garrison to wait for the reinforcements, and in this proposition the majority of the council entirely concurred.

Every preparation, therefore, was made for the renewal of hostilities at the expiration of the armistice, in case the conditions offered by Lord Derby should be rejected. A council was likewise held by the Parliamentarians, in which the only voice in favour of peace was Colonel Holland's, but he was overruled, the militia and townsfolk declaring they would rather shed their last drop of blood than deliver up the town.

An early morning service took place in the Collegiate Church, and a sermon was preached by Warden Heyrick. Discourses were likewise delivered in various parts of the town by the different ministers, and hymns sung. In this manner the ardour of the townspeople was greatly inflamed, and no one would hear of a surrender.

When the hour arrived for the delivery of the answer, Colonel Holland rode forth from Deansgate attended by Captains Radcliffe, Bradshaw, and Booth, and followed by a company of well-mounted and well-armed horsemen.

They were watched by a great number of the townsfolk, men and women, who were collected on the walls facing Alport Park, and by Rosworm and his daughter from the summit of the church-tower.

About a bow-shot from the gate was stationed the Earl of Derby, completely armed, and mounted on a noble charger. His lordship was closely attended by Frank Standish, and at a little distance were Sir Thomas Tyldesley, Sir Alexander Radcliffe, Sir Edward Mosley, and Mr. Prestwich.

Behind was drawn up the whole of the Royalist cavalry and dragoons—each troop having a captain—and yet further on were the foot soldiers, altogether forming a splendid sight.

At the battery behind the trench recently dug in front of Deansgate, cannon was planted, and the artillerymen were in readiness. Everything betokened that a grand attack could at once be made upon the town, if necessary.

On the other hand, though little display was made, no preparations for the defence had been neglected by Rosworm.

On Colonel Holland's approach Lord Derby rode forward to meet him, and courteous salutations passed between them. After they had exchanged a few words, the earl said:

"I hope my offer can be accepted, colonel, and that we shall be able to come to an amicable understanding."

"I fear not, my lord," replied the governor, assuming a grave expression. "I am as anxious as your lordship can be that the effusion of blood should be stayed, and that the horrors of a civil war should be avoided, but this can only be accomplished in one way, and it does not rest with us. Hitherto, Heaven has fought on our side, so that we have been able to resist every attack made upon us. It is idle, therefore, to suppose we shall surrender the town while we are able to keep it. The siege must be raised by your lordship, if peace is to be made between us."

"Never will I raise the siege, colonel," rejoined Lord Derby firmly, "unless by his majesty's express command. The bloody strife must, therefore, continue. But be not too confident that you can maintain the town. That I have underrated your strength I freely admit—but in concluding you can hold out you are equally mistaken."

"We can hold out till we are relieved, my lord," said the governor. "Reinforcements are certain to be sent us by the Parliament."

"But they may be cut off," rejoined the earl. "Prince Rupert will take care they do not reach you."

"We have little apprehension on that score, my lord," said the governor. "Prince Rupert will be wanted by the king."

"Then all my attempts at pacification are vain," said the earl. "In an hour I shall recommence the attack. Be not surprised if we should visit the town to- night."

"In that case I must prepare for your lordship's reception," rejoined the governor.

And courteously saluting the earl, he rode back to the town with his companions.

Scarcely was he gone when Sir Thomas Tyldes-ley informed the earl that a messenger had just arrived from the king.

"'Tis Captain Galliard," said Sir Thomas; "he has brought this letter for your lordship."

Lord Derby hastily opened the despatch, and glanced at its contents.

In spite of his habitual self-command, he could not conceal his annoyance.

"Your lordship looks disturbed," said Sir Thomas; "I hope you have not received bad news?"

"So bad that I scarcely like to mention them, Sir Thomas," replied the earl. "His majesty has commanded me to raise the siege, and return to Warrington without delay."

"But you will not obey the injunction, my lord," said Tyldesley.

Lord Derby made no reply, but desired to speak with the messenger, whereupon Captain Galliard came forward.

"Are you acquainted with the contents of this despatch, sir?" asked the earl.

"No, my lord," replied Galliard. "I received it from his majesty's own hands, and he bade me tell your lordship that it must be instantly obeyed. I have ridden as hard as I could from Nottingham."

"I would you had arrived an hour later, for the attack would then have commenced," said the earl. "Never before did I feel inclined to disobey his majesty's order. What shall I do, Tyldesley?"

"I dare not counsel you, my lord," replied the other. "But I know what I would do myself."

"No! no! I must not be disloyal," cried the earl.

Then turning to Sir Alexander Radcliffe and the others, he said:

"Gentlemen, the attack will not be made. I have just received the king's orders to raise the siege forthwith."

They looked at each other in surprise and consternation.

"My lord," said Sir Alexander Radcliffe, "the men will be greatly dissatisfied when they hear the order. They feel certain we should take the town to-day."

"It cannot be helped," rejoined the earl.

Then turning to Standish, he bade him cross the river at Ordsall, and proceed as quickly as he could to Salford to communicate the intelligence to Lord Molineux and Sir John Girlington.

"Take Captain Galliard with you," he added.

Standish immediately rode off on his errand, accompanied by the messenger.

Nothing could exceed the dissatisfaction of the soldiers when the order was made known to them.

The arrival of Captain Galliard and his interview with the earl had been witnessed by Rosworm from the summit of the church-tower, and he at once inferred from the subsequent proceedings that the siege would be raised, and communicated his opinion to the governor.

The opinion seemed confirmed, when no attack was made.

All remained quiet throughout the day, and nothing was heard during the night, but when Rosworm looked from the church-tower next morn, the bridge was clear—the besiegers were gone from Salford, and from Alport Park, and had taken their ordnance with them.

BOOK II. — CHARLOTTE DE LA TRÉMOILLE, COUNTESS OF DERBY

CHAPTER I

Lathom House

ABOUT a week after the siege of Manchester had been raised in the manner previously related, the Earl of Derby, accompanied by Lord Molineux and Sir John Girlington, and attended by a large body of men, set out from Wigan—one of the few towns in Lancashire that remained perfectly faithful to the king, and took his way towards Lathom House.

As he came in sight of the stronghold, he remarked with a stern smile to those near him:

"That house will never be taken by the rebels."

Lathom House was certainly a magnificent pile, and so large that, according to an old poem, "within it could be lodged kyngys three." It was also at Lathom House that a former Earl of Derby had dwelt in such state, that it was said by Camden, "that with his death the glory of English hospitality had fallen asleep." Equal hospitality had likewise been exercised in the same lordly mansion by James Earl of Derby until the breaking out of the Civil War, when he had been obliged to fortify the house, and arm the greater part of his servants and retainers.

Nothing could be more striking and picturesque than the appearance of Lathom House, at the period of our story.

It was a vast embattled mansion, crowned with turrets, from the midst of which rose a lofty square tower, called the Eagle Tower. From the summit of this tower was displayed the proud banner of the Stanleys, bearing the loyal motto—SANS CHANGER.

Originally built in the reign of Henry the Seventh, Lathom House is said to have furnished that monarch with the design of Richmond Palace. Possessing a very grand and imposing exterior, it contained many noble apartments—an immense banqueting-hall, and a grand presence-chamber. Attached to it was a beautiful chapel. The outer court, which was of considerable extent, and contained large stables and other buildings intended for the garrison, was surrounded by strong battlemented walls, defended by nine towers, each

provided with six large pieces of cannon—three placed to fire one way, and three the other. The walls were encompassed by an unusually wide and deep moat, the inner banks of which were defended by a row of stout palisades. The walls were strengthened internally by earthworks, two feet in thickness. The gatehouse was exceedingly lofty and strong, and its machicolated battlements and tall towers were furnished with ordnance; while the entrance was protected by a drawbridge and double portcullis.

"There is something particular and romantic in the situation of this house," says Archdeacon Rutter, "as if nature herself had formed it for a stronghold, or place of security. The uncommon situation of it may be compared to the palm of a man's hand, flat in the middle, and covered with a rising round about it, and so near to it, that the enemy in two years were never able to raise a battery against it so as to make a breach in the wall practicable to enter the house by way of storm."

The ground on which Lathom House stood was a moorish tract but thoroughly drained by the moat. At a short distance from the mansion there was a park, and embosomed among the trees was Burscough Priory—a convent of Black Canons, founded by Robert Fitz-Henry, Lord of Lathom, in the reign of Richard the First.

Wherever it could be seen, this strong castellated mansion, with its great gatehouse, embattled walls, numerous turrets, and lofty central tower presented a most imposing appearance.

In the presence-chamber, and in a high-backed ebony chair, sat a majestic dame. She could not be called young, yet she was still exceedingly handsome, and possessed a full, stately figure. Her manner was dignified, and at times haughty, and her look showed she was accustomed to command. Her eyes were remarkably fine, of a dark hazel, fringed with long silken lashes, and arched over by finely pencilled brows. Her dark tresses were brought in small curls over her brow and flowed down in ringlets at the side and at the back, according to the then charming mode. She wore a collar of pearls, and large pearl ear-rings. Her gown was of black velvet, trimmed with lace, and her stomacher was adorned with pearls. In the peculiar grace of her manner, as in her speech, there was something that showed she was of French origin.

Need we say this was Charlotte de la Trémoille, Countess of Derby? From her charms and her ability, it is not wonderful that she held such sway over her noble husband.

With the countess were her three daughters, ranging from ten to thirteen—lovely creatures, dressed in white satin, and wearing their hair in the same becoming fashion as their mother. All three had fine bright eyes and charming features. The elder—the Lady Henriette Marie Stanley, to whom the queen had stood godmother, was tall, and possessed a slight graceful figure. When of tender age she had been contracted to Lord Molineux. Lady Katherine, the second daughter, was about a year younger than her sister, and equally beautiful. A blonde, with light blue eyes, fair tresses, a delicate complexion, she had a very gentle expression of countenance, and a very engaging manner.

If we may be permitted to glance into the future, we may mention that the Lady Katherine was subsequently wedded to Henry Pierrepont, second Earl of Kingston-upon-Hull, and was buried at Hurstpierpoint, in Sussex.

The liveliest, and perhaps the most attractive of the three girls, was the Lady Amelia—a bright little brunette, with sparkling black eyes, and a brilliant complexion. Again to forecast the future, it may be mentioned that this lovely creature—her mother's favourite—became Marchioness of Athole. She was now playing with her little brothers, Edward and William.

Edward, a grave-looking boy then some four years old, was dressed in black velvet, and his dark hair, brought over his brow, made him look like a miniature of the earl, his father, to whom his features bore a marked resemblance. William, the youngest of the party, being scarcely three, was seated on a tabouret near the countess, and comported himself well, being a very quiet little boy.

The children we have enumerated constituted the whole of Lord Derby's family, with the exception of Charles, Lord Strange, born in 1628, who was then in Holland.

A middle-aged nurse, of discreet appearance, and attired in very sober apparel, was in attendance upon the younger children.

No one else was present at the moment, though different members of the household from time to time entered the hall. The countess looked unusually

cheerful, for she expected the earl from Wigan on that day. Of necessity his lordship had been long absent from home, so that his return was eagerly looked for by his family.

"Do you think our father will really return today, dearest mother?" inquired Lady Katherine. "We have been so often disappointed that I almost despair of beholding him again."

The countess heaved a sigh, for she, too, had been often disappointed; but her face brightened as she answered:

"Yes—I feel sure you will see him to-day, Kate."

"But will he bring Lord Molineux with him?" cried the Lady Henriette Marie, eagerly.

"I cannot answer for that," replied the countess, with a smile. "But make yourself easy. Unless Lord Molineux is obliged to remain at Wigan—which I think unlikely—he will certainly come."

"Oh! I hope he will," cried Henriette. "But what was that? I thought I heard a noise in the outer court. They may have arrived. Shall I go forth and see?"

"No! stay where you are! We shall learn presently."

It was evident from the sounds that an arrival had taken place, and the countess herself could scarcely control her impatience, when Doctor Rutter entered the hall, and hastened towards her. His looks showed that he brought some important intelligence.

"Prepare yourself for a great surprise, madam," said the chaplain. "You will scarce credit me when I inform you that the queen has just arrived at the castle."

"Impossible! her majesty is at York," said the countess.

"She is at this moment in the court-yard of the castle," replied the chaplain. "I have spoken to her myself. She has just come from York, and is proceeding to Chester. She is attended by Lord Goring and Lord Jermyn and a small escort."

"She runs great risk in passing thus through Lancashire," cried the countess, who had listened in astonishment to what was told her. "But I must not sit here. Come with me, girls," she added to her daughters, who were equally astonished with herself.

Without waiting to give any orders to Master Cunliffe, the major-domo, who had now made his appearance with Daniel Trioche, the earl's confidential attendant, and several other servants, she hastened forth, accompanied by her daughters and Doctor Rutter.

CHAPTER II

Queen Henrietta Maria

THE court-yard was full of soldiers, for the garrison had turned out at once as soon they became aware that the queen had arrived, and shouts rent the air, while drums were beaten and trumpets blown.

Her majesty had just dismounted from her palfrey, being assisted by Lord Goring, who was now standing beside her. Close behind were Lord Jermyn, Sir Edward Dering, and several other Cavaliers of inferior rank. Behind them was the escort, which consisted only of a party of fifty well-armed men.

Not far from the queen stood Captain Chisenhale, Captain Rawsthorne, and Captain Ogle, with other officers of the garrison, who were waiting to conduct her majesty to the hall; but on the appearance of the countess and her daughters they stopped, and formed themselves into two lines.

Despite the constant anxiety she had recently experienced, Queen Henrietta Maria looked remarkably well. Possessing great courage and spirit, she never succumbed to difficulties and dangers. Her personal charms were still unimpaired, her fine black eyes being brilliant as ever, and her tresses as dark and lustrous as when she first met her royal husband. Her features had lost none of their beauty. Though not tall, the queen was perfectly proportioned, and remarkable for grace.

Her majesty wore a riding dress of green velvet embroidered with gold, and a broad-leaved Spanish hat, with a white plume, secured by a diamond buckle.

As the countess approached, she advanced to meet her, and prevented her from making an obeisance—professing herself delighted to see her and her daughters.

The discourse that took place between her majesty and Lady Derby was conducted in French.

"You are right welcome to Lathom, gracious madam," said the countess. "In my noble husband's name, I place the castle, and all within it—men, munitions, and stores—at your entire disposal. Your majesty has only to give your orders and they will be obeyed."

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart, dearest countess," replied the queen, very much touched. "I know your devotion to the king and myself, and should feel perfectly secure at Lathom, which I now find is quite as strong as it has been represented to me, but I do not propose to stay here long. I am on the way to Chester, and shall proceed thence to Oxford to join the king. My object in coming here was to consult the Earl of Derby, but I find he is absent."

"His lordship is momentarily expected from Wigan, gracious madam," replied the countess. "But I will at once despatch a messenger to him on a fleet horse to acquaint him with your arrival."

"Since you expect him that is sufficient," said the queen. "I can wait. I shall be glad to pass a short time with you and your fair daughters. How well they are looking," she added, smiling graciously upon them, and embracing each in turn.

"Do you know that you are my goddaughter?" she remarked to the eldest.

"Indeed I do. I am very proud of being named after your majesty," replied Henriette, blushing deeply.

"I have not much to offer you, mignonne, for I have sold all my jewels to help the king. But I pray you wear this ring for my sake."

And as she spoke she took off a ring and placed it on Henriette's finger.

"I will never part with it, gracious madam," said the noble damsel, delighted.

While this was passing, the countess addressed Lord Goring, Lord Jermyn, Sir Edward Dering, and the rest of the queen's attendants, and bade them welcome with the refined courtesy she knew so well how to practise.

All the Cavaliers were splendidly accoutred, and made a very gallant show in their glittering cuirasses, richly embroidered baldricks, scarves, and plumed hats.

As we have said, the two nobles were accounted the handsomest men belonging to the Court, and were especial favourites of the queen.

Lord Derby believed they were secretly hostile to him, and though the countess entertained the same impression, she did not allow it to influence her reception of them.

At this juncture the major-domo, with two yeomen-ushers, all three bearing white wands, came up, for the purpose of conducting her majesty to the house, and the queen was about to proceed thither, when an interruption occurred. Trumpets were blown from the summit of the gate-house, announcing the Earl of Derby's return, and, on hearing these sounds, the queen remained stationary.

Immediately afterwards the great gates were thrown open, and the earl, with Lord Molineux, Sir Thomas Tyldesley, Sir John Girlington, and closely attended by Captain Standish, rode into the court, followed by a large troop of horse. Loud shouts at the same time arose from the garrison, who were rejoiced to behold their lord again.

Great was Lord Derby's surprise when he found the place occupied as we have described; but the moment he learnt that the queen was present, he flung himself from the saddle, and made his way to the spot where she was standing, followed by Lord Molineux and the others.

"Welcome! thrice welcome! gracious madam," he cried, bending the knee before her. "Lathom is greatly honoured by this unlooked-for visit. Could I have anticipated it, I would have made every preparation for your reception! But I frankly own I did not expect to find your majesty here."

"Nor had I any such intention when I left York, my lord," she replied, praying him to rise. "I will explain the object of my visit anon. For a time I place myself under your care, knowing I shall be well guarded by the loyal Earl of Derby,"

"Your majesty is as safe here as you were at York," replied the earl. "Deign to enter the house."

Then bowing haughtily to the Lords Goring and Jermyn, he conducted her majesty towards the entrance of the house, preceded by the major-domo and the ushers—a large retinue of servants having ranged themselves on either side of the steps.

Seeing that the queen desired to confer with him in private, Lord Derby led her to the lower end of the presence-chamber.

No one followed them. All the courtiers and Royalist gentlemen remained with the countess, in the centre of the large apartment.

"Madam," said the earl, "I am prepared to listen to aught your majesty may have to say to me."

"My lord," said the queen, after a brief pause, "I am aware that your loyalty has been heavily taxed, and very inadequately rewarded—but I must put it to a further test."

"Hesitate not to command me, madam. Aught I can do for his majesty and yourself shall be done."

"You have, indeed, a noble and a generous heart, my lord," said the queen. "I was told you deeply resented some supposed injuries done you, and attributed them to my influence with the king. But I resolved to trust you. I am here—in your stronghold. Were you the traitor your enemies would have me believe, you could deliver me up, and make your own terms with the Parliament."

"Those who have charged me with treasonable designs have belied me, madam," rejoined the earl, with difficulty controlling himself, and speaking with forced calmness. "This is not the moment to call them to account, but the time will come when I will force them to confess the falsehood. I will make no idle professions of loyalty. My acts speak for themselves. But thus much I will say—I am ready to sacrifice my life for the king, and all my possessions are at his majesty's disposal. With such feelings could I prove faithless to your majesty?"

"No, my lord," replied the queen, emphatically; "nor did I ever suspect you of treachery. But let us dismiss this matter. I have come to you for aid, and I do not think you will refuse it me."

"Assuredly not, madam," said the earl; "you shall have all the aid I can give you, either in men or money."

"It is the latter that I want, my lord," rejoined the queen. "The king's necessities are very great—greater even than you imagine. Your lordship is aware that I sold all my jewels and plate in Holland, and though a very large sum was raised by this sacrifice—for sacrifice it was—more—much more—is needed."

"My coffers are not so well filled as I could desire, madam," replied the earl. "But all I have is yours."

"With how much can you supply me, my lord?"

"Not more than a thousand pounds, madam," he replied.

"Cannot a larger sum be borrowed?" she cried with a look of deep disappointment.

"I may, perhaps, be able to obtain two or three thousand more from Sir Alexander Radcliffe of Ordsall Hall, near Manchester," replied the earl. "If your majesty can remain here till to-morrow, I will send off a trusty messenger to him forthwith."

"The matter is so important to the king, my lord, that I must needs wait," said the queen. "But cannot Lord Molineux aid us?"

"I fear not," he replied. "The Lancashire, Royalists have no funds."

"'T is everywhere the same," said the queen. "The two noblemen with me, and Sir Edward Dering, have nothing, or next to nothing."

"I will speak to Sir John Girlington and Sir Thomas Tyldesley presently," said the earl. "But with your majesty's permission I will first send off the messenger to Ordsall."

"I pray you do so, my lord," said the queen.

Having conducted her majesty to the countess, the earl proceeded to his cabinet, taking with him Doctor Rutter, to whom he imparted his design.

"Shall I send Frank Standish, or Captain Bootle on the errand?" remarked the earl. "Give me your advice, Rutter?"

"Captain Bootle, I think, will be the best, my lord," rejoined the chaplain. "He is more cautious than Standish, and will run no needless risk. Besides, Standish is well known to the Manchester Roundheads, and would be recognised if he chanced to encounter any of them."

"You are right," replied the earl. "It would not be prudent to send him. While I write to Sir Alexander Radcliffe, go fetch Captain Bootle, and explain the business to him."

While Rutter went in quest of the messenger, Lord Derby sat down at a table on which writing materials were laid, and had just finished his letter, when the chaplain returned with Bootle.

Captain Bootle's looks seemed scarcely to warrant the confidence placed in him by the earl and Doctor Rutter, for there was something sinister in the expression of his countenance, caused by a slight obliquity of vision, but he was brave and active, and esteemed a staunch Royalist. He was fully accoutred in breastplate and helmet, and his stout riding-boots were drawn above the knee. Besides the long sword by his side he had pistols in his belt.

"Has Doctor Rutter explained why I have sent for you, Captain Bootle?" said the earl.

"Ay, my lord," replied the other. "You desire me to take a letter to Sir Alexander Radcliffe of Ordsall Hall, and to bring back a large sum of money."

"There is much risk in the expedition," observed the earl. "Take a strong guard with you."

"If I take a strong guard, my lord, I shall probably be attacked, and may be plundered," said Bootle. "I would rather go alone; I can reach the hall then unobserved."

"As you will," said the earl. "But mind, you will incur a great responsibility."

"I believe it to be the safest course," remarked Rutter.

"I am sure it is," said Bootle.

The earl did not seem altogether satisfied, but he gave him the letter, adding, "Set out at once, and use all the despatch you can. Sir Alexander will furnish you with another horse, and if he deems it needful, will send a guard with you."

Captain Bootle bowed and withdrew.

In less than a quarter of an hour afterwards, he had quitted the hall, and was speeding in the direction of Wigan, whither it was supposed he had been sent, for none, save those concerned in it, were aware of the real nature of his errand.

CHAPTER III

What the Queen beheld from the Eagle Tower

As it was now known that the queen intended to remain at Lathom till the following day, arrangements were immediately made for the accommodation of her majesty and her suite.

This was accomplished without the slightest difficulty, since there were an immense number of rooms in the mansion, as will readily be understood, when we mention that more than two hundred guests with their attendants had often been lodged within it.

To the queen was assigned a noble apartment in the grand gallery, the walls of which were hung with the choicest arras, while the bedstead presented a magnificent specimen of carved oak. Amid the painted glass of the bay window was a portrait of the Countess of Richmond, mother of Henry the Seventh. Scarcely inferior were the rooms allotted to the principal personages in attendance upon her majesty.

As we have said, the apartments were truly regal, Henry the Seventh's palace at Shene being modelled upon Lathom. Even the queen was struck with the princely character of the mansion. As to her majesty's guard, they had no reason to complain of their quarters.

After a plentiful repast had been served in the great banqueting-hall, the queen inspected the garrison. Except the musketeers and artillerymen on the walls, the whole of the men, fully armed and accoutred, and having an officer at the head of each company, were drawn up in the court-yard, and presented a very imposing sight. Accustomed to such displays, the queen was able to judge of their efficiency.

"You are better served than his majesty, my lord," she remarked to the Earl of Derby. "I have no such troops as these elsewhere."

"I have reason to be proud of them, gracious madam, for they are all my retainers," replied the earl. "They are ready to fight for his majesty when called upon. But methinks they are best employed in the defence of this castle, which helps to sustain the royal cause in Lancashire."

"When my husband is absent I have charge of the castle," said the countess; "and your majesty may rest assured it shall never be surrendered to rebels."

"I have no fear of that," rejoined the queen.

Before quitting the court, the troops marched past the queen, and manifested great enthusiasm.

Her majesty next visited the stables, which, though large enough to hold a hundred horses, were now quite full.

From the stables she proceeded to the magazine and provision stores, and was surprised at the extent of the supplies.

"Your majesty sees we are not unprepared," said the countess.

"No castle in England can be in better condition," replied the queen. "But I have not yet completed my survey. From the summit of that lofty tower I could see the whole of the place."

"Your majesty would find the ascent fatiguing," remarked the earl. "I do not advise you to attempt it."

"I make no doubt the countess often goes there," said the queen.

"Twice a day regularly, madam," rejoined Lady Derby.

"Then the effort cannot be too great for me!" cried the queen. "Come with me all who list. My lord, I place myself under your guidance."

The Eagle Tower towards which Lord Derby conducted the queen was situated in the centre of the mansion.

In the lower part there was a guard-room wherein half a dozen musketeers were now assembled. From this chamber a wide staircase, that followed each angle of the tower, gradually mounted to the summit. So easy was the ascent that the queen accomplished it without the slightest fatigue. On the appearance of the earl and his illustrious visitor, the two sentinels stationed on the leads retired.

Now that the whole of the castle was spread out before her, the queen was surprised at the size of the fabric. With the various buildings and walls it looked like a strongly fortified town. Lord Goring and Lord Jermyn, and her majesty's other attendants, were equally amazed. A smile of satisfaction played upon Lady Derby's countenance, but the earl maintained an immovable demeanour.

The queen was no careless and superficial observer. Not content with a mere glance at the place, she minutely examined the fortifications—noted the immense thickness of the walls, and the strong internal earthworks—numbered the towers and counted the ordnance—and bestowed a second look of scrutiny upon the lofty gatehouse.

Then turning to the Earl of Derby; she remarked:

"This is a strong castle, my lord—much stronger than I thought."

"It was built by my ancestor, the second Lord Stanley, and first Lord Derby," replied the earl. "It was a strong place then—but I have made it somewhat stronger."

"To me it seems impregnable," remarked the queen. "But you must guard against treachery."

"I hope we have no traitors at Lathom, gracious madam," said the countess.

Before descending, the queen surveyed the surrounding district. Owing to the fine weather that prevailed, the view was seen to great advantage.

The lofty position on which she stood enabled her to overlook the rising ground on the south side of the moat, and beyond the park she beheld a vast moor, almost uncultivated and entirely destitute of timber, that extended nearly to Knowsley.

On the north was another park, in the midst of which was Burscough Priory, a reverend pile, founded some four or five centuries ago by the Lathoms, but now completely deserted, except by a few poor bedesmen, who were allowed to occupy it.

The picturesque structure, however, did not escape the queen's eye, and she put some questions respecting it.

On the west was New Hall, a small mansion belonging to the Earl of Derby, now untenanted, and beyond it, above the trees, could be distinguished the spire of the old church of Ormskirk, in the vaults of which Earl William had recently been laid beside his ancestors.

On the east, a range of hills shut out the view in the direction of Wigan.

Owing to the large tract of moss and moor, the country had generally a wild and sterile look—but portions of the prospect were extremely picturesque and beautiful. The parks contained much fine timber, and were well stocked with deer. Up to a late period the Lord of Lathom and Knowsley had been devoted to the chase.

For some time the queen remained gazing on this prospect—turning from one side to the other and questioning the earl as to any objects that interested her.

After studying the locality in this manner she came to the conclusion that no better situation for a stronghold could have been chosen.

The two nobles in attendance upon her majesty made few remarks, and held aloof while she was conversing with the earl.

In the evening a banquet, distinguished by as much splendour as had formerly characterised Lord Derby's entertainments, took place in the great hall. In the centre of the dais, under a canopy, sat the queen, and all the most important personages then staying within the mansion were placed on her right and left. Lord Derby waited upon her majesty in person. Nearly a hundred persons sat down at the lower tables—all the officers of the garrison being present.

Thus filled and illumined with torches, the hall presented a magnificent sight. The richest liveries were worn by the servants, and strains of minstrelsy were heard from the galleries. Trumpets were blown when certain large dishes were set upon the tables, and many old and long-neglected customs were observed.

CHAPTER IV

How Gertrude Rosworm arrived at Lathom House

THE Earl of Derby's confident expectation that Captain Bootle would return at an early hour on the following morning was not realised.

Not till nearly noon did the messenger make his appearance. Nor had he been successful in his errand. Sir Alexander Radcliffe was absent from Ordsall, and, consequently, the money could not be procured.

The queen was greatly disappointed at the result of the expedition, and scarcely seemed satisfied with Bootle's excuses. When he was gone she remarked to the earl:

"I do not like that man's looks. I think he could have brought the money if he would."

"He could only have obtained it from Sir Alexander himself, madam, and unfortunately he was absent."

"But he would have returned to-night," cried the queen. "The messenger ought to have waited."

"Doubtless he would have waited, but for the special orders given him," said the earl. "But if your majesty can be induced to prolong your stay I will send off another messenger at once."

"It will be well to do so, my lord," said the queen.

Just then, Captain Standish entered the cabinet wherein the foregoing discourse had taken place between the queen and Lord Derby.

"Pardon this intrusion, gracious madam," said Standish, bowing. "A youth has just arrived at the castle from Manchester, who has a matter of the utmost importance to communicate to your majesty."

"From Manchester, say you?" exclaimed the queen. "He may be from Sir Alexander Radcliffe."

"No, madam, the youth is not from Ordsall," said Standish.

"Ah! then you know his errand?" cried the queen.

"Of thus much, I am certain, gracious madam—he brings no message from Sir Alexander Radcliffe. His lordship is acquainted with the youth, who has rendered him some slight service."

"Who is he?" demanded the earl.

"He calls himself Karl Rosworm," replied Standish. "Your lordship will recognise him at once!"

"Rosworm!" exclaimed the queen. "Why that is the name of the famous German engineer, by whom Manchester has been fortified."

"And if I am not wrong in my suspicions," said the earl, a slight smile crossing his features, "this Karl Rosworm is a near relative of the engineer. But your majesty may safely see the youth."

"He is without, gracious madam," said Standish.

"Admit him, then," said the queen.

In another minute, a youth of very prepossessing appearance entered the cabinet, and bowed deeply to the queen. His light locks flowed over his shoulders, and heightened the delicate and almost feminine character of his features. He was habited in a riding-dress, and the dusty state of his boots showed he had travelled far.

After bringing this youth into the royal presence, Standish would have retired, but the queen signed to him to stay.

"Attempt not to deceive me," she said to the new-corner, "you are not what you seem."

"Pardon me, I pray your majesty, for appearing before you in this disguise," said Gertrude, for it was she. "I required it to come hither. I am the daughter of Colonel Rosworm, but I am a Royalist at heart, as I hope to prove. A plot has been contrived in Manchester against your majesty, and I have come hither—at some hazard to myself—to warn you of it."

"I thank you for your zeal," replied the queen. "But I am at a loss to understand how such a plot can have originated."

"Your majesty's movements are better known than you imagine," said Gertrude. "It is known to Colonel Holland and some of the Manchester garrison that your majesty is staying at Lathom, and an attempt will be made to capture you. An ambuscade will be formed into which it is hoped you may fall when you quit the castle. Fearing the design might prove successful, I have come to warn you of it."

"I thank you heartily for the great service rendered me," said the queen, "and will requite it. How can Colonel Holland have obtained this information?" she added, to Lord Derby. "'Tis certain we have been betrayed. But by whom? My own suspicions alight on Captain Bootle."

"I cannot believe him capable of such villainy," said the earl. "But he shall at once be placed under arrest. Your majesty can then interrogate him. See it done!" he added to Standish, who forthwith departed on the errand.

"But for this unlooked-for and untoward incident," said the earl, "I would have sent a second messenger to Ordsall; but it would not be prudent to do so, since he might fall into the hands of the enemy."

"Trouble yourself no more about the matter, my lord," said the queen. "But I shall now need an additional guard to Warrington."

"I will attend your majesty myself with a strong guard," said the earl. "I do not think the enemy will venture to attack us."

At this juncture, Frank Standish returned. But he brought no prisoner with him.

"Where is Captain Bootle?" demanded the earl.

"He has fled, my lord," replied Standish.

"Fled!" ejaculated the earl. "That proclaims his guilt."

"The arrival of this disguised damsel seems to have alarmed him," said Standish. "Feeling sure that a discovery must take place, he mounted his horse, and quitted the castle."

"But why was he suffered to depart?" cried the earl, angrily.

"No suspicions were entertained of him, my lord," replied Standish. "Besides, he declared he was sent with a pressing message by your lordship."

"I will hang the false traitor if I catch him!" cried the earl.

"No doubt he has gone to join Colonel Holland and the rebels, and will direct their design," said the queen.

"A plan occurs to me by which this design might be effectually defeated," said Standish. "I know not if your majesty will approve of the plan, but with your permission I will mention it."

"Let us hear it," said the queen.

"This damsel must play a part in it," rejoined Standish. "Nay, she must personate your majesty."

"Personate me!" exclaimed the queen.

"The success of the scheme depends upon the disguise, gracious madam," said Standish. "With a small party of horse, and accompanied by this damsel—disguised as I have ventured to suggest—I will undertake to lure Colonel Holland and his men from their ambuscade, and it shall not be my fault if they have not a long chase, and in a wrong direction."

"The scheme promises well," remarked the queen. "But how say you, fair maiden?" she added to Gertrude. "Are you willing to take part in it?"

"Nothing would please me better, madam," was the eager reply,

"Then be it so," said the queen.

"The plan cannot be carried out with any chance of success till night," said the Earl of Derby, who had listened to Standish's proposition in silence. "Is your majesty content to remain here till then?"

"I do not care for the delay," she rejoined. "But I must inform my council of my design."

"Lord Goring and Lord Jermyn are in the banqueting-hall with the countess," said Lord Derby. "Shall I summon them?"

"No, I will go thither," said the queen. "Come with me, fair demoiselle," she added graciously to Gertrude. "I will provide you with a fitting disguise."

CHAPTER V

How Gertrude personated the Queen

ALL was arranged as Frank Standish had suggested, and a suitable riding-dress having been found for Gertrude, darkness had no sooner come on, than she rode forth from Lathom House, closely attended by Standish and followed by a party of well-mounted men-at-arms.

They took the road to Wigan, and had not proceeded more than two miles, when they entered a wood. It was here that Standish expected the attack would be made. Nor was he wrong in the calculation. They had not advanced far when the trampling of a large body of horse was heard behind them. At the same time an officer, who was recognised as Bootle, galloped quickly up, and shouted to them to surrender.

"We know the queen is with you," he said. "She cannot escape. Yield her up quietly, and your lives shall be spared."

"We will part with life sooner than yield up our charge," replied Standish.

"Then we will cut you in pieces and take her," cried Bootle.

"You will never assist at her capture, villain," said Standish. "Take the reward of your treachery."

And plucking a pistol from his belt, he fired, and Bootle fell from his horse, though not mortally wounded.

After this incident, Standish and his men continued to gallop on, but their progress was soon checked by another large party of Parliamentary troopers who were drawn across the road.

"Yield!" shouted Colonel Holland, who commanded the party in front. "If a single shot be fired, every man shall be put to death."

Then riding up to Standish, he said:

"I know you are escorting the queen to Warrington. Where is she?"

Standish made no reply, and Colonel Holland repeated the question in a yet more authoritative and menacing tone.

"If her majesty were here I would never deliver her up to you with life," said Standish.

"This denial is useless," said Holland. "I can see her yonder, surrounded by your men, who vainly attempt to hide her."

"That is not the queen," said Standish. "Satisfy yourself on the point."

"I am satisfied," rejoined Colonel Holland. "I require no further proof. It will be time enough to put any questions to her majesty, when I have conveyed her safely to Manchester. You and your men must accompany me thither."

"As prisoners?" demanded Standish.

"As prisoners. Resistance would be useless. I therefore recommend you to deliver up your arms quietly."

The injunction was obeyed. Standish and his men were disarmed, but every respect was paid to her whom the Parliamentary leaders supposed to be the queen; and as Gertrude did not utter a word, and was not required to remove the half-mask that covered her face, no discovery was made.

Meanwhile both divisions of the rebel force had now formed a junction—the Royalists being placed in the midst, so that the important captive was well guarded.

At the head of the troop rode Colonel Holland, and he now took a road across a moor leading towards Bolton, whence he intended to diverge to Manchester. But he soon found he was followed by a company of horse, whose shouts convinced him they were Royalists.

Anxious to avoid an engagement with them, he quickened his pace, but it soon appeared that the Cavaliers had the swiftest horses, for they speedily overtook the rebels, and fell with great fury on their rear, killing several, and driving others into the morass.

Owing to the narrowness of the causeway, Colonel Holland was unable to wheel round, and sustained considerable loss before he could reach firm ground. He

then formed as quickly as he could, and prepared to receive the Royalists, whom he found were commanded by the Earl of Derby in person.

A sharp conflict took place, but though the combatants were nearly equally matched in point of numbers, and fought well on both sides, it soon became evident that the Cavaliers were gaining ground. Colonel Holland, therefore, decided upon a retreat, but determined at the same time to carry off his royal captive, who was placed for safety at the rear.

Riding up to her, he said:

"Fortune is against me, madam. Lord Derby may prove the victor, but he shall not rob me of my prize."

"I have no right to the title you bestow upon me," she rejoined. "And I refuse to accompany you."

"Are you not the queen?" he exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Her majesty, I trust, is safe in Warrington," she replied.

"Confusion!" he cried. "Have I been duped? Who are you? Your voice seems familiar to me."

"You ought to know me, Colonel Holland," she rejoined, removing her mask. "You have often seen me before."

"Gertrude Rosworm!" he exclaimed. "I will not leave you here. You must give your father an explanation of your strange conduct. Come with me!"

But before he could seize her bridle, she dashed aside, and in another minute had joined the Royalists.

Shortly afterwards, Colonel Holland and the Parliamentarians were in full retreat. Lord Derby pursued them to the very gates of Bolton, and then returned with his company across the moors to Lathom. He had sustained but little loss in the encounter, though the rebels suffered heavily.

In the confusion of the fight, Frank Standish and his men had liberated themselves from their captors, and recovered their arms. Nearly forty prisoners

were taken by the victors to Lathom, and the queen, who had not yet departed, was greatly rejoiced at the result of the engagement.

Gertrude was regarded as the heroine of the day, and received high commendations from her majesty and the Countess of Derby.

On the following day, the queen set out with her attendants for Chester, and was escorted thither by Lord Derby and a large party of horse. But she met with no interruption. Her majesty proposed to take Gertrude with her, but Lady Derby seemed loth to part with the young damsel, and she was allowed to remain.

BOOK III. — THE STORMING OF LANCASTER

CHAPTER I

Hoghton Tower

LORD DERBY remained for a day at Chester, which was now strongly garrisoned by the Earl of Rivers, and then finding the queen did not require his further services, returned to Lathom. Gladly would he have remained tranquil for a short time, but the whole country was in so disturbed a state that it was impossible to do so.

News was brought him that the important town of Preston had been taken by Sir John Seaton, Major-General of the Parliamentary force, and that Lancaster was threatened.

On receiving this intelligence, he determined to hasten to the assistance of the Royalists with all the force he could muster, and leave Lathom to the charge of the countess. Accordingly he set out on the same day with a body of two hundred and fifty men for Hoghton Tower—a large castellated mansion belonging to Sir Gilbert Hoghton, situated within half a dozen miles of Preston. Hoghton Tower had been appointed as a rendezvous of the Royalists, and a beacon was burnt nightly there to summon them.

Nothing could be finer than the situation of this strong and stately fabric—nothing grander or more picturesque than its appearance; crowning the summit of a knoll, the base of which was washed on one side by the river Darwen, while on the other it was environed by a large park, or rather forest, abounding in wild cattle, wild boar, and red deer.

Founded in the early part of Elizabeth's reign by Sir Thomas Hoghton, this stately structure overlooked the whole district. From its walls Preston could be described on the heights on the further side of the Ribble, and the course of that noble river could be traced from Penwortham to the Irish Sea—its broad estuary looking like a lake. Blackburn, Leyland, Chorley, and several other towns were likewise visible, and beyond the limits of the forest a rich and fertile country gladdened the eye.

Through this dense wood the Earl of Derby and his company made their way to the castle.

Night had come on since they quitted Chorley, and the narrow road, arched over by the trees, seemed profoundly dark, and when they emerged from it at the foot of the hill, the beacon fire, burning above them, and illumining the towers and walls of the mansion, produced a very striking effect.

Captain Standish had been sent on with a small party of men to announce his lordship's approach, so that when the earl reached the outer gate, he found it thrown wide open, and rode into the quadrangle without delay.

Neither here, nor elsewhere, were torches needed, for the beacon, placed on the summit of the second gatehouse, which was much loftier than the first, afforded light enough. In the inner court were assembled a number of servants, headed by Master Urmston, the steward.

Sir Gilbert de Hoghton was a strict Romanist, and at the moment when Lord Derby arrived, he was attending vespers in his domestic chapel, so that the duty of receiving his lordship devolved upon the steward, who performed the task with great ceremony.

After assisting his lordship to dismount, he prayed him to enter the house, and conducted him to a spacious apartment called the Green Room, from the colour of its hangings. The room, which was well lighted up, was richly but cumbrously furnished, and the walls were adorned with portraits of the ancestors of the owner of the mansion—Sir Adam de Hoghton, who flourished in the time of Henry the Third, Sir Richard Hoghton, knight of the shire, when Edward the Sixth was king, and Sir Thomas de Hoghton, who built the tower in the early days of Elizabeth, and was killed at Lea by the Baron de Walton.

Here the Earl found Lord Molineux, who had arrived at the tower on the same day with fifty horse, and shortly afterwards Sir Gilbert himself appeared.

In age the baronet was about fifty, and had a tall, stately figure, and handsome features. His habiliments were of black velvet, relieved by a lace collar.

"I am glad your lordship has brought so large a force with you," he said. "Captain Standish tells me you feared I should not be able to accommodate all your men. You have forgotten how many persons the tower contained when King James was my father's guest."

"But other Royalists may arrive, Sir Gilbert," said the earl; "and each will bring a score of men at least."

"There is ample room for a hundred more," rejoined Sir Gilbert. "Come with me, and I will speedily convince you I am right."

Thereupon they repaired to the outer court, and found there was no lack of accommodation either for horses or men. Moreover, there was abundant supply of provisions.

As the earl had anticipated, several other Royalist leaders arrived, and a goodly supper was served in the great hall, of which more than a hundred persons partook.

That night the Earl of Derby occupied the splendid bedchamber assigned to King James during his stay at the tower, and seemed haunted by that monarch whose portrait was hung over the fireplace. In a small adjoining chamber slept Frank Standish.

Next morning five hundred countrymen, armed with bills and clubs, arrived at the tower to join Lord Derby.

They were drawn up in the outer quadrangle, and when his lordship showed himself to them, with Lord Molineux, they threw up their hats, and shouted lustily, "God bless the king, and the Earl of Derby."

The earl thanked them heartily for their zeal and loyalty, and told them that with their aid he hoped to be able to deliver Preston and Lancaster from the rebels, upon which they shouted again as lustily as before, and declared they were quite ready to follow wherever he chose to lead them.

On returning to the house, Lord Derby found Daniel Trioche, his confidential French servant, who brought him a letter from the countess informing him that all was going on well at Lathom.

The earl was too busy at the time to write a reply, but he sent a tender message by Trioche, telling her ladyship that he was just starting on an important expedition, and hoped she would soon receive good tidings of him.

"Tell her ladyship," he added, "that my next letter to her shall be from Lancaster."

Half an hour afterwards, Lord Derby marched from Hoghton Tower at the head of four hundred horse, and six hundred foot. He was accompanied by Lord

Molineux, Sir Gilbert Hoghton, and the other Royalists. The billmen and clubmen were commanded by Frank Standish and Captain Hoghton—Sir Gilbert's nephew.

At Walton-le-Dale, Lord Derby learnt that Lancaster had already been taken by the Parliamentary commanders—Colonel Holcroft, Major Sparrow, and Major Heywood; and that Preston was also very strongly garrisoned by Sir John Seaton, who had received large reinforcements from Manchester and other towns, and had now fifteen hundred musketeers and several troops of horse.

After some consultation with Lord Molineux and Sir Gilbert, Lord Derby resolved not to attack either town, until he had augmented his own forces. He therefore crossed the river at Penwortham, and marched into the Fylde, a large tract lying between the estuaries of the Ribble and the Wyre, and took up his quarters at Kirkham and Lytham, and immediately issued warrants commanding all the inhabitants of the Fylde, above sixteen and under sixty, on pain of death, to appear before him at Kirkham, armed with the best weapons they could provide.

The summons was responded to by the whole district, which abounded in Romanists, and in less than a week he was joined by three thousand stalwart billmen and clubmen. He was likewise joined by Sir John Girlington and Sir Thomas Tyldesley with six hundred men—half of whom were horse, and half musketeers.

Being now at the head of a sufficient force he determined to assault Preston without further delay, when a circumstance occurred that induced him to change his plan, and begin with Lancaster.

CHAPTER II

The Spanish Man-of-War

DURING a strong south-westerly gale, that had prevailed for two or three days, a large Spanish man-of-war, supposed to be bringing arms and ammunition for the king's party, was driven into the estuary of the Wyre, and blown ashore on the left bank of the river opposite Rossall Hall.

Being unable to get away she fired several guns for assistance, and was quickly visited by a pilot, who found she had sprung a leak, and was likewise immovably embedded in the mud.

At the same time the pilot ascertained that she was furnished with twenty-one pieces of large brass ordnance, and knowing he should be well rewarded for his pains, he made all haste to quit the ship, and conveyed the intelligence to the commanders of the Parliamentary garrison at Lancaster.

Cannon being greatly wanted for the defence of the castle, Major Sparrow immediately gave orders that two or three strong boats should be sent from Sunderland, and taking three companies of foot with him, and a number of men armed with pole-axes, he marched through Garstang, and crossing the Wyre at Saint Michaels, proceeded with all possible despatch to the stranded ship and took possession of her in the name of the Parliament.

The greater part of the crew having already gone ashore, no opposition was offered by Captain Esteban Verderol, and Lieutenant Christobal Puntales, and Major Sparrow and his men immediately began to plunder the ship, carrying off all they could lay hands upon.

All the powder and small arms, together with two demi-cannons, a minion, and three sakers had been got into the boats which had arrived from Sunderland, when the Parliamentarians were disturbed in their operations by a report that the Earl of Derby, with a body of four hundred horse, was coming from Kirkham to attack them.

Not caring to hazard an encounter with the earl, Major Sparrow immediately quitted the ship, and bidding the boatmen proceed to the further side of Wyre Water, here almost as broad as a lake, with the plunder, he beat a hasty retreat with his men.

Only two hours previously had Lord Derby heard of the stranded ship, and feeling certain the Parliamentarians would plunder her and endeavour to secure her guns, he determined to thwart the design.

Accordingly, he set out at once with the force just mentioned, being accompanied in the expedition by Lord Molineux and Captain Standish.

On reaching Rossall, he found several of the crew, and learnt what had happened. Hoping to surprise the rebels, he hurried on, but arrived too late. The enemy had fled, and he deemed pursuit useless.

However, he captured Colonel George Dodding, and Mr. Townson of Lancaster, who had come thither to see the ship, and mistook the Royalists for Parliamentarians.

Lord Derby and Lord Molineux were astounded at the size of the ship, for neither of them had supposed that so large a vessel could enter the mouth of the Wyre, and as she stood there in the shallow water her bulk seemed enormous.

While noting her powerful ordnance, Lord Derby determined to burn her rather than any more of her guns should fall into the hands of the enemy, and Lord Molineux entirely approved of his resolution.

On going on board with Lord Molineux and Standish, attended by a dozen men, he was very courteously received by Captain Verderol, who advanced to meet him, attended by Lieutenant Puntales.

Captain Verderol had already learnt that the new-comers were Royalists, and being now made aware that the Earl of Derby stood before him, he addressed him in French, their subsequent discourse being conducted in the same language.

"I am proud to receive your lordship on board my ship," he said. "I regret I cannot offer you a better welcome. Ten days ago, I sailed from Dunquerque, and my instructions from his majesty King Philip the Fourth of Spain, were to land certain arms and stores intended for the use of the Royalist party at some point on this coast. Unfortunately, I have been unable to execute my orders. Caught in a violent storm, I was driven ashore, as you see, at the mouth of this river. Ever since the disaster occurred, I have been unable to communicate with the loyal subjects of King Charles, and this very day my ship has been

boarded and plundered by the rebels, who have only just departed, carrying off with them all my powder, and several pieces of ordnance. I would your lordship had arrived a little sooner—you might have punished their audacity as it deserved. Their leader, however, declared that he would return for the rest of the cannon."

"That shall never be, captain," rejoined the earl, sternly. "If the rebels return they shall be disappointed."

"You will take the guns yourself, my lord," cried Verderol. "I am glad to hear it."

"No—that is impossible, captain," said the earl. "The surest way to prevent the guns from falling into the hands of the enemy is to burn the ship. I shall be deeply grieved to destroy so fine a vessel, but there is no help for it."

"If it must be so, it must, my lord," replied Captain Verderol. "I have nothing to say against your determination. You are quite justified in what you propose to do."

"I am of the same opinion, my lord," said Lieutenant Puntales.

"Then let all leave the ship forthwith, I pray you, captain," said the earl.

"Give the necessary orders, lieutenant," said Verderol, stepping aside to hide his emotion.

"See that none are left behind," remarked the earl to Standish, who immediately went below.

On being made acquainted with Lord Derby's intention, such of the crew as remained behind promptly departed, taking with them what they pleased. A couple of chests belonging to the captain and lieutenant were removed at the same time.

Meanwhile, the ship had been set on fire in several places below deck by Lord Derby's soldiers, and shortly afterwards smoke began to appear.

Nothing having been seen of Frank Standish for some minutes, the earl inquired anxiously what had become of him, when the young man suddenly appeared on deck, bearing in his arms a beautiful Spanish damsel of some

eighteen or nineteen. She had fainted, and was closely followed by an elderly Spanish gentleman—evidently her father—and a female attendant.

A word of explanation may here be necessary. Don Fortunio Alava, a Spanish merchant trading with France, and his daughter Engracia, with her attendant Maria, were being conveyed from Dunquerque to Cadiz, and had suffered greatly from the disaster that had befallen the ship; but they had been still more alarmed by the visit of the rebels, and had taken refuge in the cabin, carefully barring the door against intrusion.

Not knowing what had taken place, and imagining the rebels were still on board, they refused to come forth from the cabin, and might have been left there to perish, had not Frank Standish burst open the door. Snatching up Engracia, who had fainted, as we have said, the young man carried her on deck, and was followed by the others.

Never had he seen such magnificent black eyes as the fair damsel fixed upon him when she regained her sensibility. She did not thank him in words, but her looks sufficiently expressed her gratitude. What she left unsaid, her father supplied, and as he spoke in French the young man understood him.

At this juncture, Maria uttered a cry, and it appeared that a valuable casket had been left behind. Not a moment must be lost if it was to be recovered, for the flames had already burst forth, and Lord Derby reiterated his command that every one should leave the ship.

Despite the injunction, Standish hurried back to the cabin, but had not returned when Engracia with her father and Maria were lowered into the boat.

Their uneasiness, however, was speedily dispelled by seeing him appear with the casket in his hand, and shortly afterwards, on landing, he had the supreme satisfaction of restoring it to its fair owner.

Pleased by his gallantry, Lord Derby desired him to conduct Don Fortunio and his daughter to Rossall Hall—an order we may be sure he very readily obeyed, and he was delighted to find that he could hold converse with Engracia, since, like her father, she spoke French fluently.

Rossall Hall, which was situated near the seashore, was not very far off, and as the party proceeded slowly thither, they often stopped to look back at the burning ship, which now being completely wrapped in flames, formed a very striking spectacle.

"Holy Virgin protect me!" exclaimed Engracia, "Little did I think, when I quitted Dunquerque, that this direful catastrophe would occur!—that our noble ship would be driven ashore and burnt—and that I should be forced to land in England!"

"Instead of repining you ought to thank the saints that you have escaped so well, child," observed Don Fortunio. "But for this brave young gentleman, who preserved us, we should have perished in the flames."

"What a dreadful death!—as bad as an auto-da-fe," exclaimed Maria, in Spanish. "How much we owe the noble caballero! The señorita Engracia must not forget that he hazarded his life to bring her the jewel-case."

"I do not forget it," said the young damsel, fixing her dark eyes upon him.

"You overrate my services, fair lady," replied Standish, who felt the glance vibrate through his breast.

"But what is to become of us in this country?" cried Engracia. "It seems all in a state of rebellion and strife."

"Fear nothing!" cried Standish, with a reassuring look. "You are in good hands. The Earl of Derby will protect you."

"I have heard that the Conde de Derby is the most powerful nobleman in this part of the country, and has several castles," remarked Don Fortunio.

"It is quite true," replied Standish. "Lathom House, the largest and strongest mansion in Lancashire, belongs to him. 'Tis not many days since the queen was there."

"Alas! poor lady! how I pity her!" cried Engracia. "The rebels, I fear, will never rest till they have driven her from the kingdom, and dethroned the king her husband."

"You take a very gloomy view of matters, fair lady," said Standish. "We confidently expect that the rebellion will be speedily crushed."

"Heaven grant it may be so!" cried Don Fortunio. "My sympathies are entirely with the Royalists."

"And so are mine," added his daughter. "I was afraid when the rebels took possession of the ship."

"Cielo! how quickly she burns!" ejaculated Maria. "Nothing will be left of her soon."

Again they halted to look at the ill-fated vessel, which was now rapidly being consumed, and were so fascinated by the sight that for a time they could not quit the spot.

It was, in truth, a strange picture. The whole of the crew, numbering three hundred, had now assembled to look their last on the ship, and their cries could be heard at that distance.

Behind them was the troop of horse, drawn up on the bank, and watching the progress of the conflagration with great interest.

At last, it appeared that Lord Derby had seen enough, for his troop quitted their position, and began to move towards Rossall Hall. With him were Captain Verderol and Lieutenant Puntales, who had been provided with horses.

Ere many minutes his lordship overtook Standish, and the party under his charge, and halted to speak to them.

Addressing Don Fortunio, he said: "You will scarce find a refuge for your daughter in this wild and disturbed region. I therefore propose that you should take her to my mansion, Lathom House, where the countess will give her welcome, and where you can both tarry, as long as you think proper."

"I am greatly beholden to your lordship," replied Don Fortunio. "But how am I to get to Lathom House? I am an entire stranger to the country, and, besides, I have no horses."

"Let not that concern you, señor," said the earl. "Horses shall be supplied you, and Captain Standish, with a guard, shall accompany you to my castle."

"Truly, your lordship is a great peer, and report has not exaggerated your princely hospitality," said Don Fortunio, bowing deeply.

Engracia, also, expressed her thanks—but more by looks than words.

Standish could not conceal his satisfaction at an arrangement so entirely consonant to his wishes.

Lord Derby then rode on to Rossall, and the others followed.

On reaching the hall, they found that his lordship had already given the necessary orders, and a couple of horses provided with pillions were quickly brought out.

On one of these Engracia was seated behind her father, while a stalwart trooper took charge of Maria.

A guard of half a dozen men was likewise in attendance.

While taking leave of Don Fortunio and his daughter, and wishing them a safe journey, Lord Derby expressed a hope that he should find them at Lathom when he returned thither.

"Though when that will be, Heaven only knows!" he added, with a melancholy smile. "I have much to do, and my enemies will not be easily overcome. Adieu! To our next meeting!"

"Adieu! my lord," said Don Fortunio. "Never shall we forget your kindness!"

When Standish came to receive the earl's last commands, his lordship said to him in a low tone:

"To-morrow I shall march to Lancaster. You will find me there. Commend Don Fortunio and his daughter to the countess."

"I will not fail, my lord," replied the young man. "I trust to rejoin your lordship ere you reach Lancaster."

He then sprang to the saddle, and putting himself at the head of the little party rode off.

CHAPTER III

Engracia

For a mile or so their course lay along the banks of the Wyre Water—a bare and desolate region.

They then struck off towards Poulton-in-the-Fylde, and Standish seized the opportunity of joining the fair Spaniard, whose appearance on horseback had quite enchanted him.

Seated behind her father, as we have described, she looked far better than an English damsel would have done under similar circumstances. But she was greatly aided by her costume. The mantilla covering her jetty tresses, the dark silk dress that so well displayed her symmetrical figure and permitted her small feet to be seen, and the fan she managed so well—all contributed materially to her attractions, and certainly produced an effect upon Standish.

For some little time he rode by her side, and during that interval, he unaccountably slackened his pace. As Don Fortunio rarely made a remark, or looked back at them, they might almost have been alone. What they talked about it is scarcely worth while to inquire, but both seemed interested, and the fair señorita's dark eyes were occasionally cast down and her fan agitated.

Maria, who watched them from her post behind the trooper, came to the conclusion that they had fallen in love with each other, and she was not far wrong.

While passing through Poulton, almost all the inhabitants of which were Romanists and Royalists, many of the villagers came forth to gaze at the foreigners, and seemed wonder-struck by Engracia's picturesque attire and extraordinary beauty. A like sensation was produced at Great Singleton, Wharles, and Treales.

At the latter place, the good folks were informed by a Romish priest that the Spaniards belonged to their own religion, and, in consequence, Don Fortunio was treated with great respect.

Hitherto, they had met with no interruption. Occasionally they overtook a party of billmen or clubmen, but all these stout fellows were going to join the Royalist

force at Kirkham, and on beholding Standish and his troop, they shouted "God bless the king and the Earl of Derby!"

At Tulketh Hall, near Ashton—originally a monastic establishment—the owner of which was a Papist, a brief halt was made, and the Spaniards were very hospitably received.

But Engracia was best pleased by being taken to the domestic chapel by the priest, who resided in the house, and enabled to offer up her prayers to the Virgin.

From Tulketh Hall, half a dozen armed men accompanied the party to the ford across the Ribble—some apprehensions being entertained that a guard had been placed there by the rebel garrison at Preston. However, the report proved unfounded, and they got safe to Penwortham.

Frank Standish had now no misgivings, and would willingly have loitered on the road. But this could not be. On the contrary, he was obliged to push on, in order to make up for lost time.

At the bridge across the Douglas near Tarleton, he perceived three or four Roundhead soldiers, and prepared to attack them, but they galloped off before he came up. He subsequently learnt that they had plundered several farm-houses in the neighbourhood, and were carrying their spoil to Blackburn. This was the only danger to which they were exposed.

Thenceforward, so much expedition was used that in half an hour's time the party came in sight of a large castellated mansion, surrounded by a wide moat, having a great gatehouse, turreted walls bristling with cannon, and a lofty square tower in the centre, above which floated a banner, bearing the motto—SANS CHANGER. Everything indicated that the place was a powerful stronghold.

No remark was made by Standish, but Don Fortunio and his daughter simultaneously exclaimed:

"That must be Lathom House."

"You are right," replied the young man, with a smile. "It is Lathom. What think you of it?"

"It is worthy of the Conde de Derby," said Don Fortunio.

"It does not appear strange to me," remarked Engracia. "I fancy I have seen it before."

"Impossible, my child," said Don Fortunio. "We have no castle like this in Spain."

"Then I must have dreamed of it," rejoined his daughter.

CHAPTER IV

How Don Fortunio and his Daughter were received by the Countess of Derby

As Standish and his troop were recognised by the guard, the gate was thrown open for their admittance, and the party rode in without delay.

The strangers caused as much sensation as they had done at different places during the journey. Officers and men turned out to gaze at the beautiful Spanish damsel.

As yet no news had been received of the destruction of the Dunquerque ship, so they could not comprehend whence she came, but they saw she was a lovely creature, and were glad she had found her way to Lathom.

Amongst the first to notice her was Gertrude Rosworm, who might have been as favourably impressed as the others, if Standish had appeared less attentive, while assisting the fair Spaniard.

From that moment an instinctive feeling of jealousy, for which she could scarcely account, was awakened in Gertrude's bosom.

As to Engracia herself, she was lost in admiration of the mansion.

It chanced that at the time of the arrival of the strangers, the Countess of Derby was in the upper part of the court-yard with her daughters. She had been inspecting some soldiers, and was just about to return to the house, when the Lady Mary drew her attention to the singularity of Engracia's costume, and she at once exclaimed:

"That must be a Spanish maiden."

Next moment, Captain Standish came up, and hastily explained all that had occurred, concluding with Lord Derby's message to her ladyship.

No sooner did she hear it than she desired that Don Fortunio and his daughter might be presented to her, and received them with great affability and kindness, saying, that as they had been so warmly commended to her by her lord, they were heartily welcome to Lathom. Don Fortunio was much struck by

her stately presence and dignified manner, but Engracia felt a certain awe of the great lady.

However, she was charmed with the young ladies Stanley, and felt quite easy with them. They were equally well pleased with her, and thought her the loveliest creature they ever beheld.

After a brief conversation with the strangers, which it is scarcely needful to say was conducted in French, the countess led them into the house, where, she again bade them welcome, and signing to Trioche, who was standing among the other servants in the hall, directed him to conduct Don Fortunio to a chamber which she designated in the great gallery.

Her next thought was for Engracia, and being aware that Gertrude Rosworm spoke French, she begged her to take charge of the fair Spanish damsel and her attendant, and find them a suitable bed-chamber.

This was soon done, and Gertrude was about to leave them in the room she had chosen, when Engracia besought her to remain.

"Do stay with me a few minutes," she said. "I am sure you are very amiable, and will not refuse to give me some information respecting the castle and its inmates."

"Excuse me, señorita," replied Gertrude. "I am forbidden to talk on such subjects. Lathom House is a garrison."

"Yes, I quite understand," said Engracia. "I have no curiosity to learn how many soldiers it contains—how many cannon—or the amount of its stores. I merely seek a little information on one or two points. First of all I will venture to inquire whether there is a priest in the castle? I am accustomed to have a confessor."

"The countess has two domestic chaplains—Doctor Rutter and Doctor Brideoake, both worthy and excellent men—and service is performed twice a day in the chapel. But these are Protestant clergymen."

"So I supposed," sighed Engracia. And she added in Spanish to her attendant, "You must do without a priest, Maria. There is none here."

Maria uttered an ejaculation of despair.

"There may be a priest for aught I know," remarked Gertrude. "If so, you will soon hear of him. Two of the officers and several of the men are Papists."

"I hope the caballero who brought us here is not a heretic?" cried Engracia.

"Captain Standish is a Protestant," rejoined Gertrude.

"Ay de mi!" ejaculated the devout Spanish damsel, clasping her hands.

"What matters his faith to you?" cried Gertrude, sharply.

"Nothing," replied Engracia.

But her looks contradicted her words.

"If you would stand well with the countess do not talk to her on matters of religion," said Gertrude. "She is not tolerant. With this piece of advice I leave you."

And she quitted the room.

"I do not like that damsel," observed Engracia to her attendant, as soon as they were alone. "Nor do I think she likes me."

"The señorita is right," replied Maria. "The maiden's eyes had a jealous sparkle in them. Do not trust her. She regards you as a rival."

"As a rival!" exclaimed Engracia.

"As sure as I was born in Cordova, she is in love with the handsome caballero," pursued Maria.

"It may be so," said Engracia, colouring deeply.

"The señorita need not trouble herself about that," cried Maria. "She is preferred, I am certain. I saw enough during the journey to convince me the caballero is desperately enamoured of her."

"But he is a heretic, Maria."

"The señorita will convert him."

"The difficulty is great—but perhaps it may be got over," said Engracia.

"No doubt of it," replied Maria.

"De paso, what have you done with the casket, Maria?" inquired Engracia. "I hope you have not lost it?"

"Lost it! Saints forbid! It is here," cried Maria, producing it.

Engracia was gladdening her eyes with a sight of its glittering contents, when a tap was heard at the door, and some girlish voices called out in French, "May we come in?"

Conjecturing who were her visitors, Engracia opened the door herself, and beheld the young ladies Stanley, who had brought her some articles of attire, thinking she might need them.

"I am sure my dresses will fit you," cried Lady Henriette Marie. "We are about the same height."

"You are a little taller, but they will fit me perfectly," replied Engracia.

"They will become the señorita maravillosamente," cried Maria, as she took the dresses.

"How can I thank you for this great attention!" cried Engracia.

"We want no thanks—we want no thanks," cried all three girls. "It is a pleasure to us to serve you."

Suddenly Lady Kate caught sight of the casket, and exclaimed:

"Heavens, what beautiful jewels!"

"Where?" asked the little Lady Amelia. "I don't see them."

"There—on the table," replied Lady Kate.

And they all rushed forward to look at them.

For a few minutes nothing was heard but rap-turous exclamations.

Charmed by this display, Engracia in the most obliging manner begged each of them to select an ornament.

"Oh! no—no—no!" they all cried, drawing back.

"You will deprive me of a great pleasure if you refuse," said the good-natured Spanish maiden.

"But we can't possibly accept such magnificent presents," replied the Lady Henriette.

"Will you deign to accept a single pearl each?" said Engracia.

The two younger girls consulted their elder sister by a look.

While they hesitated, Engracia took three pearls from a string, and gave one to each.

"I would willingly do more, if you would allow me," she said, smiling.

"You have done far too much already," rejoined Lady Henriette. "These are lovely pearls. We must show them to the countess, our mother, and if she will allow us, we will gladly accept them."

They then retired, but the little Lady Amelia would not quit the room till she had kissed her new friend.

Contrary to expectation, the countess did not object to the gifts. Like her daughters she was charmed by the winning and ingenuous manner of the fair Spaniard, and would not mortify her by a refusal.

CHAPTER V

Love and Jealousy

THE countess had been questioning Standish as to her lord's plans, and though she naturally felt some anxiety as to the result of the meditated attack on Lancaster, she allowed no doubt to appear in her looks.

"If Lancaster falls, Preston will soon follow," she said; "and then my lord will once more be master of that part of the country. Of late, the rebels have been gaining ground, but a defeat like this will be a great check to them. I am sorry his lordship felt compelled to burn that Spanish ship."

"The step was unavoidable, madam," replied Standish. "Had the rebels succeeded in securing the guns, Lancaster might have held out for a month."

"But what has become of the unfortunate captain and his crew?" inquired the countess.

"The captain and lieutenant are with his lordship," replied Standish. "As to the crew they will doubtless join our ranks."

"When do you return?" she demanded.

"Not till to-morrow," he replied. "Horses and men will then be fresh. I shall set out at day-break, and hope to rejoin his lordship near Lancaster."

"It is well," said the countess. "You shall take a letter from me to him."

Just then, her daughters entered the hall, and showed her the presents they had received from the fair Spaniard.

"She is as generous as a princess," observed the countess, smiling.

"I hope she will remain with us a long time," said Amelia. "I am sure I shall love her very much."

"Yes, we all like her," said Lady Kate.

"I do not wonder at it," remarked the countess. "But she may not wish to remain here."

"I think she does," said Lady Henriette.

The hour had now arrived at which the countess attended evening service in the chapel, and she therefore proceeded thither with her daughters. She was followed by Standish and several of the household, and Gertrude soon afterwards joined the little train.

The chapel was situated in the inner court, and was capable of containing a great number of persons. A large pew on the left near the altar was occupied by the countess and her daughters. Gertrude sat with them. The body of the chapel near the door was crowded with musketeers, in front of whom were Captains Standish, Chisenhale, Ogle, and Molineux Radcliffe. The service was admirably performed by Doctor Rutter.

When the congregation came forth, Standish repaired to the stables to give some orders to his men, and was returning through the inner court, when he perceived Gertrude at a distance and tried to overtake her, but she hurried on, and avoided him.

According to custom supper was served at eight o'clock in the great banquet-hall. Among the company were Don Fortunio and his daughter, with all the officers of the garrison. Don Fortunio sat on the right of the countess, and Standish contrived to obtain a place near Engracia. Gertrude was likewise present, but she sat at the other end of the table, and never looked towards them.

Both chaplains supped regularly with the countess, and grace was never omitted before and after the meal. Great form was observed on the occasion; the servants were marshalled by a steward carrying a wand, and Trioche devoted himself exclusively to the Spaniards.

But the meal, though ceremonious, was of short duration. When grace had been said by Doctor Brideoake, the countess arose, and all the company followed her example.

For some time the party remained in the hall, conversing together.

After pacing to and fro for a few minutes, Standish and Engracia sat down on a couch at the further end of the vast apartment, which was here but imperfectly

illuminated. They had much to say to each other, but now they were alone, and might have said it, they remained mute.

"Why are you so pensive?" inquired Engracia, at length.

"I am thinking how wretched I shall be to-morrow, when I am forced to ride away," he replied. "For the first time the battle-call will fail to animate me. Yet I should not feel so sad, if you would give me some hopes that the passion you have inspired is requited."

Owing to the obscurity, Engracia's blushes could not be seen, and besides she had her fan. She murmured some response, but it was scarcely audible. Standish took her hand, and as she did not withdraw it, he conveyed it to his lips.

"You have wrought a great change in me," he said. "Heretofore, I enjoyed nothing so much as an expedition like that in which I am about to be engaged, but now I would rather stay here."

"That must not be," she cried. "Go and fight by the side of your valiant lord, and win renown. You may be certain I shall think of you constantly during your absence, and rejoice at your return."

"I shall find you here when I come back?" he asked.

"Undoubtedly," she replied. "There is no probability of our immediate departure. The countess, as you know, has seconded her lord's invitation, and urged us to stay as long as we like. She is a noble dame. I am delighted with her and her daughters, and feel I shall be happy here."

"I am glad to hear it," said Standish. "I feared this dull life would not suit you. There are no diversions here—no fêtes. One day is like another."

"I do not want amusement. I shall think of you. I should have been perfectly content if there had been a priest."

"That is a difficulty I cannot get over," said Standish. "But I would recommend you to perform your devotions in private—since by doing so, you can offend none."

"Such is my design," said Engracia. "I spoke to the damsel who conducted me to my chamber, and she gave me like advice."

"Gertrude?" remarked Standish.

"Yes, that is her name. She is very beautiful, and I cannot but admire her, but I do not think I can ever love her."

"I hope you may not dislike her," said Standish. "I fear she dislikes you."

"Why should she dislike me? What have I done to offend her?"

"Nothing," replied a voice near them, which both recognised as Gertrude's. "I heard my own name mentioned," continued the speaker, "and I deem it right to say I have no feeling towards you save good will."

"I am glad to receive the assurance," said Engracia.

"Do not confide in her," whispered Standish.

"I fear I have intruded, but I have no such design," said Gertrude.

Then addressing Standish, she added, "The countess desires to speak with you. She is in the presence-chamber."

"I will attend upon her ladyship at once," he replied.

And bowing, he left the two damsels together.

Proceeding to the presence-chamber, he found the countess. She gave him a letter, and charged him with several verbal messages to the earl.

"Say everything loving from me to my lord," she observed, "and all that is fond and dutiful from my children to their father. I have but one other injunction to give you. Be first to bring me tidings of the defeat of the rebels."

"If life be left me, and my lord will grant me leave, I will do it," replied Standish, as he placed the letter carefully in his doublet.

"You set out early in the morn?"

"At daybreak."

"'Tis well. A soldier should be early. I have only to wish you a good journey, and a safe return. Au revoir."

No other opportunity occurred to the young man of exchanging a word with Engracia, beyond bidding her adieu at parting for the night, but the tender valedictory look she gave him was sufficient.

He looked round in vain for Gertrude. She had retired.

The bell struck five as Standish entered the court-yard next morning, and found his little troop waiting for him, fully armed and equipped.

It was only just light, and the musketeers were scarcely distinguishable on the walls, but while glancing round, he perceived a female figure near the entrance of the hall, and feeling sure it must be Gertrude, he left his horse with a trooper, and hastened towards her.

Before he could reach the spot, the figure had disappeared.

CHAPTER VI

How the Mayor of Lancaster was summoned by the Earl of Derby to surrender the Tower

No adventure of any kind occurred to Standish and his troop till they came within a few miles of Preston, when learning that the bridge over the Ribble was strongly guarded, they turned off on the right, and crossing the river near Walton-le-Dale, proceeded to Ribbleson, and thence to Fulwood and Broughton.

The whole of this district was overrun by foraging parties from Preston, and being anxious to avoid an engagement, Standish sought to keep out of their way; but as he drew near Myerscough Hall—the residence of Sir Thomas Tyldesley, who was then with Lord Derby—he encountered a small troop of Parliamentarians.

They had been plundering some farmhouses belonging to Sir Thomas, and were hastening to Preston with their spoil. Standish at once attacked them, and a sharp conflict ensued, but it was soon ended. Shouts were heard in the direction of Myerscough announcing pursuit, whereupon the Roundheads threw down their booty and galloped off.

Immediately afterwards a dozen stalwart yeomen, mounted on strong horses, and armed with muskets and pistols, made their appearance, and were well satisfied to regain their goods without continuing the pursuit. They heartily thanked Standish for the aid he had rendered them, and only wished they had come up in time to punish the robbers.

From these men Standish learned that the Earl of Derby had arrived overnight at Garstang with the whole of his force, and was probably there still. But for this piece of information, a halt would have been made at Myerscough, but the young man now pushed on, and in half an hour reached Garstang, where he found Lord Derby, who was very glad to see him, and receive the letter from the countess.

Before eight o'clock, the whole Royalist force, now exceeding three thousand men—horse and foot—set forward towards Lancaster. The men were in good spirits, and enjoyed the march.

Mists still hung upon Bleasdale Moors, and the Fell Ends overhanging Lower Wyersdale, but the estuary of the River Lune and the broad expanse of Morecambe Bay glittered in the sunbeams.

Ere long, the stern old keep of Lancaster Castle came in sight, and on beholding it, the billmen and clubmen shook their weapons and shouted lustily.

From their numbers the Royalists presented a very imposing appearance. The advanced guard, consisting of three troops of horse, was commanded by Lord Molineux. Then came Lord Derby at the head of a large body of horse, very well mounted and equipped. These were followed by several companies of musketeers, led by Sir John Girlington and Sir Thomas Tyldesley. Then came Sir Gilbert Hoghton with a regiment of horse, while the billmen and clubmen, divided into fifteen companies, each numbering a hundred, and each having a captain, brought up the rear.

These formidable fellows were content to serve without reward, but expected to pay themselves with plunder. Embodied with them were the crew of the Spanish ship, armed with pikes, and commanded by Captain Verderol and Lieutenant Puntales.

On arriving at Moorside, within a mile of Lancaster, a halt was called, and Lord Derby, attended by Standish, rode to the front to reconnoitre the town, and confer with Lord Molineux and the other commanders.

Lancaster Castle, as already explained, was fortified and garrisoned by a strong Parliamentary force, commanded by Colonel Holcroft, Major Sparrow, and Major Heywood, and could only be taken by a regular siege, but Lord Derby intended to storm the town, and deal with the castle afterwards.

His lordship was much surprised, however, to find that, after all, the guns had been recovered from the charred remains of the Spanish ship, and transported to the castle walls, where they now threatened him, but though vexed, he could not help admiring the spirit displayed by Major Sparrow.

In addition to the force of the garrison, two regiments had been formed by the townsfolk, each three hundred strong, and respectively commanded by Captains Ashworth and Shuttleworth.

Until the arrival of the Earl of Derby, the Parliamentary commanders were very well satisfied with their preparations, but when they beheld the large Royalist force drawn up in the plain below, they began to feel uneasy, and messengers were despatched to Sir John Seaton at Preston, urging him to send them aid.

Having carefully examined the defences of the castle, and pointed out the Spanish guns on the walls to Lord Molineux and the others, Lord Derby read to them a summons, which he proposed to send to the mayor and burgesses before commencing an attack on the town. Thus it ran:

"I have come to free you from the bondage of the declared traitors, who now oppress you, and seek your destruction by bringing you into their own condition. Deliver up your arms, and lend me aid to regain the castle, and you shall have all fair usage. If not, expect from me what the laws of the land and of war will inflict upon you."

This missive, being entirely approved by the other commanders, Lord Derby delivered it to Captain Standish, who immediately rode off towards the town, attended by a trumpeter carrying a flag of truce.

On arriving at the entrance of the town, Standish found a small troop of horse drawn up under the command of Captain Shuttleworth, who rode forward to meet him, and learning that he brought a summons for the mayor from the Earl of Derby, said:

"If you will tarry but a short space, I promise you shall take back an answer—but to obtain it you must accompany me to the castle."

"The answer I require is from the mayor and burgesses," said Standish. "The commanders of the garrison are not summoned. Lord Derby well knows they would not surrender the castle. The town is different."

"The mayor and the town council are now in the castle with Colonel Holcroft," replied Captain Shuttleworth. "They will consult together when the summons is laid before them."

"On that understanding I consent to accompany you," said Standish.

Thereupon, they proceeded to the castle, followed by the guard.

At that time Lancaster Castle was surrounded by a moat, and had been strongly fortified by the Parliamentary commanders. The walls were thronged with musketeers, and amongst its ordnance could be discerned the pieces of cannon taken from the Spanish ship.

While Captain Shuttleworth passed through the gateway to deliver the summons to the commanders of the garrison and the mayor, Standish remained outside, near the drawbridge, and employed the interval in surveying the magnificent prospect spread out before him. His eye was still wandering over the estuary of the Lune, Morecambe Bay, and the fine Westmoreland hills, when Captain Shuttleworth came forth, and giving him a letter, said:

"This is the answer to Lord Derby's summons. I will tell you its purport. The mayor and burgesses affirm that the castle never was at their command, and having been taken and fortified by the Parliament, the Parliament now holds the town in control. Thus much on their part. But even if the town were independent of the castle, they, the mayor and burgesses, would never consent to a surrender."

"They understand the consequences of a refusal, I presume?" observed Standish, sternly. "They must expect the full punishment of war."

"They will adhere to the Parliament, and resist to the uttermost," replied Shuttleworth.

Standish said no more.

Accompanied by his conductor to the end of the avenue leading to the town, he took a courteous leave of him, and rode back to Lord Derby.

On perusing the answer brought him the earl was highly incensed, and exclaiming that the rebels and traitors would bitterly rue their decision, gave immediate orders for the assault.

CHAPTER VII

How Lancaster was taken by the Earl

IN a very short space of time, the whole Royalist force, divided into four squadrons—each numbering four hundred men—was moving towards the town, but in different directions, as the attack was intended to be made at various points.

Besides these, there were the billmen and club-men, who were likewise divided into four companies, each having a mounted leader.

The squadron commanded by Lord Molineux started first, having a wide circuit to make, and kept as much as possible under the cover of the hedges, but it was descried from the castle, and formed a mark for the guns, which now began to play upon the besiegers.

Moving off with his men towards the river, Sir John Girlington attacked the town on the north. An intermediate point was chosen by Sir Thomas Tyldesley, while Lord Derby marched along the high road on the south side of the town. Not only was he exposed to the fire of the castle guns, but his advance was disputed by Captain Shuttleworth and a large body of cavalry.

Seeing that a charge was about to be made, the earl halted, and firmly received the furious onset.

He then attacked the rebels in his turn, and drove them back into the town, killing a great number, and pursuing them so quickly that they could not make another stand.

In vain Captain Shuttleworth endeavoured to rally his men. They would not stop till they reached the castle, and being hotly pursued by Standish and a party of horsemen better mounted than the rest, Shuttleworth was cut down before he could cross the drawbridge.

This daring act had well-nigh cost Standish his life. A shower of bullets flew around him, and it seemed miraculous that he was not hit.

However, he managed to rejoin Lord Derby safe and sound, and found him engaged in setting fire to several houses in the main thoroughfare, in order to clear them of the marksmen, who did great mischief.

Meanwhile, the rattle of musketry was heard in other quarters, commingled with the roar of the castle guns. But the latter did more harm to friends than foes, and many buildings were crushed by the ponderous shot.

Strange to say both Captain Verderol and Lieutenant Puntales, who were with Lord Derby, were killed by the discharge of a cannon taken from their own ship. Their death infuriated the crew to such a degree, that they butchered many unresisting townspeople, and vowed vengeance upon Major Sparrow.

They kept their oath in this manner. Three of them, armed with muskets they had picked up, contrived to reach the bank of the moat unobserved, and perceiving Major Sparrow on the walls, whom they recognised from having seen him when he plundered the ship, they took deliberate aim, and shot him.

By this time, the town was completely invested by the Royalists, who gained an entrance at every point they attacked, and driving their opponents before them made their way to the market-place, where they formed a junction.

In accomplishing this object they sustained comparatively little loss, but the destruction they caused was terrible. The Parliamentary troops who opposed them were forced to retreat, while the townspeople, many of whom were favourably disposed towards the besiegers, were ruthlessly slaughtered, since no quarter was given. Buildings were set on fire in every direction, and two whole streets were burnt down, but not before the houses had been pillaged by the billmen and clubmen, who claimed the right to plunder.

For more than three hours the Royalists were scattered in various parts of the town, and as they could not be restrained by their leaders, the havoc was frightful.

Such were the horrors of Civil War, like excesses being committed by both sides.

During all this time, the guns of the castle continued firing, but as we have already explained they did infinitely more damage to the townspeople than to the enemy.

At length the strife ceased, at least in the central part of the town. Quarter, hitherto refused, was now given in every instance, to those who submitted. Houses were still burning in various parts, and pillage was still going on, but the firing from the castle had ceased. Indeed, there was good reason for the

cessation, for the supply of powder was well-nigh exhausted. This circumstance would have rendered Colonel Holcroft seriously uneasy, if he had not felt sure of aid from Preston.

No intelligence had been received from Sir John Seaton, but it could not be doubted that when that brave commander heard of Lord Derby's attack upon Lancaster, he would hasten to the assistance of the town and garrison.

Lord Derby was quite aware of the difficulties in which the garrison was placed. He knew they not only wanted powder and match, but provisions, since several hundreds of the townspeople had taken refuge in the castle, and must be fed. He also knew that the well would soon be drained, and the want of water and food must compel a speedy surrender.

He therefore determined to press the siege with the utmost vigour, and was detailing his plans at a council of war held in the town-hall, when a sudden change was caused by important intelligence brought him by his scouts from Preston.

That very night it appeared Sir John Seaton was about to march from Preston with fifteen hundred musketeers and some troops of horse to the relief of Lancaster.

Lord Molineux, Sir Thomas Tyldesley, and the other commanders and captains who assisted at the council, looked aghast, but Lord Derby seemed quite undismayed.

"Since Sir John Seaton is coming to Lancaster, we must go to Preston," he said; "but by a different route. Doubtless, he will march through Garstang. Our route must, therefore, be by Cockerham, Kirkland, and Catterall. We will set forth at dusk with our whole force."

"It will be dark in an hour, my lord," said Sir Thomas Tyldesley. "The men are scattered about the town, and cannot be got together in that time."

"They must," said the earl. "Preston must be attacked to-night, and before dawn it will be in our hands."

"A bold stroke, and I doubt not it will prove successful," observed Lord Molineux.

"Deprived of all its strength, the town can offer no resistance, and must surrender," said Sir John Girlington.

"Ay, the Royalists will not be afraid to declare themselves," said Lord Molineux.

"They will welcome us as deliverers," said Sir Gilbert Hoghton. "Sir John Seaton could not have served us better than by this movement."

"'Twill be a good exchange," said Lord Derby. "Preston is of more importance to the king than Lancaster; and having recovered it, we will summon Blackburn."

"Nothing would please me better than to punish that insolent town," said Sir Gilbert Hoghton.

"Ere many days you shall have the satisfaction you desire, Sir Gilbert," rejoined the earl. "But, first, we must secure Preston. Let the men be got together forthwith. But mark! no trumpets must be sounded; or our purpose will be suspected, and information sent to the enemy."

"Tidings of Seaton's design cannot yet have reached the garrison," remarked Lord Molineux.

"I will not answer for it," replied Lord Derby. "But if Colonel Holcroft finds we have quitted the town, he will infallibly pursue us, and endeavour to impede our march."

"We ought not then to set out till it is quite dark," observed Sir John Girlington.

"We must quit the town by different outlets," said the earl; "and our rendezvous must be Ashton, on the left bank of the Lune. Now to collect the men."

CHAPTER VIII

How Preston surrendered to the Earl of Derby

BY dint of great exertion on the part of the commanders and officers, the men belonging to each corps were got together at the appointed time, and marched secretly out of the town, as Lord Derby had directed.

The chief difficulty was with the billmen and clubmen, who were very reluctant to abandon their spoil, but being told that they would certainly be cut to pieces if found there by Sir John Seaton, they contented themselves with what they could carry off.

Lord Derby was the first to arrive at the place of rendezvous, but the others were not long behind.

It was now dark, but from this point the town presented a terrible spectacle. Many houses were still burning in various quarters, and a lurid light was thrown on the walls and keep of the castle.

Dreadful as was the scene, it produced little effect upon the beholders, most of whom rejoiced to think that Sir John Seaton would find the town untenable on his arrival.

As soon as the force was complete, the order to march was given.

Lord Derby commanded the advanced guard, and Sir Thomas Tyldesley brought up the rear. The road to Cockerham was taken, and as they were now close to the bay, and the tide out, the broad sands could be distinguished through the gloom.

Nothing occurred till they reached Cockerham Moss, and as they skirted it, the sound of horse was heard behind, and they knew they were pursued.

On this alarm, Sir Thomas Tyldesley halted, and immediately wheeling round, awaited the horsemen, whom he did not doubt came from the castle.

Lord Derby's departure had not been accomplished with so much secrecy as to escape the notice of the garrison, and Colonel Holland finding that the whole of the Royalists had evacuated the town, and probably set out for Preston, started in pursuit with a large party of horse, determined to harass them.

Easily ascertaining the route they had taken, he hovered for some time in their rear, and then made a sudden dash forward, but Sir Thomas Tyldesley being prepared, drove him back with the loss of several men, and the colonel did not hazard another attack.

Thenceforward, the march of the Royalists continued without interruption.

From Nateby, Frank Standish, ever ready for a daring exploit, rode across the country with a couple of well-mounted troopers and brought word back that Sir John Seaton with his whole force had halted at Garstang.

It had been Lord Derby's intention, as we have shown, to surprise Preston that night, but as he proceeded, he learned from his scouts that the Royalists had begun to display a bold front against the few Parliamentarians in the town, so that he should be able to take possession of it almost without a blow. He therefore postponed the attack till the morrow, and halted for the night at Fulwood Moor, on the north of the town.

The inhabitants, however, soon learnt that he was in the neighbourhood with a large force, and the tidings being quickly spread about—notwithstanding the lateness of the hour—caused the greatest delight to the Royalists, and corresponding dismay among the rebels.

It chanced that there were several Roundheads from Blackburn and Bolton lodging at the inns that night, who sought to decamp, but were unable to do so, since the ostlers, who sympathised with the Royalists, locked the doors of the stables, and took away the keys, to prevent the intending fugitives from getting out their horses.

Next morning, at an early hour, Lord Derby marched up to the Friar's Gate. The avenue was strongly guarded, but not a single shot was fired, and as the earl drew near with his whole force, the rebels fled.

The bars were then broken down, and the gate burst open by the clubmen, whereupon several troops of horse dashed in, and galloping right and left, posted themselves at Church Gate and Fisher Gate to prevent flight, while another party scoured the Ribble Bridge and the adjacent ferry.

Meanwhile, the earl had entered the town with his commanders, and after ordering several arrests to be made, and a great number of houses to be taken

possession of, but not plundered, he proceeded along Friar's-street at the head of a regiment of horse.

Crowds of loyal folk came forth to greet him—hailing him as their deliverer. All the Parliamentarians seemed to have disappeared. Scarves and kerchiefs were waved from the windows, hats flung in the air, and enthusiastic shouts were everywhere heard of "God bless the king and the Earl of Derby!"

Thus triumphantly did the earl ride to the market-place, where a large concourse was assembled.

Before alighting at the town-hall, he called to Standish who was close behind him, and said:

"Take half a dozen men with you, and make all haste you can to Lathom. Tell the countess I have recovered Preston for the king, without a shot fired or a life lost. The news will gladden her."

Standish instantly set forth on the joyful errand. He was the first to quit the town, and cross the Ribble, since gate and bridge had been guarded by the Royalists. As he looked back from the riverside, he saw the royal standard floating above the church tower.

Lord Derby's orders were strictly carried out. Anxious to avoid a repetition of the terrible scenes that had occurred at Lancaster, he would not allow any slaughter.

Several hundred prisoners were made, and being deprived of their arms, were shut up in the church or in the gaol.

Finding it impossible to check the clubmen, Lord Derby allowed them to plunder a certain number of houses and shops, and then dismissed them.

Heavy fines were imposed on several of the wealthier rebels, and were ordered to be paid at the town-hall on the following day, and the amount was then distributed among the soldiers.

When Preston was stormed by Sir John Seaton, Adam Morte, the loyal mayor, was slain while fighting valiantly against the besiegers.

His grave was in the churchyard, and all the prisoners taken to the church were compelled by Sir Thomas Tyldesley to walk past it bareheaded.

Not deeming this indignity enough, the guard would willingly have forced them to kneel down at the grave, while some of the townspeople, who revered the memory of the heroic mayor, went still further, and would have shot a score of rebels on the spot.

"In losing Adam Morte, we lost the best and bravest man in Preston," remarked a bystander. "He was a staunch Cavalier, and detested a Roundhead as much as he loved the king. He vowed he would never surrender Preston with life, and if the besiegers entered, it should be over his dead body. The first three Parliamentarians who mounted the walls fell by his hand. He could have escaped with his men, but he would not fly. He fought obstinately to the last—wounding a rebel with every blow. Mad with rage against him, they thrust him through with their pikes, and flung his bleeding body from the walls. And here the brave man lies. Shall we not bedew his grave with their blood?"

Had the guard received a look from Sir Thomas Tyldesley they would have complied, but he sternly shook his head.

"Adam Morte fell in fair fight," remarked one of the prisoners—a dark- looking Puritan.

"Thou art one of those who helped to slay him, Phineas Clay," cried the first speaker.

"I deny it not," rejoined Clay. "I glory in the deed. I did good service in removing so bitter a malignant."

As the words were uttered, a bullet was lodged in the Puritan's brain, and he fell upon Adam Morte's grave.

No one knew by whom the shot had been fired. Nor did Sir Thomas Tyldesley care to inquire.

Lord Derby and Lord Molineux took up their quarters in the town-hall. Sir Gilbert Hoghton owned a large mansion in the town, which had been occupied by Sir John Seaton, while he was in command of Preston.

Of course, Sir Gilbert took immediate possession of his own house, and Sir Thomas Tyldesley and Sir John Girlington were lodged with him. There was no difficulty in providing the soldiers with quarters.

Plenty of ammunition was found in the magazine, and on the walls, which had recently been strengthened by Seaton, were a few small pieces of ordnance. This was highly satisfactory to Lord Derby, since it was quite possible he might soon be besieged in his turn.

CHAPTER IX

How Frank Standish brought news of the Surrender of Preston

ABOUT noon on the same day on which Lord Derby regained Preston, the countess ascended the Eagle Tower at Lathom House, in company with her daughters, Gertrude Rosworm, and Doctor Rutter. She conversed with none of them, and her countenance wore a thoughtful, almost sad expression.

Early that morning a messenger had brought word that Lancaster had fallen; adding that half the town was burnt and many of the inhabitants slain.

The latter part of the intelligence distressed her exceedingly, and she could not shake off the painful impression.

"Your ladyship looks pensive," observed Doctor Rutter.

"I am thinking of Lancaster," she replied. "Much mischief must necessarily be done when a town is stormed, and if the soldiers only suffered I should not much heed, but I cannot help grieving for the inhabitants who have been forced by the garrison to resist. I am sure my lord would willingly have spared them, had it been possible."

"Rebellion must be punished with severity, madam, or it can never be effectually crushed," replied the chaplain; "and though no doubt many innocent persons perished with the guilty in this terrible siege, the earl could not distinguish between them. The blame must rest with those evil-minded persons who compelled their fellow-townsmen to defy the king's authority. 'Tis to be hoped that the fate of Lancaster will prove a warning."

"The warning, I fear, will be disregarded," said the countess. "The rebels will retaliate. The castle is still occupied by the garrison, and will cost a long siege ere it can be taken."

"In my opinion, madam, the garrison will surrender," rejoined Rutter. "The capture of the town is a great blow. We shall soon hear more good news."

"It comes!" cried Gertrude, who had been anxiously looking out for another messenger. "I see a small party of horsemen galloping hither."

All eyes were instantly turned in the direction towards which she pointed.

"You must be mistaken, girl," said the countess. "I can perceive no horsemen."

"You will behold them presently, madam," replied Gertrude. "They are hidden by the trees."

Almost as she spoke, the troop appeared, and the Lady Henriette Marie called out:

"Yes, there they are! The Cavalier at their head is Captain Standish."

"Standish!" exclaimed the countess. "Then, of a surety, he brings good tidings."

"Was I not right, madam?" said Doctor Rutter. "I doubt not the castle has been taken."

"Surrendered—not taken," rejoined the countess. "I am heartily glad of it."

Just then the leader of the little troop, which was approaching very rapidly, descried the party on the Eagle Tower, and waved his feathered hat to them.

The action caused great excitement among the beholders, and the young ladies Stanley, as well as Gertrude, waved their kerchiefs in reply.

"May we go down and meet him, dearest mother?" said the Lady Henriette Marie.

Beseeching looks were cast by all the others at the countess, who willingly assented, and the whole party descended to the court-yard.

By the time they got there, Standish and his followers had nearly reached the mansion, and a loud shout from the warders at the gate, and musketeers on the walls, greeted them, as they crossed the drawbridge.

Perceiving the countess and those with her in the court, Standish hastily alighted and hurrying towards her would have flung himself at her feet if she had not stopped him.

"Your news—your news?" she cried.

"My lord has recovered Preston," he replied.

"Indeed!" she exclaimed, in astonishment. "When I last heard of him, he was at Lancaster, and about to besiege the castle."

"His lordship left Lancaster last night, madam, and this morning, he surprised Preston. He is now master of the town."

"A great achievement, and quickly performed," she rejoined. "It will redound to his lordship's honour." She then asked in an anxious tone, "Has there been much slaughter?"

"None whatever, madam. His lordship bade me tell you that not a man has been killed."

"I am truly glad to hear it. This clemency may be set against the havoc at Lancaster."

"His lordship would gladly have spared the people of Lancaster, madam; but they refused his summons, being compelled to do so by the commanders of the garrison."

"Had the garrison been put to the sword I should not have grieved," said the countess; "but I pity those poor souls."

"They do not all deserve your pity, madam—nor can they complain, since, as I have shown, they brought this punishment upon themselves."

Here Doctor Rutter interposed.

"Shall we proceed to the chapel, madam," he said, "and offer up thanks to Heaven for the victory vouchsafed us, and for the preservation of the earl from his enemies?"

"I was about to make the suggestion, reverend sir," said the countess. "Our first duty is to Heaven, and if we neglect it, we cannot hope that our cause will continue to prosper."

By this time, all the officers of the garrison had come up, and manifested the greatest satisfaction, when they learnt that Preston had been recovered.

CHAPTER X

How Hoghton Tower was blown up

COLONEL NICHOLAS STARKIE, of Huntroyd, a staunch Parliamentary leader, who had previously defeated Sir Gilbert Hoghton at Hintfield Moor, having learnt that Sir Gilbert had marched with Lord Derby on Lancaster, resolved to surprise Hoghton Tower, and suddenly appeared before it with three hundred men, and some cannon, and firing a shot against the gates summoned the commander to surrender.

Captain Musgrave, who had been left in charge of the castle by Sir Gilbert, and had with him forty musketeers, haughtily refused the summons, and at once returned the fire.

The defence was vigorous, but it soon became clear that the assault would be successful, whereupon Captain Musgrave sent out an officer to demand a parley, which was granted.

A conference then took place between Musgrave and Colonel Starkie—the result of which was that the former offered to deliver up the castle, provided the lives of the garrison were spared.

These terms being agreed to, after the delay of half an hour, Colonel Starkie and his men entered the outer court, where they found Captain Musgrave with the musketeers drawn up, and ready to depart. The great gates of the inner court were likewise thrown open, and no one could be seen upon the towers or walls.

"You have done wisely in delivering up the castle to us, Captain Musgrave, since you cannot hold it," said Colonel Starkie, as he courteously saluted the discomfited officer. "You have made a gallant defence."

"I hope Sir Gilbert Hoghton may think so," replied Musgrave sternly. "Are we free to depart?"

Receiving an answer in the affirmative, he passed with the musketeers through the outer gate, and quickly descending the hill, made the best of his way with the little party to Walton-le-Dale, whence they proceeded to Preston.

Meanwhile, Colonel Starkie entered the castle with his men, and mounted towards the upper part of the building, in quest of arms and ammunition.

In a chamber on the summit of the structure, they found a much larger supply of muskets, calivers, petronels, and pistols than they expected, besides a great number of old arquebuses.

Moreover, there were two or three barrels of gunpowder, one of which seemed to have been half emptied by the men previous to their departure, since a good deal of powder was scattered about on the floor, and on the staircase.

Attaching little importance to this circumstance, Colonel Starkie was collecting all the arms he could find, when a terrific explosion took place, that shook the whole fabric to its foundations, rent the walls, blew off a large portion of the roof, and scattered great beams, stones, and mutilated bodies far and wide.

Immediately following the explosion, shrieks and cries could be heard, forming altogether a most appalling and unearthly noise.

When the soldiers left in the court-yard recovered from the shock, they rushed into the house, and found nothing but a heap of ruins, amidst which could be seen the bodies of their dead or dying comrades.

The upper part of the staircase was entirely destroyed, the floor cracked and broken, and a great portion of the roof blown off.

It was speedily discovered that a train had been laid, which had set fire to the barrels of gunpowder.

By this stratagem Colonel Starkie with a hundred and fifty of his soldiers were destroyed. Starkie's body was so mutilated that it was only by his accoutrements that he could be recognised. The train had been laid by Urmston, the steward. He was betrayed by some of the household, and shot.

The central part-of the edifice, where the explosion occurred, was so damaged that it could not be inhabited, and it was not thought worth while to repair it. But the castle was fortified as strongly as ever, and the three large pieces of ordnance still kept their places on the outer gate.

By the Royalists the act was looked upon as just vengeance—by the Roundheads it was regarded as a detestable piece of treachery, which Heaven in due time would infallibly punish.

CHAPTER XI

How Lord Goring brought a Despatch from the King to the Earl of Derby

Two days after he had captured Preston, Lord Derby held a council of war in an inner room in the town-hall, at which Lord Molineux, Sir Gilbert Hoghton, Sir Thomas Tyldesley and all the other commanders were present.

"I have now a proposition to make to you," he said. "This success must be immediately followed up. Before the rebels can recover from their surprise we must strike another and heavier blow. We must attack Manchester with the fixed determination of taking the town. I doubt not we shall be successful. This very night we must start on the enterprise. If we tarry here we shall have to defend ourselves against Sir John Seaton and Colonel Holcroft, who most assuredly will besiege the town, whereas if we set out at once our movements cannot be checked."

"I entirely agree with your lordship that it will be best to leave Preston," said Sir Thomas Tyldesley; "but I thought it was your intention to take Blackburn, and then proceed to Bolton."

"Manchester is far more important than either Blackburn or Bolton," rejoined the earl. "And if I march against the town now, I will either take the place, or lay my bones there. Are you of my mind, gentlemen? Will you all go with me?"

"After our former experience," remarked Lord Molineux, "I think the attempt on Manchester very hazardous—"

"The town must be captured—sooner or later," said Lord Derby, "or the whole county is lost to the king. At this moment, Colonel Holland and Colonel Assheton are unprepared."

"Well, I will raise no further objections," said Lord Molineux.

"I will go wherever your lordship chooses to lead me," said Sir Thomas Tyldesley.

"And I," added Sir Gilbert Hoghton, and several others.

"Then we will set out to-night with all our force," said the earl, "and proceed to Chorley. Tomorrow we will move on to Wigan, and give out that we mean to

assault Bolton, but ere another dawn shall break the rebels shall find us at Manchester."

Preparations were then secretly made by the Royalists for their departure, and at nightfall, Lord Derby, with his whole force, marched to Chorley, where they took up their quarters for the remainder of the night.

After a few hours' repose, the army pursued its march to Wigan without meeting any opposition.

This town still remained faithful to Lord Derby, and here he had placed a strong garrison under the command of Major Blair, and had recently fortified it with new gates and outworks, so that the town was in an excellent state of defence, and the commander laughed at the threats of the rebels.

But scarcely had Lord Derby entered Wigan than all his plans were frustrated.

Lord Goring, with a small guard, had just arrived from Oxford, bearing a despatch from his majesty. The earl received him in the presence of Lord Molineux and all the other commanders.

"You are welcome, my lord," he said. "I trust you bring good news from his majesty?"

"Not such good news as I could desire, my lord," replied Goring. "The king has instant need of aid, and enjoins your lordship, on your allegiance, to send him forthwith all the men you can spare. The despatch I have just given you is an order to that effect, as you will find. Lord Molineux is also commanded to rejoin his majesty with all his officers and men."

"I am quite ready to obey the order, my lord," said Lord Molineux; "though I must mention that I have engaged with Lord Derby to make another assault on Manchester."

The earl was unable to conceal his chagrin, though he controlled himself as well as he could.

"I am ready as ever to obey his majesty's behest," he said; "and will bring him all the troops I can muster—horse and foot. But I must pray for three or four days' delay, during which I shall endeavour to take Manchester; and the importance of that capture will, I trust, satisfy his majesty."

"There must be no delay, my lord," said Lord Goring, haughtily. "You make sure of taking Manchester, but you were not successful on a former occasion. As I have already told you, his majesty requires at once all the force he can muster."

"My lord, I believe if I had an opportunity of speaking to his majesty, he would approve of my purpose—"

"Then you refuse to obey?" said Lord Goring, sternly.

"No, my lord, but I must strongly remonstrate," said Lord Derby. "An opportunity will be lost that may never occur again."

"I am bound to say," remarked Lord Molineux, "that, in my opinion, Manchester is so strongly garrisoned, and so well defended, that it cannot be taken under a month."

"You hear, my lord?" said Goring, looking at the earl. "How say you, Sir Thomas?" he added, to Tyldesley. "You have had experience of this rebel town."

"My experience leads me to the same conclusion as Lord Molineux," replied Sir Thomas. "Manchester cannot be taken by a coup de main. Colonel Holland and Colonel Assheton are too much on the alert."

"You are both mistaken," cried the earl, warmly. "Let us march there to-day and I will engage to take the town before to-morrow morning. If your lordship will come with me, you shall behold the royal banner floating from the church tower at dawn."

"I cannot comply with your request, my lord," replied Goring. "Nor can I permit troops, that will be invaluable to his majesty at this juncture, to be sacrificed in a useless enterprise. I must be frank with your lordship. Neither the king nor his council think you are serving the royal cause in Lancashire."

"Not serving it!" exclaimed the earl. "What would you have me do? I have just taken Lancaster and Preston."

"But you can hold neither place," said Goring. "And I am certain his majesty would not sanction your proposed attack on Manchester. I have commissions for Lord Molineux and Sir Thomas Tyldesley, empowering them to recruit their regiments from your last levies, and to join the king immediately at Oxford."

"Since such are his majesty's commands I shall not oppose them," said the earl; "though I feel I should best serve him by acting contrary to his orders. However prejudicial to the royal cause it may be to strip Lancashire of its defenders, I am ready to take my whole force to Oxford."

"That is not needful, my lord," said Goring. "The king desires you to retain such troops as may be necessary, but to send him all you can spare."

"I will take them to him as I have just said," replied Lord Derby.

"My lord," said Goring, "it will suffice if Lord Molineux and Sir Thomas Tyldesley join his majesty. Hereafter, if required, you can follow. You are best here for the present. Lancashire must not be given up to the rebels."

"If I lose my men, I can make but a poor defence against the enemy," said the earl. "But his majesty shall be obeyed. My men are ready to march in another direction—but it matters not. They will go wherever I bid them, and though I doubt not they will regret as much as I do myself that the attack on Manchester is abandoned, they will fight well elsewhere. I will take my whole force to Warrington, where I will leave it at his majesty's disposal."

"Nay, my lord, I must take the greater part of it with me," said Goring. "Such are my orders."

"You shall take all if you will," rejoined Lord Derby.

"A dozen troops of horse and five hundred foot will suffice for the present," said Goring.

"You shall have them," replied the earl. "As soon as the men have rested, we will set out."

Two hours later, the whole force that had just arrived at Wigan set out for Warrington.

As Lord Derby had anticipated, the change in the plans gave great dissatisfaction, and much reluctance was expressed by some of the soldiers to proceed to Oxford.

During the whole of the march between Wigan and Warrington, Lord Derby rode by himself. A short halt was made at Newton, but even then his lordship

seemed in no humour for converse. Evidently it was a great grief to him to part with his army, and he could not conceal his vexation.

The whole force rested that night at Warrington, but early on the following morning, the chosen regiments set out for Chester on their long march to Oxford, under the command of Lord Molineux and Sir Thomas Tyldesley.

Thus checked in his victorious career and deprived of the greater part of his force and his two most efficient commanders, Lord Derby could not but feel the greatest mortification and disappointment.

Overcome by a despondency he could not shake off, he remained for three days at Warrington, when news was brought him of a great disaster.

Wigan had been captured by Colonel Assheton with a very strong force, consisting of upwards of two thousand men, and the town plundered.

Immediately on receiving this grievous intelligence, Lord Derby put himself at the head of the two troops of horse which were all that were now left him, and rode off to Wigan to see what could be done.

With him was Captain Standish, who had only joined on the previous day. The second troop was commanded by Sir Gilbert Hoghton.

On the earl's appearance before the recently captured town, the fortifications of which showed how much it had suffered from the recent assault, Colonel Assheton immediately sallied forth at the head of a force trebling that of the Royalists.

A very sharp conflict ensued, during which many were slain on both sides, but at length the earl was compelled to retreat. He did so, however, in very good order, and rode with his company to Lathom House.

BOOK IV. — THE SURRENDER OF WARRINGTON

CHAPTER I

The Countess proposes to write to Prince Rupert

NATURALLY, the unexpected return of the Earl of Derby to the castle under such circumstances caused great consternation.

The whole garrison got under arms. As soon as his lordship had ridden through the gate with his followers, the drawbridge was raised, and preparation was made for attack.

After dismounting in the court-yard, the earl immediately retired with the countess, and told her all the reverses he had sustained—how he had been thwarted in his intended assault of Manchester—how his best troops had been taken from him—and how Wigan had been captured.

"Wigan captured!" exclaimed the countess, in amazement. "I heard it had been attacked—but I knew not it was taken."

"It was taken yesterday by Colonel Assheton, and is now in the hands of the rebels," replied the earl, despairingly. "Only Warrington and this stronghold are left me. All else is gone."

"Do not despair, my dear lord," she said, striving to cheer him. "Fortune will take a turn."

"I fear not," he replied. "Things will get worse, instead of better. Warrington is certain to be attacked by the rebels, but it is well fortified and well garrisoned, and may hold out for a time; but if the whole county is in the hands of the rebels, I cannot maintain it. As the king will not have me with him, I must perforce retire to the Isle of Man."

"Not yet, my dear lord—not yet," remonstrated the countess. "All is not lost. I will write to Prince Rupert to come to our assistance, and I doubt not he will accede to the request."

"You are mistaken, my dear heart. Goring and Jermyn, and the rest of the king's advisers, who are hostile to me, will not let him," observed the earl.

"Nevertheless, I will write," she said; "and I will send the letter by Frank Standish."

"A better messenger could not be found," rejoined the earl. "If the prince will bring a sufficient force to Lancashire, all will be right. But I fear—"

"Have no fear, my lord," cried the courageous dame. "All will yet be well. Go forth, I pray you. See your children. Show yourself to the officers of the garrison. I will join you as soon as I have written the letter to Prince Rupert."

Very much cheered by his discourse with the countess, the earl proceeded to the great hall, where he found his daughters with Doctor Rutter, and embraced them tenderly, and then cordially greeted the chaplain.

After this, he went forth into the court-yard, where all the officers of the garrison were assembled.

Putting on as cheerful a countenance as he could assume, he thus addressed them:

"You have heard we have just lost Wigan, and it is doubtless a very heavy blow to us, and a great gain to the rebels, but rest assured we shall recover the town. Meanwhile, we have Warrington, which is strongly fortified, and which we can hold till we receive assistance from the king."

"I hope the assistance may not be delayed, my lord," said Captain Chisenhale.

"When his majesty learns how we are situated, I trust he will send Prince Rupert to our assistance," said the earl.

These words, and the tone in which they were spoken, produced an excellent effect on the officers, who had been much depressed by the loss of Wigan.

The earl next carefully inspected the whole garrison, and by his manner inspired confidence in the men.

CHAPTER II

What passed between Standish and Gertrude

MEANTIME, Frank Standish had gone in quest of Engracia and her father.

But before he could find them, he encountered Gertrude.

"I grieve to hear you have lost Wigan," she said.

"Yes, the town was taken yesterday by Colonel Assheton, with the aid of your father," he replied, gloomily.

"Was my father with Colonel Assheton?" she inquired.

"He was," replied Standish.

"I am sorry for it," she rejoined. "But do not reproach me. I am not to blame."

"The rebels will attack Warrington next, and your father may give them further aid."

"Yes, I see, that is possible," she replied. "I will try to prevent it."

"What will you do?"

"I will go to Wigan and talk to him. Perhaps he may listen to my entreaties."

"That is not very likely. But the countess will not allow you to leave Lathom House on such an errand."

"I will find some means of getting away," she replied.

"Do not come to any decision till you have spoken further with me," he rejoined.

At this moment, Engracia was seen approaching with her father, and Standish went to meet them.

"Ah, my young friend, I rejoice to see you," said Don Fortunio. "But is it true you have sustained a reverse?"

"Yes, we have lost an important town," replied Standish; "and one I thought perfectly safe. All our late successes will now go for nothing. Warrington alone remains to us."

"And this castle," cried Engracia.

"Yes, but if Warrington falls, Lathom House will be besieged," said Standish. "Do you think you ought to remain here?"

"I am not at all afraid," she replied. "I feel quite safe with the countess."

"You do not know what a siege is like, my child," cried Don Fortunio. "The matter requires consideration. Would it be possible to quit the castle now?"

"Yes, but a few days hence it may be too late," replied Standish.

"I do not wish to go, dear father," said Engracia. "If you desire to depart, leave me here."

At this moment the countess appeared with her daughters. She had a letter in her hand.

"I was looking for you, Captain Standish," she said. "You must take this letter to Prince Rupert."

"To Prince Rupert!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "Unless I am misinformed, his highness is at Oxford with the king."

"It is to Oxford you will have to proceed," replied the countess. "If you deem the journey too long, I will send another messenger."

"The journey is not too long for me, madam," he replied. "If I have my lord's consent I will willingly take the letter."

"His lordship has selected you for the errand," said the countess.

"Then I will set out at once," replied Standish.

"I felt sure I could rely on you," she rejoined, with a smile. "You will deliver this letter into the prince's own hands as speedily as may be, and bring me back an answer."

"I will, madam," he replied, placing the letter in his doublet.

Just then Lord Derby came up, and finding that the countess had already entrusted her letter to Standish, he took him aside, and charged him with a message to Prince Rupert.

"You will be able to describe to his highness the exact state of affairs in Lancashire," he said. "Tell him I deem it utterly impossible to hold out much longer without assistance. Had I succeeded in taking Manchester, all would have been well; but now the prospect is, indeed, dark."

"I will explain all to his highness," said Standish; "and should I obtain an interview of the king, I will tell his majesty exactly how your lordship is circumstanced."

"You are a trusty messenger," said the earl. "I need not tell you to lose no time on the journey. Take half a dozen men with you. You had better not set out till night."

Promising to obey his lordship's direction, Standish went to choose the men, and as he proceeded to the stables, he met Gertrude.

"Let me be one of your attendants," she said.

"You!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. I have still my costume as a cavalier," she replied.

"But you forget the distance," he rejoined. "You could not ride from this place to Oxford."

"I think I could," she cried. "But I do not desire to go further than Wigan. Get me through the gates, and across the drawbridge, and I will soon find my way to my father."

"I see your purpose," he replied, "and will aid you. You shall pass out with me to-night. A horse and all equipments shall be found you."

CHAPTER III

How Gertrude accompanied Standish

Having made all necessary arrangements, Standish returned to the court-yard, where he found Engracia and her attendant Maria.

"I am sorry we shall soon lose you again," she said. "I hear you are starting on another expedition to-night. How long shall you be absent?"

"I can scarcely tell," he replied; "but I suppose three or four days. Should I not return, I hope you will think of me."

"Do not trifle with me," she rejoined, with emotion. "I shall never cease to think of you. But when you do return, I hope you will stay here."

"I know not," he replied. "I must obey orders. But unless shut up, I shall not stay here long. When I return from my mission I shall be posted with my lord at Warrington."

"Is Warrington far from this castle?" she inquired.

"Not much more than an hour's ride. If the rebels will let me, I shall often come and see you."

"You must not expose yourself to risk on my account," she said, tenderly. "But pray inform me of your return. The time will pass wearily till then."

"That it will, I am sure, señorita," remarked Maria. "Ah, señor, my young lady thinks only of you."

"Fie, Maria!" cried her mistress. "You should not betray secrets."

"But it is right the caballero should know how much you care for him," said Maria. "It will console him."

"You are right," cried Standish.

In such discourse as this they passed away the time, and so engrossed were they by each other, that they were quite unaware they were watched by the jealous Gertrude.

In obedience to the earl's injunctions, Standish did not prepare to start on his perilous journey till it became dark.

He had already chosen five attendants, but it was not till the last moment that the sixth made his appearance.

The youth had a slight figure, and scarcely looked equal to the journey, but was well mounted.

Standish had taken leave of the earl and countess, so that no delay occurred. The gate was thrown open, the drawbridge lowered, and Standish rode forth with his attendants, and took his way along a lane leading to Skelmersdale.

Thence they galloped across Holland Moor to Pemberton, which was nothing more than a small collection of cottages and an old hall.

From this place a narrow lane brought them to a high road, when Standish came to a halt, and said in a low tone to the youthful attendant we have mentioned:

"This is your road to Wigan. It is not much more than a mile off. Adieu!"

Without waiting for a reply he dashed off on the right, followed by his other attendants.

CHAPTER IV

How Gertrude found her Father at Wigan

THE youth remained stationary for a moment, and then rousing himself, took the course indicated by his leader.

Very shortly he came in sight of a large town, which, even in the gloom, he could see was surrounded by partly-demolished fortifications.

Presently he was challenged by an advanced guard stationed in front of the gate.

"Who are you?" demanded a hoarse voice.

"A friend," was the reply.

"Are you alone?" demanded the guard.

"Yes—alone."

Two musketeers then stepped forward to reconnoitre the stranger, and the foremost inquired:

"What is your business here at this hour?"

"I desire to see Colonel Rosworm," replied the youth. "I pray you take me to him."

"It is too late," replied the musketeer, gruffly. "You cannot enter the town. Go your way. Return to-morrow morning if you list."

"It is important that I should see Colonel Rosworm to-night. Will you take a message from me to him?"

"No," was the stern answer. "He has retired to rest, and I will not disturb him."

"He is yonder. I hear his voice."

And the youth called out a few words in German which evidently reached Rosworm's quick ears, for he hastened to the spot.

The musketeers could not understand what passed between Rosworm and the stranger, for their discourse was conducted in a language unknown to them; but they were surprised when the great German engineer took the new comer's horse by the bridle, and led him through the gate into the town, saying to the guard, "It is all right."

In this manner they proceeded along the main street till they came to a large house, at the entrance of which sentinels were placed. Here they stopped.

The youth dismounted, and giving his horse to one of the sentinels, followed his conductor into the house.

Several Roundhead soldiers made their appearance in the passage, but retired on a word from Rosworm, who ushered the stranger into a large room, dimly lighted by a lamp, where they were quite alone.

No sooner was the door closed, than the engineer affectionately embraced his daughter.

"I ought to chide thee severely for thy conduct," he said, in a voice in which anger struggled with tenderness; "but I cannot do it. I thought thou hadst left me for ever."

"Not so, dear father," she rejoined. "I am always ready to return to you, but I cannot endure these rebels."

"Then why come here, where thou art in the midst of them?" he asked.

"Because I have something important to say to you," she rejoined. "Are you content with the mischief you have done to this town?"

"What mean'st thou?" he said. "I shall not be content till I have fulfilled my engagement. I have undertaken to deliver all the towns in Lancashire to the Parliament."

"I feared as much, dear father," she rejoined. "But I hope to dissuade you from your cruel purpose."

"Thou wilt fail," he said.

"I trust not. You will listen to what I have to say?"

"Humph!" he exclaimed. "It is mere waste of time. I will promise not to assist in any attack on Lathom House—but Warrington is different."

"I hope you will not be able to take the place," she cried.

"Indulge no such notion," he rejoined. "Wigan was more strongly fortified than any other town in Lancashire, and you see how soon it fell. We shall make short work with Warrington."

"I hope you may be unsuccessful, father," she said. "And if I am permitted I will fight against you."

"You will not have the opportunity of doing so, child," he rejoined. "You will remain here for the present."

"May I not return to Lathom House?"

"Not till after the capture of Warrington," he rejoined, in a decided tone. "You should have thought of this before you came hither."

"Oh, father!" she exclaimed, "I judged you very differently."

"I detain you against my will," he said. "But you compel me to act thus by your indiscretion. Were I to let you go, my motives would be misconstrued."

"If this is your fixed determination, father, I shall try to escape," she cried.

"Act as you think proper," he rejoined. "I will not suffer thee to depart."

"Father," she implored, "I pray you let me go! Do not drive me to some desperate act."

Rosworm could not resist her entreaties.

"I ought not to yield," he said. "But thou hast placed me in a disagreeable dilemma, and perhaps this is the best way out of it. Come, then, I will go with thee to the gate."

Without another word he left the room, and she followed him.

The horse was instantly brought by the guard, and when Gertrude had gained the saddle, Rosworm walked by her side to the gate.

Thus escorted, no question was asked, and no hindrance offered to her departure.

CHAPTER V

How Gertrude warned the Earl that Warrington was in danger

Gertrude had failed in her errand. She had found her father impracticable, but she had ascertained that Warrington was to be attacked on the morrow, and resolved to warn the Earl of Derby that the town was in danger. She hastened back as fast as she could to Lathom, and met with no hindrance on the way.

On arriving at the castle, some explanation was necessary to the guard, but they were quickly satisfied, and admittance was given her.

Her first business was to obtain an audience of the earl. Fortunately, he had not retired to rest, but was engaged in converse with the countess and Doctor Rutter in a small chamber adjoining the great hall.

She had no difficulty in obtaining admittance to him, but some explanation was necessary to account for her appearance in male attire. She concealed nothing from the earl, and told him she had been to Wigan, and detailed all that had passed between her and her father, adding, in conclusion:

"I am certain Warrington will be attacked tomorrow morning, my lord."

"In that case, I must go there to-night," said the earl. "But I shall only take the two regiments I brought with me to-day. The men must get ready instantly. I shall not disturb the garrison here. You have rendered me good service," he added to Gertrude, "and I thank you."

"I am sorry I could not serve you better, my lord," she replied. "But I should like to go with you to Warrington—if I may be permitted."

"I admire your spirit," he replied. "But I must refuse your request."

He then went forth to give orders for the immediate departure of the troops.

Shortly afterwards, the trumpet was sounded in the court-yard, and in reply to the summons the men came forth fully equipped.

Torches were lighted, so that the assemblage could be fully seen. Some of the officers of the garrison at Lathom were anxious to attend his lordship, but were not allowed.

Meanwhile, the earl had taken leave of the countess. Though sorely grieved to part with him, she concealed her distress, and strove to cheer him.

"Grieved as I am to part with you, my dear lord," she said, "I would not have you stay, but would rather urge your departure. Whatever may chance at Warrington, have no fear of this castle. Be sure I will keep it for you."

"I have no doubt of that," he rejoined. "I shall make the best defence I can, but should Warrington fall into the hands of the rebels, and should no assistance be sent by the king, I shall retire to the Isle of Man. Thither you can follow with our children. And now farewell, dear heart, I will not say for ever!"

Tenderly embracing her, he bade adieu to Doctor Rutter, and went forth into the court-yard, where, as already stated, the two regiments were drawn up.

As soon as he had mounted, trumpets were blown, the gates were thrown wide open, and the earl rode forth at the head of his company.

Passing through a wood on the south of the mansion, and riding as rapidly as was consistent with safety across a wide bleak moor to Rainsford, the earl proceeded through Windle and Haydock to Newton, where he halted for a short time, and ascertained that, as yet, Colonel Assheton had made no movement from Wigan.

There was a small Royalist force at Newton, and having given some directions to its leaders, the earl rode on with his company to Warrington, now not more than five miles distant.

VI

How Warrington was assaulted by Colonel Assheton and Colonel Holland

Strongly fortified by mud walls with gates, posts and heavy chains, and numerous outworks in advance, possessing, moreover, a strong garrison, the ancient town of Warrington seemed well able to resist any attack made upon it.

The river Mersey, which flowed past the town, was crossed by a strong stone bridge, built by the first Earl of Derby, upwards of a century and a half previously.

With its walls and battlements, a watch-tower in the centre, and an engine to prevent any passage over it, this ancient bridge constituted a powerful defence.

On the summit of the church-tower were placed two small pieces of ordnance, while the church itself was converted into a storehouse for ammunition and powder.

From its well-planned defences, its position on the Mersey, its bridge, and its strong garrison, Warrington was deemed impregnable. The governor, Colonel Edward Norris, who acted for Lord Derby, was an officer of great bravery and unquestionable loyalty, and there were others almost equally distinguished in the garrison.

The Earl of Derby's first business on his arrival was to have an interview with the governor, and having explained the position of affairs, he threw himself on a couch, and sought some repose of which he stood greatly in need.

When he awoke, he learnt from the scouts that the enemy was advancing with the evident intention of investing the town, and attacking it on two sides—the force on the west being led by Colonel Assheton, that on the east by Colonel Holland, with whom was Colonel Rosworm.

On receiving this intelligence, the earl immediately sallied forth at the head of a large troop of horse, and attacked Colonel Assheton near Sankey Bridge, driving him back as far as Burton Wood; and he might have routed the whole force, had not Colonel Holland sent a detachment to Assheton's aid, and Lord Derby was thereupon compelled to return to the town, or his retreat would have been cut off.

Not long afterwards the assault was commenced by Colonel Holland, assisted as we have said by Rosworm, and notwithstanding the vigorous defence made by Colonel Norris, part of the mud walls were taken, and it seemed certain that the enemy would succeed in penetrating into the town.

Upon this, the Earl of Derby, who was riding about on his charger, declared that rather than the enemy should capture the town, he would burn it to the ground.

When Colonel Holland and Rosworm heard of this threat, they laughed at it, and redoubled their efforts to advance. But they were stopped by loud

explosions, which proved that several houses had been blown up, and flames were soon afterwards perceived bursting forth in different quarters.

The earl had executed his threat.

All the habitations nearest them were on fire, and the conflagration, aided by combustibles, was rapidly extending along the main street.

Struck with consternation at this spectacle, the assailants paused in their efforts, and considered what should be done.

It was impossible now to advance without exposing themselves to the greatest risk—indeed, to almost certain destruction. Besides, as the town would inevitably be burnt down, little would be left them but the mud walls.

From information which they obtained, they learnt that Lord Derby and Colonel Norris, with a large body of men, had retired to the church, where they were secure from the fire, as well as from attack.

Under these circumstances the assailants judged it their wisest course to retire for the night to Sankey, and wait to see what the morrow would bring forth.

It was a night of terror and surprise. More than half the town was on fire, but no efforts were made by the inhabitants to extinguish the flames. Most of them had crossed the bridge, and found shelter at Groppenhall, Thelwall, and other villages.

But the besiegers were not allowed to rest at Sankey. At midnight the sentinels were shot, and the Parliamentarians, who had fancied themselves in security, were suddenly roused to arms.

The foe was upon them. A fierce fight ensued that lasted more than two hours, and ended in a complete rout of the Parliamentarians, part of whom returned to Wigan, and the rest to Manchester.

Warrington was thus delivered from the rebels, and though the town suffered as much as it would have done had it been ravaged by the enemy—perhaps more—not a murmur was heard from the loyal inhabitants. Every assistance in his power was rendered them by the earl, and in the course of a few days many partly consumed dwellings were again rendered habitable.

As some fears were entertained that another attack on the place would be made by Colonel Assheton from Wigan, Lord Derby remained to protect it.

CHAPTER VII

How Standish returned from his Mission

IT had now become quite evident to the earl that unless he received prompt and efficient assistance from the king, it would be impossible to continue the struggle. He looked anxiously for Standish's return, but nearly a week elapsed and no tidings were heard of him.

One evening the earl had mounted the watch-tower on the bridge, and was gazing at the river flowing through the narrow arches, when his attention was aroused by the sound of horses' feet, and he saw a Cavalier advancing rapidly along the Chester road, followed by some half-dozen attendants.

Could it be Standish? He watched the newcomer anxiously, and felt convinced he was right in the supposition. Quitting the watch-tower, he hastened towards the gate by which the new-comers would have to enter the town, but long before he reached it, Standish had obtained admittance.

On descrying the earl, the young man flung himself from his steed, and giving the bridle to one of his followers, hurried forward. Lord Derby instantly perceived from his looks that he brought bad news, and inquired:

"Have you seen Prince Rupert?"

"I have, my lord," replied Standish; "and I bring a letter from his highness to my noble lady the countess."

"Is it favourable?" cried the earl. "Will the prince come to us?—will he bring, or send assistance?"

"He cannot, my lord," replied Standish. "The king will not allow him. I represented your lordship's position exactly to his highness, and he sees your peril; but he cannot help you."

"Then all is lost!" cried the earl, in a voice of anguish. "All the sacrifices I have made are useless. You see that this town has been burnt. It was destroyed to save it from the rebels; but it will now fall into their hands."

"I trust not, my lord," said Standish. "I have a message for you from the prince."

"What says he?" cried the earl.

"He counsels your lordship to retire to the Isle of Man, and remain there till better days arrive."

"He is right," said the earl. "I shall find a safe refuge there. Come with me to Colonel Norris."

Proceeding to a large house near the bridge, they found the governor of the town.

"Captain Standish has just returned from Oxford, and brings me bad news," said the earl. "There is no hope of assistance."

"Then it will be useless to hold out," observed the governor.

"Quite useless," rejoined the earl. "Hoist the white flag, and make the best terms you can with the enemy. My own intention is to retire to the Isle of Man, and there abide my time. To-night I shall go to Lathom, and bid farewell to the countess."

"Will you not take her ladyship with you to Castle Rushen?" asked Colonel Norris.

"She would refuse to accompany me," replied the earl. "But I have no fear for her safety. She has a strong castle, and a strong garrison, and can defend herself. Ride on to Lathom, Frank," he added to Standish, "and deliver Prince Rupert's letter to the countess. Tell her that Warrington must be surrendered. Acquaint her with my resolve, and say I will be with her before midnight to bid her farewell."

"I will, my lord," replied Standish.

As the earl evidently wished to confer with the governor, Standish left them together.

The young man remained for an hour at Warrington to rest his horses and men, and then, after receiving the earl's final commands, set out for Lathom, where he arrived in safety, and delivered the missive to the countess, informing her at the same time that Warrington was about to be surrendered by the governor.

Whatever the countess felt on perusing Prince Rupert's letter, and however distressed she might be by the tidings brought her, and her lord's determination to return to the Isle of Man, she said nothing at the time, but withdrew to her own chamber.

When she had quite regained her composure, she sent for Doctor Rutter, and passed some time in consultation with him.

After this, attended by the chaplain and Standish, she inspected the garrison, examined the stores, and made it understood by all the officers that they must prepare for a siege. They all displayed the utmost zeal.

CHAPTER VIII

How the Earl took his Departure for the Isle of Man

MIDNIGHT came, but the earl had not arrived, and the countess began to feel some little uneasiness, and this greatly increased when another hour had passed by.

Suddenly, Standish entered to announce that her lord had arrived, and the next moment the earl made his appearance, and clasped her to his breast.

"I have come to bid you adieu!" he said, regarding her tenderly. "Do you approve of my resolution?"

"Entirely," she replied, firmly. "Since assistance has been refused you by the king, you have no alternative. Doctor Rutter, with whom I have conferred, is of the same opinion."

"Since Warrington has fallen, it is useless to continue the struggle at this moment," said the chaplain. "Therefore you will be best away."

"But am I justified in leaving you here?" said the earl to the countess.

"My lord," she replied firmly, "unless you command me to accompany you I will not stir. Let me remain here. I will keep this castle for you against all the combined forces of your enemies. But perhaps they may not attack me."

"Expect no consideration from them," he rejoined, bitterly. "But I will not thwart you. I commit this castle to your charge."

"And I will keep it for you, my lord," replied the courageous lady, in a tone that electrified her hearers. "I will never yield it, but with life. You may rely on me."

"I know it," he replied, with admiration. "You will remain with her ladyship, Rutter?"

"To the last," he replied. "I consider it my duty to stay with her, since she may need counsel and consolation. But there is not a single person in the garrison who will quit her ladyship."

"I think not," said the countess proudly.

"How say you, Frank?" remarked the earl to Standish. "Will you remain here, or accompany me to the Isle of Man?"

"Since your lordship allows me the choice, I will stay here," replied Standish.

"I felt sure you would so decide," said the earl. "You shall attend me to Whitehaven, where I shall embark, and then return. Go and prepare, I shall not tarry long here."

On this, Standish quitted the room, and Doctor Rutter was about to follow, but the earl stopped him.

"Do not go, Rutter," he remarked. "I have nothing to say in private to her ladyship."

"Will you not see your children ere you depart, my lord?" said the countess. "They have not retired to rest, and will be sadly grieved indeed if they do not embrace you."

"Nay, then, bring them to me at once," he cried.

Summoned by Rutter, the three noble damsels rushed into the room, and were tenderly embraced by their father, who blessed them as he strained them to his breast.

"You will soon come back to us, dear father, will you not?" they cried in concert.

"I hope so," he rejoined. "If not you must come to me. I am going to Castle Rushen."

"We would rather remain at Lathom," they exclaimed.

"Ay, it is best you should stay with your mother," he rejoined. "And now adieu, my darlings. If I remain here a moment longer I shall never be able to tear myself away."

Again embracing them all—again clasping the countess to his breast, he hastily quitted the room.

In the court-yard he found the escort he had brought with him consisting of a dozen well-armed and well mounted troopers—not more. All the officers of the garrison were assembled.

"Farewell, gentlemen," he cried, as he sprang into the saddle. "I commit the countess and my children to your care."

"We will guard them with our lives," they rejoined with one voice.

Attended by Standish, and followed by the troopers, the earl then rode through the gateway.

His heart was very sorrowful, and he said to himself:

"Shall I ever return here? Shall I ever behold these dear ones again?"

BOOK V. — THE BELEAGUERED MANSION

CHAPTER I

Of the Garrison at Lathom House

NEARLY two months had elapsed since the Earl of Derby's departure to the Isle of Man, where he had been occupied in repressing a threatened insurrection and re-establishing his authority, and though Warrington had surrendered, and almost every castle, or fortified mansion in the county was now in the hands of the Parliamentary leaders, no attack had as yet been made on Lathom House.

Its real strength not being known, it was thought the castle could be easily taken at any time. Though the countess had not been disturbed, she was virtually a prisoner in her own house, and never stirred forth without a guard. She made no display whatever, but was always secretly increasing the strength of the garrison. In fact, the castle, which was a small town in itself, was in a perfect state of defence, and quite capable of standing a lengthened siege.

Immediately after the surrender of Warrington, a summons was sent by Colonel Holland, the Governor of Manchester, to the countess, requiring her to acknowledge the Parliament, or deliver up her mansion, but to this demand she returned a haughty and peremptory refusal.

"Take back this message to the Governor of Manchester," she said. "I will do nothing derogatory to my husband's honour. I will neither acknowledge the Parliament—nor give up my house. But I promise to attack no one—and only to defend myself. All I desire is to remain here peaceably, and I trust I shall not be disturbed."

This response seemed reasonable to Colonel Holland, and for a time she continued unmolested.

Not desiring to give the enemy a pretext for assailing her, the countess carefully restrained her garrison from giving them any provocation, and forbade them to plunder any houses belonging to Parliamentarians, or commit any outrage whatever. They might defend themselves, but must not make reprisals.

By this judicious conduct she remained free from attack, and was enabled to strengthen herself, and add to her stores.

At this time the number of the garrison was fully three hundred men, many of whom were expert marksmen, several having been the earl's keepers and fowlers. The majority were armed with muskets, but some carried long fowling-pieces and screwed guns.

Sixteen of the best marksmen kept watch on every alternate night, while an equal number of musketeers occupied the towers during the day, in addition to the engineers who had charge of the cannon.

Besides Standish, there were five officers, whom we have already particularised, but it may be proper to call over the roll again.

All were men of good family: Henry Ogle of Prescot—Edward Chisenhale of Chisenhale, near Chorley—William Farmer, a Scottish gentleman who had served in the Low Countries—Edward Rawsthorne of New Hall—Molineux Radcliffe, a relative of the Radcliffes of Ordsall—and John Foxe of Rhodes.

There were likewise six lieutenants—namely, Bretergh, Penketh, Walthew, Worrall, Kay, and Halsall.

Chief in command was William Farrington of Worden, appointed major of the garrison by the countess. He had suffered much for his attachment to Lord Derby and loyalty to the king. He had been a colonel of militia, and a commissioner of array, but his goods were seized and his property sequestered by the Parliament. Major Farrington was a man of excellent judgment, and the countess had entire reliance upon him, and consulted him on all occasions.

Lady Derby had now three chaplains in the house. Archdeacon Rutter, with whom the reader is already acquainted, Doctor Brideoake, and the Reverend John Lake. Service was always performed twice a day in the chapel, and on special occasions more frequently. Within the stronghold the greatest order and discipline prevailed. Not one person had been punished for disobedience or neglect of duty.

Already, we have endeavoured to familiarise the reader with the appearance of this proud embattled mansion, with its wide courts, its circuit of walls, its great gate-towers, its broad moat, strengthened by stout palisades on either bank, and, above all, its lofty central tower. But we must again refer to the picture, in order to notice a marked change that had taken place in its appearance.

Though more strongly garrisoned than formerly, Lathom looked less menacing. In each tower on the walls were six pieces of ordnance. But neither engineers nor musketeers were visible. They were there, but did not show themselves. Only on the gate-towers could the guard be distinguished. No banner floated as of yore from the summit of the Eagle Tower, and the sentinels seemed to have been removed.

But these appearances were deceptive. Strict watch was kept night and day on tower and rampart, and on every part of the castle.

That officers and men found this inactive life wearisome is certain. They would have preferred annoying the enemy by an occasional sortie, but Major Farrington, acting upon the countess's instructions, would not permit them. She was resolved not to provoke assault. It surprised her that the enemy allowed her to remain quiet so long, but she would not precipitate matters.

CHAPTER II

How Captain Markland brought a Letter from Sir Thomas Fairfax to the Countess

AT length an event occurred that brought about the attack the countess had been so studious to avoid.

Her chief enemy was Colonel Alexander Rigby, an active Parliamentary officer, who harboured a strong vindictive feeling against the Earl of Derby, and now sought to gratify it.

The traitor Bootle, who had only been severely wounded in his attempt to capture the queen, and had since joined Rigby, was sent by him to plunder the countess's tenants and neighbours, and arrest all who attempted to take refuge in the castle.

Hitherto, Don Fortunio and his daughter had been allowed to remain without molestation at Knowsley, whither they had removed about a month ago, but now they were taken prisoners by Bootle, who intended to carry them off to Wigan, but was prevented. Having learnt his design Standish attacked him with a small party of horse, rescued the captives, and conveyed them safely to Lathom.

In this skirmish, several of Bootle's men were wounded. Deeply resenting the affront, as he conceived it, Colonel Rigby immediately represented the matter to Sir Thomas Fairfax, general of the Parliamentary forces in Lancashire, who was then in Manchester.

Reluctant to disturb the countess, Fairfax at length yielded to Rigby's importunities, and called a council of war, at which Colonel Holland, the Governor of Manchester, Colonel Assheton of Middleton, Colonel Moore of Bank Hall, and Rigby himself were present.

After some discussion, it was resolved that a strong force should be sent against Lathom, and the countess summoned to surrender.

Immediate warning of their design was given to the countess, who had a spy among the enemy, and she was enabled to prepare for them. The three Parliamentary leaders, however, gave out that they were about to march to

Bolton and Wigan, and thence to Westmoreland, but her ladyship was not surprised to find they had fixed their quarters at various points round the hall.

Next day, Captain Markland, the Parliamentary general's aide-de-camp, attended by a small guard, presented himself at the gate of Lathom House and desired admittance, stating that he had a letter for her ladyship from Sir Thomas Fairfax.

This being reported to the countess, she gave orders that the messenger should be admitted, but his attendants must remain outside.

The gate was then opened, and Captain Markland rode into the court-yard, and was shortly afterwards ushered by Major Farrington into the presence of the countess.

Captain Markland was tall, strongly built, and well equipped. A motion with a ridge on the top, a gorget, cuirass, and taches met by immense gambado boots formed his accoutrements, and he had a large cutting sword by his side.

On approaching the countess, he made her a military salute, which she haughtily returned.

"You come from Sir Thomas Fairfax, as I understand, sir," she remarked.

"I am the bearer of a despatch from the general to your ladyship," he replied.

Taking a letter from his belt, he gave it to Major Farrington, who handed it to the countess.

Calmly and without any change of countenance, Lady Derby read the letter, and then said to the messenger:

"I presume you are aware of the purport of this missive?"

Captain Markland replied in the affirmative.

"It is a requisition from Sir Thomas Fairfax," he said, "enjoining your ladyship to yield up Lathom House on such honourable conditions as he shall propose."

"Does Sir Thomas Fairfax require immediate compliance with his injunction?" she asked.

"Even so, madam," replied Markland, "And I trust I may be able to carry him back an answer to that effect."

"You are in a strange hurry, sir," remarked the countess. "Think you I can decide at once upon a matter of such import. My lord has left me in charge of this mansion, and I cannot yield it up without due consideration. I require a week's delay."

"I am not prepared to say the delay will be granted, madam," replied Markland, "but I will deliver your answer to the general. Do you hold out any promise of compliance at the expiration of that time?"

"I hold out nothing," replied the countess. "Put any construction you deem proper on my words. I shall consult with my advisers," she added, glancing at Major Farrington and her three chaplains who were standing near.

"I trust they will counsel you to submit to necessity, madam," observed Markland.

Major Farrington would have spoken, but the countess checked him by a look and said haughtily to the messenger:

"Take back my answer, sir."

Upon this, Captain Markland bowed and retired, and was conducted to the courtyard by Standish.

As he mounted his steed, the Parliamentary officer remarked:

"We shall soon be masters here."

"Not so soon," rejoined Standish, contemptuously.

CHAPTER III

How Captain Markland brought a second Letter from Sir Thomas Fairfax, and in what Manner the Countess replied to it

AFTER this visit, the countess was allowed to remain in peace for a few days, but from the summit of the lofty Eagle Tower she perceived that her enemies were increasing in number, and drawing the cordon of troops still more tightly around her.

Colonel Assheton was stationed at Burscough Priory and Blyth Hall—Colonel Moore was near Cross Hall—and Colonel Rigby at Newburgh.

As to Sir Thomas Fairfax, she learnt from her scouts that he had taken up his quarters at Knowsley.

During this interval, she restrained her soldiers from making an attack on the enemy.

Hitherto, fresh provisions had been regularly brought by her tenants, but now these were almost entirely cut off, and the countess was most unwilling to have recourse to her stores. Parties of the enemy were constantly on the watch to cut off supplies.

The utmost enthusiasm prevailed in the garrison; officers and men were in excellent spirits. The heroic countess had inspired them all with an ardour and zeal akin to her own, and they longed for an opportunity of distinguishing themselves. As we have said, the utmost regularity was observed. The men were daily inspected by Major Farrington, accompanied by Standish or some other officer, and no one was ever found absent from his post. The horses were regularly exercised in the court-yard, and thereby kept in health and good condition. Nothing, in short, was neglected.

The routine of the countess's life was exactly the same that it had been. Twice in each day, sometimes thrice, service was performed in the chapel by Archdeacon Rutter, Doctor Brideoake, or Mr. Lake, and she always attended with her family. All the officers of the garrison, and such of the men as were not actually employed, together with part of the household, likewise attended.; and nothing could be more impressive than the service—nothing more striking than the picture presented by the chapel filled with armed men surrounding

the noble lady and her daughters. Their deportment was most serious and devout. At these services Gertrude Rosworm was always present.

On the third day after Captain Markland's visit to the countess, another letter was brought her by the same officer from Sir Thomas Fairfax.

In this despatch the Parliamentary general regretted that he could not accord her ladyship the delay she required, but he added, with some courtesy:

"Since nothing can be arranged without a conference, I hope your ladyship will come in your coach to Knowsley, where I and my three colonels will meet you, to discuss the terms of surrender. You need have no apprehension. I guarantee your personal safety."

The countess read this letter with great indignation.

"In sending this message," she said, scornfully, "Sir Thomas Fairfax has forgotten what is due to my lord and to myself. I decline to meet him and his colonels at Knowsley. If they desire to confer with me they must come here. It is meet they should wait on me, not I on them."

"I will deliver your ladyship's message," replied Captain Markland.

Later on in the same day he returned, bringing another letter from General Sir Thomas Fairfax, to say that he did not desire to put her ladyship to inconvenience, and would, therefore, wait upon her next day, at Lathom House.

CHAPTER IV

How Sir Thomas Fairfax came to Lathom House, and what passed between him and the Countess

NEXT day, about noon, in accordance with the message he had sent, Sir Thomas Fairfax, attended by a troop of horse, arrived at Lathom House.

Leaving his guard at a short distance from the castle, he rode up to the gateway, accompanied only by Captain Markland, thus showing the perfect reliance he had on the countess's honour.

The distinguished Parliamentary general was then about thirty-three, but looked, perhaps, a little older. Tall, and well-proportioned, he had handsome, but strongly-marked features, characterised by a grave and sombre expression. He had more the air and manner of a Cavalier than a Roundhead; but he had no sympathies whatever with the Royalist cause.

Though of noble birth on both sides, being the son of Lord Fairfax by Mary, daughter of the Earl of Mulgrave, Sir Thomas preferred a democratic form of government, and hated the Court. Having served in Holland under Lord Vere, he was a thorough soldier. He was likewise highly accomplished, and though not learned, well read.

Already he had played an important part in the Civil Wars, and at the period in question promised to become the foremost man in the Parliamentary party, though he was subsequently overshadowed by the bold and crafty Cromwell.

Sir Thomas Fairfax's accoutrements were a steel cuirass, with cuisses, and buff boots, and his sword was sustained by a richly ornamented baldrick. Instead of a steel head-piece, however, he wore a broad-leaved hat with a black feather.

As Sir Thomas Fairfax rode up to the mansion he was quite surprised at the formidable appearance it presented. Suddenly it had become a fortress, and a very strong one. Hitherto, as we have shown, it had been the policy of the countess to conceal her defensive preparations from the enemy, but she now ostentatiously displayed them. The aspect of the place was altogether changed. It looked threatening and defiant. A broad banner floated from the summit of the Eagle Tower, bearing the proud motto of the Stanleys—SANS CHANGER. The large pieces of ordnance on the high turreted gateway, and in the

numerous towers on the ramparts, were unmasked. The engineers were at their posts, and the walls were thronged with musketeers,

Scanning the place with a curious eye, Fairfax saw the strength of its position, and how well it was garrisoned.

But another surprise awaited him.

When the drawbridge was lowered, and the gates were thrown open to admit him and his aide-de-camp, an imposing spectacle was presented.

Two hundred stalwart musketeers, fully armed and equipped, and having their lieutenants with them, were ranged in double lines, extending from the gate to the doorway of the mansion.

On his entrance into the court, Fairfax was received by Major Farrington and Captains Standish and Chisenhale, all three fully accoutred, and as soon as he had dismounted, he was conducted by the major along the living avenue we have described to the entrance.

As he marched along, the musketeers were struck by his looks and martial bearing, but they allowed no admiration to appear, and regarded him sternly.

Very few words passed between the Parliamentary general and his conductor, but they were courteous towards each other. More musketeers were on the steps, and the doorway was environed by officers of the household.

Ceremoniously conducted to the presence-chamber, Fairfax perceived the countess at the upper end, seated like a queen on a high chair, with her daughters beside her. Near her were her three chaplains, and Captains Rawsthorne and Molineux Radcliffe were in attendance.

"The countess keeps a court, I perceive, at Lathom," observed Sir Thomas Fairfax to Major Farrington. "I did not expect to be treated with so much ceremony."

"Her ladyship desires to do you honour, general," rejoined the other.

As Sir Thomas approached, the countess arose, and received him with stately courtesy, praying him to be seated.

"You are welcome to Lathom, Sir Thomas," she said, "albeit you come as an enemy."

"I thank your ladyship for your welcome," he rejoined. "You have surprised me. I own I did not expect to find you so well prepared."

"Doubtless you expected to find me ready to submit, Sir Thomas," she said, with a haughty smile; "but such is not my intention."

"Resistance to the forces I can bring will be useless, madam," he remarked. "I hope, therefore, your ladyship will listen to the conditions I have to propose."

"Let me hear them," she rejoined.

"From the display I have just seen, I find your ladyship has a large stock of arms, and I doubt not abundance of ammunition. These stores must be delivered up to me."

At this demand the countess's attendants exchanged glances. She answered calmly but firmly:

"When I procured the arms you have just seen, Sir Thomas, and such munitions of war as I possess, it was to defend myself against my enemies, and not to attack them. Unless my house had been strongly garrisoned, I should have long since been driven from it. I have been subjected to every kind of provocation and annoyance from the soldiers of the Parliament, but I have not retaliated, and have restrained my own officers and men as much as possible."

"I have heard otherwise, madam," rejoined Fairfax. "I am told that your soldiers have been in the habit of stripping the country round about, and if your garrison is well provisioned, such must have been the case. I am also informed that some of your officers have seized upon several persons well affected to the Parliament, and brought them as prisoners into this stronghold, demanding large sums for their ransom."

"Whoever said so has belied me," remarked the countess.

"I can give a positive denial to that statement, Sir Thomas," interposed Major Farrington. "No such thing has occurred."

"It is an invention of the false traitor Bootle," remarked the countess. "My soldiers are not marauders."

"I will not dispute the point, madam," said Fairfax. "I repeat that the arms and ammunition in this fortress—for such it is—must be delivered up to me. On your compliance with this condition, I engage that your ladyship and all your family and household, with all officers, soldiers, and others, composing your garrison shall be suffered to depart to Chester, or any other town they may select in that county—but not in Lancashire."

"I will answer for the whole garrison, Sir Thomas," observed Major Farrington. "Unless by her ladyship's commands—not an officer—not a man will depart."

"And we, her ladyship's chaplains," added Archdeacon Rutter, "refuse to leave her unless in obedience to her injunctions."

"And such injunctions I shall never give," said the countess.

"Neither your chaplains nor any of your household are required to leave you, madam," said Fairfax. "They will be allowed to reside with you at Knowsley, which will be placed at your ladyship's disposal on your submission to the Parliament."

At this proposition all the countess's pride was aroused, and she said haughtily and indignantly:

"And think you, Sir Thomas, that I would act disloyally to my sovereign, and undutifully to my lord and husband, to obtain any favour from the Parliament? No! I reject the offer—scornfully reject it."

"Have patience, madam, and hear me to an end," said Fairfax. "If you prefer it, you shall be allowed to rejoin the earl, your husband, in the Isle of Man, and take with you your family and household."

"Hear me, Sir Thomas," cried the countess. "Much as I desire to behold my lord and husband again—greatly as I suffer at my prolonged separation from him—I will not swerve for a moment, even in thought, from my duty. Unless my lord himself commands me, I will never leave Lathom House. I will rather perish than relinquish my charge."

"Consideration for others may move you, madam," remarked Fairfax. "Your daughters, I doubt not, would fain be with their father."

"You are mistaken, Sir Thomas," said the Lady Henriette Marie, with great spirit. "We will never leave our dear mother, the countess."

"Never!" cried the two others with equal spirit. "We will perish with her."

"You hear, Sir Thomas," said the countess with a proud smile. "We are all of the same opinion."

"So I find, madam," replied Fairfax, "and I much fear I may be compelled to have recourse to extremities, which I am most anxious to avoid. However, in the hope that you may yet change your mind, I will give you two more days for reflection, and during that interval I shall be willing to receive any proposition you may think fit to make to me. You have able advisers with you," he added, glancing at Major Farrington and the three divines, "and will do well to profit by their counsel."

"I should counsel nothing that the Earl of Derby himself would not approve," observed Major Farrington. "And I am certain he would never advise a surrender."

The interview then terminated.

Bowing to the countess, who arose and returned the salutation, Sir Thomas Fairfax departed. He was attended by Major Farrington and Standish, and as he passed through the lines of musketeers, who were still stationed in the court-yard, there arose from them a loud shout, which was taken up by their comrades on the towers and ramparts.

"God save the Earl of Derby and the king," resounded on all sides.

CHAPTER V

How a Stand in the Park was destroyed by Rigby, and a Mill burnt

FAIRFAX rode back in a very thoughtful mood to Ormskirk, where he found Colonel Rigby, and told him his errand had been unsuccessful.

"I expected nothing else from that impracticable and imperious dame," said Rigby. "Then the siege will commence at once?"

"No; I have given her a further delay of two days," replied Fairfax.

"I am sorry for it," said Rigby. "Nothing will be gained by the delay."

"Perhaps reflection may induce her to submit, and I do not wish to treat her harshly," observed Fairfax. "On the day after to-morrow, should I not hear from her in the interim, Colonel Morgan shall take a final message. Meantime, some slight work may be done. Within the park, at the south of the mansion, is a stand from which the earl used to shoot deer. Of late, it appears, this stand has been used as a receptacle for provisions—carcases of sheep and oxen—which have been secretly conveyed to the mansion. It must be destroyed."

"It shall be," said Rigby.

"There is also a windmill on the road to Newburgh, which I make no doubt the countess has found useful. No more corn must be ground there."

"I will take care of that," rejoined Rigby, with a laugh.

"My object is to cut off all supplies," observed Fairfax; "and I believe the loss of that storehouse in the park, together with the windmill, will seriously inconvenience the garrison."

"I doubt it not," said Rigby. "Shall I instruct Captain Browne, the engineer, to draw the lines round the mansion?"

"Ay, that may be done, to show we are in earnest," said Fairfax. "But no attack must be made till the siege is declared."

Rigby immediately proceeded with a troop of horse to the stand in the south park. Three or four persons were within it, but they fled on the approach of the Parliamentarians, leaving behind them a large stock of meat and provisions.

After the structure had been demolished, Rigby took his men to the windmill. The place was unguarded, and no one was to be seen but the miller, who resolutely refused them admittance, and drew up the ladder, so that they could not reach the door, which was high up in the building. At the same time, he himself disappeared.

With some difficulty the ladder was got down, and a couple of troopers mounted it, but the foremost stopped at the door, for he discovered that the interior of the mill was on fire, and turning round, communicated this disagreeable information to his leader.

"Heed not the fire," cried Rigby. "Go in and extinguish it."

"It cannot be extinguished," replied the man. "It burns furiously. I dare not enter."

"What has become of the miller?" shouted Rigby.

"I see him not," replied the trooper. "But most assuredly he will perish in the flames if he comes not forth instantly."

"Look in once more, and tell me if there is much corn in the mill," said Rigby.

The man did as he was bidden, but quickly drew back his head, and dashing down the ladder, upset his comrades on the lower steps.

In another moment the flames burst from the door and window.

As soon as the man had recovered speech, Rigby again put the question to him:

"Didst thou see much corn in the mill?"

"Yea, verily," replied the man. "It seemed to me filled with corn."

"Then let it burn," cried Rigby, "and the miller with it."

And without making an effort to save anything, he rode off, followed by his men.

CHAPTER VI

What happened in the Ruins of Burscough Priory

BETWEEN Lathom House and Ormskirk, in the midst of a wood, stood Burscough Priory—a large religious establishment that had been suffered to go to decay. But the ruins were very picturesque and beautiful, and contained many sculptured shrines and other monuments.

Rigby had heard of the priory, but had not seen it, and he now determined to inspect the ruins.

Taking with him half a dozen men, he sent the rest of his troops to Ormskirk, and rode through the wood to Burscough.

Resolved to examine the interior of the priory, he dismounted, and giving his horse to one of the troopers, he entered the ruins, but had not advanced far, when, to his surprise, he saw a grave-looking personage advancing towards him, who saluted him courteously.

A moment's reflection convinced Rigby that this must be the Spanish gentleman who had been staying at Knowsley, and he therefore said to him sternly:

"If I mistake not, you are Don Fortunio Alava?"

The stranger replied in the affirmative, and added by way of explanation, though he could scarcely make himself understood, since he spoke English with difficulty:

"I have come hither with my daughter. She is praying at a shrine yonder. You will not disturb her?"

"This praying at shrines, and worshipping of images, is an abomination to me," rejoined Rigby.

"But here—in this retired place—such prayers can offend no one," protested Don Fortunio.

"They offend me," said Rigby. "Doubtless you have come here from Lathom House?"

Don Fortunio replied in the affirmative.

"Then return thither forthwith," said Rigby. "It is well for you that there is a truce with the countess, or I had made you a prisoner."

"You are mistaken, Colonel Rigby," said Standish, suddenly appearing from behind a monument, which had hitherto concealed him. "Don Fortunio Alava and his daughter are not unprotected."

"They should have kept within Lathom House at this time," said Rigby. "If they give my soldiers provocation I cannot be answerable for the consequences."

"What provocation can they give your men?" demanded Standish.

"It is an offence to them that Papists should come here to pray," said Rigby; "and they will not permit it. The Spaniards had best go back to Lathom House."

"They are returning to Knowsley, whence they were forcibly taken by Captain Bootle," said Standish.

"That cannot be permitted," rejoined Rigby.

"You will not dispute this warrant from Sir Thomas Fairfax, colonel," said Standish, taking a paper from his belt. "By it Don Antonio Alava and his daughter, with her attendant, are licensed to reside at Knowsley Hall."

"Let me look at the warrant," said Rigby.

After glancing at it he said, sternly:

"I am satisfied. You are at liberty to conduct them to Knowsley—but you yourself must return to Lathom."

"Such is my intention," replied Standish.

Upon this Rigby departed, and mounting his horse rode off with his men.

As soon as he was gone, Engracia and Maria made their appearance from another part of the ruins.

"Heaven be praised that dreadful man is gone!" cried Engracia. "I was afraid we should be made prisoners."

"I have got a safe-conduct for you from the general," replied Standish; "and even the audacious Rigby would not dare to disobey it. You can now return to Knowsley."

"But I shall be afraid to remain there," she said.

"You will be safer there than at Lathom," said Standish.

"But you will never be able to come to Knowsley when the siege commences?" she remarked.

"Not often, I fear," he replied. "All communication will be cut off by the enemy's lines."

"Then I will stay at Lathom."

"But the countess may not desire to have us there," observed her father. "We must not presume too far on her hospitality."

"Let us see her once more, dear father, before we return to Knowsley?" said Engracia.

"She must not be put to the slightest inconvenience. I will never consent to that," said Don Fortunio.

The horsemen whom Standish had brought with him, and Don Fortunio's steed, and the two palfreys belonging to Engracia and her attendant, were in waiting at the back of the ruins, and so well concealed, that they had escaped the notice of Rigby and his troopers.

On the arrival of the party at Lathom, the countess chanced to be in the courtyard, and without a moment's hesitation declared that, under the circumstances, they ought to proceed to Knowsley.

"With Sir Thomas Fairfax's warrant you will be quite safe there," she said, "and will have none of the inconvenience you would have to endure here."

Engracia would much rather have remained at Lathom with all its perils, but Don Fortunio was perfectly satisfied, and thanked her ladyship for her consideration. So they set out at once for Knowsley, and were escorted thither by Standish.

CHAPTER VII

Of the Message brought by Colonel Morgan to the Countess

NEXT day, the countess prepared for the reception of the messenger whom she knew would be sent to her by Sir Thomas Fairfax.

About an hour before noon, Colonel Morgan arrived, attended by a dozen troopers, whom he was obliged to leave outside the gate. No display was made of the strength of the garrison, as was done when Sir Thomas Fairfax visited the castle.

Colonel Morgan dismounted in the outer court, and was at once conducted to the countess.

A man of small stature, with a very fierce expression of countenance, heightened by a pair of piercing black eyes. His manner was exceedingly consequential, far more so than that of Fairfax, and he comported himself very haughtily towards Major Farrington, who received him, and conducted him to the countess.

Colonel Morgan had won a considerable reputation for activity and courage, and was reputed a very skilful engineer. As he marched through the court with Major Farrington, he encountered several of the officers, and eyed them sharply, almost menacingly, and he also glanced inquisitively at the ramparts.

The countess received him in the presence-chamber, but very coldly, being highly displeased by his manner. Only Archdeacon Rutter and Captain Standish were with her at the time.

In a somewhat insolent tone he informed her that Sir Thomas Fairfax agreed to her conditions, and would allow her to take her children, her chaplains, and her servants to the Isle of Man, but she must disband all her men, and prepare to receive an officer and forty Parliamentary soldiers as her guard.

"Disband all my men?" cried the countess.

"Before noon to-morrow," said Colonel Morgan, peremptorily.

"And you, I presume, are the officer in command?" remarked the countess.

"Your ladyship has guessed aright. It is so," he replied. "I trust I shall be able to carry back a satisfactory answer to the general."

"You will tell Sir Thomas Fairfax that I refuse his proposition—entirely refuse it," she rejoined. "And I am heartily glad he has refused mine. Were it to save my life I would not renew the offer. Had my lord been in command here you had not dared to offer this insult to him,"

"No insult is intended to your ladyship," re-marked Colonel Morgan. "The general merely requires you to disband your garrison."

"Is it not an affront to send such a message to me?" said the countess. "Did Sir Thomas expect compliance? If he did, he little knows me. I am ready to resist his utmost violence, and trust in Heaven for protection and deliverance. As to you, sir, who have dared to bring me this insolent message, and have ventured to intimate to me that you are appointed to the command of the castle—you shall never set foot in it again."

"I may not be admitted, madam, but it is possible I may enter, nevertheless," said Morgan, boldly.

"Shall I cast him forth, madam, for his insolence and presumption?" cried Standish.

"No, I have promised him free access and a safe return," said the countess. "But he has abused his license."

"I do not desire to offend your ladyship, and am sorry if I have done so," said Colonel Morgan, in a slightly apologetic tone. "I share in the high respect which the general bears for you, and regret that you will not submit to the ordinances of the Parliament. Resistance will be impossible against the large force we shall bring, and by which the castle will very shortly be completely invested. We have ordnance of the largest size, bombards, basilisks, and a great mortar, that will cast forth grenades that cannot fail to burn down the place."

"I fear not your grenades," said the countess. "Heaven will protect me."

"Your terrible mortar will do us no mischief," said Standish. "We will take it from you."

"That is not all," said Morgan. "We will proceed against you by sap and mine."

"We will meet you however you may come," said Standish.

"Enough of this," cried the countess. "I make no boast of my strength, but my cause is just, and I am assured it will triumph."

"May I have a word more with your ladyship ere I depart?" said Morgan. "I am authorised by Sir Thomas Fairfax to grant you another day's delay if you desire it."

"I will not be beholden to your general for any further favour," replied the countess. "Let him come how he will, and when he will, he shall find me prepared. Conduct the messenger to the gate."

While mounting his horse in the court-yard, Colonel Morgan said to Standish, who had conducted him thither:

"I am persuaded this is not the last interview I shall have with her ladyship. Possibly, when I am next admitted to her presence, she may treat me with more courtesy than on the present occasion."

"Before that, I trust, you and I shall meet again, colonel?" said Standish, significantly.

CHAPTER VIII

How the Intrenchments were made

BY this time the Parliamentarians had taken up their quarters at various points round the castle.

Colonel Rigby was encamped near Newburgh, Colonel Moore on the road to Ormskirk, and Colonel Assheton and Sir Thomas Fairfax on the south side, where the tents could be descried amongst the trees.

The besiegers now numbered a force of more than two thousand men—five hundred horse, and fifteen hundred foot—quite sufficient, it was thought, for the reduction of the place.

The mansion was now completely invested, parties of men being posted so closely together that all communication with friends was cut off.

Already the lines had been marked out by the engineers, and the pioneers had commenced digging the trenches. They were assisted by several hundred sturdy yeomen and hinds, all of them being Lord Derby's tenants or servants, who were forced by threats and blows to do work that was most distasteful to them.

Some of these poor fellows broke away and ran towards the castle, but the mounted guard galloped after them and brought them back.

The intrenchments were begun at night at the distance of a musket-shot from the mansion, and in a place screened by the rising ground from the ordnance on the towers, and the pioneers and their assistants laboured so hard that before dawn considerable progress had been made. Concealment was then no longer possible, and fire was opened upon them from the walls of the castle, but little mischief was done.

From this time the work proceeded rapidly, being continued night and day without intermission. A deep trench, sheltered by a breastwork of earth, gradually encircled the mansion, and imprisoned its occupants. Constant attacks were made on the pioneers, but no real interruption was effected, and the work went on.

Posted on the Eagle Tower, the countess viewed the progress of this work with ill-suppressed rage, but without uneasiness. In this exalted position, she was out of reach of the enemy's guns, for as yet no large piece of ordnance had been directed against the house, and all shot had been fired against the ramparts.

No serious assault, however, had been made; nor did any such seem intended.

Evidently, the design of Sir Thomas Fairfax, and the other Parliamentary leaders, was to terrify the countess into submission, but if they could have seen her on the Eagle Tower, with Major Farrington, Archdeacon Rutter, and her daughters, they would have felt she would not be easily intimidated. Her sole feeling was that of anger against her foes, and an almost irrepressible desire to attack them. But she was far too prudent not to check the impulse.

Not unfrequently, was Gertrude Rosworm present, and if her sentiments could be judged by her flashing eyes, she shared the countess's indignation, and longed to assail the besiegers.

From this eminent position, the beholders not only overlooked the rising ground on the further side of the moat, and the breastwork of the trenches, but could distinguish the pioneers and their assistants at work. They saw the Parliamentary commanders riding from point to point, each with a troop of horse; they saw the numerous parties of infantry posted around; and they likewise descried in the distance the different encampments of the enemy.

While they were gazing at this picture, Sir Thomas Fairfax, whom they easily recognised, rode round the intrenchments, followed by a troop of horse. He was attended by Colonel Browne, the chief engineer, and Colonel Morgan, and halted ever and anon to inspect the works.

Several shots were fired at him, and though he escaped, two of his men were killed. He did not seem in the slightest degree disturbed by these occurrences, but continued his inspection quietly, as if nothing had happened.

The countess could not help admiring his coolness and courage, and she was still watching him as he moved on, when Captain Standish made his appearance.

"I have a request to prefer to your ladyship," he said. "It is that Captain Chisenhale and myself may be permitted to sally forth on the enemy tomorrow morning. The trenches are now nearly opposite the gateway, and we wish to

give the pioneers a check. Captain Chisenhale will take with him a hundred musketeers, and I will support him with a dozen horse. Captain Ogle will cover our retreat."

Before making a reply, the countess glanced at Major Farrington who was standing near.

"'Tis too hazardous," he replied. "If twenty or thirty musketeers are left behind in the trenches the loss will be serious to your ladyship."

"But we shall strike a heavy blow against the enemy, and bring back arms and prisoners," said Standish. "As yet we have done nothing. 'Tis time our assailants should be reminded that they have good soldiers to deal with."

"True," remarked the countess. "I consent to the attack. I have perfect reliance on you and Captain Chisenhale."

"We will not disappoint your ladyship," said Standish.

"I hope you are not too sanguine of success," said Major Farrington.

"The first blow is half the battle, and we must strike it," rejoined Standish. "If we are successful—as I believe we shall be—the enemy will be disheartened, and the garrison encouraged. It will gladden Captain Chisenhale to learn that I have obtained your ladyship's assent to the sally."

CHAPTER IX

Of the Sortie made by Captains Chisenhale and Standish

NEXT morning, at an early hour, as previously arranged, both gates of the castle were thrown open, the drawbridge was lowered, and a hundred stalwart musketeers, headed by Captain Chisenhale and Lieutenant Bretergh, suddenly sallied forth. They were quickly followed by Captain Standish and a dozen well-mounted and well-armed troopers.

As soon as the musketeers and troopers had crossed the drawbridge, which they did with great expedition, it was instantly raised, and the outer gate shut.

Meanwhile every precaution had been taken. The cannoniers in the two tall towers, flanking the gate-house, were standing beside their guns with lighted matches in their hands, and the large guard-chamber above the gate was filled with musketeers, with whom were Captain Ogle and Lieutenant Kay.

Indeed, the whole garrison was astir, and there were numerous lookers-on at the sortie, though being concealed in the towers on the walls, they could not be descried by the enemy.

Amongst the watchers was the countess herself. Already she had ascended the Eagle Tower—the only persons with her being Archdeacon Rutter and Gertrude Rosworm.

She had seen the brave band of musketeers assemble noiselessly in the court, where they were marshalled by Captain Chisenhale and his lieutenant, who gave them their final orders. She had seen Standish come forth with his little troop of horse, and thought how well both the men and their leaders looked. She beheld both parties pass through the gates, and for a moment lost sight of them, for they were hidden from view by the towers. Earnestly—most earnestly—did she pray for their success.

Gertrude looked on with equal interest, though feelings of a different kind agitated her breast, and her chief anxiety was for Standish. What would she have given to accompany him. Archdeacon Rutter regarded the sortie more calmly, but even he was deeply interested.

When next the watchers beheld the musketeers, they were marching swiftly, and in a compact body towards the trenches with Captain Chisenhale at their

head, and Lieutenant Kay at the rear. Close behind rode Standish with his troop.

No sooner were they discovered by the sentinels, than the alarm was given, and several shots were fired against them.

But Chisenhale would not allow his men to return the fire. Hurrying forward as quickly as he could, he spread out his force, and quickly climbing the breastwork, poured a murderous fire into the trenches, killing a great number of the besiegers, and putting the rest to flight.

The fugitives, however, were intercepted by Standish, who had crossed with his men at a point not yet reached by the pioneers, and a sharp conflict ensued.

The Parliamentarians greatly outnumbered their assailants, and ought to have made a stand; but the furious onset of the Royalists proved irresistible.

With loud shouts of "For the king and the Earl of Derby!" they dashed among their opponents, hewing them down, or trampling them under foot.

Half a dozen prisoners were taken, and more than thrice that number of the rebels were killed—but not a single Royalist was wounded.

An hour had not elapsed since the sortie was made, and the victorious Royalists were returning to the castle with a great number of arms—swords, pistols, musquetoons, bandoleers, and match-tubes—a drum and a flag—together with the prisoners previously mentioned.

The triumphant issue of the conflict had been witnessed with great exultation from the towers and ramparts of the mansion, and loud shouts hailed the victors on their return.

CHAPTER X

Of the important Prisoner brought in by Standish

NO one was more elated than the countess, though she veiled her satisfaction under a calm exterior.

Quitting the Eagle Tower, she repaired to the court-yard with her daughters and Gertrude, and arrived there just as Chisenhale and Standish entered the gate.

The services of Captain Ogle, who was waiting to cover their retreat, had not been required, but he was first to welcome them back.

By this time the court-yard was thronged. Major Farrington and all the officers not employed in the affair, had assembled to congratulate their friends on their success. The whole place resounded with shouts.

Standish and Chisenhale, with their two lieutenants, lost no time in presenting themselves to the countess, who was stationed near the entrance of the mansion, and received her congratulations and hearty thanks.

"You have indeed rendered me a most important service," she said; "and though I never doubted your courage and zeal, I scarcely thought it possible you could achieve so much."

"Our success is mainly owing to the bravery of our followers, who have displayed the greatest gallantry," said Captain Chisenhale. "They have given the rebels a lesson that will not easily be forgotten."

"I am proud of both officers and men—and with good reason," rejoined the countess. "As to you, Captain Standish, you have amply redeemed your promise, and have brought back both arms and prisoners."

"I have brought with me a far more important prisoner than I ever expected to capture," replied Standish.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the countess. "Where is he?"

"Yonder, with the others," replied Standish.

"They are all accoutred alike," said the countess. "I see no one who appears above the rank of a common soldier."

"Yet the ablest engineer in the service of the Parliament is amid the group," rejoined Standish.

"The ablest engineer!" exclaimed the countess in surprise. "That should be Colonel Rosworm. You would not have me understand that he is a prisoner?"

Then calling to Gertrude, who was standing near, she said to her:

"Look at those men. Do you recognise any one of them?"

Gertrude remained silent.

"Is your father there?" pursued the countess. "Be not afraid to speak. No harm shall befall him."

"After that promise I will avow the truth," rejoined Gertrude. "He is there, madam."

"Bring Colonel Rosworm forward that I may question him," said the countess to Standish.

The injunction was obeyed, and in another moment the prisoner stood before her.

He maintained a very bold demeanour, and signed to his daughter, who would have rushed forward to him, to remain quiet.

"Do I behold Colonel Rosworm?" asked the countess. "If so, I may deem myself singularly fortunate."

"I am the person you suppose, madam," replied the prisoner. "I have no desire for concealment. I am certain I shall be honourably treated by your ladyship."

"You may rely on that, sir," she replied. "I bear you no personal enmity. Apart from your hostility to the king, I esteem your character, and I have the highest opinion of your skill as an engineer. But how is it that I see you in this disguise?"

"My buff coat is not intended as a disguise, madam," he replied. "I have doffed my cuirass and other accoutrements, in order that I might work more freely in the trenches. I did not expect to appear before your ladyship, or I would have come more suitably attired. But, in sooth, I had not time for any change of dress. When your musketeers climbed the breastwork, and fired into the trench, I cared not to tarry there, and had enough to do to save my life by flight. Having no arms to defend myself, I was subsequently taken prisoner by Captain Standish, but he did not demand my name."

"I knew you perfectly well, colonel, and deemed the inquiry unnecessary," remarked Standish. "But I had another reason for the course I pursued," he added, turning to the countess. "I wished to give your ladyship an agreeable surprise, and I think I have succeeded in my aim."

"You have," she observed, with a smile. "As to you, Colonel Rosworm, I am really glad to see you. You will be a prisoner on parole, and while you are detained here you shall not have to complain of harsh treatment. Till you are ransomed, or exchanged as a hostage of war, you shall have as much liberty as you can reasonably desire, and enjoy the society of your daughter."

"I thank your ladyship for your great consideration," replied Rosworm. "And I readily give you my word that I will not attempt to escape."

"Enough," said the countess. "Of necessity, you must submit to a certain restraint—but it shall not be much."

Any uneasiness that Gertrude might have felt was now completely dispelled. Coming forward she said to the countess:

"Am I at liberty to speak to my father, madam?"

"Assuredly," replied the countess. "It is my wish that you should be together as much as you please. Find a lodging for him forthwith. I commit him to your charge."

In another minute Gertrude and Rosworm had disappeared, but not till both had expressed their gratitude.

Most of those who witnessed this scene thought the countess showed far too much consideration to the German engineer; but Major Farrington, Archdeacon

Rutter, and Standish regarded her conduct differently, and thought it exceedingly judicious.

The rest of the captives were not quite so fortunate. The countess did not deign to notice them. Taken to the gate-house, they were confined in the prison under the guard-room, there to remain till the chances of war might effect their liberation.

It will not be supposed that Lady Derby neglected to return thanks to Heaven for the success vouchsafed her. From the courtyard she proceeded to the chapel, whither all the officers and most of the men engaged in the sortie, followed her.

It was a service to be remembered, since there was one person present on the occasion, who could not have been looked for.

This was Rosworm. Probably Gertrude induced him to attend; but be that as it may, the countess was well pleased to behold him in the chapel.

CHAPTER XI

How the Countess received a Visit from several Royalist Gentlemen

NEXT day, being Sunday, there was a suspension of hostilities, and no firing took place on either side.

It could not be discovered whether the enemy were at work in the trenches, but it seemed not, and it was certain the different parties of men collected near the tents were singing psalms, or listening to the lengthy discourses of their preachers, for their voices could be heard by the musketeers on the towers and gate-house, even at that distance.

If the besiegers were engaged in their devotions so were the besieged. Half the garrison attended divine service in the chapel at an early hour in the morning, and the remainder later on, when a thanksgiving sermon was preached by Archdeacon Rutter.

In the afternoon, an incident occurred for which the countess was quite unprepared.

She was in the great hall with her daughters and some other persons, when Major Farrington came to inform her that some half-dozen Royalist gentlemen, with whom she was well acquainted, had just arrived at the castle.

Scarcely able to credit the statement, she inquired who they were, and how it came to pass that they were permitted by the enemy to approach the gate.

"They have a safeguard from Sir Thomas Fairfax, who is desirous they should have an interview with your ladyship," replied Major Farrington; "as he hopes they may induce you to surrender the mansion."

"Methought you said they are Royalist gentlemen with whom I am well acquainted," remarked the countess. "They can know little of me, if they entertain any such notion. Who are they?"

"The principal person among them is Sir Thomas Prestwich," replied Major Farrington. "With him are Sir Edward Litten, Sir John Getherick, Mr. Gillibrand, Mr. Fleetwood, and Mr. Leigh—all adherents of the noble lord, your husband, and devoted to the royal cause."

"Bring them to me, I pray you," said the countess. "I shall be glad to see them."

Shortly afterwards the gentlemen in question were ceremoniously ushered into the hall, and presented to her ladyship by Major Farrington, who received them very courteously.

"I am glad to see you, gentlemen," she said, "though I marvel you have been able to obtain admittance to me."

"We could not have done so, but for the consideration shown us by General Fairfax," replied Sir Thomas Prestwich. "We have a petition to your ladyship, signed by many friends and adherents of your noble husband, praying you to make terms with your enemies, who are disposed to treat you honourably and fairly, and not continue a useless resistance."

"I thank you, gentlemen, for the interest you take in me," she replied; "but you would have done better to petition those rebellious leaders who have plundered and spoiled the county to cease their wicked actions, rather than come to me, who seek to attack no one, but desire only to defend my children and my mansion during my lord's enforced absence. You profess yourselves loyal servants of the king, and I do not doubt your zeal, but see you not that you are taking part with his enemies in bringing this petition to me? It is the aim of Sir Thomas Fairfax and those with him to induce me to surrender. But they will fail. No representations, either of friend or foe, shall induce me to take such an unworthy course. I will make no terms with declared rebels and traitors, for those who are faithless to their sovereign are not likely to be true to me. You shall take no message back from me to Sir Thomas Fairfax, save one of defiance. With Heaven's help I will hold my house against him and all my enemies, and he will never induce me to surrender, either by promises that I disbelieve, or threats that I despise. Take back this answer from me, I pray you, Sir Thomas, to General Fairfax, and say it is final. I will receive no more messages from him—nor would I have received this, had it not been brought by you."

"We applaud your resolution, madam," said Sir Thomas Prestwich. "You have entirely changed our sentiments. We were led to believe it would be impossible for you to hold out against the force brought against you, but we now think otherwise."

"Have you not heard of the success of our sortie yesterday, Sir Thomas?" asked Major Farrington. "We have made a most important prisoner. Colonel Rosworm is now in our hands."

"No mention was made to us of the circumstance," replied Prestwich. "The capture of Rosworm is indeed important."

"He is here," remarked Major Farrington. "Look towards the bottom of the hall, and you will behold him. You can now tell Sir Thomas Fairfax that you have seen him here."

"I shall not fail to do so," replied Prestwich. "We will now take our leave of your ladyship."

"Nay, you must not depart thus, gentlemen," she said. "Stay and dine with me, I pray you. You will then be able to tell Sir Thomas Fairfax that we do not lack provisions."

The party required little pressing, but willingly consented to stay.

Orders having been sent to the steward by Major Farrington, an abundant repast was speedily served, to which more than fifty persons, including the chaplains and officers, sat down.

Sir Thomas Prestwich and his companions were placed at the upper end of the table near the countess, and only separated from them by Doctor Brideoake was Colonel Rosworm.

In taking leave of her ladyship, her visitors bade her be of good cheer, and as they passed through the gate they called out "God bless the king and the Earl of Derby."

CHAPTER XII

How Rosworm was taken by Standish to the Guard-room in the Gate-house

COLONEL ROSWORM seemed quite reconciled to his captivity. Indeed, there was nothing irksome about it, since he was treated rather as a guest than as a prisoner.

The countess directed Standish to show him every attention, and take him where he would, except upon the Eagle Tower and ramparts.

Rosworm had thus an opportunity of seeing the men, and was greatly struck by their appearance. Almost all of them were stalwart fellows with a very resolute expression of countenance, and though many of them were not equipped as soldiers, but looked like what they were—huntsmen, keepers, and fowlers—he could not doubt they were excellent marksmen, and admirably adapted for the service on which they were employed.

"Those men have been most judiciously chosen," he remarked to Standish; "and now I see them and their long fowling-pieces, I do not wonder that so many of our pioneers have been shot."

"I will show you some of our best marksmen," said Standish. "They have just finished their watch, and have gone into the guard-room. We shall find them there."

With this, he took Rosworm to the gatehouse, near which half a dozen musketeers were posted, and entering a small door in one of the towers, mounted a short circular staircase that brought them to the guard-room.

A large square chamber, with strong stone walls, and a staircase on either side that afforded instant communication with the leads above on which two pieces of ordnance were placed.

Narrow loopholes commanded the drawbridge, and there was a mullioned window looking towards the outer court.

Within the chamber were machines for raising and lowering the two portcullises.

Seated on benches at a stout oak table, and making a hearty meal from a cold meat pasty were a dozen stalwart men. Occasionally they applied to a large jug of beer placed in the centre of the table, but these interruptions were not frequent.

All these individuals wore buff coats, and belts from which hung powder- flasks and pouches containing bullets; while reared against the walls were long fowling-pieces and screwed guns evidently belonging to them.

So occupied were the hungry marksmen with their meal, that they did not notice the entrance of Standish and his companion; and besides, the intruders were partly hidden by the portcullis which had been raised.

"What hast thou done, Tom Thornhaugh?" asked a man whose back was towards them, of a brawny yeoman who sat opposite him. "I heard thee fire twice, and I suppose neither shot missed?"

"Thou art right, Dick Bold," replied Thornhaugh. "It grieves me to kill those poor country folk who are forced in the trenches—but I couldn't help it. I wish I could get a shot at some of their officers—but they always contrive to keep out of reach."

"Not always," rejoined Dick Bold, with a laugh. "I should have lodged a bullet in Captain Bootle's brain this morning, had he not worn a combed headpiece."

"I have been on the look out for Colonel Rigby," remarked another, whose name appeared to be Launce Walker; "but he was too cautious to come near."

"Ay, marry, Rigby would have been a feather in thy cap, Launce," observed Dick Bold. "All the garrison would have rejoiced at his death, but thou say'st truly—he won't expose himself to danger."

"Nay, we ought to give the devil himself his due," observed another of the company. "Rigby doesn't want courage."

"He doesn't want cunning and malice," said Dick Bold. "I verily believe it is he who has caused this place to be besieged. He hates our good lord because he trailed his friend Captain Birch under a hay-cart at Manchester. That was a good jest."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the whole company.

"I wish Captain Standish would make Rigby a prisoner in his next sally," remarked Thornhaugh.

"We have got a prisoner worth a dozen of Rigby," said Dick Bold.

"You mean Colonel Rosworm," remarked Launce Walker.

"Ay," rejoined Bold. "If he would only join us, we should have nothing to fear."

"We have nothing to fear as it is," said Launce. "But no doubt Rosworm could give us great help."

At this juncture the person referred to made a movement to depart.

"Let us go," he said. "I have played the listener too long."

But Standish detained him, and drew him forward.

As soon as the men became aware of Rosworm's presence they all arose.

"I have heard what you have just said," Rosworm remarked; "and I thank you for the good opinion you seem to entertain of me."

"Join us, colonel! join us!" they cried with one voice.

"No, I cannot do that," he replied. "But I will not fight against you if I can help it."

"You must not have the opportunity of doing so, colonel," said Standish. "Now you are here, we must keep you with us."

"Ay, that we must," cried the men.

"But the countess has promised to exchange me," rejoined Rosworm. "And you well know she will keep her word."

"Ay, if her ladyship has made you that promise no more need be said. But you may change your mind, colonel, and stay."

"I don't think that likely," he rejoined.

"Then we must try and prevent your departure," cried the men.

"I feel no apprehension on that score," laughed Rosworm, as he quitted the guard-room with Standish.

CHAPTER XIII

In what Manner a Letter was sent to Colonel Rosworm

AS they returned through the court, they saw the countess and her daughters. She was attended by Major Farrington, Archdeacon Rutter, and one or two of the officers.

"I must now leave you," said Standish. "Her ladyship is about to ascend the Eagle Tower, and I must attend her."

"You should caution her not to expose herself too much," said Rosworm. "At present we have no cannon that can reach the summit of that tower—but some bombards and a culverin are expected."

"I will tell her what you say," rejoined Standish.

And he proceeded towards the entrance of the Eagle Tower.

Rosworm was still in the outer court, pacing to and fro, and thinking over what had just occurred, when a soldier halted beside him, and holding out his hand as he spoke, said, in a significant tone:

"I have just picked up this ball, colonel. Have you dropped it?"

Thus addressed, Rosworm looked at the man and saw that he held between his fingers and thumb, a wax ball about the size of a musket bullet.

"Give it me," he said, instantly comprehending what was meant.

The man complied, and without waiting to be thanked, marched on.

The incident did not occupy more than a minute, so that if noticed by the musketeers on the ramparts, it was not likely to excite suspicion.

Rosworm continued his promenade for a short time longer, and then repairing to his lodging, which was in an outbuilding attached to the mansion, he broke the ball, and found—as he expected—that it contained a letter, written on very thin paper.

He fancied the handwriting was that of Captain Bootle, but as the words were traced in pencil, he did not feel quite sure.

The message was very brief, and ran thus:

"Means will be found to effect your escape. Be prepared. You have a friend in the house."

"The offer is useless," mentally ejaculated Rosworm, after he had read the missive. "I have promised the countess not to attempt flight, and I cannot break my word."

While he was revolving the matter, a tap was heard at the door, and Gertrude entered the chamber.

"Do you find your captivity irksome, dear father?" she inquired. "You look melancholy."

"Were I not bound by my word, I need not remain here," he replied. "Means of escape have just been offered me. Read that letter."

After casting her eyes over it, Gertrude said:

"I will not ask how this letter was brought you, father; "but I am sorry to find we have traitors in the castle."

"Those traitors are my friends," remarked Rosworm. "No word must be said of this matter to the countess."

"She ought to know it, father," rejoined Gertrude.

"She must not, child," said Rosworm, sternly, and authoritatively. "It is sufficient that I shall not avail myself of the offer made me."

"But by the same means which would be employed for your flight a secret communication may be kept up with the enemy."

"That cannot be helped," said her father.

"I do not feel that I shall be doing my duty to the countess by keeping silence, father."

"Your duty is to me, child. I lay my commands upon you. You will not dare to disobey them."

Well knowing that remonstrance would be useless, Gertrude did not attempt it, but she said:

"Would it were possible, father, that you could aid this noble lady to defend her mansion against the rebels!"

Rosworm shook his head, but his looks showed that her entreaties had produced some impression.

Seeing this, she flung herself on her knees before him, and exclaimed:

"I will not rise till you grant my prayer! Aid her, I implore you, dear father! aid her!"

"I cannot, daughter," replied Rosworm. "My sympathies are with her, but I must not—cannot aid her. Besides," he added, after a pause, "I do not think she needs assistance."

"You give me hopes," she cried, rising to her feet. "You are of opinion that the countess will triumph?"

"From what I have seen since I came here I am convinced she can hold out till the Earl of Derby comes to her deliverance."

"May I tell her you have said so? It will give her hopes."

"As you please," he replied. "It is really my opinion."

Just then, the door was opened, and Standish entered the room.

"I bring you good news, Colonel Rosworm," he said. "You are no longer a prisoner."

"I will not suppose for a moment that you are jesting with me, Captain Standish," rejoined Rosworm. "But I am scarcely able to credit the intelligence."

"What has happened?" asked Gertrude, equally astonished.

"Your father has been ransomed," replied Standish. "A letter has just been brought from Sir Thomas Fairfax, offering a large sum as a ransom for Colonel Rosworm, and the countess has accepted the offer. You are therefore free, and can return with the messenger. Her ladyship has sent me to convey the intelligence to you, well knowing the errand would be agreeable to me."

"I thank you heartily, Captain Standish," rejoined Rosworm. "The intelligence is wholly unexpected on my part, for I need scarcely say I have had no communication with Sir Thomas Fairfax, and I did not think he valued my services so highly as to offer a ransom for my liberation."

"Then you will depart at once, father," cried Gertrude, "and again join the ranks of the enemy."

"I shall not depart without taking leave of the countess," rejoined Rosworm, "and thanking her for the generous treatment I have experienced."

"Her ladyship has descended from the Eagle Tower, and is now on the parade," said Standish "I will conduct you to her."

Having no preparations to make for his departure, Rosworm at once accompanied Standish to the outer court, where they found the countess and her usual attendants.

At some little distance stood the Parliamentary officer who had brought the message from Sir Thomas Fairfax.

"Colonel Rosworm is come to take leave of your ladyship," said Standish, leading the sometime prisoner forward.

Rosworm bowed deeply, and in accents that bespoke his sincerity, thanked the countess for the great kindness she had shown him.

"Rarely has a prisoner of war been treated as I have been," he said ; "and I shall ever entertain a grateful sense of your ladyship's kindness. But I fear I shall never be able to requite it. May I ask if you have made any stipulations in regard to my release?"

"None whatever," she replied. "You are free to act as you think proper. Had I made any bargain I would have consulted you."

"Such noble conduct is worthy of you, madam," said Rosworm. "You set an example to your enemies which they will do well to follow."

With another profound salutation, he turned to depart.

After bidding adieu to his daughter, he joined the officer, who was waiting for him, and they were conducted by Standish and a guard to the gate.

On the way hither, they encountered Captain Chisenhale and Captain Ogle. Both of them bowed to him and the former remarked:

"We shall be glad to see you here again, colonel, in the same character."

In another minute Rosworm had passed through the wicket at the side of the gate, crossed the drawbridge, and was riding with the messenger and a sergeant who had accompanied him on his errand towards the camp.

On the way thither, he looked back once or twice at the beleaguered mansion, but made no remark, nor did he answer any questions put to him by his companion.

CHAPTER XIV

A Traitor punished

A MIST rendered it very dark that night, and one of the sentinels stationed on the ramparts at the back of the castle, fancying he heard some one swimming across the moat, fired in the direction of the sound, but missed his aim owing to the obscurity.

It was subsequently discovered that one of the soldiers—the same who had delivered the secret letter to Rosworm—had got out at the postern gate, and favoured by the darkness had effected his escape in the manner described.

This circumstance being mentioned to Standish, caused him some uneasiness, for though he could not account for the man's flight at that juncture, he felt certain he was a traitor.

After some discussion with Captain Chisenhale and Lieutenant Bretergh, these two officers resolved to anticipate any attack that might be made by the enemy, and give them another alarm in the trenches.

Accordingly, about an hour later accompanied by thirty musketeers, they proceeded to the postern tower, part of which stood on the further side of the moat, and beyond the palisades, and issuing forth from a small door strongly cased with iron, marched swiftly and silently towards the trenches.

But they were not so successful as on the previous occasion. The enemy were more on the alert, and had placed sentinels on the breastwork.

Though these men could not distinguish the sallying party, they were warned of their approach by the lighted matches carried by the musketeers, and gave the alarm; whereupon their comrades instantly quitted the trenches, and speeded towards an adjoining wood; whither they were chased by Chisenhale and his company.

Sheltered by the trees, the fugitives sustained little loss, and only three or four were killed.

One prisoner was likewise made, and this proved to be Ralph Thorold, the man who had just escaped from the garrison.

When brought back to the mansion, and interrogated by Major Farrington, Thorold confessed that he had been in communication with Captain Bootle, but refused to declare how the letters had been brought to him.

Adjudged to die the death of a traitor, he was hanged at an early hour next morning from the battlements of the postern tower in full view of the trenches.

CHAPTER XV

How a Letter sent by the Earl of Derby to Fairfax was brought by Captain Ashhurst to the Countess

NEXT morning, Captain Ashhurst rode with a flag of truce to the gates of the castle, and sought an interview of the countess; stating that he had an important message to deliver to her from Sir Thomas Fairfax.

Though wearied out with propositions ending in nothing, her ladyship consented to receive him, and the messenger was conducted by Standish to the presence-chamber, where he found her with Major Farrington and Archdeacon Rutter.

Captain Ashhurst's manner was extremely respectful, and offered a marked contrast to the insolent deportment that generally characterised a Parliamentary officer.

Bowing to the countess, he informed her that Sir Thomas Fairfax had just received a despatch from the Earl of Derby, and had sent it for her perusal."

"It is here, madam," he continued, handing it to her, "and it is the general's opinion that this letter will have more weight with you than any message he could send."

"Let me see it," said the countess. "Ay, truly, it is from my lord, and sent from Castle Rushen,"

And she could not help pressing her lips to the signature.

Seeing her so much moved, Captain Ashhurst augured well for the success of his mission.

But as she read the letter, her aspect entirely changed, and she looked stern and resolved.

After showing the letter to her advisers, who returned it without a word, she said:

"His lordship writes in error. Unaware of the propositions already made by Sir Thomas Fairfax, and of my rejection of them, he desires an honourable and free

passage for myself and my children, being unwilling to expose us to the danger and suffering of a lengthened siege."

"Exactly so, madam," replied Captain Ashhurst; "and I am instructed by Sir Thomas Fairfax to say that if your ladyship wills it, he will readily grant his lordship's request."

"Tell Sir Thomas Fairfax I am much beholden to him for his consideration in referring the matter to me," she rejoined. "But I must beg that he will henceforth treat with my lord. When I receive my husband's express commands I will obey them, be they what they may. But till I am assured that his lordship desires me to yield up this castle, I will neither quit it, nor make any terms for its surrender."

Both Major Farrington and Doctor Rutter looked at her approvingly, but neither spoke.

"Pardon me, madam," said Captain Ashhurst, "if I venture to observe that the Earl of Derby's wishes are plainly conveyed in this letter. Had not his lordship felt that you ought to surrender, he would not have written in these terms to the general. For that reason Sir Thomas has sent you the letter."

"And I thank him again for his courtesy, and for choosing you as his messenger," replied the countess. "Take back the letter to your general, and tell him that till I learn my lord's pleasure I abide where I am, and wait the event in full confidence of Heaven's support."

Seeing that the audience was at an end, Ashhurst retired, and was conducted to the gate by Standish.

"Yours is a noble lady," he said; "and it is impossible not to sympathise with her. For her own sake I wish she would surrender."

"She has nothing to fear," rejoined Standish.

CHAPTER XVI

How two Pieces of Ordnance were seized by Standish

ON that night, despite a constant fire from the postern tower, the besiegers contrived to bring up a demi-cannon and a culverin, and placed them on the summit of the rising ground beyond the moat.

Next morning the cannoniers on the opposite towers tried ineffectually to dislodge these pieces of ordnance. Several shots were fired from the newly-erected battery against the walls of the mansion, but without doing any material damage.

Afterwards a higher range was taken. Two or three battlements were broken, and a musketeer who imprudently showed himself on the ramparts was killed.

This was regarded as a great achievement by the enemy, who raised a loud shout; but their exultation was soon over, for within a quarter of an hour two of the cannoniers were killed.

Another sortie was made that night by Standish and Chisenhale, accompanied by fifty musketeers—their object being to dismount the two pieces of cannon that had given the garrison so much trouble throughout the day. After a sharp conflict with the guard, during which Captain Chisenhale was slightly wounded, they succeeded in accomplishing their design.

Their triumph would have been complete, if they could have brought the two guns away with them, but this was impracticable.

The besiegers now began to show more activity and determination than they had hitherto displayed.

Provoked at the destruction of their little battery, they brought up a basilisk and a saker, two pieces of ordnance of smaller calibre than a culverin, and planted them against the gate-towers.

A misdirected shot from the basilisk entered the wicket, and killed one of the guard, but did not find its way to the court.

Immediately afterwards the gate was thrown open, and the drawbridge lowered, and a party of horsemen headed by Standish dashed out provided with ropes.

Seizing the two pieces of ordnance, they dragged them into the court, their own retreat being covered by the guns in the gate-towers.

Not a single man was lost on the occasion.

Hitherto, the Royalists had been uniformly successful, and had baffled all the attempts of the enemy, generally inflicting severe loss upon them.

But it was felt that these constant defeats would only make the besiegers more determined, and that their efforts to take the mansion would be redoubled.

The besieged had no fear of such a result, but to prevent it the utmost vigilance and activity were required.

CHAPTER XVII

Of the Preparations made for a Grand Sortie

BY this time the works of the besiegers had made great progress. Bulwarks had been cast up, but as yet all the batteries had not been mounted with cannon.

It was also certain that a mine had been commenced, which it was intended should pass under the moat, either for the purpose of blowing up some of the towers, or cutting off the water.

As the deep well from which the garrison was abundantly supplied was situated in the very centre of the castle, it would necessarily take the miners some time to reach it, and it was resolved to sink a countermine to meet them as soon as their course could be discovered.

Engineers were, therefore, posted in various places to listen for any sounds that might guide them in their task.

Notwithstanding all these disquieting circumstances the courage of the countess remained unshaken, and, indeed, rose higher than ever. Nor was uneasiness manifested by any one in the mansion. Even those not engaged in its defence were full of ardour.

But the person most interested in the siege was Gertrude. As we have shown, she took an active part in the defence of the house—carried messages and orders—mounted ramparts and towers—and watched the cannonier when he pointed his gun, and would have done more if she had been permitted. Her great desire was to attend a sortie, and she would have accompanied the first expedition habited in male attire, if the countess would have allowed her.

With this recklessness, she now passed hours in the postern-tower, accounted the most dangerous part of the castle, being most exposed to a sudden assault of the enemy. Here she could watch the progress of their fortifications, and could count the sakers, the periers, the minions, and falconets on their batteries.

One morning while engaged in her survey she perceived that the besiegers had begun a new fort on which they were most diligently employed.

Fixed on the summit of a rising ground at a short distance on the south-west, it commanded the whole of the mansion; but the position being too high for cannon, it was evident the battery was intended for a mortar, or a bombard. The sconce was circular, and surrounded by a rampart, which, as yet, was unfinished.

On making this discovery, Gertrude hastened to the countess, but her ladyship had already been informed of the new fort by Major Farrington and Standish, and had given orders that it should be destroyed, if possible.

Accordingly the cannoniers had just opened fire, and having killed two of the men, and driven away the rest, were knocking down the ramparts.

"We may check the work for a time," said Standish. "But it is certain it will be resumed on the first opportunity."

"No doubt the sconce is designed for the large mortar, with which we have been threatened," observed Major Farrington.

"The monster shall be silenced as soon as he begins to roar," said Standish. "Meantime, we must make another sortie, and destroy the works. The enemy have been too long unmolested, and have grown insolent."

"I approve of your design," said the countess. "But this time, you must take a large party with you, and do the work effectually. How say you, sir?" she added, to Major Farrington. "I think half the garrison should go forth on this occasion."

"I am quite of your ladyship's opinion," replied Farrington. "We must inflict a blow upon them, calculated to shake their overweening confidence."

"True," rejoined the countess. "The near approach of those forts and batteries is unpleasant to me. You must give Captain Standish the command of this expedition."

"In an affair of this kind, wherein so large a number of men will be concerned, more than one leader will be required," said Major Farrington. "I therefore propose—with your ladyship's approval—to divide the party into three squadrons—one squadron to be commanded by Captain Standish, another by Captain Farmer, and the third by Captain Molineux Radcliffe. This will prevent any jealousy."

"You are right," said the countess. "And I trust Captain Standish is satisfied with the arrangement."

"Perfectly," he replied. "I could desire no better."

"Each officer can take his own lieutenant," pursued Major Farrington.

"Mine shall be Bretergh," cried Standish.

"I propose to make several other arrangements within the mansion," said Major Farrington. "But before doing so, I desire to consult your ladyship."

"Let me hear them," she rejoined.

"First then, at the gates, which must be kept open, and the drawbridge down, I shall station Captain Ogle and a party of musketeers to defend the entrance. Should the enemy approach—though I do not deem it likely—the cannoniers will fire upon them from the towers and gate-house. The sally-port in the postern- tower shall be guarded by Captain Chisenhale with a party of men ready to succour our friends should they need aid. Captain Rawsthorne shall have charge of the musketeers upon the walls, while Captain Foxe shall be posted on the summit of the Eagle Tower, and with a pair of flags signal the movements of the enemy—so that our friends may know when to advance or retire."

"Your plan seems well considered," remarked the countess; "and if fully carried out, as I doubt not it will be, cannot fail to be successful. I have always thought that signals might be given from the Eagle Tower. I will be there myself. And you shall attend me, if you will, damsel," she added to Gertrude.

"Your ladyship could not confer a greater favour upon me," was the reply.

Soon afterwards, Major Farrington and Standish quitted the countess to make preparations for the proposed sortie.

Though the utmost activity prevailed within the garrison, no sign of it was manifest to the enemy, who began to think the besieged had taken alarm and were meditating a surrender. The besiegers therefore resumed the work they had suspended, and repaired the damage done to the sconce, intending to play the mortar with stones of eighty pounds weight on the following day.

CHAPTER XVIII

Of the Daring Deeds done by the Cavaliers in the Sortie; and how the New Fort was taken by Standish

At an early hour next day, Captain Foxe having received his orders from Major Farrington, mounted to the summit of the Eagle Tower, accompanied by a soldier bearing a pair of flags.

As soon as he had gained his post he looked around to see whether anything indicated that the enemy suspected the meditated attack. But there was no unusual movement amongst them.

The morning was bright and clear, and he could perceive every object distinctly, without the aid of a spy-glass, though he had one with him.

Four camps were in view, but there was no unwonted stir in any of them. He saw the men assembling in answer to the morning call, and he likewise beheld small parties moving towards the trenches and fortifications to relieve guard. But the numbers were not greater than usual, nor did the besiegers quicken their march.

Satisfied with this distant survey, he next examined the fortifications, that now completely encircled the besieged mansion. No doubt these earth-works and batteries, though ill-provided with cannon, presented a very formidable appearance, and it seemed absolutely necessary for the security of the place that they should be destroyed.

Captain Foxe had just completed his survey, when turning round he perceived Gertrude, and bade her good-morrow.

"I am sent by the countess for information," she said. "As you are aware, there is to be an early morning service for the officers and men chosen for the attack; and before proceeding to the chapel, her ladyship desired to know if all is quiet without."

"Her ladyship need have no uneasiness," rejoined Foxe. "The enemy suspects nothing. We shall take them by surprise—of that I am certain. If you are going to the chapel, I would entreat you to offer up a prayer for me."

Promising compliance, Gertrude disappeared.

On returning to the countess she told her what she had heard, and the devout dame being freed from all immediate anxiety, proceeded with her daughters to the chapel, which was crowded with musketeers fully equipped for the conflict, and presented a very striking sight.

Never had Archdeacon Rutter preached a more animated sermon than he did on this occasion.

On the conclusion of the service, the three parties of musketeers, each under the command of a captain and lieutenant, were drawn up in the outer court, and after the countess had addressed a few words to them calculated to rouse their ardour, they prepared to sally forth upon the foe.

As the attacks, though made from various points, were to be simultaneous, it was no sooner ascertained that the two squadrons under the command of Captain Farmer and Captain Molineux Radcliffe were ready to issue from the sally-port in the postern tower, than the gate was thrown open, and the drawbridge lowered, and Standish and his men dashed out, while Captain Ogle with another party of musketeers, blocked up the gateway, so as to prevent all ingress of the enemy.

At the same time the walls were thronged with marksmen, under the command of Captain Rawsthorne and Lieutenants Walthew and Halsall.

The engineers in every tower stood beside their guns with lighted match in hand, and only awaited the order to fire.

Need we add that Captain Foxe was at his post?

Just before the attack began, the countess appeared on the Eagle Tower, attended by Gertrude. Captain Foxe did not allow himself to be distracted by their presence, but kept a careful look out.

For a few minutes the countess and her attendant spoke not a word, and strange to say, scarcely a sound seemed to reach them from beneath.

Their gaze was riveted upon the postern-tower.

Suddenly, the sally-port was opened, and from it poured out with astonishing rapidity a large band of musketeers with Captain Farmer at their head.

While they were forming, another party came forth with equal quickness, under the command of Captain Radcliffe.

Before commencing the attack, the two leaders turned their gaze towards the Eagle Tower, and saw that Captain Foxe waved the red flag to them to advance.

By this time the enemy had taken the alarm, and were gathering thickly in their fortifications, whence they fired upon their assailants, but could not check them in their onset.

Sustained by the musketeers and marksmen on the ramparts of the mansion, who were admirably directed by Captain Rawsthorne, the assailants scaled these bulwarks, and drove the engineers from their guns, killing several, and firing with deadly effect upon the soldiers who came to their relief.

While the conflict was raging in this quarter, Captain Standish, who had issued with his men from the gateway, had attacked another part of the works, and with equal bravery and success.

The attack had not lasted more than quarter of an hour, and already he had gained two batteries, and killed three men with his own hand.

But his main object was to spike the great mortar, and leaving Lieutenant Bretergh and those with him to deal with the cannon on the batteries, he forced his way to the rising ground on which the huge piece of ordnance was placed.

An attempt was made by the enemy to defend this little fort, but nothing could resist the impetuosity of Standish and his followers.

In an inconceivably short space of time they climbed the ramparts, and put the engineers to the sword after a brief struggle, and were consequently masters of the fort.

This daring exploit, witnessed from the walls and towers of the mansion, was hailed with shouts.

Striking the wide-mouthed and ponderous piece of ordnance with his sword, and regretting that its enormous weight prevented its removal, Standish ordered it to be spiked, and the work was effectually performed by one of the men who had come provided with a smith's hammer and nails.

While this was going on, Standish looked up at the Eagle Tower and perceived that Captain Foxe was giving him a signal to retreat by waving a white flag in such a manner as to intimate that a large body of the enemy was advancing from the camp.

Compelled, however, to tarry for a few minutes longer, Standish looked around, and witnessed the end of a sharp conflict between Lieutenant Worrall and the occupants of an adjoining battery.

Having sprung suddenly into the work, sword in hand, the valiant lieutenant had been instantly surrounded by a host of his foes, but he managed to defend himself against them all till Captain Farmer came to his assistance and delivered him.

At this juncture Standish caught sight of his friends, and responded to their shout of triumph by waving his sword.

Everywhere success had attended the Cavaliers in their onslaught, though the enemy trebled them in number, and were protected by forts and ramparts. The assailants were supported by the musketeers and cannoniers on the walls and in the towers of the castle; but the latter had to fire carefully for fear of injuring their friends.

But the Cavaliers were so impetuous that they scarcely seemed to need aid. Animated by a burning desire to chastise the insolence of the rebels, and inflict a severe blow upon them, they succeeded almost beyond expectation.

Many daring deeds were done that gave renown to those who performed them. A battery was taken single-handed by Captain Radcliffe, who slew seven men with his own hand, and a feat almost equally remarkable was achieved by Lieutenant Pesketh.

Ere long, a panic seized the besiegers, who had lost altogether more than fifty men. No prisoners were made by the Royalists, because they had found that the Parliamentary commanders were unwilling to exchange them.

Thus the whole line of fortifications was abandoned, all the cannon were spiked, and as far as possible the works were destroyed. An immense number of muskets were taken.

For some moments the signal given by Captain Foxe was unheeded, the victors being unwilling to retire, but at length Captain Standish prepared to re-enter the castle, and the other leaders followed his example.

Though scattered about, the men were speedily got together, and the retreat was executed in very good order, albeit a troop of horse, under the command of Colonel Rigby, was close at hand at the time.

But no attempt at interruption was offered, and Rigby, though highly incensed, did not deem it prudent to expose himself to the fire of the garrison.

Thus Standish was allowed to cross the drawbridge, and pass through the gates unmolested, while equal good fortune befel Captain Farmer and Captain Molineux Radcliffe, as they entered the postern-tower.

On descending from the Eagle Tower, the countess found the three victorious squadrons drawn up in the court-yard, and gave them a hearty greeting, telling them how much she was beholden to them, and how highly she appreciated their valour.

"I have always believed, and I now find I was right," she said, "that I have nothing to fear from the enemy so long as I possess such valiant soldiers as you."

"We have all vowed to defend your ladyship to the last," cried the men enthusiastically. "And we will keep our oath. God bless the king and the Earl of Derby."

And the court resounded with their shouts, which being taken up by the musketeers on the ramparts, were heard by Rigby and his troop, heightening the rage of the Parliamentary commander, and determining him to take ample revenge.

"Your ladyship will be pleased to hear," said Standish, advancing, "that although we have slain many of the enemy, and brought away their arms, we have not left a man behind."

"That is marvellous, and proves that Heaven is with us," replied the countess. "We should be wanting in gratitude if we did not return thanks for the great mercy vouchsafed us."

And accompanied by Archdeacon Rutter and her daughters, she proceeded to the chapel, where shortly afterwards all those who had been engaged in the recent conflict were assembled.

CHAPTER XIX

How a Council of War was held by the Besiegers; and how a Day of Fasting and Prayer was appointed by Fairfax

NOT satisfied with the damage done by the attack just described, the engineers in the towers kept up a constant fire upon the enemy, and strove to prevent them from repairing the fortifications, and unspiking the cannon.

In this manner the besiegers were harassed throughout the entire day, and at night they were alarmed by a fresh sortie conducted by Captain Chisenhale and Captain Ogle.

Though this sortie was on a small scale, and intended merely as an alarm, it was very well carried out, and produced a singular result.

Reinforcements had just been sent to the trenches by Rigby, and the newcomers, perplexed by the shouts and cries which were heard on all sides, fired upon their friends, whom they mistook for foes, and killed several of them. As in the morning, the Royalists escaped without the loss of a man.

These repeated disasters produced the natural effect. The besiegers lost spirit, and fought badly, and it was evident they would go on still worse, if something was not done to rouse them.

A council of war was therefore held in the camp, at which Sir Thomas Fairfax and the three commanders were present.

Rigby, whose rage had not yet subsided, and who considered himself aggrieved by the want of attention paid him by the general, was very anxious that the mansion should be assaulted, but Fairfax would not listen to the proposition.

"I have reason to believe that the place is much stronger than we thought," he said, "and that an assault would be very hazardous. I shall therefore persist in my plan of reducing it by siege. This is slow but sure, whereas if we should be repulsed in an assault, the whole county will ring with the news, hundreds of malignants, who now dare not show their heads, will come here, and immense service will consequently be done to the royal cause."

"Should the attack prove unsuccessful, I grant that such would be the case," replied Rigby; "and I know Rosworm is averse to an assault, but I do not think

there is any risk, and this slow siege disheartens our men. These last successes of the enemy have greatly disheartened them."

"Hitherto, we have been very unlucky, it must be owned, and have succeeded in none of our designs," observed Colonel Assheton. "Our miners have not yet been able to get under the moat, and the scheme to drain the springs on the south- east of the castle that supply the deep well inside has totally failed."

"We must employ another plan, and drain the well itself," said Colonel Moore. "I believe that can be accomplished."

"No doubt," said Fairfax; "and although we have met with many more obstructions in our work than might have been expected, we have made good progress. We have cut off all supplies from without. No fresh provisions have been obtained by the garrison, and as their stores will soon run short, they must submit or starve."

"The prisoners last exchanged declare they have plenty of provisions, and can hold out for a couple of months longer," remarked Rigby.

"It is the countess's policy to make it appear so," observed Fairfax. "But it is not possible the garrison can be so well stored."

"A contrary opinion prevails," remarked Rigby. "But I do not think their sallying parties have succeeded in procuring any fresh provisions, and none can have been introduced in any other way."

"You are sure of that?" said Fairfax.

"I am sure of it," replied Rigby. "Since I took possession of that stand in the park and the windmill neither meat nor flour can have been carried in without our knowledge."

"Then you may be sure the end is not far off," said Fairfax. "The Earl of Derby would never have asked for a free passage for his wife and children had he believed the garrison could long hold out."

"But her ladyship's bold answer seems to have undeceived him, since he now refuses to treat for a surrender," rejoined Rigby.

"I attach little importance to that," said Fairfax. "He well knows her ladyship will be honourably treated. As you say that our men are dispirited by their ill success, and they may haply deem that our undertaking is not approved by Heaven, to-morrow shall be observed as a day of fasting and prayer, and our ministers shall be enjoined to implore Divine assistance in our behalf."

"Such an injunction will do much good," said Rigby, "and we must see that it is strictly obeyed. With so many zealous ministers as we have in the camp, a good effect cannot fail to be produced. Our men will fight all the better after listening to their discourses."

Both Colonel Assheton and Colonel Moore concurred in the opinion that a day of fasting and supplication would do infinite good, and the order for its rigid observance on the morrow was issued accordingly.

Nor was the injunction neglected. In each camp, as we have said, there were several ministers—many more than were needed—but each had a certain number of listeners to whom he addressed his discourse. All preached against the countess, and all earnestly besought Heaven to aid them in their endeavours to drive her from her stronghold, denouncing her as a Papist and an idolatress.

One of the most infuriated amongst them took for his text the words of the Prophet: "Put yourselves in array against Babylon round about: all ye that bend the bow shoot at her, spare no arrows, for she hath sinned against the Lord."

The discourse of this zealot produced the desired effect upon his hearers, and they resolved to carry out his injunctions.

But the soldiers in the trenches were not allowed to pass the day in quiet. Already they had been disturbed in their devotions by an occasional cannon shot falling among them; and at last they were roused to action by shouts and a discharge of musketry that announced that the restless Cavaliers were again at hand.

CHAPTER XX

How a Cannon-shot fired by the Besiegers burst into the Countess's Chamber

THE Countess of Derby, as we have shown, was a very early riser, and generally appeared on the parade with her daughters before attending service in the chapel; but on the third morning after the successful attack had been made upon the enemy, she had not quitted her chamber at a somewhat later hour than usual, owing to the unfavourable state of the weather.

The room was situated at the end of the great gallery in the upper part of the mansion, and had a noble bay window, filled with stained glass, looking towards the south. The furniture was of oak, and richly carved, and the walls were covered with tapestry.

Attached to the room was an ante-chamber, furnished in precisely the same manner, except that it was not provided with a stately bed and a toilette-table. The rooms had formerly been occupied by Earl William and his countess, and in the couch, just alluded to, that pious lady had breathed her last.

On the morning in question the countess was in the ante-chamber, though the door between the rooms usually masked by a piece of arras, was left open. Her private devotions had been finished before she left her bedroom, and she was seated at a table making some additions to a journal, which she kept in the hope that her lord might one day peruse it.

The last records were very satisfactory. All had gone well. Though the besiegers had completed their trenches and mounted their batteries they could not hold them. Their guns had been silenced, their forts partially destroyed, and if they began the work again, she felt sure that with Heaven's aid the like result would follow. Therefore she was of good heart.

As this journal was intended for no other eye than her lord's, she put down within it her in-most thoughts, and these words now flowed from her pen:

"Oh, my dear lord, I have an arduous task to perform, and I trust strength may be given me from Above to accomplish it. At times I want support from thee. Oh! that thou wert with me now, to counsel and encourage me. I know the wish is vain, yet I cannot repress it. After all, I am only a woman."

When the brave lady had finished this sentence, she closed the little volume, and her breast found relief in a deep sigh.

At that moment her countenance had a different expression from that which it habitually wore. The haughty and resolute look that usually marked her features had disappeared, and a feminine softness succeeded, and lasted so long as she was alone; but when Gertrude entered the room, she instantly shook off the feeling and became determined as ever.

"You have a letter for me, I perceive," she said to the damsel, after bidding her good-morrow. "Whence comes it? From Sir Thomas Fairfax?"

"From the noble lord, your husband, madam," replied Gertrude, giving her the letter. "The luckless messenger who brought it reached the posterngate unharmed. There he was struck by a shot from the enemy, but had strength enough left to fling the letter to the guard."

"He should have had a better reward for the service," sighed the countess.

Then opening the letter, and casting her eyes over it, she said:

"My lord approves of my refusal to surrender to Fairfax, and bids me to listen to no propositions, but hold on, as I am certain to be relieved. That is well. Had he commanded otherwise, I could scarce have obeyed him."

"I do not think your ladyship could be forced to surrender to the rebels," observed Gertrude.

"Thou art right, girl," she rejoined. "I will blow up this house and bury us all in the ruins rather than yield to them, so you know the fate that awaits you, if you stay with me."

"I am not afraid," replied Gertrude, with a firmness equal to her own.

"Thou art a brave girl," cried the countess, approvingly.

At this juncture, the three young ladies Stanley entered the room, and flew towards their mother.

"You have a letter from our dear father," they cried. "Is he coming to drive the enemy away?"

"Not yet," replied the countess.

"He may come too late," cried Lady Henriette Marie. "They say the rebels are more threatening than ever, and are determined to batter down our walls as soon as their cannon will fire properly."

"I am afraid of that terrible mortar," said Lady Kate. "Captain Standish says they have taken the nails from it, and we may soon expect to hear its dreadful voice again."

"I think the culverin and the saker make noise enough," said the little Lady Amelia. "We are to have that music all day."

"They will cease firing when they find they can do us no harm," said the countess. "By this time they ought to have found out that they can make no impression on our walls."

"But they may damage the house," said Lady Henriette.

As she spoke, a terrible crash was heard in the adjoining chamber, followed by the descent of a heavy body, making it clear that a cannon shot had entered the window, and dropped upon the floor.

The young ladies Stanley screamed, but the countess and Gertrude maintained their composure, and the latter instantly rushed into the other room to see what had happened.

As she supposed, a ponderous shot had broken the beautiful glass of the bay window, and rolled to the foot of the bed.

"Tis well your ladyship had left the room ere this occurred," said Gertrude, as the countess came in, followed by her daughters, whose countenances bespoke their alarm.

"Yes, I have been wonderfully preserved," replied the countess.

"But you will not continue to occupy the room, mamma?" cried the Lady Henriette.

"Wherefore not?" rejoined her mother, "Heaven will protect me."

They were examining the shot when the voices of Trioche and others of the household were heard without, praying admittance, and the countess bade Gertrude open the door of the ante-chamber.

Great was the delight of these faithful servants to find their noble mistress unhurt, and they were still expressing their satisfaction, when Major Farrington, with Standish and Archdeacon Rutter, made their appearance, and were equally pleased.

"We knew that a shot had struck this part of the building, and feared mischief," said Major Farrington. "But since your ladyship is safe all is well."

"I had no such fear, madam," observed Archdeacon Rutter. "I felt sure Heaven would protect you."

"The engineer who fired that shot will never fire another," said Standish. "He was killed next moment by our marksmen, and his place has not yet been taken, as is evident by the silence of the culverin."

"It may be well that your ladyship should show yourself," said Major Farrington. "Fears are entertained for your safety."

"I will go down at once," replied the countess.

"I must perforce change my lodging till that window is repaired, but the enemy shall not drive me from my room."

"I felt sure of it, madam," said Gertrude.

Accompanied by her daughters and Archdeacon Rutter, the countess then descended to the parade, where she was enthusiastically received by the officers and men, and shouts resounded from the walls.

By this time the rain had ceased and the morning had become bright and cheerful. After remaining in the court for a few minutes, she proceeded to the chapel to offer up thanks for her preservation.

Meanwhile three or four engineers on the batteries of the besiegers had been shot, and apparently not a man could be found to work the guns. Thus the enemy ceased firing altogether, and the garrison became completely tranquillised.

But towards evening it seemed certain—from preparations that were then being made—that the mortar would again be tried on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXI

Of the Experiments made by the Besiegers with the Great Mortar

NEXT morning, as Major Farrington, in company with Standish, reconnoitred the enemy from the ramparts, he perceived they were again very busily employed in the sconce in which the great mortar was placed. As far as the observers could make out, some two hundred men were collected near the new fort, and it was evident this large force had been brought there to resist any attack.

"I do not like that mortar," remarked Major Farrington, "and I am persuaded it will give us more trouble than all the rest of their guns put together."

"It may not prove so formidable as you anticipate," said Standish. "However, I own it has an ugly look, and should be glad if its large mouth could be stopped, but that does not seem practicable. Nailing it is useless as we have found."

"Depend upon it, they are going to give it a thorough trial to-day," said Major Farrington; "and unless I am mistaken some of their commanders are in the sconce to witness the experiment. I will take care they shall not have a very pleasant time of it."

"If Rigby is there I hope a shot may hit him," rejoined Standish. "But for him we should not have been plagued by this pestilent mortar."

Major Farrington then gave orders to the engineers in all the towers facing the fort in question to concentrate their fire upon it. This was done and carried on so persistently, that at length not a man could be seen above the ramparts.

However, the besiegers were not to be deterred from their design. Suddenly, a thundering sound announced that the mortar had been discharged, and a ponderous stone—the course of which could be traced through the air—passed over the walls, and fell in the court, luckily without doing any damage, though causing great consternation.

No further experiment was made that day, because the engineers in the fort were afraid to work, owing to the incessant fire kept up from the ramparts; but enough had been done to prove the tremendous power of the mortar, and all those who gazed at the stone thought what destruction would have been caused had it fallen on the top of a tower or on the roof of the mansion.

Next day, on examining the magazine, Major Farrington made the unpleasant discovery that the powder was beginning to run short.

The constant firing from the ramparts and towers that had taken place during the last week had well-nigh exhausted the stock, and although a considerable supply had been obtained from the trenches of the enemy during the sallies, very little was left.

For the first time, the countess became uneasy when she received this alarming intelligence, and she gave peremptory orders that no more powder should be wasted. Not a needless shot must be fired.

Standish and the officers did not share her ladyship's uneasiness, because they felt certain the trenches would yield a fresh supply, and the men were not altogether pleased by the restraint put upon them. However, they did not dare to disobey orders, and for the present the firing almost wholly ceased.

As if to test their patience, the enemy were more active than usual on that day, and again brought all their ordnance to bear upon the walls.

Six of the cannon were loaded with chain-shot and bars of iron, but happily did little mischief. They then tried their muskets for more than half an hour together, but with no better success. Not a single man on the walls was hit, nor could they provoke a reply.

Later on, they made another experiment with the great mortar, and this time a grenado was thrown at the mansion. It fell in a small court at the back of the chapel where it exploded, and with such violence that it shook down the walls near it. Again no one was injured, but infinite alarm was caused by the concussion.

The engineers feared that some new fireballs would next be tried, and men provided with wet hides stood ready to extinguish these combustibles if they fell near the mansion. Luckily the services of these assistants were not required. Only a second stone shot was launched against the stronghold, and did no harm.

But the mortar had now become a terrible engine, and frightened the brave men, who had hitherto derided all the attempts of the enemy.

The greater part of the mansion was built of oak, and though shot proof, it might be set on fire. This seemed now to be the aim of the enemy, and the possibility of such an occurrence filled the whole garrison with alarm. The staunchest musketeer turned pale when speaking of shells and grenadoes, and many of them asked permission to quit their lodgings in the upper part of the walls.

To shame them from their fears the officers removed to these rooms, but nothing could overcome the dread caused by the mortar, and when next day another grenado fell in the midst of the musketeers it scattered them like so many sheep.

Familiarity, however, with the danger gave them courage, and when they found that grenadoes were not so dangerous as they imagined—no one as yet having been hurt—they began to laugh at them—especially when a couple that were badly aimed, flew over the house.

Just at this time an incident occurred which, although it did not for a moment shake the fortitude of the countess, caused her great annoyance.

Despite all the firing and the danger to which she was exposed, she had mounted daily—sometimes more than once—to the summit of the Eagle Tower.

One day she was at her post, and surrounded by her usual attendants, when Major Farrington showed her that the engineers in a battery beneath were pointing a culverin against the tower on which she stood. The countess looked on undismayed, and smiled as the shot flew harmlessly past. Shortly afterwards a demi-cannon was fired from an adjacent battery, its mark being evidently the same as the culverin. Shot after shot from both pieces of ordnance followed at short intervals, but the tower remained untouched.

"I would counsel your ladyship to descend," said Major Farrington, who had watched this display with anxiety. "Those cannoniers have evidently got orders to demolish this tower, and they will not desist from the attempt, unless we stop them. Shall I direct our engineers to fire upon them? They will not do so without orders."

"Have we sufficient powder?" inquired the countess, in a low voice.

"Enough for this purpose," he replied. "Not more."

"Then let the enemy fire on," said the brave lady. "We must reserve our scanty stock for a more important occasion."

"I am certain Rigby is in the nearest battery with the culverin," said Major Farrington. "I can see him now."

"Say you so?" said the countess, almost fiercely. "Then, by Heaven, he shall not insult me thus. Give instant orders to return the fire. At any hazard we will silence them."

"I am right glad your ladyship has so resolved," said Major Farrington, as he departed on the errand.

Not till she had enjoyed the gratification of seeing the demi-cannon dismounted by her own engineers did the countess quit her post.

She then descended to the court, feeling perfectly satisfied with the answer she had given to Rigby's insolent challenge.

But her triumph was of short duration. While she was talking to Major Farrington, who had come to meet her, a shot from the culverin struck an angle in the Eagle Tower, making a large breach in the wall, and demolishing part of the staircase.

"Your ladyship has just got down in time," observed Major Farrington. "That shall be the last stroke of Rigby's malice."

And he made good his word. The culverin did not fire another shot, both engineers being killed.

CHAPTER XXII

How a Summons was sent by Rigby to the Countess to yield up the Castle and sue for Mercy to the Parliament; and of the Answer she returned

THAT night it was very dark and well adapted for a sortie, but as the officers were not allowed to sally forth in consequence of the scarcity of powder, they resorted to a device to annoy the enemy, that proved perfectly successful.

Balls of clay, furnished with a lighted match, such as were used by the musketeers, were flung from the ramparts towards the enemy's works, and quickly attracted the attention of the sentries, who thought an assailing party was at hand.

The alarm was instantly given. Drums were beaten, and shortly afterwards, muskets and periers were fired in the direction of the lights.

For a short time this went on, to the great delight of the spectators on the ramparts, when the besiegers finding the lights continue motionless, suddenly ceased firing. Shouts of laughter from the ramparts explained the trick played upon them.

Next morning the besiegers began to shout loudly in their turn, being evidently desirous of attracting the attention of Major Farrington and the officers of the garrison to a fresh stock of grenadoes and bombs that had just arrived at the works. These they displayed ostentatiously, and pointing significantly to the fort in which the mortar was placed, vociferated at the top of their voices:

"We will soon send you some of them."

Burning with rage, the men would fain have responded to these insults with their guns, but were forbidden to fire.

But the sight of the grenadoes made Major Farrington feel very anxious, and he had a long conference with the countess, during which he represented to her, without any attempt at disguise, the extreme danger to be apprehended from a shower of these terrible projectiles.

Two other persons only were present at the conference. These were Archdeacon Rutter and Captain Standish, but though deeply interested, they offered no opinion.

"The time has arrived," said the countess, after some minutes' reflection, "when a heavy blow must be struck against the enemy. At any risk—at any cost—we must deprive him of that mortar."

"Unquestionably, that would be the heaviest blow that could be dealt him," rejoined Farrington. "But I doubt if it can be accomplished."

"I have no such doubt," said the countess, in a determined tone. "But be the result what it may, the attempt shall be made, and without delay. How say you, Captain Standish?" she added, to him. "Are there not officers and men within the garrison willing to undertake this perilous task?"

"Assuredly, madam," he rejoined. "There is not an officer or man in the garrison who would refuse to execute any command given him by your ladyship. The more hazardous the task, the better he would like it."

"I spoke not of zeal or courage," said Major Farrington; "but I fear that the bravest and most devoted men will find it impossible to remove that mortar."

"It must be brought away," said the countess.

"It shall be, madam," rejoined Standish. "Some plan shall be devised for its removal, of which Major Farrington himself will approve."

"I am glad to find you are so sanguine," observed the countess. "But I repeat there must be no delay. The plan must be executed forthwith."

Just then, Captain Chisenhale entered, and informed the countess that a trumpeter was at the gate, and brought her ladyship a letter from Colonel Rigby.

"From Rigby!" she exclaimed. "How dares he write to me? Send back the messenger."

"Let me counsel your ladyship to hear what he has to say," remarked Archdeacon Rutter. "You cannot then reproach yourself hereafter."

"That is good advice," she rejoined. "I will see him. Let the man come to the parade. I will read the letter publicly, that all who list, may hear my answer."

"With your ladyship's permission, I will make that known," said Captain Chisenhale.

And he bowed and departed.

Shortly afterwards, the countess proceeded to the parade accompanied by her attendants.

A great number of musketeers were assembled to hear what she had to say to the messenger, who was standing in their midst.

The man, who had a trumpet suspended from his shoulder, bore himself bravely, and returned the fierce looks thrown at him. He had a letter in his belt, and delivered it to Captain Chisenhale, by whom it was handed to the countess.

While reading the missive she seemed scarcely able to control her indignation, and when she had done, she called out in a loud voice:

"You shall all hear the message sent me by that insolent fellow Rigby. He tells me this is his last letter, that he will write to me no more, and summons me to yield up to him Lathom House, and all the persons within it, all arms and munitions, and sue for mercy to Parliament. Furthermore, he requires me to return my final answer before two o'clock to-morrow. What think you of this letter?"

Cries of indignation resounded on all sides, and menacing looks were cast at the messenger.

"Come forward, fellow," cried the countess to the man, who tremblingly obeyed. "It were a fitting reward for thy presumption to hang thee up at my gates."

"Nay, spare me, I pray your ladyship," cried the poor wretch, seeing how eager all around were to execute the threat. "I could not refuse obedience to Colonel Rigby's command."

"Nay, I waste not my anger on thee. Thou art merely the instrument of a traitor, and shalt go back in safety. Tell the insolent rebel how I received his letter," she added, tearing it in pieces. "Tell him I deride his summons. Never shall he have Lathom House—never! Rather than surrender it to him I will burn it in his sight. We will all perish together. Myself, my children, my soldiers, and my

household will seal our loyalty and religion in the same flame. This is my final answer."

As she concluded, loud acclamations arose, and the assemblage shouted with one voice, "We will all die for our noble lord and lady! God save the king!"

With these shouts ringing in his ears, the Trumpet was hurried to the gate, and thrust forth ignominiously, glad to escape with life.

When he got back to Rigby, he told him what had happened, and added, that in his opinion the garrison would never surrender.

"I expected no other answer from that furious woman," he said. "But thou art mistaken as to the garrison. It cannot withstand our next assault."

"Wherefore not?" demanded the Trumpet.

"Because they have no powder," replied Rigby. "That I have just found out."

"I can scarcely think it from what I have just seen and heard," said the Trumpet.

"'Tis certain, nevertheless," rejoined Rigby.

CHAPTER XXIII

Showing how the Great Mortar was captured by Standish and Chisenhale

IMMEDIATELY after the departure of the Trumpet, all the officers of the garrison were summoned to a council, at which it was decided that an attempt should be forthwith made to bring away the mortar, as it was felt that the capture of this terrible engine would inflict the heaviest blow on the enemy, and serve to raise the flagging spirits of their own men.

The best mode of carrying out the enterprise was then discussed, and various plans were suggested; the boldest of which, proposed by Captain Standish, met with the approval of the countess and Major Farrington, and was therefore adopted.

It was next settled that the sortie should be made about half an hour before daybreak on the morrow, and the utmost caution was to be observed, so as not to alarm the sentinels of the enemy.

The officers appointed to the dangerous service by the countess were Captains Standish and Chisenhale, with Lieutenants Bretergh and Walthew. But all were to be employed. To Captains Ogle and Foxe the command of the main guard was entrusted. Captain Rawsthorne had charge of the sally-port. Captain Molineux Radcliffe had command of the marksmen and musketeers; and the post assigned to Captain Farmer, with a party of fifty men, was the parade. Moreover, he had charge of the gateway.

Not only was employment found for every man in the garrison, but the whole of the household, which numbered more than a dozen stout serving-men, had a special duty to perform. They were to be under the command of the steward and Trioche, and were to aid a company of soldiers in levelling the ditch.

No objection was made by any of them. On the contrary, they were proud to be thus employed, and only begged that each of them might be provided with a pistol to be used against the enemy if an opportunity offered.

Never had the garrison been so excited before, because they had never before such a difficult and dangerous task to perform, and even the boldest felt that success was uncertain.

Major Farrington retracted the opinion he had at first expressed as to the impossibility of the feat, but he was secretly anxious; and even the countess herself, despite her undaunted demeanour, was not free from internal misgiving.

The besiegers remained tolerably quiet during the remainder of the day, and only indulged in an occasional shot from a saker or a perier.

Rigby made no experiment with his new grenadoes and fire-balls, reserving them for the following afternoon, when the countess was informed that he had invited Colonel Holland, the governor of Manchester, and several others to witness the destruction of her house.

When this was told her by Major Farrington, she simply remarked:

"I am glad he has asked so many of his friends to witness his own discomfiture."

None of the garrison retired to rest on that night—neither did the countess.

Long before it was light all were prepared. Captain Radcliffe was on the ramparts with his marksmen and musketeers, and Captain Farmer had assembled his men on the parade.

Provided with strong ropes, shovels, and other implements, the serving-men were ready to set forth, under the command of Trioche and the steward.

It was still dark, when the sally-port was opened, and two companies of musketeers, each numbering fifty men, came forth, respectively commanded by Standish and Chisenhale.

So noiseless were their movements, that their approach was not discovered till they got under the cannon of the battery nearest them, the ramparts of which they scaled in spite of the desperate resistance of the soldiers, and put all within the fort to the sword.

The noise of this conflict roused all the besiegers from their slumber, but the assailants had successfully accomplished their first object, and secured themselves a retreat. Moreover, they had obtained a fresh supply of powder.

Leaving Bretergh and Walthew with a sufficient number of men to hold the fort, Standish and Chisenhale fought their way along the trenches to the battery on which the mortar was placed.

They were followed in their march by the party of serving-men, not one of whom manifested the slightest fear, though it was their first fight.

The sconce in which the mortar was placed was guarded by fifty men, who fired upon their assailants as they came on, but could not check their advance, and did them little injury.

From the position of this fort, which has been described as on a rising ground, it was soon found by the Royalists that their muskets were useless. They therefore picked up some of the large stones lying about, and hurled them over the ramparts. The clatter of these missiles on the steel headpieces was prodigious. Many of the soldiers were stunned and fell to the ground. Others fled. Taking advantage of their confusion, the assailants quickly cleared the ditch surrounding the fort, and scaling the ramparts, killed several of the enemy, and put the rest to flight.

Having thus secured their prize, they gave a loud shout, which was returned by their comrades in the battery they had first taken, and again by the musketeers on the postern-tower and on the walls of the castle.

The time had now come when the assistance of the serving-men, who had attended them during the attack, was required.

These stout fellows, who, it has been said, were provided with the necessary implements, soon contrived to level the trench, while the musketeers pulled down a portion of the ramparts.

A passage being thus made for the mortar, it was dragged by a score of strong hands from the sconce, then down the side of the mound, and across the now levelled trench.

Thus much was accomplished without opposition. But the enemy were resolved to prevent the removal of the great engine.

A large party of musketeers rushed forward with shouts and attacked the successful Royalists, who returned their fire, and a sharp conflict ensued.

However, it did not last long. Aided by Captain Molineux Radcliffe from the walls of the castle, which were within musket-shot, Standish and Chisenhale were soon able to disperse the foe, and moved on as fast as they could with their prize towards the gateway.

Two other attempts were made to check their retreat, but were equally unsuccessful.

The victors were now joined by Bretergh and Walthew with the party from the battery first taken, and their force was sufficient to repel any attack. So they moved on tranquilly under the guns of the garrison.

They had good reason to be satisfied with the result of the sortie. Not only had they secured the grand prize for which they had come forth, but what was nearly as important, they had obtained a large supply of powder; so that they were now quite easy on that score.

In addition to all these things, snatched from the very teeth of the foe, they brought back with them a great number of muskets, three drums, and five prisoners—the latter captured at the battery from which the mortar was taken.

As the victors entered the gates they were welcomed by the guard with shouts and other demonstrations of delight, but this was nothing compared to the frantic enthusiasm manifested by the soldiers collected in the court-yard at the sight of the mortar.

They could scarcely believe that the terrible engine that had caused them so much alarm was standing before them. They struck it with their guns, they spurned it, they leaped upon it, they danced round it, and committed a hundred extravagances.

"Ah! monster," cried one of them, who had jumped inside it, and tried to make it ring with the butt-end of his gun, "we have thee now, and will not let thee go."

"Little did Rigby think when he had thee cast, in the hope that thou wouldst accomplish our destruction, that thou wouldst soon be turned against himself, and help to deliver us from him."

This speech was received with loud cheers and laughter by all who heard it, and the mortar rang like an anvil with the blows dealt against it.

The officers did not attempt to check the exuberant delight of the men, for they were almost as much excited themselves.

The countess, who was in the court-yard with her daughters and her customary attendants, was enchanted by the spectacle. The shouts and demonstrations of the men delighted her. She felt that their confidence—if it had been at all shaken—was completely restored, and that henceforth all would go on well.

After watching the spectacle for a few minutes, she desired Major Farrington to bring before her Standish, Chisenhale, and the other officers, who had assisted in the glorious undertaking, and publicly thanked them for the great service they had rendered her.

"I do not hesitate to declare," she said in a loud voice, that all might hear her words, "that by your bravery and gallantry you have rescued us all from a cruel foe. You have saved this ancient pile from destruction by fire, and all within its walls from death, for I would have perished rather than yield, and I know full well you would all have died with me!"

"We would!" responded a hundred voices.

Allowing these vociferations to subside, she again addressed the officers.

"Besides this mortar," she said, "you have brought me, I am told, a good supply of powder, with several other prizes. These I will receive anon. Our first duty is to Heaven."

She then proceeded to the chapel followed by all those who had just returned from the successful sortie.

CHAPTER XXIV

How Colonel Holland promised to bring Reinforcements from Manchester

GREAT was the mortification of Rigby, when he found that the engine, with which he had hoped to accomplish the destruction of Lathom House, had been taken from him; and additional sharpness was added to the stroke by the fact that Colonel Holland had been invited to witness his triumph, and had used great despatch to arrive in time.

Unable to invent any excuses, Rigby was obliged to confess the truth—neither could he conceal the fact that such great discontent prevailed among his soldiers, that a mutiny was threatened. More than two hundred had run away from the trenches that morning, and these added to the large number killed in the attack of the Royalists, or malignants, as he termed them, made a very serious loss. Nor did he see how the reduction of the garrison could now be accomplished, except by starvation or want of water. He believed that their stock of provisions was getting low, and hoped to drain their well, but so many failures in his plans had occurred that he did not feel very sanguine. The siege might drag on till the countess obtained assistance from the king, or from the Earl of Derby, who he understood had quitted the Isle of Man, and was now in Chester.

After thus explaining his position, he requested Colonel Holland to send him an immediate reinforcement from Manchester.

"I want five hundred men without delay to replace those I have lost," he said. "I am no longer equal to the task given me. The sorties of the enemy are so frequent, that the soldiers are obliged to guard the trenches for two nights running—sometimes more. By this last attack I have lost more than two hundred of my best men, and at least twenty engineers. I would fain have another mortar, in order that I may make a fresh attempt to burn down the house. I should likewise feel well pleased if you would send Colonel Rosworm to me. He might render me great assistance."

"I am unable to comply with the latter request," replied Colonel Holland. "I have already spoken to Rosworm on the subject, but he absolutely refuses to lend any further aid against the Countess of Derby, and does not seek to disguise his hope that she may be able to hold out. I will bring you the five hundred men you require with as little delay as possible, though their withdrawal from

the Manchester garrison will greatly reduce our strength—but I cannot promise you another mortar. However, it is time this long siege should be brought to a close. The heroic defence made by the countess—for heroic it is—is the talk of the whole county, and is damaging our cause while it raises the hopes of the malignants. We must compel her to surrender."

"I see not how that can be accomplished," rejoined Rigby. "I have tried every means, but hitherto without success. After the defeat of today matters will become worse. As I have just explained to you the soldiers refuse to work in the trenches, and many of them have taken to flight. Another such month as I have gone through would compel me to raise the siege. The labour is beyond my strength."

"Well, you shall have the reinforcement you require, and that speedily," replied Colonel Holland. "But you must not relax in your exertions."

"I shall remove the demi-cannon and the culverin from the batteries, or the enemy will obtain possession of them next," said Rigby.

"That will be judicious," rejoined Colonel Holland. "The cannon can be taken back again when I arrive with the reinforcement."

"But by that time the batteries may be destroyed," remarked Rigby.

"Others must then be reared," said Colonel Holland. "Do not let the countess suppose you are discouraged. Keep up a bold appearance. When I come back we will send her another summons to surrender."

"If we do, she will hang the messenger."

"No, I will take it myself," replied Colonel Holland. "Bold as she is, she will not venture to hang me."

"I am not sure of it," said Rigby. "But I would as soon enter a lion's den as into her mansion. I should expect to be torn in pieces. She is often on the Eagle Tower. I wish a shot could reach her."

The colloquy then ended, and Colonel Holland set out on his return to Manchester.

CHAPTER XXV

Of Asaph the Avenger, and the terrible Crime he committed

FOR three days the besiegers remained perfectly quiet, keeping close within the trenches, and not firing a single shot.

Since they had removed all their large cannon the opportunity seemed favourable for making another nocturnal attack, and accordingly, on the second night, Captain Ogle sallied forth with a dozen musketeers. He was fired upon by a party who were lying in ambush near the postern-tower, but sustained no damage, and brought back more powder and match, together with a prisoner, who declared that he possessed some intelligence of the utmost importance, but refused to communicate it to any one, save the countess herself.

This being reported to her ladyship by Captain Ogle, she resolved to question him, and he was brought before her for that purpose on the following morning.

The interrogation took place in a room adjoining the great banquet-hall.

The prisoner was a strongly-built man with harsh features, and his closely-cropped hair and deportment proclaimed him a rigid Puritan.

His accoutrements were a buff coat and boots, but he had been deprived of his head-piece and belt, and, as was supposed, of all weapons.

He was guarded by a couple of musketeers, who could not force him, even with blows, to make an obeisance to the countess.

She was seated in a high-backed chair, and on either side of her were her daughters, Gertrude, Archdeacon Rutter, Major Farrington, and Standish.

The prisoner surveyed the assemblage sternly, and slightly started when his eye fell upon Gertrude. The damsel had noticed him at the same time, and observed to the countess:

"I recognise the man. He calls himself Asaph the Avenger, and is accounted one of the saints. He was well known to my father."

"I like not his looks," replied the countess. "He seems to me of an evil disposition, and full of hatred and malevolence."

"Such is his character, madam," said Gertrude. "For my own part I never could endure him."

At this moment Asaph, who had hitherto been silent, lifted up his voice, and addressing Gertrude, said:

"What dost thou here, in the habitation of Jezebel, thou daughter of a holy and valiant man? It grieveth me to the heart to find thee whom I loved so well, abiding with the enemy."

"Hold thy peace, thou psalm-singing hypocrite," cried Captain Ogle, striking him with the flat of his sword. "Thou saidst thou hadst important information to give her ladyship. What is it?"

"I have to tell her that Colonel Holland, the righteous governor of Manchester, is bringing large reinforcements to Colonel Rigby. She will therefore be compelled to submit to the mercy of Parliament."

"Art thou a messenger from Rigby, fellow?" demanded the countess, angrily.

"The man was taken prisoner last night in the trenches," said Captain Ogle.

"I could easily have escaped, as this officer can testify, if he will speak the truth," said Asaph. "But I allowed myself to be captured, because I desired to speak to thee—to warn thee that if thou dost continue to slaughter the saints, thou wilt be cut off by a sudden and violent death—thy soldiers will be slain—thine house destroyed, and turned into a nest of owls, and a den of dragons."

"Take him hence," cried the countess, fiercely. "I said I would hang the next messenger sent to me. This man has dared to usurp the office and shall not escape the penalty attached to it. Take him hence, and hang him from the walls that all his comrades may behold his punishment."

Before any movement could be made to execute this stern decree, Gertrude threw herself at the countess's feet, and cried:

"Spare him, madam, spare him, I implore you! It will more accord with your noble character and humane disposition to pardon such a miserable caitiff than to put him to death. He is beneath your resentment."

The words and the tone in which they were uttered produced an impression on the countess, and seeing it, Gertrude arose and turning to Asaph, said:

"Down on thy knees, rash man. Sue for mercy, and thou shalt obtain it."

"Never!" exclaimed Asaph, resolutely. "Never will I bend knee to Jezebel. I came not to her to sue for mercy, but to tax her with her crimes, and warn her of her end. Her punishment is at hand. Deeply hath she sinned against the Lord and she shall die. I have pronounced her doom. The servants of the Lord are in array against her. The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken."

As he finished speaking, he drew forth a pistol, which he had contrived to conceal in his accoutrements, and levelled it at the countess.

So sudden was the act that neither the musketeers nor Captain Ogle could prevent him from discharging the weapon.

No doubt the shot would have been fatal if Gertrude, who had watched him narrowly, and divined his purpose, had not placed herself before her noble mistress, and received in her breast the bullet intended for her—thus preserving the countess's life at the sacrifice of her own.

A cry of horror burst from all around. Rising from her seat at the moment, Lady Derby caught her preserver in her arms, while the young ladies Stanley crowded round eager to render aid.

The wretch who had done the dreadful deed, looked on aghast—his features expressing the most terrible mental anguish.

"I meant not to kill her," he cried, almost piteously. "I would have died rather than harm her. Let me obtain her forgiveness, and I will go with you to instant death."

"Thou shalt go to instant death, thou execrable assassin," cried Captain Ogle, "but without the forgiveness of thy innocent victim, that thy soul may be sent to the perdition thou so justly meritest."

Asaph made no further resistance, but was hurried by the musketeers to the small court at the back of the chapel, where it may be remembered a wall had been knocked down by a grenado.

They were followed by Major Farrington and Captain Ogle.

At the door of the chapel they met Doctor Brideoake, who wished to pray with the murderer, but the wretched man sternly rejected the kindly offer.

Though the party moved on as quickly as possible, they were joined by several other musketeers and some of the servants, whose maledictions Asaph had to bear. But he seemed insensible to them, and entirely occupied by silent prayer.

On reaching their destination the two musketeers, who had never quitted their hold of the prisoner, took him to the further end of the little court.

Captain Ogle then bade him take off his buff coat and kneel down, and again asked if the chaplain should pray with him.

"We do not desire to destroy thy soul," he said.

The offer was rejected as sternly as before, but the murderer begged to be allowed a few minutes to make his peace with Heaven.

This was granted, and the musketeers stayed by him till he had stripped off his accoutrements.

They then withdrew, and joined their comrades, who now numbered nearly a score, at the other end of the court.

The wretch then knelt down, and after passing a few minutes in earnest supplication, held up his hands.

At the signal, more than a dozen muskets were fired, and the assassin fell with his face to the ground, his body being completely riddled with shot.

None pitied him, but several spurned the bleeding carcase, as they would a dead dog.

CHAPTER XXVI

Of Gertrude's last Parting with Standish

MEANWHILE, the wounded damsel had been carefully transported to her own chamber, and laid upon the small bed with which it was furnished.

When Master Holbrook, the surgeon of the garrison, and a man of great skill, entered the room, she had become insensible, and the countess and her daughters, who, with Archdeacon Rutter, were the only persons present, almost feared she had expired.

No pulsation could be felt by the countess, who had placed her hand on the luckless damsel's wrist. How beautiful she looked even under these sad circumstances! Her eyes were closed, and the colour had fled from her cheeks, but the exquisite outline of her features was perfectly preserved. Her fair tresses having become unbound, streamed on the couch. Even the surgeon, who was rarely touched by such spectacles, was greatly moved.

On examining the wound, he found—as indeed was apparent—that it bled internally, and his grave looks announced that he deemed it fatal.

"Is she gone?" inquired the countess, in broken accents.

"No, madam," replied Holbrook. "I can revive her, but it will only be for a short time."

He then poured a few drops from a phial upon a small piece of linen, and applied it to her lips.

Ere long, to the amazement of all the observers, who had watched the result of the experiment with the utmost anxiety, symptoms of returning animation were perceptible.

Opening her eyes, the ill-fated damsel fixed them upon the countess, who was still standing near her.

At first, she did not seem to comprehend her situation, but soon the terrible truth rushed upon her.

Slightly raising herself, she gazed earnestly and inquiringly at the surgeon, whom she recognised, and finding he did not speak, said in a low, but firm voice:

"Tell me! tell me truly! Am I wounded to death?"

"You are," he replied.

Then, without manifesting any fear, she asked in the same firm tone:

"How long have I to live? Do not deceive me."

"You may live half an hour—not longer," was the answer, pronounced very solemnly. "Drink from this phial," he added, presenting it to her. "'Tis a sovereign elixir, and will help to sustain you."

She eagerly swallowed a few drops, and returned the phial to him.

"That is all I can do, madam," observed Holbrook to the countess, as he stepped back and quitted the room.

Forcibly repressing the emotion, by which she was well-nigh overcome, the countess bent down, and kissed the brow of the dying maiden.

"Oh! how can I thank you! You have rendered me many great services—but this is the greatest of all," she cried, in a voice broken by emotion.

"It is the last service I shall ever render your ladyship!" replied Gertrude. "But I have done no more than my duty—no more than any of your soldiers would have done for you! There is not a single person in this castle, who would not gladly have sacrificed his life to save yours! Farewell, madam—farewell for ever! At this moment, when all else has become indifferent to me, I am gladdened by the thought that you will triumph over your enemies. Think of me, I pray you, in the hour of victory!"

"Doubt it not," cried the countess. "But for you I should never have gained a victory."

"Enough," rejoined Gertrude. "I shall now die content."

She then looked at the young ladies Stanley, who were gazing tearfully on the scene, and signed to them to come to her.

"You know how dearly I have loved you," she exclaimed, holding out her arms to them. "Kiss me all of you, I entreat you! I cannot press you to my breast as I long to do, but while life lasts you will be next my heart."

Approaching singly, each tenderly embraced her.

As they withdrew, Archdeacon Rutter came forward, and said:

"You have now done with the world, and must turn your thoughts to Heaven."

"I have not quite done with the world, dear and reverend sir," she rejoined. "There is one other person to whom I would bid farewell, ere I depart."

"You mean Captain Standish," observed the countess. "You would see him alone?"

"I would," replied the dying damsel.

"I will send him to you instantly," said the countess.

And signing to the others to follow her, she quitted the room.

In another moment Standish entered, evidently quite overcome by grief.

"Can you forgive me?" he cried, taking the hand she extended to him, and pressing it to his lips.

"I have not waited for this moment to forgive you," she rejoined, fixing her gaze tenderly upon him. "I know you have preferred another, and when I first made the discovery I thought my heart would break—nay, I even meditated revenge, and there were moments when I was so maddened by jealousy that I could have stabbed my rival. But those feelings have long since ceased. I love you still—but it is with a holy, sisterly love. You cannot doubt what I say, since I tell it you with my dying breath."

"I do not doubt it," cried Standish, in a voice of anguish. "Though you pardon me, I can never pardon myself."

"Think no more of me," she said. "Let no remembrance of me mar your future happiness. Heaven never intended I should be your wife, and though I have reconciled myself to my hard destiny, I feel this death is a boon to me, and has saved me much suffering. May you be happy with Engracia!"

The effort was too much, and she sank back upon the pillow.

Standish thought all was over, and with difficulty repressed a cry.

After remaining quiet for a few moments she again spoke.

"One thing distresses me greatly," she said. "I cannot see my father—I cannot receive his blessing. But you will see him. Tell him I thought of him, and reproached myself that I have not adequately requited his strong affection for me. Heaven, therefore, has denied me his blessing."

"I will tell him what you say," cried Standish. "Have you any further injunction for me?"

"Should you behold my father again, give him this necklace," she said, taking off a little string of beads; "and now, farewell for ever!"

Seeing she was sinking, Standish flew to open the door, and in another moment the countess and her daughters were kneeling by the bedside.

She beheld them not, for her eyes were closed, but she heard them, and breathed their names.

They were followed by Archdeacon Rutter, who likewise knelt down with Standish, and recited the prayer for the dying. But ere it was ended her spirit had passed away.

CHAPTER XXVII

How the Soldiers of the Garrison looked their last on their Favourite

No event had occurred during the siege that caused such a painful sensation as the death of Gertrude Rosworm.

Next to the countess herself, no one was more universally beloved than Gertrude. Her beauty, her courage, her devotion made her the pride of the garrison. All the officers were secretly in love with her, though she favoured none of them. The men adored her, and whenever she appeared among them, they testified their delight. To catch sight of her figure on the parade, on the Eagle Tower, or in the chapel, was always a gratification to them. To be thus deprived of their favourite by the hand of an assassin was a blow that all felt severely; but if anything could mitigate their regret, it was that she had saved the countess.

However, on that melancholy day, the garrison presented a very different aspect from what it usually wore. Sorrow was depicted on every manly countenance. The young ladies Stanley were overwhelmed with grief, and Lady Derby suffered deeply.

In compliance with the earnest wishes of the soldiers expressed through their officers, they were allowed to behold their favourite once more.

Placed on a bier, in the attire worn when she met her fate, the body of the unfortunate damsel was conveyed to the chapel. It was partly covered by a black velvet mantle which served as a pall, but the face and upper part of the person could be seen.

As yet the features had lost none of their beauty—nay, perhaps they looked more beautiful than in life—at least, the beholders thought so, and the striking spectacle was never effaced from their remembrance.

Some of the officers were stationed at the door of the chapel, and others inside, while Archdeacon Rutter and Docter Brideoake were likewise present.

The musketeers came in singly, but lingered not. After gazing for an instant at the lovely and now placid features of the dead, each passed on.

It was touching to see how deeply these stout-hearted men were moved. For the time they repressed their grief, but gave vent to it when they left the chapel.

All the garrison, at intervals when the men could quit their posts, came to look their last on their favourite.

The body remained there till evening, when it was taken back to the house, and placed in a coffin that had been prepared for it.

At midnight it was brought back again to the chapel, where the funeral rites were performed by Archdeacon Rutter in the presence of the countess and her daughters, the officers, and a great part of the household, both male and female. Many tears were shed on this sad occasion.

The body was then deposited in a vault beneath the chapel.

CHAPTER XXVIII

How a Letter was brought to the Countess from her Husband

IT was quite a relief to the men, after this depressing event, to be actively engaged against the enemy.

Colonel Holland had arrived with his reinforcements from Manchester, and the ranks of those who had been killed, or had disbanded themselves, were filled up. Batteries and fortifications were once more occupied, and mounted with cannon, and presented a very formidable appearance.

Everything showed that the Leaguer was greatly strengthened, and would be maintained till the besieged were completely worn out, either by starvation, want of water, or want of ammunition.

The countess had been told that her husband had quitted the Isle of Man, but she had not heard direct from him, for of late no messenger had been able to enter the castle.

But a few days after the arrival of Colonel Holland, when the Leaguer, as we said, had become greatly strengthened, a man named Linacre contrived to elude the vigilance of the sentinels, and was admitted at the postern-gate.

He brought a letter for the countess rolled in lead, which he declared was from the earl, her husband, and so it proved.

The letter informed her that he had arrived safely at Chester. The garrison there was commanded by Lord Molineux, Sir Thomas Tyldesley, Richard Grosvenor, and other Cavaliers, but they were unable to come to her assistance. His lordship, however, had hopes of aid from Prince Rupert, who had succeeded in raising the siege of Newark, and was about to march to York with ten thousand men.

"I have conjured the prince," he said, "to march through Lancashire and lend you succour, and I trust he will comply with my request. Were his highness so disposed, he could raise the siege of Lathom House in two days, and inflict such a blow on the enemy, as must needs bring to us all the well-affected in the county. I have not yet seen the prince, for I have much to do here, and am striving to get together two or three hundred men. I want money, and though I

like it not, your jewels must be sold. 'Tis a most critical juncture, and if I fail now, all may be lost."

"My lord shall have my jewels," said the countess, as she read this portion of the letter. "But how convey them to him? I must send Standish. He is the only person, who can be relied upon in such an emergency."

She then gave some orders to an attendant, and proceeded to her cabinet, where Standish, who had been summoned by the servant, joined her. He saw she had something of importance to communicate to him.

"You are aware that I have just received a letter from my lord," she began. "He is at Chester with the garrison. He wants money, but as all his property has been sequestered, he can obtain none. I would fain send him my jewels, which are worth five thousand pounds. Will you convey them to him?"

"I will, madam," he replied. "The task is difficult and dangerous, but I doubt not I can accomplish it."

"You must take half a dozen men with you."

"Not so, madam," he replied. "That would be to invite attack, and then I might be robbed of the treasure. Alone, or with a single attendant, I shall run comparatively little risk."

"You are right," said the countess, approvingly. "Linacre, the man who brought this letter from my lord, may be useful to you. He must have passed through the trenches."

"I had already thought of him," rejoined Standish. "Yes, he will be very useful. I have conversed with him, and like his manner. He looks like an honest fellow. I will promise him a good reward, if he conducts me safely through the enemy. I doubt not that will tempt him. If it suits your ladyship, I will start on the expedition to-night."

"You are ever prompt," said the countess. "The jewels shall be ready for you. Stay!" she cried, glancing again at the letter. "There is more here that I have not read. My lord, I find, bids me send you with the jewels. So far well. But he likewise wishes you to halt at Knowsley till you hear from him. Perchance, he may meet you there."

"His orders shall be obeyed," replied Standish. "It will be particularly agreeable to me to make halt at Knowsley, as I shall have a chance of seeing Don Fortunio and his daughter."

"I hope you may meet them, and I beg you will remember me most heartily to them," said the countess.

Standish then withdrew to prepare for the expedition, and confer with his proposed attendant, Tom Linacre.

Linacre undertook to get him safely across the trenches, and past the fortifications, after which Standish felt certain he could make his way through the camp.

Satisfied with the arrangement, he returned to the countess, who gave him three cases, containing the jewels.

"These shall be securely placed beneath my cuirass, madam," he said, "and shall never be taken from me while I live."

CHAPTER XXIX

How Standish encountered Rosworm

SOME quarter of an hour before the bell tolled midnight, the sentinels of the besiegers stationed on the fortifications near the postern-tower were alarmed by seeing a long line of lights suddenly appear before them, and at once fired in the direction, not suspecting that the lights they beheld were a device contrived by Captain Chisenhale to distract their attention from Standish's departure.

Roused by the shots, their comrades apprehending an attack, quickly joined them, and likewise fired, and some time elapsed before they discovered that a cord hung with lighted matches, and tied to the stump of a tree, had deluded them.

Meanwhile, Standish and his attendant, both well-mounted and well-armed, sallied forth from the great gate, and managed to get across the trench at a point that Linacre had noted, without causing alarm till they were both safe on the other side. Some muskets were then fired at them, but they were soon out of reach, and galloping towards the camp.

It was now so dark that scarcely any object could be discerned, but Standish fancied he could distinguish a horseman approaching them. Whether he was alone, or followed by a small troop, could not be made out, but Standish went boldly on.

"Who goes there?" demanded the horseman.

"A friend," replied Standish, slackening his pace, for he now felt certain the person was alone, and had made up his mind to shoot him if he offered any hindrance.

"I heard firing at the trenches, and was going thither," said the new-comer. "But I have changed my mind, and will return with you to the camp."

Standish made no reply to the proposition, but drew a pistol from the holster, resolved to disembarass himself of his enforced companion.

The horseman perceived the action, but without betraying the slightest fear, said:

"You call yourself a friend, but you are about to treat me as an enemy. I am not the enemy of Captain Standish. My eyes are sharper than yours. I knew you at once."

"Your voice is familiar to me," replied the young man. "Can it be Colonel Rosworm?"

"It is that most unhappy man," said the other, in a mournful tone. "In losing my daughter I have lost all that was dear to me on earth. Many hours have not flown since I heard of her death, and I came here at once."

"With what intent?" demanded Standish, struck by his manner.

"To die!" replied the other. "Since I have lost her, I have no desire to live. I shall find the death I seek from the cannon of Lathom House."

"This is the madness of grief," said Standish. "Do not throw your life away. I have something for you, that may yield you comfort, and deter you from your fatal purpose. Almost with her dying breath, she prayed me give you this string of beads. Little did I deem that I should so soon be able to fulfil her wishes."

And as he spoke, he took the necklace from the small leather bag attached to his girdle, and gave it Rosworm, who pressed it to his lips.

"I know it well," he cried. "I gave it her when a child. Truly, this will be a great comfort to me."

Then overcoming his emotion by a powerful effort, he added:

"Tell me where she lies!"

"In a vault beneath the little chapel of the mansion," replied Standish. "All the garrison mourned for her. The countess, no doubt, will deliver up the body to you, should you desire it."

"No, I will not disturb her," said Rosworm. "But we must separate. We are near the camp."

"Farewell, then!" cried Standish, preparing to dash forward.

"Stay!" cried Rosworm. "You will run great risk of capture. I can help you to pass through the camp,"

Quickening their pace, they were presently challenged by the sentinels, to whom Rosworm called out, upon which they were allowed to pass.

The camp seemed buried in slumber, and was very negligently watched, probably because so many men had been sent to the trenches.

No sentinels were near any of the tents, nor did the party encounter a single patrol.

Rosworm did not quit his friend till he had brought him to the wood that skirted the back of the camp. He then bade him farewell.

"I shall not tarry here," he said, "since you have induced me to change my design. I have no sympathy with Rigby, and I hope the Earl of Derby may come speedily and raise the siege of his castle."

He then rode back, while Standish plunged into the wood followed by Linacre.

CHAPTER XXX

How Standish found Engracia at Knowsley

PERFECTLY well acquainted with the country, Standish had no difficulty in making his way through the wood, nor in traversing the broad moors and avoiding the dangerous morasses that lay between him and his destination. Nor did he meet with any foraging party of the enemy.

It gladdened him, however, to quit this wild and uncultivated district, and enter Knowsley Park, which though sequestered by the Parliament had not been disturbed.

Not knowing whether the house was occupied by the enemy, though he believed they had altogether abandoned it, he proceeded to the stables, and succeeded in rousing a groom, who took charge of the horses, and relieved him of his anxiety as to the Roundheads by telling him they had all gone to the camp at Lathom.

After a time, he obtained admittance to the mansion, and was conducted by a serving-man to a chamber, where he found a large and comfortable bed. Before lying down to slumber, he placed the jewel cases under the pillow.

Captain Standish had been so long accustomed to the garrison reveillé, that not hearing the early beat of the drum, he slept on to a much later hour than usual, and was at last awakened by the entrance of old Randal Fermor, the steward, who had been informed of his arrival by the groom, and came to see what he could do for him.

"Little did I expect to see you here, sir," said Randal. "I thought you would never have quitted Lathom."

"Nor should I unless I had a mission to perform for the countess," replied Standish. "But tell me! Are Don Fortunio and his daughter still here? We have heard nothing of them of late, and the countess has been very anxious for their safety."

"Yes, they are here," replied Randal, "and as comfortable as circumstances will permit. Having a warrant from Sir Thomas Fairfax, authorising him to occupy certain apartments in the mansion, Don Fortunio has never been disturbed. For the last month we have not been troubled by the enemy, and the troop of

horse that was quartered here has been removed to the Leaguer. Ah! sir, do you think our brave lady will be able to hold out? I am told Colonel Holland has brought large reinforcements from Manchester."

"That is true," replied Standish. "But I hope and believe the Earl of Derby himself will come to her aid, and raise the siege."

"Heaven grant he may!" exclaimed Randal. "Were he to show himself, I am sure hundreds would flock to his standard."

"Have you heard from his lordship, Randal?" demanded Standish.

"A week ago there came a messenger from Chester, who told me that his lordship had returned, and wished to ascertain whether Knowsley was still occupied by the enemy. I told him as I have just told you, that they have completely evacuated it, and that his lordship could come hither, if he pleased, with safety."

"Then you may expect him, Randal, but of course he will come secretly."

"When I heard of your arrival, I thought at first 'twas he," said the old steward. "But I will now leave you—unless you require my assistance. Breakfast shall be prepared for you in the great hall."

He then left the chamber, and Standish arose. Before accoutring himself, he ascertained that the jewel cases were safe. Linacre made his appearance in time to buckle on his corslet.

"I know not how long I shall remain here," said Standish. "But hold yourself in readiness for instant departure."

Linacre promised obedience.

The apartment Standish had occupied was situated in the great gallery, which now seemed completely deserted, though it had not been robbed of the noble family portraits that adorned it.

As he marched along he perceived Maria in the distance. She instantly recognised him, and uttering a cry of delight, flew towards him, and kissed his hand.

"Oh! how delighted the señorita will be to learn you are come at last!" she exclaimed. "She has been quite in despair, but will now revive. She has never ceased to regret that she left Lathom House."

All this was spoken in Spanish, but her hearer quite understood it, and made the best reply he could.

"Tell her I am most anxious to see her," he said. "I only arrived here last night, and may not remain long. I am now going down to breakfast in the banqueting-hall. Perhaps she will join me there"

"I am sure she will," cried Maria. "She has not yet left her room. But she will come to you as soon as she can. Oh! how she will thank me for my good news!"

And she hurried off to convey it, while Standish descended the magnificent staircase, and proceeded to the banqueting-hall.

One or two persons were to be seen in this vast apartment, which used formerly to be thronged with serving-men and guests. These were Randal Fermor and another servant who were spreading a cloth at the upper end of the long oak table.

"It has occurred to me that your honour may like to breakfast with your friends," said Randal. "Shall I arrange it so?"

"By all means," replied Standish.

So great was his impatience to behold Engracia that he thought it an age before she appeared with Maria, though in reality not many minutes had flown.

It was a rapturous meeting, for the frank-hearted Spanish damsel did not attempt to conceal her delight, and her lover could not repress his ardour. As he held her hand, and gazed into her splendid black eyes, he thought her looking more beautiful than ever, and told her so with a warmth that left no doubt of his sincerity.

Their first transports over, they proceeded to the further end of the hall, where their discourse would be unheard, for he had much to say to her.

In the first place, he had to assure the lovely mistress of his heart that his devotion was unaltered, and, if possible, stronger than ever, while she declared that he had never for a single moment been absent from her thoughts.

"I have had nothing else to do but think of you, caro," she said, "and pray that you would soon come to me. I have thought of you at all times, and in all places, but especially on the lake. Our separation has been so long, that I sometimes began to fear I should never behold you again—and that fear almost broke my heart. But at last you are come. I behold you again, and nothing can equal my bliss. Promise not to leave me, or I shall become miserable again."

"I will not deceive you, my beloved!" cried Standish. "Nothing would give me so much delight as to stay with you—nothing will pain me more than to quit you. But I am not my own master. I should not have left Lathom House—I should not have deserted the countess, had she not sent me on a special mission. I have come here to meet the Earl of Derby."

"Then it is not to see me that you have come—as I fondly persuaded myself?" she cried, somewhat piqued.

"Duty has the first claim upon me, dearest," he rejoined. "I must obey her call."

"Yes, I have no right to complain. But it will be very—very hard to lose you." Then controlling her emotion, she added, "When do you expect the Earl of Derby?"

"I know not," he rejoined. "He may arrive at any moment. No doubt he will come secretly."

"And take you with him when he does come."

"It may be so. I cannot tell. It is not likely I shall remain here."

"Then you give me no hope?"

"Alas! no. My own idea is that his lordship has some important task for me to execute, and that I must set about it forthwith."

Their discourse was here interrupted by Don Fortunio, who had entered the hall unnoticed by either of them, and now coughed slightly to announce his

presence. He expressed the greatest pleasure at beholding Standish, and inquired anxiously after the countess, and how the siege progressed.

"I hope she still defies her enemies," he said.

"Resolutely as ever," replied Standish. "They have not relaxed in their efforts, but all those engaged in its defence believe that Lathom House will never be taken."

"I joy to hear you say so," cried Don Fortunio.

"The Earl of Derby will speedily raise the siege—of that you may feel certain," remarked Standish. "The countess has endured much, but I trust the worst is over."

"Her losses, I am told, have been slight compared with those of the enemy?" observed Don Fortunio.

"True," replied Standish. "But we have just had one loss that has afflicted the whole garrison. Gertrude Rosworm has been killed."

"What do I hear?" cried Engracia. "Gertrude Rosworm killed! But I wonder not. She ever exposed herself to danger."

"Her end was heroic. She saved the countess from an assassin," said Standish.

"Truly, that was an heroic death," exclaimed Don Fortunio.

CHAPTER XXXI

How the Jewels were sold to Simon Ophir, the Liverpool Jew

BREAKFAST was finished, but the little party were still seated at the table, when Randal, who had attended upon them during the meal, suddenly disappeared, but returned in a few minutes, and signified to Standish that he had something to say to him in private.

Upon this, the young man arose, and bowing to his friends, followed the steward out of the hall.

"Be pleased to come with me to my lord's cabinet," said Randal, leading the way in that direction.

"Wherefore thither?" demanded Standish, struck by his manner. "Do you expect his lordship? Is he here?"

The steward, however, made no reply, but on reaching the cabinet, opened the door, and admitted him.

Two persons were in the chamber.

One of them was the Earl of Derby himself. He had evidently ridden far, and had just dismounted, having hastily taken off his mantle, and thrown his feathered hat on the table. He looked somewhat haggard, and scarcely greeted Standish as he entered the chamber.

With him was an elderly personage, who from his aspect might have been taken for a Puritan. His features were sharp and intelligent, and his eyes keen. He was enveloped in a loose gown fastened at the neck, that concealed the rest of his costume, and had not removed his steeple-crowned hat.

Beside him on the table were two large leather bags, which Standish felt sure contained money. The earl did not mention the name of this personage, and treated him with great hauteur.

"Have you brought the jewels with you?" was the earl's first inquiry of Standish.

"I have, my lord," he replied, producing the cases.

Lord Derby handed them to the stranger, whose keen eyes glistened as he carefully inspected their contents.

The examination took some time, during which not a word was spoken, but the earl and Standish exchanged significant glances. The young man had seen an Israelite money lender in Liverpool, named Simon Ophir, who had grown rich by the necessities of Cavaliers. He suspected this to be the person, and he was right in his surmise.

"Are you satisfied?" said the earl, when the usurer had finished his inspection.

"Yes, they are fine jewels, no doubt," replied Ophir. "But if I give three thousand pounds for them, I shall gain very little by the transaction."

"I will abate nothing," rejoined the earl, haughtily. "I believe the jewels to be worth double the sum I have asked. You know full well that if I did not want the money for an especial purpose I would not part with them."

"Yes, I am aware of that," replied Ophir, "and I have so much respect for your lordship that I would strain a point to serve you. Though, from prudential reasons, I maintain the exterior of a Puritan, I am a Royalist at heart, and my sympathies are entirely with your party. I only lend money to Cavaliers, and always to those of good family."

"Yes, I am aware of it. Sir Thomas Tyldesley has had a thousand pounds from you," observed the earl. "'Twas he recommended you to me."

"Sir Thomas is not the only one of your lordship's friends I have served," remarked Ophir. "Lord Molineux and Sir Gilbert Hoghton could tell you something if they chose."

"I do not want to hear it," said the earl. "They would have had no dealings with you, if they could have helped it. Neither would I."

"Your lordship is mistaken in me," rejoined Ophir. "I desire to deal honourably and fairly with you. I have come to Knowsley at your request, and have brought with me three thousand pounds in gold, wherewith to purchase certain diamonds, which your lordship values at double the sum, but which I feel sure will leave me small profit—if not entail loss. However, a bargain is a bargain, and I am content. You will find the exact amount in those bags."

"Take not his word, my lord," interposed Standish. "Let the money be counted. I am willing to undertake the task."

"I can make no objection," said the moneylender. "But if the sum be not correct, I will forfeit double the amount."

"Trust him not, I repeat, my lord," cried Standish. "Such fellows are not to be believed on oath."

"Count it, then—count it!" cried Ophir angrily.

"I will," replied Standish.

And untying the neck of one of the bags, he emptied half its glittering contents on the table.

"I leave the matter in your hands, Frank," said the earl, rising. "I will send Randal Fermor to help you."

With this, he quitted the cabinet, and proceeded to the great hall, where he found Don Fortunio and Engracia. His appearance did not cause them surprise, as they had been prepared for his arrival by Standish, but they were greatly pleased to see him.

Don Fortunio did not venture to make any inquiries which the earl might have been indisposed to answer, but he obtained the satisfactory assurance that Lathom House would soon be delivered from its assailants.

After some little time spent in converse, they walked out into the garden, as the earl was anxious to see how it looked, but they had not got beyond the terrace, when they were joined by Standish.

"Is the affair settled?" inquired the earl.

The young man replied in the affirmative, and added in a low tone to his lordship:

"The money was perfectly right, so I did the rascal an injustice. He has departed with his treasures, and I frightened him by saying he would certainly be robbed before he got to Liverpool."

"You did wrong, Frank," said the earl. "Should his fears be realised, he will think you hired the robbers."

"Nay, for that matter, I feel half inclined to turn robber myself," laughed Standish.

"You will be otherwise employed," said the earl. "You must accompany me to Chester. I shall set out in an hour."

"So soon, my lord?" cried the young man, gazing wistfully at Engracia.

"I have done all I came to do, and shall return without delay," said the earl. "Where is Randal Fermor?"

"You will find him in your cabinet, my lord," replied Standish. "I left him in charge of the money."

The earl then re-entered the house, and proceeded to his cabinet, where he found the steward, who showed him the bags of money, and received his orders respecting them. They were to be carried by two of the troopers who had come with his lordship from Chester.

The hour had flown with inconceivable quickness as it seemed to Engracia and her lover, allowing scarce time enough, they thought, for a tender parting.

But the earl, who had bidden adieu to Don Fortunio, was in the saddle. His little troop was ready. Linacre, also, was ready, and holding Standish's steed by the bridle.

One last embrace and away!

BOOK VI. — PRINCE RUPERT

CHAPTER I

Of the Royalist Force under Prince Rupert

LORD DERBY and his attendants having made their way safely to Cuerdley, crossed the Mersey at Penketh Ferry, and rode on to Daresbury, where the earl learnt to his great satisfaction that Prince Rupert had entered Cheshire, and was marching with an army of ten thousand men, chiefly cavalry, from Betley, where he made a short halt, towards Has-lington and Sandbach.

Report added that the inhabitants of Nantwich, most of whom were friendly to the Parliament, had been thrown into the greatest consternation, as they expected the town would be assaulted by the prince, but he appeared to have other designs. The Royalist troops, however, were plundering the whole district, seizing all the horses they could find, and forcing great numbers of the peasantry to join them.

On receiving this intelligence, Lord Derby at once altered his plan, and instead of proceeding to Chester, struck across the country towards Knutsford, resting for the night at Nether Peover.

Next morning, he ascertained that the prince was advancing with his whole force to Knutsford, and rode on to meet him.

Ere long abundant evidences were afforded that a large army was on the march. Most of the farmhouses were deserted, and the country folk were flying in all directions, fearful of being compelled to serve as recruits.

At length the advanced guard of the Royal army came in sight. It consisted of five hundred lancers, and a like number of cuirassiers, all well mounted and completely armed—the foremost being furnished with steel caps, gorgets, and breast-plates, and the latter with polished cuirasses, that glittered in the sun. Then followed several regiments of harquebussiers and dragoons. These did not make quite such a brilliant show as the troops that had gone before them, but were quite as serviceable in the field—if not more so. The artillery consisted of twenty large cannons, each drawn by four strong horses. These pieces of ordnance had just been used at Newark.

The infantry, which we have said was not so numerous as the horse, comprised six regiments, each five hundred strong, and besides there were a thousand pikemen and billmen.

Viewed from the brow of a hill, as Lord Derby first beheld it, with its flags flying, and its numerous richly accoutred officers riding with their men, this large army presented a splendid sight, well calculated to fill the earl with martial enthusiasm. Equal ardour was kindled in Standish's breast, and he longed to join the force, which appeared to him resistless.

Having gazed at the spectacle for a few minutes and listened to the stirring strains that added so materially to its effect, the earl rode down the hill, and galloped past the lancers and cuirassiers till he met the prince, with whom were several officers of distinction. Most of them were fine-looking men, but not to compare with their valiant leader.

As usual Prince Rupert was magnificently accoutred, and bestrode a powerful charger. Elated by his recent successes, confident in his ability to subdue the foe on any future engagement, and burning for revenge, he looked full of spirit, though even when thus excited, his countenance had a stern expression, and when he spoke his eyes seemed occasionally to flash fire.

The prince was much surprised to behold the Earl of Derby, as he had not expected to meet him on the march, but he greeted him most cordially.

No halt was made. The officers who were with the prince when Lord Derby came up fell back, and left them together.

They then rode side by side, and were soon engaged in earnest discourse, which was conducted in a low tone.

Rupert's expression became fiercer, and his eye blazed as he listened to what the earl said to him.

Notwithstanding the representations made to him, it seemed that the prince had not exactly comprehended the condition of the countess at Lathom House, nor was he aware of the indignities to which she had been subjected. But when Lord Derby explained what had really occurred during the siege, he was exceedingly wroth.

"I had no idea my cousin, the countess, had been so much distressed by these insolent rebels," he said; "but I promise you she shall be speedily delivered from them. I will do nothing till I have succoured her, and avenged her on her malicious enemies."

"I thank your highness for these promises which I am sure will be fulfilled," replied the earl. "Had my noble wife been able to contend with her enemies she would not have asked for assistance. But she fears that the garrison may be reduced by famine."

"That shall never be," cried Prince Rupert. "In a few days I shall be before the castle, and we shall then see how long the siege will endure."

"Again I thank your highness in my wife's name and my own," said the earl. "Had I not lost all my men before I retired to the Isle of Man, it would not have been needful for me to apply to you for aid. But your soldiers shall be well rewarded for the service they will render me. I have brought three thousand pounds in gold with me, which I will place in your highness's hands to be distributed among them when the siege is raised."

"By my faith! you have done well, cousin, and I thank you heartily," cried Rupert. "My men want pay as you are well aware, and this will gratify them."

"It is right your highness should know that the money is the produce of my wife's jewels," said the earl. "Your cousin, the countess, therefore, will reward the men."

"They shall know that," said the prince; "and they will then comprehend what sacrifices are made for the king. His majesty himself shall know it."

"After the siege is raised, I make no doubt I shall be able to bring his majesty large bodies of men," said the earl. "But in the present state of Lancashire, which is now entirely in the hands of the rebels, it is impossible to do so."

"All that shall speedily be changed," said Rupert. "I mean to storm Bolton and Wigan."

"I rejoice to hear it," said the earl. "With this force neither place will be able to withstand your assault. You mean to enter the county, I conclude, by Stockport Bridge?"

"Such is my design," replied the prince.

"The pass will be strongly defended," observed the earl.

"I count upon that," rejoined the prince. "But if they bring all the force they can muster from Manchester and elsewhere, they will not prevent my entrance. Your lordship must help me. You shall have the command of my cuirassiers."

"I thank your highness," replied the earl. "If we do not cut our way through all opposition, it shall not be my fault."

Knutsford, then but a very small town, afforded poor quarters for so large a force. Tents were therefore pitched in Tatton Park, while Toft Hall, Booth's Hall, Mere Hall, and several other habitations in the neighbourhood were occupied. The prince and the Earl of Derby, with some of the chief officers, found lodgings at Tabley Hall, the residence of Sir Peter Leicester. Sir Peter, who had suffered much for his loyalty, gave them a hearty welcome, but his house had been recently plundered by the Parliamentary soldiers.

On arriving at Tabley Hall, Lord Derby's first business was to deliver to the prince the sum of money he had promised him. Rupert smiled as the bags of gold were placed before him by Standish, and after he had transferred them with some private instructions to his paymaster, he said:

"Lord Derby informs me, Captain Standish, that you are about to return to Lathom House and hope to gain an entrance, in spite of the besiegers. Should you succeed in doing so, tell the countess to be of good cheer. I shall shortly come to her succour."

"Your highness may be sure that no message could give her ladyship greater satisfaction," replied Standish, "and I hope soon to deliver it. If fortune favours me, I shall see her ladyship to-morrow morn."

"Good," rejoined Rupert, approvingly. "Are you alone?"

"I have one attendant with me, your highness."

"You can depend upon him?" said the prince.

"He brought me safely through the trenches, your highness, so I think he will take me back."

"The man may be trusted," observed the earl. "He conveyed a letter to the countess from Chester. I shall not write to her now. Your highness's message will suffice. When she learns that relief is at hand, she will be perfectly content."

CHAPTER II

How Standish returned to Lathom House, but stayed to sup at Knowsley on the Way thither

EVENING was coming on, when Standish, attended by Linacre, set out from Tabley Hall.

On his way to Daresbury, whither he speeded, he encountered several foraging parties, but as they belonged to Prince Rupert's army, they did not molest him.

From Daresbury he galloped on to the ferry that had served his turn in the morning, crossed the Mersey to Penketh, and went on at the same rapid pace to Prescott. His intention was to halt at Knowsley, and he hoped to reach the house before its inmates had retired to rest.

He succeeded in his design, and astonished Don Fortunio and Engracia by his unexpected appearance in the great banqueting-hall. Engracia uttered a cry when she beheld him.

"Is it possible you can have returned so soon?" she said. "You gave us no hopes of seeing you again."

"I had no expectation of returning immediately when I left you," he replied. "But I have tidings that will delight you. Prince Rupert is coming with a large force to the countess's relief. I have seen him, and am on the way to Lathom with a message from his highness."

And he hastily recounted all that had occurred. They listened with the greatest satisfaction to his narration, and so did Randal Fermor, who was present at the time.

"You must be fatigued by your long ride, sir," said the old steward, filling a goblet with wine, and presenting it to him.

"Touch the cup with your lips ere I drink, I pray you, fair damsel," said Standish.

She complied, exclaiming at the same time: "To the countess's speedy deliverance."

While Standish emptied the goblet, Don Fortunio likewise drank the same toast, and as it was now quite evident that the young man stood in need of some refreshment, the steward pressed him to sit down at the table, at the same time placing part of a cold fowl before him.

To bear him company, Don Fortunio, who had finished supper, began again, and even Engracia ate a little more. But while thus taking care of himself he was not unmindful of his attendant, but sent Randal to look after Linacre and the horses.

Having rested sufficiently, and renovated his strength by a good supper, Standish took leave of his friends, and again set forth on his perilous journey.

The night was dark, but he rode swiftly through the park with his attendant, crossed the moors safely, and entered the wood beyond which lay the camp of the enemy. Here he halted for awhile to consult with his attendant.

The greatest caution was now required. Linacre thought they might be able to steal through the camp unperceived, but if the alarm should be given, they must trust to the swiftness of their horses.

At length, they issued from the wood, peering through the gloom, and listening anxiously for any sound, but they had not proceeded far when they were challenged by a sentinel whom they had not been able to distinguish in the gloom.

As they made no answer the man fired, upon which they dashed on, determined at all hazards to pass through the camp. But the alarm had been given, drums were beaten, and several more shots fired.

Linacre displayed great skill in avoiding the danger. At his earnest request he was allowed to take the lead, and it was well that Standish consented to his guidance, as by the various turns he made, he completely perplexed the enemy, and caused them to fire upon one another.

At last, Standish and his attendant cleared the camp, and without hurt or hindrance to themselves or their steeds; but other sentinels had to be passed. They freed themselves from the first who challenged them by shooting him, and then galloped towards the trenches. They were next pursued by a mounted guard, who shouted to them to stop, and fired at them when they refused, and the pursuit continued till they reached the fortifications.

Meanwhile, the firing had been heard by the musketeers on the ramparts, and suspecting what was taking place, Captain Chisenhale, who had a party of men in readiness, instantly sallied forth from the postern-gate, and fired a volley at the nearest battery.

This was done to distract the enemy's attention, and proved completely successful, while it served to direct Standish and his attendant in their course, and they now made for that part of the trenches which was nearest the gateway.

But their pursuers were not far behind, and shouted to their comrades to stop them, but the cries were unheard. The fugitives got through the trenches, killing three men who sought to check them, and though pursued to the last, crossed the drawbridge in safety, and entered the gateway.

"Has the countess retired to rest?" asked Standish, as he rode into the court.

"Her ladyship is in the chapel," replied Captain Ogle, to whom the inquiry was addressed. "She has ordered a special service to-night."

"Come with me thither," cried Standish, leaping from his steed. "I have news you will be glad to hear."

When they reached the chapel, the service was just finished, and the soldiers who had attended it were coming forth.

Standish ordered them to wait outside, and entering the little fane, met the countess and Arch-deacon Rutter.

She was greatly surprised, but had not time to question him, ere he spoke.

"I bring a message to your ladyship from Prince Rupert," he said. "His highness is coming to succour you. You may expect him ere many days."

"Heaven, then, has heard my prayers," she exclaimed.

CHAPTER III

How Stockport Bridge was defended by Colonels Duckenfield and Mainwaring, and how it was taken by Prince Rupert and the Earl of Derby

THE tidings brought by Standish that Prince Rupert and the Earl of Derby were marching to succour the countess quickly spread through the garrison, and caused so much excitement, that the musketeers were with difficulty prevented from shouting out to the enemy.

The countess, however, gave the strictest orders that no manifestation whatever should be made, and her injunctions were enforced by Major Farrington and the officers.

Standish had explained to her ladyship that the prince and the earl meant to enter Lancashire by Stockport Bridge, which was certain to be defended by a strong force of the enemy, and that till this pass was won, she must not reckon upon the immediate appearance of her deliverers.

The well-judging lady was of the same opinion, and though she had no apprehension of the result of the conflict which she felt must ensue at Stockport, she would not allow any precautions to be neglected.

"On the contrary we must be more vigilant than ever," she said, "lest the enemy should make a last attempt to assault the castle before they are forced to abandon the siege."

"My counsel is that we should make another grand sortie," said Major Farrington, "and if we can, drive the enemy from the trenches, before our friends arrive, so that the honour may rest—as it should do—with your ladyship."

"I am quite satisfied with what I have done," she replied. "I do not desire to expose my brave soldiers and their officers to heedless risk."

"I beseech your ladyship not to think of us," observed Standish. "We all long to punish the enemy, and shall be grievously disappointed if we have not another opportunity of doing so. Besides, there is nothing to fear. In the numerous sorties we have made our losses have been trifling."

"That is true," replied the countess. "Heaven has fought with us. My brave soldiers shall not be deprived of the honour they covet. If the prince and my lord arrive not here in three days, another sortie shall be made."

"Why should it not be made to-night, madam?" said Standish.

"No—that must not be," she replied. "Were any disaster to occur, my lord would blame me."

Standish said no more, though he felt mortified by her ladyship's refusal.

A strong sense of disappointment pervaded both officers and men that they were not to be allowed a last chance of punishing the detested foe, but they repressed the feeling as well as they could, and only displayed it by picking off a man now and then on the batteries.

A strange sort of quietude prevailed amongst the enemy, which could only be explained by the supposition that they were preparing either for a general assault or a speedy retreat. That news had reached them of the advance of Prince Rupert and the earl was apparent, but how they meant to act under the circumstances could not be so readily conjectured.

The greatest care was taken by Rigby to cut off all communication between the garrison and their friends, and he succeeded so well that no intelligence, later than that brought by Standish, had as yet reached the countess.

She knew not whether Rupert and the earl had passed Stockport Bridge, or whether they had been compelled by the successful resistance of the enemy to cross the Mersey at Warrington. In the latter case they would have to storm the town, and this would occasion considerable delay.

Linacre and another scout had been sent out to obtain information, but neither had returned.

Meanwhile, though the garrison knew it not, the utmost anxiety prevailed in the camp of the enemy, and constant councils were held by Rigby and Colonel Assheton, Colonel Holland having returned to Manchester on the first tidings of the prince's approach, as it was not improbable that town might be assaulted by the prince.

All the available force that could be got together by the Parliamentary commanders was sent to Stock-port to defend the bridge. Unfortunately for them, Sir Thomas Fairfax, the only general who could have adequately directed their efforts at this critical juncture, or encountered the resistless Rupert with a chance of success, was in Yorkshire, and could not arrive in time.

The Parliamentary force, thus hastily collected, amounted to four thousand men—five hundred of whom were contributed by Rigby from his beleaguering force at Lathom. The commanders of this force, which consisted chiefly of infantry, were Colonels Duckenfield and Mainwaring, two officers of courage and experience. They had with them a dozen large cannon.

At Stockport, the Mersey, which here divides Cheshire and Lancashire, runs through a deep ravine with high cliffs on either side. At that time the river was crossed by a narrow stone bridge, which from its position could be easily defended.

Posted on the Lancashire side of the river, the Parliamentary leaders had placed six of their cannon so as to command the bridge, and the rest on the heights above.

The cliffs were covered with musketeers who could fire upon the enemy as from the ramparts of a castle, while a large force, drawn up on both sides of the bridge, was ready to dispute the passage.

When Prince Rupert looked down upon this formidable pass, and saw how well it was defended, he remarked to the Earl of Derby, who was with him:

"The rebels have done their best to keep us out of Lancashire. It will take some time and cost some men to get to the other side of this ravine, but we shall do it in spite of them."

"Will your highness go first, or shall I clear the bridge?" asked the earl.

"No, cousin. No one shall go before me," replied the prince. "Follow with the cuirassiers."

Having given some orders, the valiant prince, who loved to confront danger, drew his sword, placed himself at the head of his lancers, and dashed down the precipitous bank like a torrent, sweeping all before it.

Utterly unable to withstand the furious onset, the soldiers, who guarded the approach to the bridge were either cut to pieces, or driven back upon their comrades, so that the bridge was crowded with soldiers jammed so closely together that they could not move hand or foot.

In this helpless condition they were mercilessly slaughtered by the lancers, to escape whom numbers leaped over the parapets into the river and were drowned.

In a few minutes, Rupert was across the bridge, cutting down, or scattering the new force that vainly attempted to oppose him.

Meantime, the musketeers on the cliffs had begun to fire, and showers of bullets whistled past the prince, but he seemed to bear a charmed life, for not a shot struck him.

The cannon near the bridge proved useless, and were taken before the engineers could open fire, while the ordnance on the heights, being badly levelled, did more harm to friends than foes.

By this time the Earl of Derby had joined the prince, and harquebussiers and dragoons were following fast, so that the whole ravine seemed filled with soldiers, and resounded with the roar of cannon and the rattle of musketry.

To prevent the Royalists from climbing the bank, Colonel Duckenfield had barred the ascent with a thousand men, and a terrible conflict took place, but it ended in the complete rout of the Parliamentarians, more than half of whom were slain.

The battle did not last more than two hours, but at the end of that time Rupert and Lord Derby were in Lancashire, with their whole force—neither of them having received a wound, while the enemy were flying in all directions.

The losses of the Royalists were slight as compared with those of the foe. Quantities of arms were taken, and many prisoners made.

In short, the prince's entrance into Lancashire had been marked by an important victory, tidings of which would quickly spread throughout the country, rousing the well-affected, and filling the rebels with dismay.

On hearing of this signal defeat, Rigby was filled with consternation. Clearly, the siege of Lathom House must be abandoned, since he could not doubt that Prince Rupert and the Earl of Derby would immediately come to succour the countess, and it would be impossible to stand against them.

He knew not which way to turn. If he retired to Manchester, he should inevitably meet the foe. After some consideration, he decided upon proceeding to Bolton, which had now become a Puritan town, and where there was a strong Parliamentary garrison.

But he determined not to set out till night, as he wished to keep the countess in suspense to the last moment. With this object he ordered a certain number of men to remain in the trenches, and occupy the batteries till it became dark.

Later on in the day, the remnant of the troops he had sent to Stockport returned, in a very shattered condition, several of them wounded, and most of them without arms or ammunition.

Captain Willoughby and Captain Bootle, the only officers left, out of half a dozen, gave him particulars of the disastrous fight, and confirmed his apprehensions that the victorious Royalist commanders were marching to Lathom to wreak their vengeance upon him. He had no alternative, therefore, but flight, and he accordingly hastened his preparations for departure.

Before setting out, he sent Captain Bootle with a small troop of horse to Knowsley, ordering him to make prisoners of Don Fortunio and his daughter, and bring them to Bolton, as he hoped to obtain a large ransom for them.

An hour before midnight, he had assembled his whole force, which notwithstanding the losses he had just sustained amounted to nearly three thousand men.

In obedience to the orders given them, the soldiers had silently quitted the trenches and batteries, and nothing indicated that the musketeers on the batteries were aware of their departure.

Screened by the darkness, Rigby then stole away, deeply mortified and humiliated, the Leaguer that had lasted nearly four months being thus disgracefully abandoned.

All possible expedition was used in the nocturnal march, for the Parliamentarians were fearful of pursuit, knowing that quarter would not be given them, if they were overtaken.

They might have found refuge in Wigan, which was not far off, but Rigby did not dare to stay there, as he would not have been secure from the vengeful Earl of Derby. So he went on, leaving behind him at Ecclestone and Wrightington such of his wounded soldiers as were unable to continue the rapid march.

On reaching Lostock Hall, he halted for an hour, and then made his way over the hills and moors lying between him and Bolton, arriving there soon after day-break. Not till he was inside the mud walls that protected the town, did he feel secure.

CHAPTER IV

Of the brief Visit paid by Prince Rupert to the Countess

WHILE Rigby was executing this rapid retreat, the officers of the garrison were preparing for a final sortie—permission having at last been accorded, though reluctantly, by the countess.

Just before dawn, Standish, accompanied by Lieutenant Bretergh and fifty musketeers, sallied forth from the great gateway; and at the same time Captains Ogle and Rawsthorne with another party issued from the postern-gate. Captain Chisenhale with a hundred men was in the centre court, and Captain Molineux Radcliffe was on the ramparts.

As the two parties cautiously advanced towards the trenches, they were surprised to find that all remained quiet. No sentinels could be discovered, nor was a single shot fired from the fortifications.

Beginning, at length, to suspect the truth, Standish dashed on, plunged unhesitatingly into the trench, which he found abandoned, and next scaled the nearest battery, followed closely by Bretergh and his men. No resistance was offered. Not a shot was fired. The cannon was in the sconce, but the engineers were gone.

Overjoyed at the discovery, Standish caused his men to shout loudly. They were answered from the fortifications gained by Ogle and Rawsthorne, and from musketeers on the ramparts of the mansion, but no other sound was heard, and it was clear that the besiegers had decamped, leaving nothing behind them except such ordnance as were too heavy to be removed.

Intelligence of this important discovery was immediately sent to Major Farrington, by whom it was conveyed to the countess.

She was quite prepared for the good news by the shouts she had heard. Indeed, there was not a single person in the garrison that did not guess the truth.

As soon as it became light, the sudden departure of the enemy was confirmed, since it could be seen that the tents had been struck during the night. Evidently Rigby had taken flight, alarmed by the approach of Prince Rupert and the Earl of Derby.

Standish besought permission to ride forth and meet the earl, and the countess yielded to his solicitations, but enjoined him to take a guard with him. Nothing could have pleased him better, and as soon as the horses could be saddled, he set out with half a dozen armed attendants.

Passing through the deserted trenches, and making his way past the fortifications, he rode on to the site of the camp. There were abundant vestiges of the besiegers, though they had taken with them all they could. Several wounded men, who had been left behind, were lying stretched on the ground, groaning with pain. Some of these poor fellows implored his help, and from them he ascertained that Colonel Rigby had retired with his whole force to Bolton. They also informed him of the conflict at Stockport, adding, that the victorious Royalists were marching to Lathom, and could not be very far off.

This proved to be the case, for ere he had quitted the spot, the loud blast of a clarion was heard, and a regiment of lancers emerged from the wood. At the head of this fine body of men rode Prince Rupert and the Earl of Derby. Having learnt from their scouts that the beleaguering force was gone, they had ridden on with the advanced guard.

Instantly recognising the two noble personages, Standish rode on to meet them.

"Soh! the siege is raised, and Rigby gone," cried the prince, as he returned Standish's salutation. "Whither has he fled?"

"To Bolton, your highness, as I learn from those wounded men," replied Standish.

"To Bolton!" cried Rupert. Then turning to Lord Derby, he added: "We will follow him thither."

The earl signified his satisfaction at the resolve.

"Were he to escape punishment, all the rebels in the county would deride us," he said. "Bolton is a strong place, as I have found, but it shall not shelter him from our swords."

"We will march there at once," cried the prince. "I will come to Lathom on our return."

"Nay, I pray your highness, pass not by the castle, now you are so near it," said the earl. "It will cheer the countess to see you."

Thus urged, Rupert could not refuse, though he controlled his impatience with difficulty. But he gave orders to an aide-de-camp to inform the different officers that no halt should be made, but that the whole army must march on to Bolton, adding that he and Lord Derby would overtake them before they got half way there.

These orders given, the prince and the earl, attended by Standish and followed by a guard of twenty lancers, together with the musketeers from the garrison, rode towards the mansion.

On reaching the batteries, they stopped for a few minutes to examine them, and while they were engaged in the scrutiny, Standish told them of the many successful sorties made by the garrison, and how the great mortar had been captured.

"Rigby has utterly failed," he said. "He has battered the walls, knocked down a turret, and hit the Eagle Tower, but he has done us no real harm."

"How many soldiers have you lost?" demanded the prince.

"Not half a dozen, your highness," replied Standish. "But upwards of five hundred of the enemy have been slain."

Rupert smiled at the earl, but made no remark.

Meanwhile, access had been given to the castle through a breach in the fortifications, and a portion of the ditch had likewise been levelled.

The drawbridge was lowered, and the gates thrown wide open, and as the prince and the earl rode into the court-yard, which resounded with the loud and joyous shouts of the musketeers, they were met by Major Farrington and the officers of the garrison.

But Lord Derby did not linger there. The countess and her daughters had just come forth, and on beholding them he sprang from his steed, and hurrying forward clasped them in his arms.

Not to interrupt this joyous meeting, the prince remained for a few minutes in converse with Major Farrington. He then dismounted, and tendered his homage and congratulations to the countess, and in no measured terms.

"I am no flatterer as you are well aware, cousin," he said, "but a rude soldier, and you will therefore believe me when I say that I do not think there is another woman in England—nay, for that matter, not a man—who could have defended this castle for so long a period against such a beleaguering force, as you have done. I am proud of you, cousin—very proud—and well I may be of my near relationship to the most heroic lady of her day."

"You praise me overmuch, cousin," replied the countess, much gratified. "But I thank you nevertheless."

"If you are proud of her, prince, what must I be, who can call her wife?" said Lord Derby. "Had I not known her intrepidity and skill I should not have left her here. But she has more than justified my confidence."

"Without your positive orders, my dear lord, I would never have capitulated, and this I told the messengers sent me by the enemy," said the countess. "And had not you, prince, come to my deliverance, I would have perished here with my children and soldiers. Such was my fixed determination. I thank you from my heart for what you have done."

"Nay, I have done nothing," rejoined Rupert. "It has not been needful to strike a blow. The enemy have fled."

"The terror of your name has driven them hence," said the countess.

"But they are not beyond my reach," said the prince, sternly. "They have fled, but I shall catch them. I have sworn to avenge your wrongs, cousin, and I will keep my word. I will exterminate Rigby and his host."

"Rigby does not deserve mercy," said the countess. "He is a traitor and a robber. Whither is he gone?"

"To Bolton," replied the earl. "There we shall follow him, so we must now bid you adieu."

"This is indeed a brief visit," she said.

"But we shall speedily return," said the earl.

"Will not your highness enter the house, and drink a cup of wine?" said the countess.

"I will drink no wine till I have taken Bolton, and slain Rigby," rejoined Rupert. "Ere many days, you shall see us again, if all goes well. And then I will feast with you, and rejoice. Farewell, dear cousin!"

While the prince mounted his charger, and rode slowly through the gateway bowing to Major Farrington, and the officers, Lord Derby lingered for a moment to embrace his wife and daughters, and shook hands heartily with Archdeacon Rutter and the other chaplains.

He then vaulted into the saddle, and followed the prince amid reiterated shouts from the musketeers.

Gladly would they have accompanied their lord to Bolton. Gladly would the officers have gone with him. But the earl had sufficient force, and would not reduce the strength of the garrison till the enemy was vanquished.

All therefore were left behind except Standish and his little troop, who had the enviable privilege of attending their lord.

As the earl looked back at the castle, and thought of all that had happened since he last beheld it, he breathed a prayer to Heaven for its marvellous preservation.

Just as Standish had passed through the breach in the fortifications, he encountered Linacre, and stopped for a moment to speak to him.

"What news from Knowsley?" he asked.

"Bad news," replied Linacre. "Don Fortunio and his daughter have been taken prisoners by Captain Bootle, and carried off to Bolton. They were taken away last night."

Fain would Standish have questioned him further, but time was not allowed him.

At this moment, the two leaders set off at a rapid pace, and he was obliged to follow.

BOOK VII. — THE STORMING OF BOLTON

CHAPTER I

How Bolton was assaulted; and how the Attack was repulsed

PRINCE RUPERT and the earl overtook the army before it had proceeded many miles.

A brief halt was made at Haigh, and Standish then informed Lord Derby, with whom he had had no previous opportunity of conferring, that Don Fortunio and his daughter had been carried off from Knowsley by Captain Bootle.

This intelligence filled the earl with rage, and he exclaimed that if he caught Bootle, he should be put to death as a felon.

From Haigh they marched on to Heaton, where they again halted, and being now about two miles from Bolton, several mounted scouts were sent across the moor to ascertain how the town could be most advantageously approached.

Wishing to observe the movements of the enemy, Standish rode out at the same time as the scouts, and mounted a little eminence, whence he obtained a complete view of the town, here about half a mile distant.

The defences he knew had been planned by Rosworm, and were skilfully made. Strong mud walls, having a deep ditch outside, surrounded the town; the entrances being protected by barricades with stout posts and chains. As far as he could discover after a careful survey, there were only two gates, and both were strongly guarded.

From previous experience in Manchester, he knew that these barricades would effectually resist cavalry. The walls therefore must be first gained, and this would be no easy task, for they were thronged with musketeers, and provided with several large pieces of ordnance.

But Standish cared not for difficulty or danger, and thought only of liberating Engracia from her captors.

Floating from the walls were a great number of flags which he had last seen on the batteries menacing Lathom House. These should soon be torn down, and sent to the countess.

Before quitting his post of observation he took a final survey of the town, and was obliged to confess that it was likely to make an obstinate resistance.

The place was not large, but the garrison was very strong, and unless he was much mistaken, Rosworm was there in person. Nothing seemed neglected—nor could he detect a weak point in the defences. With the firm conviction that the assault would be hazardous, though burning to engage in it, he rode back.

Two of the scouts had already preceded him, and declared that it mattered little where the attack was made, as the whole garrison was evidently prepared.

On hearing Standish's report, Prince Rupert would not wait a moment longer, but commanded a simultaneous attack to be made on the walls and gates.

The trumpets then sounded, and the army, which had hitherto looked like a vast compact mass, divided into different companies, some moving to the right, and others to the left, but all with great rapidity.

Before each gate was a squadron of horse eager to dash in as soon as an entrance could be forced, and discharging their arquebuses and calivers at the guard, who, screened by the barricades, were keeping up a continuous and destructive fire against them.

Outside the entire circuit of the fortifications, which was not of very great extent, and scarcely exceeded a mile and a half, were collected companies of infantry, who were endeavouring to cross the ditch and scale the walls at various points, but were checked in their efforts by the obstinate resistance offered by the defenders.

In every instance where the assailants had succeeded in obtaining a footing they were killed, or hurled back again into the ditch.

But though repulsed, they constantly returned to the attack, and desperate fighting, attended by great slaughter, went on ceaselessly along the walls.

Furious at the unexpected resistance offered by the Parliamentarians, of whose bravery he had formed a very contemptible opinion, Prince Rupert galloped round the walls, and shouted to his men to renew the assault. His orders were reiterated by the officers, but despite every effort, no substantial advantage was gained.

The besieged had lost very few of their number, while the Royalists had suffered severely, and stimulated by success, the former performed prodigies of valour.

Several Cavaliers of distinction were killed, greatly to Rupert's vexation, and the loss of his friends, slaughtered before his eyes on the walls, exasperated him to the highest degree.

The Earl of Derby was quite as much incensed as the prince at the check they had sustained, for he would not acknowledge a defeat, even to himself. He had expected an easy victory, and a repulse by Rigby mortified as well as exasperated him.

Even Standish had met with a reverse.

Though he had received no orders to make the attempt he was so galled by what he witnessed, that he sprang from his steed, and calling to his men to bring a scaling ladder, gained the summit of the walls, only to remain there for a minute. He was then pushed back by a pikeman, luckily without receiving a wound.

Half an hour later a retreat was sounded, and Rupert and the earl retired, slowly and in good order, evidently intending to renew the attack.

No attempt was made to cut off their retreat, for the Parliamentarians were too prudent to quit their stronghold. Had they sallied forth, the Royalists would have instantly driven them back, and entered the gates with them.

When they were beyond the reach of the cannon, the prince and the earl held a council of war, at which the principal officers assisted, and it was considered how an entrance could be found for cavalry, Rupert, whose wrath was undiminished, declaring he was resolved to take the town, and give quarter to none within it.

CHAPTER II

How Stephen Marsh offered to take Two Hundred Musketeers into the Town

AT this juncture, a man, guarded by a couple of musketeers, was brought in by an officer.

The officer explained that the prisoner stated he had just come secretly from the town, as no doubt was the fact, and, moreover, asserted that he could render the prince a most important service, but would not do so except for a large reward.

"How art thou named, fellow, and what service canst thou render?" demanded Rupert.

"My name is Stephen Marsh," replied the man. "I dwell in Bolton, and can take your highness into the town—but I must be well rewarded for doing so."

"Ha! say'st thou so?" cried the prince. "Make good thy words, and doubt not thy reward."

"I must have it now," replied Marsh.

"Will not my word suffice?" observed the prince.

"I would rather have the money," rejoined Marsh, bluntly.

"Give him two hundred pounds," said Rupert, to one of his officers. "Will that content thee?"

"Ay, marry," replied Marsh. "I will engage to bring into the town, through a place called the Private Acres, as many musketeers as there are pieces of gold in this bag."

"Canst thou not convey horsemen as well as foot?" demanded the prince.

"Impossible, your highness," replied Marsh. "Once inside, the musketeers can admit their comrades. They will be near the Bradshaw Gate,"

"Ay, if that gate be opened for us, the crow's nest will be soon destroyed," said the prince. "What think you of this, my lord?" he added to the earl.

"The plan cannot fail, if treachery be not intended," rejoined Lord Derby.

"The musketeers will have me with them," said Marsh.

"Let me have the command of the party, I pray your highness," said Standish, "and I will answer for the rest."

"Have I your highness's permission to lead the van in this new assault?" cried the earl, eagerly. "You could not accord me a greater favour."

"Then be it so," replied Rupert. "Go in, and spare not. No quarter must be given."

"I am not in a mood for pity," said the earl, sternly.

"No quarter given!" cried Marsh. "I repent me of the bargain I have made. Take back the money."

"'Tis too late now," said Standish. "Thy compact must be fulfilled. Guide me forthwith to the Private Acres."

Then turning to the earl, he added: "Your lordship shall not have to wait long for admittance at the Bradshaw Gate."

Putting himself at the head of a company of musketeers, and keeping Marsh beside him, Standish then proceeded cautiously towards the town.

CHAPTER III

What passed between Colonel Rigby and Rosworm

RIGBY and his officers were greatly elated by their successful defence of the town. But they scarcely liked to acknowledge how much they owed to the skill of the great German engineer.

Rosworm had not taken an active part of the defence, but had explained his plans to Rigby, by whom they were carried out, with the result just described.

But though Rupert and Lord Derby had been repulsed, Rosworm felt certain the assault would be renewed, and with additional vigour, and he warned Rigby not to be too confident, since he had terrible foes to deal with, who were bent upon vengeance, and would not depart without it.

Rigby paid little heed to the counsel, for he now felt sure he could hold out till assistance arrived from Wigan, Blackburn, Manchester, and other places.

"Before to-morrow, I shall be reinforced by ten thousand men," he said.

"But before to-morrow, the town may be taken," rejoined Rosworm.

"I am not uneasy," said Rigby. "After the reception given them I do not think the prince and Lord Derby will venture to make another assault. But should they do so, we shall repulse them again."

"Keep out the cavalry and you are safe," said Rosworm. "But should they once enter, the town is lost."

"You have fortified the place so well that it is impregnable," said Rigby.

"There is but one weak spot, and that the enemy will never discover," said Rosworm.

"Ha! where is it?" inquired Rigby, somewhat uneasily. "I have not found it out myself. I thought the walls were perfect. I have been round them several times, and could detect nothing wrong."

"The walls are quite secure, but there is a subterranean passage under the ditch that may be used as a sally-port," replied Rosworm. "It leads to a place called the Private Acres."

"Where is the entrance to this subterranean passage?" asked Rigby.

"In the cellar of a house belonging to one Stephen Marsh," replied Rosworm. "The man is well affected towards the Parliament."

"May be so," said Rigby. "But the habitation ought to be guarded. I will give orders to that effect, but I must first go to the church, where two worthy ministers, Master John Harper, Pastor of Bolton, and Master John Fogg, Pastor of Liverpool, are offering up prayers."

"I will cause a guard to be placed there myself, since you deem it needful," said Rosworm. "But I desire to say a word to you respecting the prisoners who have been brought here from Knowsley by Captain Bootle. Do you intend to detain them?"

"Ay, till they are ransomed," replied Rigby. "But I cannot bestow a thought upon them now."

"Do you know where they are?"

"Not exactly," replied Rigby. "I directed Bootle to provide them with a lodging, and he told me he had done so. As I have just said, I have not had time to think of them."

"They are lodged in the very house we have just been speaking of—Stephen Marsh's,"—said Rosworm. "The young damsel was greatly terrified by the assault, and offered me some jewels if I would deliver her and her father, and their Spanish servant. But I could not comply without consulting you. Will you take these jewels as a ransom, and let them go? They can depart by this subterranean passage."

"Are they aware of the outlet?" asked Rigby.

"No; neither is Captain Bootle," replied Rosworm.

"I will give the matter consideration," said Rigby. "The prisoners are best here for the present."

"But we may have another assault."

"If so, they shall be removed to a safer place. When I have been to church— if nothing happens to prevent me—I will go to Marsh's house."

"You will find me there," replied Rosworm.

They then separated.

Their discourse had taken place in the inner room of a large inn situated in the market-place, the other rooms of the house being filled with soldiers, who were refreshing themselves after their active service on the walls.

In the market-place itself, some five or six hundred pikemen and clubmen were collected, numbers of whom were listening to a preacher in a grey cloak, stationed at the foot of the old stone cross, who was congratulating them on the glorious victory they had achieved.

Alas! how soon was the scene changed. That place now filled with stalwart men was speedily to be choked up with the dead and dying.

The tone of the preacher at the cross in the market-place was full of exultation.

"They compassed us about," he said, "but they have not prevailed against us. The Lord of Hosts was with us, and fought for us, and if they return, he will help us to smite them again."

Little did he dream that in the next assault, he himself would be smitten.

CHAPTER IV

How Engracia and her Father escaped by the subterranean Passage

IN the upper room of a house, scarcely more than fifty yards from the mud walls surrounding the town, was a beautiful young damsel, whose attire and features showed she belonged to a different clime. She was kneeling in prayer, with a small crucifix clasped in her hands, on which her eyes were fixed.

Close beside her was another kneeling figure—a woman somewhat older than herself, and of inferior degree, but not without pretensions to good looks.

Both were very earnest in their supplications to the Blessed Virgin to deliver them from the hands into which they had fallen, and when they arose, they believed that their prayers would be heard.

The dreadful sounds that had recently assailed their ears, and filled them with terror, had ceased. No more roaring of cannon—no more rattling of musketry—no more shouting.

The attack was over, and seemed to have ended in the defeat of their friends, for as such they regarded the assailants. But though greatly distressed by this result, they did not believe that Heaven would abandon them; nor did they think the fight was entirely ended.

The room in which we find Engracia and her attendant Maria, looked towards the town, and on approaching the windows, they beheld a great number of musketeers and pikemen hurrying past.

These men were making towards a wide street that seemed to lead towards the centre of the town, and in reality conducted to the market-place, whither the soldiers were proceeding.

In this street were a multitude of townsfolk—men and women—who welcomed the soldiers with enthusiasm, and proffered them jugs of ale, which were quickly emptied.

Part of the mud walls, and a barricade, that served to defend the Bradshaw Gate, could be seen from the window on the left. On the right were more fortifications.

As seen from this window, the town looked like a mass of black and white houses, in the midst of which rose the tower of the church, surmounted by a broad banner. Very few soldiers could be perceived on the walls, and none at the barricades. All had gone to the taverns, or to the houses of friends, to refresh themselves.

Engracia and her attendant were still gazing at this strange scene, with mingled emotions of fear and curiosity, when the door opened and Don Fortunio entered the room accompanied by Rosworm.

As the latter had shown them great kindness during their brief captivity, Engracia manifested much pleasure on beholding him.

"Colonel Rosworm has been endeavouring to obtain our release, but without success," said Don Fortunio to his daughter. "Colonel Rigby will not give him a decided answer."

"He is unwilling to part with you," said Rosworm. "I offered him the jewels, but he would not be tempted."

"Is there no hope of deliverance?" she asked. "Are Prince Rupert and Lord Derby gone?"

"No; they have only retired for awhile," replied Rosworm. "The assault will be renewed."

"Holy Mother be praised!" exclaimed Engracia. "There is still hope of deliverance."

"Not much," rejoined Rosworm. "The town is well fortified, and the garrison strong. Besides, assistance will arrive ere long from several neighbouring towns."

"So you see there is but little hope for us, my child," said her father, tristfully.

"Alas!" ejaculated Engracia.

"Ay de mi!" cried Maria.

"Do not despair," said Rosworm. "Colonel Rigby himself will be here presently. Your entreaties may have more effect upon him than my proposition."

Scarcely were the words uttered than the person referred to made his appearance. As usual, his manner was rude and overbearing. Haughtily saluting Don Fortunio, he said:

"I have come to tell you that I cannot liberate you at present on any terms. But you shall have a lodging in the centre of the town, where you will be safe from injury, in the event of a second assault by the enemy."

Rosworm glanced at the Spaniard, who understood the meaning of the look, and declined the offer.

"I would rather remain where I am," he said.

"But I require this house for other purposes," rejoined Rigby. "So I beg you will prepare for immediate departure."

Feeling remonstrance would be useless, Don Fortunio did not attempt it.

"I have something to say to you in private, colonel," said Rigby, signing to Rosworm to follow him.

But before the latter could obey, Captain Bootle burst abruptly into the room. His looks betrayed great anxiety.

"Your presence is needed elsewhere, colonel," he said to Rigby. "Another assault may be speedily expected. The enemy are moving towards the town."

"I will come with you instantly," replied Rigby. "I leave the prisoners in your charge, Colonel Rosworm; keep them here, or take them where you list. When you have seen to the security of the house," he added, significantly, "join me on the walls."

Without waiting for a reply, he quitted the room with Captain Bootle.

Wishing to ascertain the truth of the intelligence just brought, Rosworm flew to a room on the other side of the house, which commanded the country on the further side of the fortifications, and perceived that Rupert's whole force was advancing to renew the attack.

Having thus satisfied himself, he returned to Don Fortunio and told him what he had seen.

"Will you remain here?" he said, "or shall I take you to another lodging. You must decide at once."

"What will you do, my child?" said Don Fortunio to his daughter.

"Remain here," she replied.

Just then a strange noise was heard below, and Rosworm went forth to ascertain the cause of it.

On reaching the staircase, he saw that the lower part of the house was entirely filled with armed men, and instantly comprehended what had happened. A party of Royalist musketeers had gained admittance by the subterranean passage.

The alarm must instantly be given, but how? As he rushed back with the intention of flinging open a window, he was followed by an officer who had discovered him.

"Advance at your peril!" cried Rosworm, presenting a pistol at the head of this person, as he was about to enter the room.

But he did not fire, for at that very moment, he perceived that the officer was no other than Captain Standish, and lowered the weapon.

At the same time, exclamations from Don Fortunio and Engracia announced that they had recognised the new-comer.

"Little did I expect to find you here, Colonel Rosworm," said Standish. "But since chance has brought us together, I am compelled to make you my prisoner. But I will not disarm you."

"You need not do so, for I shall not resist," said Rosworm, replacing the pistol in his belt. "But tell me, how did you discover the subterranean passage?"

"It was shown to me by Stephen Marsh, the owner of this house, who brought me here," replied Standish.

"Ah! the traitor!" exclaimed Rosworm.

"Traitor to Rigby, but friend to Prince Rupert," replied Standish. "From him I learnt," he added to Don Fortunio, "that a Spanish gentleman and his daughter, who had been seized by Captain Bootle, were lodged here. Thus I was prepared to find you here, and what is more to liberate you."

Up to this moment Engracia had been kept motionless by surprise, but she now sprang forward, and was clasped in his arms.

"Will you take us away?" she cried.

"Impossible!" he replied. "I must remain here. I have much to do."

"We will stay till you can go with us," she cried, still clinging to him.

"Nay, this must not be," he said, extricating himself from her embrace. "Not a moment must be lost. Come with me all of you! The man who brought me here will take you safely from the town. Come quickly!"

"I will go with them," said Rosworm.

"Come, then," cried Standish.

Taking Engracia's hand, he led her from the room, and hastily descended the staircase followed by the others.

The lower part of the house, as already intimated, was filled with musketeers, but they drew aside to allow Standish and his companions to pass through their midst.

A short flight of stone steps brought them to a vault, where they found Stephen Marsh with a lighted lantern.

Standish then left them, having previously confided them to Rosworm's care.

"Take them to Lathom House," he said; "and fear not to go there. The countess will receive you well."

CHAPTER V

The Second Assault, and the Massacre

As soon as the firing from the walls announced that Lord Derby had come up, Standish sallied forth from the house at the head of his party of musketeers, and rushed towards the barricade.

So completely were the enemy taken by surprise by this sudden attack, that they could offer little resistance, and almost every man was killed.

From the barricade, the victorious party hurried on to the gate which we have said was defended by stout posts and chains.

In vain the guard stationed here strove to oppose the furious onset. Though aided by their comrades on the walls, as far as was practicable, they gave way after a short but sanguinary conflict, and Standish was master of the gate.

A loud shout from his men announced their success, and they proceeded to unfasten the chains, and throw open the gate.

As soon as these obstacles were removed, the Earl of Derby dashed in with his cuirassiers, shouting with a loud voice, "No quarter!"

These terrible orders were strictly obeyed. Exasperated by the slaughter of their comrades in the previous assault, the men swore not to sheathe their swords till they had slaked their thirst for vengeance.

Headed by the earl the first troop galloped along the main street towards the market-place, cutting down all they encountered. Shrieks and groans were heard on all sides, but no pity was shown.

Other troops rode to the right and the left, or plunged into the narrow thoroughfares shouting out, "Kill! kill—spare not—spare not."

Frightful scenes occurred. Blinded by fury, the men slaughtered their unresisting victims like sheep, utterly disregarding their cries for compassion, and trampling the still breathing bodies under their horses' feet.

In the back streets, the wretched inhabitants were quite undefended, and sought to escape from the merciless soldiers, leaving their wives and children to their fate.

In the market-place, however, the Earl of Derby found a great number of pikemen, together with a troop of horse.

With savage satisfaction, he perceived that the latter were commanded by Captain Bootle, and burning for vengeance, he instantly charged them.

The fierce onset could not be resisted, and such of the Parliamentarians as were not cut down took to flight, their retreat being aided by the pikemen.

But their leader was captured and disarmed, and at once brought before Lord Derby.

Bootle could not mistake the look fixed upon him by the earl. Nevertheless, he sued for quarter.

"Spare me, my lord," he cried, "and I will deliver Rigby into your hands."

"Thou art false to the last, perfidious villain!" cried the earl. "Already thou hast betrayed me, and now thou wouldst betray him thou art bound to serve. I will not spare thee."

Stabbed to the heart, the traitor fell from his horse.

By this time, Prince Rupert had entered the devoted town with the whole of his army, and the work of destruction was then carried on with greater fury than before.

No such massacre took place during the civil wars in Lancashire as occurred at Bolton on that day.

The soldiers were killed on the walls, and their bodies thrown into the ditch, but that was no more than would have been done at any siege. All the pikemen were killed; but they could not expect a lighter fate. The houses were plundered, but houses had been plundered in every town taken before—both by Roundheads and Cavaliers—at Lancaster, at Preston, at Wigan and Warrington.

It was the indiscriminate slaughter of the in-habitants, after the garrison had surrendered, and when the town was at the entire mercy of the victors, that stamped the assault with the character of a massacre. The ruthless soldiers spared none—old men, women, children.

Four divines were killed—one a venerable man with grey locks, who had stationed himself at the foot of the cross in the market-place, and lifted up his voice to denounce them, had his skull cloven by a dragoon. The streets resounded with the shrieks and groans of the wounded and dying, and the kennels ran with blood.

Neither Rupert nor the earl interposed to check the slaughter. In the market-place, as we have said, the carnage was frightful; and it was here that all the divines we have mentioned were killed.

One of these addressed the earl in words that proved prophetic.

"Thou hast destroyed Bolton," he said, with his dying breath; "but thou shalt not escape. When brought here to die—as thou shalt be—thou wilt remember this day."

Standish took as little part as he could help in these dreadful scenes. His soul revolted from them, and he would have shut his eyes if he could to the terrible sights forced upon him.

On Rupert's entrance into the town he obtained a horse, and feeling sure Rigby would seek safety in flight, his great desire was to prevent him. And he had well nigh succeeded.

Discovering that Rigby had contrived to get out of the town with a small party of horse, and was making all haste he could towards Bury, Standish put himself at the head of a score of dragoons, and galloped after him.

He continued the pursuit for a couple of miles, and might have overtaken the fugitive, if a body of Parliamentarians had not been seen advancing in the opposite direction. These men were no doubt hastening to the relief of Bolton, but were too late. They came, however, in time to rescue Rigby, and escorted him to Bury, while Standish was compelled to return without his expected prize to Bolton.

CHAPTER VI

How Standish met Rosworm for the last Time

WHEN Standish approached the town, he found Prince Rupert and the Earl of Derby with a squadron of lancers near the Bradshaw Gate. They had just been riding round the walls, and Rupert had given orders that all the colours taken in the assault should be brought to him.

They proved to be twenty-two in number, and all had been displayed at the Leaguer of Lathom.

"What of Rigby?" cried the earl, as Standish came up.

"He has fled to Bury," replied Standish.

"And left his army to perish! Ignoble dastard!" exclaimed the prince.

"He has baulked my vengeance by flight," cried the earl, with a look of deep disappointment. "'Tis well for him he has got away. But we may meet again."

"Think of him no more!" cried Rupert. "Think of the countess—and how overjoyed she will be at our victory. You must send her word of it without delay."

"May I bear the message to her ladyship?" cried Standish, eagerly.

"I would fain send you," observed the earl. "But you must be fatigued."

"I have strength enough left to reach Lathom," rejoined Standish. "I pray your lordship not to refuse my request."

"Let him have his wish," said the prince. "He is not wanted here. Hark ye, Captain Standish! you shall do more than convey a message to the Countess of Derby from her valiant lord. Commend me heartily to her ladyship, and present these colours to her. Tell her they have just been taken at Bolton."

"I will gladly obey your highness's behest," replied Standish, bowing.

"I have more to say," pursued the prince. "When I set out from Lathom to besiege this place, I told her ladyship, when my work was done, I would return

and feast with her. I shall not forget my promise. She may expect me to-morrow."

"The countess will be enchanted," said the earl. "But suitable preparation can scarce be made for your highness by to-morrow."

"No preparation need be made for me," said the prince, "My cousin's welcome will suffice."

Well knowing the prince's humour, Lord Derby said no more on the subject, but bade Standish prepare for instant departure; and Prince Rupert enjoined him to take a strong guard lest he should be robbed of the colours.

"Take the party of dragoons you have just brought back with you from the pursuit of Rigby," said the prince.

Proud of his errand, yet fearful of losing the flags, which he committed to the care of the stoutest men in the troop, Standish departed.

After the dreadful scenes he had recently witnessed, and knew were still being enacted in the town, he was not sorry to leave Bolton behind.

Speeding across the moor he soon reached Lostock, and found the place abandoned.

From Lostock Standish took his way across the country to Haigh, and thence to Wrightington, and he was close upon Newburgh, when he saw a horseman coming towards him, whom even at a distance he recognised as Rosworm.

On seeing the party of dragoons, Rosworm would have galloped off, but a shout from Standish checked him, and he waited tranquilly till the young man came up. A brief colloquy then took place between them—being so conducted that it could not be overheard by the troopers, who had likewise halted.

"I can give you a good account of your friends," said Rosworm. "I have just left them at Lathom House. The journey there was not difficult, since I was fortunately able to procure horses for them at Great Lever."

"Why did you not remain at Lathom as I advised?" asked Standish.

"I had reasons for not doing so," replied Ros-worm. "I am now going to Wigan. But what has happened to Bolton?"

"Bolton has fallen," replied Standish. "Hundreds have been slain, but Rigby has escaped to Bury."

"Lathom has proved unlucky to him in every way," observed Rosworm. "He gained nothing during the siege, and now he has lost all at Bolton."

"I should have been satisfied if we had slain him," said Standish. "But he lives to do us more mischief."

"Not much, I think," said Rosworm. "But I must be gone. Night is at hand. Farewell for ever! It is not likely we shall meet again."

"Wherefore not?" demanded Standish.

"I shall leave this country," replied Rosworm. "I am sick of the war."

"If you had seen Bolton to-day you would have had enough of it," observed Standish, in a sombre voice.

"I am glad I had left before the second assault began," said Rosworm. "But I have another reason for leaving this country. My daughter has warned me to return to my native land. I have seen her twice."

"You fancy so."

"I am sure of it. I shall obey. Again, farewell!"

No more passed between them.

Rosworm rode off, and Standish proceeded to Lathom House, which was not much more than a mile distant.

CHAPTER VII

How the Colours taken at Bolton were presented to the Countess

NEWS had reached the countess and the officers of the garrison that Prince Rupert and the earl had been repulsed, and though they did not credit the rumour, it caused them great uneasiness.

Their delight may therefore be imagined when Standish arrived and announced that Bolton had been taken on the second assault.

But when the dragoons rode into the court carrying the colours of the enemy—colours they instantly recognised—their enthusiasm knew no bounds.

The good news was instantly conveyed to the countess by Major Farrington, who told her that Bolton had been taken, and that both Prince Rupert and Lord Derby were unhurt.

For once the heroic lady's firmness forsook her. She who had so often faced danger unmoved, and had borne so many trials with unshaken constancy, now felt ready to sink. But by a great effort she regained her self-possession, and observed to Major Farrington:

"You say Captain Standish has brought this good news. Why does he not come to me himself?"

"He brings your ladyship a present from Prince Rupert, and desires to deliver it to you before the garrison."

On hearing this the countess immediately went forth, accompanied by her daughters, by her chaplains, and by Don Fortunio and Engracia.

At the entrance of the mansion stood all her officers ready to attend her. The court-yard was thronged with the soldiers of the garrison, who had hastily assembled to witness a scene of the deepest interest to them. In front of the musketeers were the dragoons who had just arrived. The latter were still on horseback, and each man in the foremost line carried a flag.

Standish had dismounted, and was stationed a few yards in advance of the troop.

Greatly touched by this spectacle, the countess marched on till she came within a short distance of the dragoons, and then stood still, while Standish with his drawn sword in his hand, advanced to meet her and made a profound obeisance.

Speaking in a loud voice that all might hear, he said:

"It will rejoice you to learn, madam, and it will rejoice your brave soldiers to hear, that Bolton has been taken after a sharp conflict, and all the garrison put to the sword. A great victory has thus been gained over the rebels, and a blow dealt them from which they will not speedily recover."

Here he was interrupted for a few moments by the shouts of the soldiers, after which he went on.

"My lord, though first to enter the gate, and exposed to the sharpest fire, is happily unhurt, and charges me to inform your ladyship that he will return to Lathom to-morrow, and bring his highness Prince Rupert with him."

"They will be right welcome to us all," said the countess.

Loud shouts again resounded. But Standish had not yet finished.

"I am commanded by Prince Rupert," he said, "to present to your ladyship these colours, which have just been taken from the enemy."

Meanwhile all the flags having been collected by a couple of dragoons, who had dismounted for the purpose, were laid at the countess's feet.

Her cheeks flushed, and her eyes blazed as she regarded them.

"At last these colours are ours," she cried, taking one from the heap, and waving it triumphantly to the shouting soldiers.

There was great rejoicing that night in Lathom House, and the countess promised the soldiers that their cups should again be filled with ale on the morrow.

Standish had little private converse with Engracia, but he thought she looked sad. He fancied the captivity at Bolton had made a painful impression on her, and told her so; but she said he was mistaken.

"These occurrences have troubled my father more than me," she said. "He is resolved to return to Spain immediately."

"And take you with him?"

"Of course. He cannot leave me behind. I fear we shall be obliged to part, unless you will come with us to Spain."

"I have already told you I cannot forsake my own country at this juncture," he rejoined. "I must go where my lord leads me. He has more towns to assault—more battles to fight."

"Then you will certainly be killed. Now in Spain you might live tranquilly."

"I will go there when this campaign is ended."

"But will it end? Never! My father is quite tired out, and to speak truth so am I. I shall grieve to quit the countess and her daughters, who have been so kind to me—but I must go."

"Perhaps you may change your mind."

"I do not think I shall—but even if I did, my father won't stay. He intends to go to Liverpool."

"But Liverpool is in the hands of the rebels."

"Then he will go elsewhere, and try to find a vessel bound for Spain. He means to consult the Earl of Derby on the subject."

"At first I thought you were jesting with me," said Standish. "But I begin to fear you are quite serious."

"My father is, and therefore I must obey."

"But you can persuade him to remain, if you choose."

"No—he won't listen to me. Colonel Rosworm has alarmed him, by telling him the king is certain to be defeated, and he is all anxiety to be gone."

At this juncture, Don Fortunio himself came up.

"Papa," she said, "I have just been acquainting Captain Standish with your determination to leave England."

"Not immediately, I hope?" said the young man.

"Yes, immediately," replied Don Fortunio. "I long to get back to Spain. If you like this constant fighting, I don't. Besides, I have very grave apprehensions for the future. Is it treasonable to say you will not long have a king in England? Such is my conviction."

"You are wrong, sir," said Standish. "These rebels will be crushed. We have begun the work to-day, and shall not stop till it is ended."

"I fear you will find it a harder task than you imagine," said Don Fortunio.

"Hear what the Earl of Derby has to say," rejoined Standish.

"If he will allow the countess and his children to remain here, I will postpone my departure," said Don Fortunio. "Not otherwise."

CHAPTER VIII

Again on the Eagle Tower

BRIGHT and sunshiny was the day, and Lathom House had an air of cheerfulness such as it had not worn for months.

Above the Eagle Tower floated the broad banner that had never been lowered during the siege—meet emblem of the heroic lady who had placed it there. The tower itself bore marks of the enemy's shot, but still rose proudly and firmly as ever. The castle walls, however, were terribly battered. Huge pieces had been knocked out of the masonry, deep holes made by shot, battlements and turrets broken—but not a single enemy had set foot on the ramparts during the long duration of the Leaguer.

But it was beyond the fosse, and in the enemy's own works, that the evidences of destruction were most apparent. In those partly demolished batteries and half-filled trenches could be seen the tremendous preparations made, and how useless they had proved. The exulting musketeers laughed and jested as they looked at them from the walls, and talked over their own exploits. "There stood the sconce that held the great mortar that was to crush us all," said one. "Where is that bulwark now? Lathom House still stands—but the beleaguering army is gone."

"Utterly destroyed," observed another. "But we have got their cannon, their mortar, and their colours."

It was not surprising that the soldiers engaged in that long siege should rejoice. Their courage had never failed them, but they might have been forced by famine to surrender—or have perished in the burning stronghold fired by the hand of the countess. All this was over now, and they felt as men feel when a great task—almost beyond their powers—is accomplished. They had done their duty, and done it well. To their thinking no pleasanter sight could be seen on that bright morning than was afforded by those half-demolished batteries.

To the brave officers who had assisted in the defence of the castle, who had shrunk from no danger, but were always ready to sally forth upon the enemy—the sight was equally agreeable, as the ruined fortifications bore testimony to their valour.

But all within the fortress rejoiced on that auspicious morning—the countess herself, her children, her chaplains, her guests, her household. Never for a moment had the heroic lady shrunk from the difficult task she had undertaken. Never at seasons of the greatest peril—when ponderous shot and stones had been cast upon her roofs, and fiery missiles and death-scattering shells had been thrown into her courts—not even when a leaden messenger of destruction had burst into her own chamber, had her stout heart failed her. Never doubting the justice of her cause, but relying entirely on Heaven's protection, she had awaited with confidence the issue of the long struggle.

At length, her loyalty and devotion to the royal cause were amply rewarded. Deliverance came—the insolent rebels were punished.

Such were the heroic lady's feelings on that morning—feelings that prompted her to return thanks to Heaven for its mercies and protection.

Two persons were on the summit of the Eagle Tower gazing around.

One of them, a lovely damsel, with dark lustrous eyes and a Southern skin, was listening with deep interest to her companion who was describing some of the principal incidents of the siege, and pointing out the localities to her.

"How enchanted you must be that the siege is over!" she exclaimed, as he concluded his narration.

"Yes, but there was great excitement about it," replied Standish. "A nocturnal sortie, such as I have just described, is quite a pleasant pastime. We kept the besiegers in a constant state of alarm."

"But suppose you had been unsuccessful. Suppose the enemy had driven you back, or captured you."

"I cannot suppose an impossibility. The enemy never did drive us back. In every conflict we had with them they got the worst of it. Good fortune always attended us. We rarely lost a man, but generally left twenty killed behind us, and sometimes brought away prisoners. Now you must own that a sortie is exciting."

"When I look at those dreadful trenches, I wonder you ever got across them."

"The trenches were the worst part of it," observed Standish; "and I wonder I did not find a grave in them. But happily the siege is over, and since most of us are unhurt, we can afford to laugh at its perils. Have you seen enough? Will you descend?"

"Stay a moment," cried Engracia. "I have something to say to you, and here it ought to be said. You have fought well in those entrenchments and have escaped with life, but you may not be always equally lucky. If you are wise you will play no more at this hazardous game of war—"

"But I cannot retire, unless with my lord's consent," he interrupted. "If he would dispense with my services, I would accompany you to Spain."

"Ask him to free you from your engagement, and I am certain he will do it," she said.

"I know not that," he replied. "He has need of faithful followers. I do not think he will be willing to part with me; and unless he consents, I cannot go."

"But will you ask him?"

"I like not to do so, fearing a refusal."

"He cannot refuse you after what you have done."

"I have some claim upon him certainly—"

"You have the strongest claim upon his gratitude. Without you, Lathom House might not have been held. By the frequent successful sorties you have made, you contributed materially to its defence, as the countess will be first to acknowledge. Lord Derby can refuse you nothing, I repeat. But you desire military renown, and will remain under his command."

"Only for a time."

"But long enough to lose me. If we part now, we shall never meet again. Will you come with us to Spain?"

"I dare not promise till I have spoken with my lord."

"Ah! I understand," she cried. "You prefer glory to me."

"No, by Heaven!" he exclaimed. "I should be far happier with you in Spain than fighting here."

"If you really think so, come with me," she said; "and leave this dreadful Civil War to be fought out by those who like it. Now let us go down."

And they left the Eagle Tower.

CHAPTER IX

How Prince Rupert visited Lathom House

EARLY in the morning the countess had received a letter from her lord, in which he told her she might expect him and Prince Rupert about noon; adding that the prince would only have a small guard with him, as the whole of the forces on quitting Bolton would march to besiege Liverpool, and halt at Knowsley and Prescott, where his highness proposed to join them.

This intelligence being immediately communicated to Major Farrington, he gave all necessary orders, and long before the hour appointed, everything was in readiness for the reception of the earl and his illustrious guest.

The weather was splendid, and the brilliant sunshine heightened the effect of the scene. The old mansion looked its best, for the damage it had sustained could scarcely be perceived. Every soldier in the garrison was on the alert. Cheery voices were heard on all sides, and the aspect of the men was very different from what it had been.

As the musketeers gathered on the ramparts, or on the towers of the gateway, they had a blithe look that bespoke utter absence of anxiety.

The court-yard itself presented a curious picture. Besides being crowded with soldiers, it contained several large pieces of ordnance taken from the enemy, conspicuous among them being the great mortar.

Officers and men, and all within the castle, were eager to welcome their victorious lord and the prince, but some delay occurred that had not been anticipated.

Noon arrived, but no signal came from the sentinel on the Eagle Tower to announce that the party was in sight. Another quarter of an hour elapsed, and it was still the same.

As time went on the men grew impatient, and the countess herself began to feel uneasy, and spoke to Standish, who instantly volunteered to ride forth and ascertain, if he could, the cause of the delay.

Just then, however, a joyous shout was heard without, announcing that the party could be descried.

An extraordinary agitation then pervaded the entire garrison, and it continued till the bruit of trumpets proclaimed the approach of Lord Derby and the prince.

A response was instantly given from the towers and battlements of the gateway, and amid the thunder of artillery, that drowned the shouts of the soldiers, the prince and the earl rode into the court.

They were preceded by a troop of lancers, and followed by a dozen Cavaliers, whose accoutrements were almost as superb as those of Rupert himself, and who were equally well mounted. These formed the prince's guard of honour. Behind them came another troop of lancers.

The musketeers were now drawn up in double line, and as the earl and his guest passed through their ranks the court resounded with acclamations.

Alighting first, Lord Derby held the prince's bridle, while the latter dismounted. Major Farrington then came forward, and bidding Prince Rupert welcome in the countess's name, besought permission to conduct his highness to the presence-chamber, where he would find her ladyship.

The vast chamber to which the prince was ushered through a crowd of attendants, really presented a very striking appearance, being hung round by the colours just taken at Bolton, and adorned by some other trophies won from the enemy during the siege.

At the further end of the room, in a chair of state, sat Lady Derby, surrounded by her daughters, her chaplains, and her officers—the latter being in their full accoutrements. She was very richly attired, but had no diamonds to display.

As the prince drew near she arose, and advancing to meet him, made him a profound reverence.

"Nay, madam," said Rupert taking her hand, and pressing it to his lips, "this ceremony is unneeded. I care not for show."

"But I desire to do your highness honour," she rejoined. "I wish to evince my gratitude. You have succoured me, and punished my enemies."

"Your enemies were beaten before I arrived," said the prince. "And they have been punished by your husband not by me. Lord Derby was first to enter Bolton, and the work of vengeance was half performed ere I took part in it."

"Your highness gives me far more credit than is my due," said the earl. "Undoubtedly, I did my best, and had I not succeeded in the assault, I should not now be here. But what are my achievements compared with those of my heroic wife?"

"Ay, my lord, you may well be proud of her," said Rupert. "No other woman in England could have braved such a general as Fairfax. I will not speak of Rigby and the others, though they were formidable."

"I am sorry Rigby has escaped," observed the countess. "He will always be an enemy."

"I will have him yet," said the earl. "But let us not mar our victory by other thoughts."

Tenderly embracing his children, he exchanged cordial greetings with Don Fortunio and his daughter, and with the chaplains.

Meanwhile, the officers composing the prince's body-guard had been conducted to the great banqueting-hall, where an excellent repast was set before them, and they were still partaking of it when the party came forth from the presence-chamber.

All arose, and raising their glasses, drank to the noble Lady of Lathom.

Prince Rupert having expressed a desire to examine the state of the fortress, he was conducted over it by the Earl of Derby and the countess, attended by Major Farrington, Standish, and some other officers.

Mounting to the ramparts, the prince carefully examined the enemy's entrenchments and batteries, and then said to the countess:

"The engineering work has been well done. With such skilful preparations, aided by the veteran soldiers who composed the Leaguer, the fortress ought to have been taken."

"Ought to have been taken?" exclaimed the countess, surprised.

"Ay—under ordinary circumstances it would infallibly have been taken. Had I not seen it, I could not have believed that any fortified mansion could resist such works as those. That Lathom House has successfully withstood them proves that its garrison is extraordinarily brave, and its commander singularly skilful. Nay, it is the truth. I pay no compliments."

The prince then gave his reasons, why, according to his opinion, the place ought to have been taken.

"The castle, I feel convinced, was saved by the frequent and successful sorties," he said. "They demoralised the enemy."

"All my officers were eager to undertake those hazardous expeditions," remarked the countess. "But I am bound to say that the boldest and most successful leader was Captain Standish."

"Then much is due to him," rejoined Rupert.

His highness then complimented the officers of the garrison on the valour and zeal they had displayed during the siege.

"As to you, Captain Standish," he said, "the important services you have rendered merit some reward. You shall have the command of a regiment of horse, with the rank of colonel."

"I cannot thank your highness sufficiently," said Standish, bowing deeply. "I have now reached the height of my ambition."

"No, I am much mistaken if you do not soon become a brigadier-general. Promotion comes quickly during this war, and you are certain to distinguish yourself."

Standish again bowed deeply.

"In conferring this well-merited distinction on my brave captain," said the countess, "your highness is not aware that you are helping to keep him in his majesty's service."

"How so?" cried the prince, surprised.

"He meant to retire. Don Fortunio Alava and his daughter are about to return to Spain, and he wished to accompany them."

"Then I suppose he is enamoured of that dark-eyed damsel?" said the prince.

"Let him answer for himself," observed the countess with a smile.

"Your highness has guessed the truth," said Standish. "I was going to Spain to be married."

"Why go so far?" laughed the prince. "Why not be married here?"

"The Señorita Engracia prefers Seville, your highness."

"But she will remain here when she finds you cannot go."

"I have failed to persuade her."

"Present her and Don Fortunio Alava to me, and I will try what I can do," said the prince.

Standish gladly obeyed, and shortly afterwards the fair Spanish damsel and her father were presented to the prince, who received them very graciously.

"You are about to return to Spain I understand, señor," he observed to Don Fortunio.

"As soon as I can obtain a passage to Cadiz, your highness."

"I will give you what assistance I can," said the prince. "But you must not rob us of your daughter."

"I cannot leave her behind," rejoined Don Fortunio. "Besides, she is most anxious to return."

"Is this so?" said the prince to Engracia.

She replied in the affirmative, and added, "Captain Standish has promised to accompany us."

"He has promised more than he can perform," observed the prince. "He has just received the command of a regiment of horse and must remain."

Engracia glanced at her lover, and read confirmation of what was said in his looks.

"I cannot honourably retire," he remarked.

"Nor can you urge him," observed the prince to Engracia.

"I thought it was all settled," she cried.

"But things have changed," said the prince. "Colonel Standish cannot abandon the brilliant career that lies before him. Nor, if you love him, would you have him do so."

"I do not," she cried earnestly.

"Then stay and make him happy," said the prince.

Standish took her hand.

"You will not leave me?" he said, in a low voice.

"I cannot," she replied.

"Then I must return to Spain without you," said her father, somewhat reproachfully.

"But you shall not be long detained," cried the prince, who seemed enchanted with his work. "The marriage shall take place forthwith. If Lady Derby consents, the ceremony can be performed in the castle chapel. I will speak to her at once."

Acting up to his expressed intention, he went to the countess, who was in a different part of the hall, and though under ordinary circumstances she would have made many objections, she yielded to his representations, and it was arranged that the marriage should take place in the chapel at an early hour next morning.

To obviate all religious scruples, it was likewise arranged that the ceremony should be first performed by Archdeacon Rutter and afterwards according to the ritual of the Church of Rome, by a priest who had found refuge in the castle.

This very satisfactory conclusion being arrived at, Standish heartily thanked the prince, and told his highness he had made him the happiest of men.

Her work being fully accomplished, the heroic Countess of Derby had no longer any desire to remain at Lathom; and since the earl was about to accompany Prince Rupert to besiege Liverpool, she proposed to relinquish the command of the garrison to Captain Rawsthorne, and repair with her daughters and a portion of her household to the Isle of Man, and there recruit her health, which had somewhat suffered.

She would have left Standish in command of the garrison, but Prince Rupert preferred that he should be actively employed.

It was therefore arranged that apartments should be assigned him at Knowsley, which could be occupied by his wife during his absence.

All these plans were discussed and settled before the grand banquet that took place in the evening.

CHAPTER X

How a Banquet was given in the Great Hall, and a Bonfire lighted in the Court- yard

ONCE more, and almost for the last time, that great hall was filled with company, and when the health of the Earl of Derby and his countess was drunk, the roof resounded with such cheers as had never been heard there before—cheers that astonished even Prince Rupert himself, by whom the toast was proposed.

The lower tables were crowded with musketeers, and by them the deafening, clamour was raised.

"God save the Earl and Countess of Derby," they shouted, "and deliver them from their enemies!"

At the head of the upper table, in a raised chair, with the earl and countess on either side, sat Prince Rupert, whose deportment well fitted him for the position he occupied.

His manner was haughty, but not wanting in dignity, and his military bearing pleased the soldiers of the garrison, who looked upon him as the great leader of the Royalists, and firmly believed he would give the king back the power of which the rebels had deprived him. Prince Rupert was their hope, and the success that had hitherto attended his arms, fully warranted their reliance on him.

When the Earl of Derby, therefore, proposed Prince Rupert's health, describing him as the deliverer of the countess, and the victor of Bolton, who would speedily free the country from its enemies, their shouts were as loud as before, and it was evident that in their breasts burnt the flame of loyalty.

While thanking them, the prince remarked, "I cannot praise you more than by saying you are worthy followers of a brave mistress. If you were fortunate in being commanded by the Countess of Derby, she was equally fortunate in having such soldiers as you. But forget not what you owe to your officers. Had it not been for their valour and skill we might not be here now."

All the officers of the garrison were seated at the upper table, opposite the prince, and on receiving this well-merited tribute to their valour, they arose and bowed to him, while the hall rang with renewed cheers.

Conspicuous among the guests at the upper table were the Cavaliers who had accompanied Prince Rupert. Young men of good family, and devoted to the royal cause, then never gave quarter to a Roundhead. Most of them were afterwards killed at Marston Moor, but they were now full of life and spirits, and enthusiastic in their admiration of the heroism displayed by Lady Derby.

But the rejoicings on the conclusion of the siege did not terminate with the banquet.

About an hour after it became dark, an immense bonfire composed of pieces of timber and wood brought from the trenches was kindled in the centre of the court-yard, and by the time the pile was fairly alight, the whole place was filled with spectators.

At the instance of the Earl of Derby, Prince Rupert, with the countess and her daughters and the whole of the company, came forth to witness the sight.

The effect was exceedingly striking. As the flames soared up their reflection fell upon the crowd of musketeers, gathered around, upon others on the walls, and on the guard on the gate-towers.

Every part of the vast edifice on which the light fell, was revealed as clearly as in the daytime, and its picturesque character was materially heightened.

The appearance of the ramparts was singularly fine, and attracted much attention as the company came forth.

So bright at this moment was the illumination caused by the flames that the architecture of the mansion could have been studied in its minutest details. Even the summit of the Eagle Tower was distinguishable.

When at their highest, the flames rose above the ramparts, producing all the effect of a conflagration.

Seen far and wide, they caused great alarm amongst distant beholders, and many of the earl's old tenants and retainers, thinking Lathom House on fire, hurried to the spot to render assistance.

Admitted to the court-yard, they were thanked for their zeal, and not permitted to depart till they had drank the health of the earl and countess.

Thus ended a memorable day.

CHAPTER XI

Of the Marriage that took place in the Chapel

NOTWITHSTANDING the festivity of the previous night the garrison was astir at the usual early hour, and Prince Rupert, who quitted his couch betimes, made another survey of the fortress with the earl, being accompanied on this occasion by Captain Rawsthorne, to whom he made some suggestions.

His highness likewise inspected the garrison, highly commending the men; and examined the stores, which were far better supplied than he expected. All this took place before breakfast.

Later on in the day, though still at an early hour, the marriage, previously arranged, took place in the chapel, and Colonel Standish was united to the lovely object of his affections.

The ceremony was twice performed in the presence of the Earl and Countess of Derby, Prince Rupert, and all the officers of the garrison. The bride was given away by her father, Don Fortunio Alava, the young ladies Stanley acting as bridesmaids.

Attired in white satin, and wearing a white veil instead of her customary black silk mantilla, Engracia looked charming. While kneeling at the altar, her attitude was full of grace, and when she raised her magnificent eyes towards her husband all were struck by their splendour.

The young Cavaliers, whose brave hearts were not unsusceptible of lighter emotions, envied him his good fortune.

The ceremony, though twice as long as usual, was over at last, and when Standish came forth with his bride, he found the court filled with soldiers, most of whom had accompanied him in his sallies on the besiegers. They now pressed forward to wish him all happiness. Similar manifestations of attachment accompanied him to the house.

Again there was a large assemblage in the banqueting-hall, but the repast was not so substantial as that on the previous day, nor did it last so long.

When their health had been drunk, bride and bridegroom disappeared, and not long afterwards they might have been seen on the way to Knowsley.

A single steed carried them, and the noble animal did not seem to heed the double burden. They were attended by a couple of troopers, one of whom had charge of Maria. Eager to reach their destination they did not loiter on the way.

Since solitude is sought by every newly-married pair, Standish and his bride must have been supremely happy at Knowsley, for they had the large mansion entirely to themselves.

Only old Randal Fermor to wait upon them—only Maria to attend on her young mistress. No one was to be seen in the great hall, on the stair-case, or in the grand gallery. No one met them on the terrace, in the garden, or on the borders of the lake.

Time was not allowed them to tire of this paradise—for such it seemed.

On the third day, the Countess of Derby arrived, bringing her daughters with her, her chaplain, Archdeacon Rutter, and a large portion of her household.

Her ladyship was likewise accompanied by Don Fortunio, who had come to bid his daughter adieu, preparatory to his departure to Spain.

As the countess was attended by a guard of twenty men, the deserted mansion seemed peopled at once. Its quietude was gone.

The change, however, mattered little to Standish. His brief season of felicity was ended.

On the same day came an order from Prince Rupert requiring him to join the army immediately at Liverpool.

He felt most unwilling to obey. His bride sought to detain him, but he broke from her arms, and set forth.

CHAPTER XII

The Siege of Liverpool

ON approaching Liverpool, Standish found that Prince Rupert had fixed his camp round the Beacon, which was situated on the top of a hill about a mile from the town.

At the period in question, the great and wealthy town, now the chief commercial port in the kingdom, and the abode of merchant princes, was then almost in its infancy. But its inhabitants were remarkably active and enterprising, the position of the port on the Mersey was admirably chosen, and even then there were indications of the future greatness and importance of the town.

Viewed from the Beacon Hill, Liverpool did not look very strongly fortified, and Prince Rupert persuaded himself he should easily take it, but he found the task more difficult than he expected.

The town possessed a large garrison, commanded by Colonel Moore, who had previously assisted at the Leaguer of Lathom. The governor had fifteen hundred men with him, of whom a third were cavalry, and fresh supplies derived from Manchester, were sent by water from Warrington. Thus he was enabled to make a formidable defence.

Like Bolton and all the other towns in Lancashire garrisoned by the Parliament, Liverpool was surrounded by high mud walls and a deep ditch.

These fortifications formed a semicircle, commencing with the river, inclosing Dale-street, and continuing to some low marshy ground, on the edge of which batteries were erected.

At the entrances to all the streets were gates protected by cannon.

On the south there was a strong castle containing the garrison, surrounded by a deep fosse, by means of which stores could be brought in.

Heavy ordnance were placed on the walls commanding the river, and the port was further protected by a battery mounting eight guns.

The ships in the harbour were likewise fitted up to defend the town on the river side.

Thus, it will be seen that Liverpool, owing to its situation on the Mersey, had advantages possessed by no other town in Lancashire, but it was somewhat exposed on the land side.

As an additional protection from the shot of the besiegers, the walls were covered with large bags of wool, brought by the fugitive Protestants from Ireland after the massacres.

When Standish joined the prince, the siege had already begun.

Expecting to take the place by a coup de main, and not anticipating such vigorous resistance as he found from Governor Moore, Rupert made a furious assault on the gate at the end of Dale-street, while another gate was attacked with equal fury by Lord Derby.

Both leaders were repulsed, and with considerable loss, and the prince was still burning with rage at the defeat, when Standish arrived.

Rupert rarely held a council of war, but formed his own judgment, and acted upon it.

However, he consulted Lord Derby as to the prudence of a second assault, and found him exceedingly averse to it. His lordship recommended a regular siege with intrenchments and batteries as at Lathom.

"Sdeath! that will occupy a month!" cried Rupert; "and then we shall have to storm the town."

"We shall not take it otherwise," said the earl. "We must batter down the walls. Only by repeated attacks shall we succeed."

Evidently dissatisfied with the advice, Rupert was unwilling to adopt it. He was all impatience to wipe out the disgrace of the defeat.

"This is not the advice you gave me at Bolton, my lord," he said. "Then you urged a second assault without delay. No talk of siege works."

"Nor were they needed, your highness, because we knew a gate would be opened to us."

"Why should not a gate be opened to us at Liverpool?" said the prince.

"The man must be found to do it," remarked the earl.

"Here he is," said Rupert, as Standish, who had just dismounted, entered the prince's tent.

After salutations had passed the prince said:

"You have heard, Colonel Standish, that the first attack on the town has been repulsed?"

"I have, your highness," was the reply. "But your next attack will be successful."

"Lord Derby thinks we ought to proceed by a regular siege. That is too slow for me. I want to join the Marquis of Newcastle at York and not waste time here. Can you open a gate for us as you did at Bolton?"

"To do so you must scale the walls," observed the earl. "They are high and the ditch is deep. The chances are a thousand to one against you."

"The more hazard the more honour," said Standish. "If your highness will give me a detachment of your best soldiers, pontoons and scaling ladders, I will manage to get to the top of the walls. Once there, your highness shall enter Liverpool."

"I know you do not make rash promises," said the prince, well pleased. "You believe you can accomplish what you say. But you must see the fortifications and judge ere you decide."

"I should like to see them, your highness, but I have no doubt as to my decision."

"If you hold to your determination, another assault shall be made to-morrow," said the prince.

"I would not damp your ardour, Colonel Standish," observed the earl. "But if you make the attempt I fear you will never behold your spouse again."

"Fortune has hitherto favoured me, my lord, and will not desert me now."

CHAPTER XIII

Death of Standish

NEXT morning, before daybreak, in pursuance of the prince's orders, the whole of his force was under arms, and a general movement was made towards the town, but slowly and cautiously, so as not to alarm the garrison.

From the Beacon Hill, on the brow of which Prince Rupert with the Earl of Derby and Lord Caryl Molineux were stationed, the town, with its fortifications, its castle, fort, and harbour, with the grand river flowing past, could be dimly descried.

The three personages were watching the advance of the army, preparatory to joining the attack.

In the van was a regiment of cuirassiers, led by Colonel Standish, which was marching towards the gate at the entrance of Dale-street.

At this gate were two large pieces of ordnance, and besides the usual guard, it had a troop of horse to defend it.

Facing it was a battery, just erected by the besiegers, that mounted three heavy guns.

As yet neither besieged nor besiegers had fired a shot.

But the prince and his companions did not remain long near the Beacon.

After looking on for a few minutes, they galloped down the hill, and each was at his post before the roar of the castle guns announced that the advance of the Royalists was perceived.

At the same time the battery opposite Dale-street opened fire, and being answered by the cannon of the gate, a sort of duel took place between the engineers on either side, that seemed likely to end in favour of the besiegers, two of their shot having already burst through the stout oak framework.

Meanwhile, the other gates were likewise attacked by Lord Derby and Lord Caryl Molineux, and defended with equal vigour.

Several ineffectual attempts were likewise made by the besiegers to scale the walls by means of ladders placed in pontoons.

Everywhere, indeed, the most determined resistance was offered by the besieged, and a ceaseless fire was kept up by them from the walls, which were shielded, as we have described, by bags of wool. Moreover, the large shot thrown by the castle guns, caused great destruction wherever they alighted.

Apparently, no advantage had been gained by the Royalists at any point, except at the entrance of Dale-street, and the captain of the guard, fearing the gate would soon be battered down, ordered the troop of horse stationed there to sally forth and dislodge the cannon at the battery.

No sooner did the troop appear outside, than Standish, shouting to his men to follow, dashed forward sword in hand as if to defend the battery.

His object, however, was to enter the town, and he succeeded in getting through the gate with a dozen of his men.

The guard were then cut down, and the gate kept forcibly open till the rest of the regiment had entered.

Bidding his men shout as lustily as they could to announce their success, Standish then galloped on into the town, in the full belief that Lord Derby or Prince Rupert would follow.

As the cuirassiers went furiously on, a few shots were fired at them, but they met with no opposition, nor were they immediately pursued, for the dragoons remained at the entrance of the street till it was effectually barricaded.

In effect, therefore, Standish and his men were prisoners, though they believed they had taken the town.

Many of the inhabitants, who were only just astir, shared in the belief, and when they beheld this splendid regiment of cuirassiers dashing past, they felt sure the sanguinary Rupert had got in, and that a general massacre would ensue.

Standish and his followers stopped not either to slay or plunder, but galloped furiously on to the centre of the town.

A few people were collected in the marketplace, but they fled when the Royalist soldiers appeared.

Windows and doors were speedily shut, as Standish halted beside the cross to consider what should be done next.

The alarm-bell now began to ring violently, and great consternation prevailed throughout the garrison.

The governor could not ascertain precisely what had happened, though he learnt that a regiment of cuirassiers had entered the town, and reached the market- place.

His first order was to send a detachment of musketeers from the castle to attack them in front, while he himself cut off their retreat with a squadron of dragoons.

Ere many minutes, the market-place became the scene of a sharp conflict.

On the appearance of the musketeers, Standish instantly charged them, but was received with a volley, by which he himself was severely wounded, and several of his men killed.

At the same time he was attacked in the rear by Colonel Moore and his dragoons—the governor calling to him to surrender, and offering him quarter.

But Standish refused, and rallying his men, who were got into disorder, endeavoured to cut his way through the enemy.

He might have succeeded, but his strength suddenly failed him, his sword dropped from his grasp, and he fell from his steed.

In the confusion of the fight, he must have been trampled under foot, had not one of his own men, whose horse had been shot, but who was himself unwounded, dragged him to the foot of the cross, and there laid him down.

Shortly afterwards, Colonel Moore rode up, and asked, with much concern, if he should send a surgeon to him.

"It would be useless, colonel," replied Standish, faintly. "My wound is mortal,"

"Have you any request to make?" said Moore. "It shall be attended to."

"My young bride will weep for me," replied Standish. "Send her the ring on my finger. It will comfort her."

"Rest assured it shall be done," said the chivalrous Moore.

A cup of wine was then offered to the dying man.

Taking it, he raised it to his lips.

"To the king!" he cried. "Confusion to his enemies!"

With these words he fell backwards and expired.

Liverpool was not taken on that day, nor for several days to come.

Finding he could no longer hold out, the governor retired and Prince Rupert entered the town with his whole army.

In the market-place he found a regiment of horse drawn up. Their leader offered to lay down his arms, and demanded quarter, which was granted, conditionally, on the surrender of the castle. The terms being acceded to, the prince at once took possession of the fortress.

By order of Colonel Moore, Standish had been buried in the old church of Saint Nicholas, and his beautiful widow now came to mourn over his grave.

When the news of her loss had been brought her, she uttered a cry of anguish, swooned, and continued so long insensible, that it was thought she was dead.

Fortunately, her father and Maria were with her, and to the care of the latter she owed her recovery.

Don Fortunio brought her and her faithful attendant to Liverpool, and after a short stay there, a vessel was found that conveyed them all to Cadiz.

BOOK VIII. — SEVEN YEARS LATER

BOLTON, October 16th, 1651

CHAPTER I

The Earl of Derby's last journey

Some description appears necessary of the tragic death of the illustrious and unfortunate nobleman who has formed the principal figure in our story.

For the details we shall refer to two contemporary narratives, reproduced by the Reverend Mr. RAINES in his "Memoirs of James Earl of Derby," published by the CHETMAN SOCIETY—narratives justly described by the learned editor as "having no parallel in our history."

"The picture is complete and perfect in itself," remarks Mr. RAINES; "and it is not extravagant praise to say that it will retain its melancholy attraction as long as any reverence shall remain for what is noble and heroic or any pity for tenderness and constancy in the saddest reverses of fortune, in fact as long as there are hearts that can feel, and eyes that can weep."

Seven years have flown, years fraught with deepest interest.

A monarch has been beheaded, and his son driven from his kingdom. Rebellion has triumphed. The fatal battle of Worcester has been fought, and the brave and loyal Earl of Derby, who left his wife and children in his castle in Mona's rugged isle to aid the youthful Charles, has been made prisoner—having surrendered after quarter for life had been given by his captor.

Confined in Chester, and tried by a court-martial, the earl has been doomed to death. To add to the severity of the sentence, it has been appointed by the judges that the execution shall take place at Bolton, where it is supposed the inhabitants have a strong vindictive feeling towards the illustrious prisoner.

On this point the earl himself, fearful of being reviled by the people of the town, wrote thus to the Speaker of the House of Parliament:

"It is a greater affliction to me than death itself, that I am sentenced to die at Bolton; since the nation will look upon me as a sacrifice for that blood which some have unjustly cast upon me, and from which I hope I am acquitted in

your opinion, and the judgment of good men, having cleared myself by undeniable evidence. At my trial, it was never mentioned against me, and yet I am adjudged to suffer at Bolton, as if indeed I had been guilty."

Notwithstanding this appeal, no alteration was made.

The day of execution having been fixed for Wednesday, 15th October, 1651, the ill-fated earl set forth on the day before from Chester, escorted by a strong guard, consisting of sixty musketeers, and eighty horse—the latter being well armed and well mounted, and commanded by a captain, notorious for his devotion to the Parliament.

With the earl were Mr. Baguley, who wrote the account of his noble master's imprisonment and death; Paul Moreau his valet, and several other faithful servants. To add to the indignity shown him by his malevolent enemies, the earl was provided with a sorry steed.

All who saw him set out on his last journey loudly expressed their grief—several accompanying to some distance.

On Hole Heath, not far from Chester, the earl was met by his two younger daughters, the Lady Katherine and the Lady Amelia Stanley, who came to take a last leave of him.

Heedless of the presence of the guard, he flung himself from his horse, embraced his daughters tenderly, and then knelt down beside them on the road, and prayed.

On rising he again pressed them to his heart, and gave them his last blessing. Such a sad spectacle has rarely been witnessed—such a father—such daughters—one so noble, the others so beautiful, tender, and loving.

The beholders were indescribably affected by the scene. Outbursts of grief were heard on all sides, and numbers knelt down and prayed.

At last, the parting was over.

The fainting girls, who had sustained themselves with difficulty, broke down in the end, and were borne away insensible.

By the help of Paul Moreau, the earl regained his steed, and the cavalcade was once more in motion.

But he could not shake off the impression made upon him by the interview. His head drooped on his breast, and during the whole of the day's journey, he scarcely looked around, or spoke.

It had been arranged that the noble prisoner should pass his last night at Leigh—a small town, about six miles from Bolton. In Leigh Church had been interred his friend and companion in arms, the valiant Sir Thomas Tyldesley, who was killed at Wigan, and the earl greatly desired to visit the grave, but the request was denied.

However, the refusal troubled him little. He had become indifferent to harsh treatment, and passed the evening in tranquil converse with Baguley.

"Commend me to Archdeacon Rutter," he said, "and ask him if he remembers how blood fell upon a book I was reading late one night in my closet at Knowsley? Ask him what he now thinks of that strange occurrence? He will answer, I doubt not, that his presentiments have been fully verified. Ask him further, if he remembers I once told him that death in battle would not trouble me, but a blow on the scaffold would greatly startle me. Now I have changed my opinion, and can as easily lay my head on the block as on a pillow."

After supper, which he declared should be his last meal in this world, the earl threw himself upon a bed without taking off his apparel, and while lying there with his head resting upon his right hand, he compared himself to a monument, adding:

"To-morrow I shall want a monument!"

At an early hour he arose and prayed. Before quitting Leigh he was joined by his son, Lord Strange, who attended him to Bolton.

A sad ride thither, for he was full of uneasiness as to the reception he should experience from the inhabitants.

But his anxiety was speedily relieved.

As they entered the town, which had a singularly dismal look, all the persons he beheld expressed the deepest sorrow.

Far from exulting in his death, they uttered doleful lamentations, and many called out:

"O sad day! O woful day! Shall the good Earl of Derby die here? Many sad losses have we had in the war, but none like unto this—for now the ancient honour of our country must suffer here at Bolton."

These unlooked-for expressions of sympathy greatly consoled him, though they forced tears to his eyes.

But the scaffold was not yet completed. To inflict additional pain upon the earl, the platform on which he was to die was constructed of timber brought from Lathom House, which had been demolished after the second siege.

Not a carpenter in the town would saw a plank, strike a nail, or lend any aid whatever. Of necessity, therefore, soldiers were employed, and they were behind-hand with their work.

The ancient cross that had hitherto adorned the market-place was pulled down to make way for the hateful structure, so that the appearance of the place was greatly changed.

As the cavalcade halted, the earl exclaimed:

"Venio Domine. I am prepared to fulfil thy will. This scaffold must be my cross. Blessed Saviour, I take it up willingly, and follow thee!"

Conducted by an officer to an adjoining house, looking upon the church, he was informed that he would not be disturbed till three o'clock.

"I do not ask for the delay, sir," said the earl, "and am quite ready now. Nevertheless, I thank you."

Lord Strange, Mr. Baguley, Paul Moreau, and all his attendants, entered the house with him and awaited his orders.

The earl's first request was that they should all join him in prayer. Their devotions were much disturbed by the knocking and hammering of the boards of the scaffold by the soldiers, and by the loud talk of the troopers, but in spite of these noises he prayed long and fervently.

When he arose, he retired into an inner room with his valet, Paul Moreau, and doffing his riding-dress and boots, put on silken hose, a rich velvet doublet, and a falling band edged with lace.

While changing his linen he said to Paul Moreau:

"Take care that this shirt is not taken from me, but let me be buried in it."

"It shall be done, my lord," replied the valet.

The earl then sent for Lord Strange, who had brought him the blue riband of the Garter, and now helped him to put it on.

"Charles," he said to his son, "I shall not wear this order long, but I desire to be seen in it on the scaffold. Baguley will bring it back to you. Return it, I pray you, to my most gracious sovereign, and say that I sent it back to him in all humility and gratitude—spotless as I received it."

This done, he desired to be left alone, and prayed in private for nearly half an hour, during which his groans and interjections could be heard by those in the outer room, and when he came forth his eyes still bore traces of tears.

Addressing those present, he said:

"I must now bid you farewell for ever. Think not from any signs of affliction you may discern on my countenance that I am unwilling to leave the world, being well assured that I shall be carried from trouble to rest and peace—from sorrow to lasting bliss. Death has no other bitterness for me save that it takes me from those I love. But I leave them to the care and protection of a better husband and a better father. As to my relentless enemies I freely forgive them, and beseech Heaven to forgive them likewise."

He then called to Lord Strange, who knelt down and received his blessing.

Tenderly embracing him, when he arose, the earl said:

"Farewell, dear son. It is not fit you should accompany me to the scaffold, so I shall behold you no more in this world, but I trust we shall meet in Heaven. Again, I commend your admirable mother to you. Farewell!"

Then gently disengaging himself from Lord Strange, whose arm was still round his neck, and who was weeping bitterly, he bade Moreau inform the officer he was ready.

After a brief interval, the door was thrown open, and with a firm footstep the earl commenced his march to death, preceded by the officer with a drawn sword in his hand, and followed by Baguley, Paul Moreau, and two other servants.

CHAPTER II

The Headsman

THE few sorrowing persons standing around, would undoubtedly have pressed upon the earl, or knelt down before him, if they had not been prevented by the double line of musketeers through which he had to pass.

Even now the scaffold was scarcely finished, and not being draped with black, had a mean look.

However, it was in a great measure hidden by the troopers who were drawn up round it, with their horses' heads turned towards the rails.

The executioner was already at his post, a churl who might have been chosen for his repulsive countenance; or more probably because no one else would fill the odious office.

The beholders regarded the caitiff with loathing and horror, and their execrations and opprobrious epithets constantly reached his ears.

From his deep-sunken fiery eyes, long black upper lip, projecting teeth, and heavy jaw the fellow resembled a bull-dog. Habited in a stout leather doublet, he wore a leather cap over his closely-cropped hair.

Near him was the block, beside which was placed the axe—a very heavy implement with an unusually short handle—the blade being large, convex in shape, and exceedingly keen.

At a little distance from the block was the coffin, the lid of which had been taken off.

On his way to the scaffold, the earl called out to the people whose prayers and lamentations he could hear:

"Good friends, I thank you heartily. The God of Mercy bless you? Continue to pray for me, I beseech you! And may our blessed Lord return your prayers into your own bosoms!"

Before mounting the steps, at the top of which stood two pikemen, he paused for a moment and exclaimed aloud:

"Heaven, I thank thee that I am not afraid to go up here, though there are but these few steps to my eternity!"

Kissing the ladder, he ascended, followed after a short interval by Baguley and Paul Moreau. The officer had already gone up

CHAPTER III

A Tumult

ON gaining the platform, the earl marched towards the rails, averting his gaze from the headsman and the block, and taking off his hat bowed to the assemblage.

Though surprised to find them so few in number—for he had expected a large and tumultuous crowd—he was inexpressibly touched by their sympathetic looks.

On their part the spectators were equally struck, though in a different manner, by the earl's appearance, as he stood bareheaded before them.

To those familiar with his noble countenance, it seemed woefully changed. Skin pallid, eyes lacking lustre, dark locks streaked with grey.

But his demeanour had lost none of its dignity, and the change described gave a peculiar interest to his features, as showing the trials he had gone through.

In the course of his speech to the assemblage, his countenance brightened up, and his eyes flashed fire as he thus concluded:

"By the king's enemies I am condemned to die, by new and unknown laws. The Lord send us our king again. The Lord send us our old laws again. The Lord send us our religion again. As for the religion now practised, it has no name. Truly can I say for myself, I die for God, the king, and the laws; and this makes me not ashamed of my life, or afraid to die."

As these bold words were uttered, a trooper near the scaffold called out in a stentorian voice:

"We will neither have king, lords, nor laws."

Regarding the interruption as a needless insult to the earl, the bystanders resented it by a loud groan, and hooting.

Thereupon, the whole of the troopers, exasperated by the sympathy manifested for the earl, turned suddenly round, and drove the people back, cutting at

them with their swords, and chasing them in different directions. Several were wounded, and a child was ridden over and killed.

This deplorable occurrence caused the earl the greatest distress, as he was compelled to witness the painful spectacle. He vainly besought the officer to stay the hands of the infuriated troopers.

"It grieves me more than my own death," he said, "that these poor inoffensive people should be hurt on my account—perhaps die for me."

"The people are not inoffensive, and must be taught a lesson," replied the officer, declining to interfere.

So the troopers continued riding backwards and forwards for some time to the great terror of the people, and the earl unable to help them, sat down in a chair, which had been placed on the scaffold, and covered his face to exclude the sight.

CHAPTER IV

The Block

WHEN the tumult at length subsided, and some of the boldest of the spectators ventured to come back, the earl called to the headsman, and bade him bring him the axe.

Rudely and reluctantly, the surly fellow obeyed.

"Friend, I will not harm it," observed the earl, as he took the implement; "and I am sure it will not harm me."

"Nay, I won't answer for that," rejoined the headsman, with a horrible grin. "Maybe it will. Feel the edge, and you will find it tolerably sharp."

"I would have it sharp," said the earl.

And kissing the weapon he returned it to him.

"Here are two gold pieces—all I have," he added. "I pray thee do thy work effectually."

"I will try," replied the churl, as he put the coin in his pouch.

"Thou hadst best take off thy doublet," said the earl. "'Tis too cumbrous for thy work."

"You are mistaken," replied the man. "It will not hinder me."

Several of the lookers on, displeased by the man's behaviour, here called out:

"Kneel, fellow, and ask his lordship's pardon."

But the churl refused, and called out significantly:

"It seems you want another lesson from the troopers, my masters."

"As thou wilt, friend," said the earl, desirous that peace should be kept. "I give the pardon thou wilt not ask. May Heaven forgive thee also!"

Hearing a noise, and fearing a fresh delay, he earnestly ejaculated:

"How long, Lord, how long!"

Quiet being soon restored, the earl arose from his chair, and looking at the coffin, said:

"Thou art my bridal chamber. In thee I shall rest without a guard."

From the coffin he turned to the block, and remarked:

"Methinks it is very low, and yet there is but one step from it to Heaven."

But he caused it to be shifted, so that he might see the church, remarking:

"While I am here I will look towards thy holy sanctuary, and I know that within a few minutes I shall behold thee, my God and King, in thy sanctuary above. Under the shadow of thy wings shall be my refuge till this calamity be overpast."

CHAPTER V

Martyrdom

HE then began to prepare for death, and taking off his blue riband gave it to Baguley to deliver to his son, saying:

"He knows my injunctions respecting it."

With Paul Moreau's aid, he next divested himself of his doublet and band, and then addressing the officer said:

"Pray tell me how I must lie. I have been called bloodthirsty, yet I had never the severe curiosity to see any man put to death in peace."

"Your lordship had best make the trial," replied the officer.

The earl then laid himself down upon the block, and on rising caused it to be slightly moved.

When this was done, he said to the headsman:

"Friend, remember what I told thee. Be no more afraid to strike than I am to die. When I put up my hand, do thy work."

Looking round at his attendants, and at the people who were watching his every action, and listening intently for a word, he lifted up his hands, and exclaimed:

"The Lord bless you all. Once more pray for me, and with me."

As he knelt down beside the chair, the injunction was universally obeyed.

After praying fervently for some time, he arose with a smiling countenance, and said:

"My soul is now at rest, and so shall my body be immediately. The Lord bless my king and restore him to his rights in this kingdom. The Lord bless this kingdom, and restore the people to their rights in their king, that he and they may join hand in hand to settle truth and peace. The Lord bless this country,

this town, this people. The Lord comfort my wife and children. The Lord forgive the authors of my unjust death."

Then laying his neck upon the block, he stretched out his arms, exclaiming:

"Blessed be God's holy name for ever and ever!"

With these words he gave the sign. But the headsman moved not.

After a moment of dreadful suspense, the earl arose, and regarding the man sternly, exclaimed:

"Why do you keep me from my Saviour? What have I done that I die not to live with Him. Once more I will lie down in peace, and take my everlasting rest."

Again extending himself on the block, he cried out!

"Come, Lord Jesus!—come quickly!"

This time the executioner did not delay, but struck off the noble head at a single blow, amid universal lamentation.

When the body was placed in the coffin, a piece of paper was dropped upon the breast, on which these lines were traced:

Bounty, wit, courage,
here in one lie dead,
a STANLEY'S hand,
VERE'S HEART, and
CECIL'S head.

THE END