The Burning Ring

KATHERINE BURDEKIN

THE BURNING RING

By the same Author :

ANNA COLQUHOUN

THE REASONABLE HOPE

THE
BURNING RING

by

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This is a work of fiction, and all the characters in the book are drawn from the author's imagination. Care has been taken to avoid the use of names or titles belonging to living persons, and if any such names or titles have been used, this has been done inadvertently and no reference to such person or persons is intended.

THE BURNING RING

PART I

THE RING

CHAPTER I

AT the moment of the coming of the burning ring, Mr. Carling was sitting cross-legged on the little strip of green lawn grass behind his house, doing nothing that was useful. He was looking at a red rose which he held in his left hand, slowly mesmerizing himself with its colour. He had not what is called an eye for colour. He never knew what combination of colours produced the effect, say, of shadow on sand on a hot day, he had no memory for colour, and no appreciation of subtle tones and delicate artistic lights and shades. But what he called " a real colour," this red of roses in the sunshine, filled him with childish and barbaric joy. The weather was pleasantly warm—the papers called it a heat-wave—and his clothes were not at all extravagant. He was dressed in a white flannel shirt and khaki drill shorts,

his legs, arms, and head were bare. He looked quite nice, as he was well-made, though small, and his skin was smooth, unhairy, and very white where it had not been burned very brown. His hair was fair and thick with a little ripple in it, the eyes he held so fixedly upon the rose were clear and grey, his nose was sharp, so were his ears, his mouth was wide and opened crookedly when he smiled. His hands were beautiful; small, as he was a small man, strong and lean, with sensitive long fingers, the type of hand which is known as artistic. He was in fact a sculptor, though not at this time an artist. He had behind his very peculiar grey eyes a brain which was as sensitive to line as it was insensitive to colour. He had a memory for line which was nothing short of marvellous, his small strong hands obeyed his eyes with powerful accuracy. But with this great natural talent he was but an indifferent sculptor, and though he could get plenty of work in England his name was unrenowned. This caused him no grief, for he did not care for art. He was a sculptor because with his eye and his hand he could be nothing else, and because a man must live, even so strange and unusual a man as Robert Carling.

He was very unusual. People in buses and in trains often stared at him, if they could see his eyes. They were not large or beautiful, or peculiar in colour or setting, but in expression they were extraordinary. They were placid, happy and cold, they were so young and clear and untroubled that they looked out of place in his head, which was the head of a man of forty or thereabouts. His forehead was lined, little laughter

lines were coming at the corner of his eyes, but the eyes themselves were those of a boy of fourteen. They were not even like the eyes of a young man, they were child-like. Of course no casual starer in a bus ever analysed his eyes or found the cause of their strangeness. He, or she, simply went on looking with vague pleasant feelings stirring down at the bottom of the mind, and perhaps, presently, particularly if it were a she, smiled. Women never minded smiling at Mr. Carling, and he always smiled back at them, though he did not particularly care for them. Their faces rarely thrilled him, even from an aesthetic point of view, and the lines of their bodies definitely displeased him. He had never been in the slightest degree in love, and the natural desires of the male animal he had subdued in his youth with a firmness of purpose he had applied to nothing else in his life. He was not a meek man, and his pride rose in arms when he found that nature intended him to be bound in eternal slavery to a desire that, when gratified, gave him no mental pleasure at all, but a nauseating distaste and weariness. So he arose and crushed her, and she, lacking her most potent weapon, the attraction of woman for man, presently abandoned the struggle and left him alone. Mr. Carling had, however, no unsound prejudice against the female sex as a whole. He liked children, and if he had a preference, it was for girl-children. Some of his best work had been sculptures of their small heads and thin-boned graceful little bodies. But when these fairy sprites grew up they bored him as much as any other women, and he

abandoned them without a twinge to other more ordinary men. He was not in the least afraid of women. He was indifferent. Their faces left him cold, their bodies he considered were full of grievous structural errors, their arts of sex roused in him contemptuous amusement. The few women who by some chance of male relationship had come to know him well treated him as a boy, others were either friendly and cheerful with him, or, piqued by his blank indifference, disliked him heartily. At bottom, he was equally indifferent to men, but he admired them aesthetically, their heads and bodies at their best had lines which pleased his eye, and in a luke-warm manner he liked their minds. He made friends easily with men, and forgot them as easily. For thirty years he had gone through the world, loving no one, hating no one, despising no one, admiring no one, without ambitions, passions, miseries or any great happiness. He was now forty-three, and at thirteen his emotional life had frozen in him. Mentally and physically he was fully developed, he was not in the least repulsive to his fellow creatures, in fact very much the reverse, but the gulf between him and the ordinary mature man was as great as if he had been born blind or idiotic.

His minor characteristics were childish. He hated tidy clothes with the violent hatred of the very youthful male, he liked playing children's games and eating sticky sweets, two moderate whiskies were too much for his head, and he never smoked because his first cigarette had made him sick. He possessed a childish

vanity which was most deeply wounded by any reference to his smallness of stature, but about his genuine draughtsman's talent he was entirely unconceited. He had a childish hasty temper which erupted very easily, but to bear malice was not in his power. He lived alone, but he was never lonely, and now on this hot morning, with the sun streaming pleasantly down on his bare neck and head and his eye filled with the pure colour of the red rose, he was as happy as it was in his nature to be.

His housekeeper called to him out of the window to say that he would get a sunstroke, but he did not hear, and she, being used to his ways, knew that unless she went up to him and touched him he was not to be recalled.

"After all," she thought, as she withdrew from the window and proceeded with her dusting, "he's been in India. He must know how much sun he can stand. But, oh, dear, it is hot!" For Mrs. West was stout, and she agreed with the papers about the heat-wave.

So Mr. Carling sat on, absorbed in his rose, and he never saw a large black shadow which passed slowly over the sunlit grass. It might have been the shadow of an unusually big bird, but he did not see it then, and he never had another chance. It passed over him, and for an instant the colour of the flower darkened, as the thing that cast the shadow dropped something which fell with a tiny thud on to Mr. Carling's bare knee.

"Thunder shower," said Mr. Carling to himself, roused from his colour ecstasy by the touch. He looked up, there was no cloud in the sky. But he was

sure something had fallen on his bare knee. He looked at it, expecting to see the unwanted portion of a bird's breakfast. He saw instead what he took to be a piece of grass in the form of a ring. He tried to pick it up, but for some reason it would not come. It seemed to be firmly stuck to the flesh of his right knee, on the inside, since he had been sitting cross-legged. But directly he touched it he knew it was not grass. It was a hard thin substance, grass-green in colour, but dead. It was metal, a little thin metal ring, and it was stuck tight on to his knee.

"This is ridiculous," thought Mr. Carling, trying to get his nail under the edge of the ring. But he could not move it, so he gave it up temporarily, and looked all round to see who could have thrown it. Mrs. West was again looking at him out of the window, and as far as he knew she was the only human being who was within quarter of a mile of him. Her daughter Fanny, who aided her in the house, was away down in the village to get supplies.

"Mrs. West!" he called out, a little severely. "Did you throw a sticky ring at me?"

"No, sir," said Mrs. West, placidly. She thought it was one of his jokes, for she often found his humour a little hard to follow. And Mr. Carling, looking up at her broad red face, knew instantly that she had nothing to do with the coming of the ring. And he knew, for he was not rigidly confined within the narrow bounds of common sense, that no person had had anything to do with the coming of the ring.

"This is an illusion," he thought, gazing at the

little metal thing still firmly adherent to his knee, "and now I must find out whether it's general or peculiar to me. But I wish the thing would come off first."

By some impulse he spoke the last words aloud. Instantly the ring fell off his knee and slid noiselessly down on to the grass.

"Ha!" said Mr. Carling, with delicious thrills, "it's an illusion of a wishing ring. Nothing could be better. Now I wonder if it's stuck to the grass."

He tried it, and it had. No power of his, unaided by a spoken wish, could move the ring from the lawn. He took a flat leather note-case from the pocket of his shorts and laid it over the ring.

"I wish you to stick on to this note-case," he said.

He lifted up the case, and there was the little green ring fixed firmly to the leather. Mr. Carling gazed at it for some moments with concentrated brows.

"I wish that you didn't *always* have to stick to things. I foresee complications. I wish you to be unsticky now."

He then tried the ring with his nail, but it was still immovable.

"Ah," he thought. "I see. This is the illusion of a wishing ring, but it has certain natural properties which cannot be interfered with. One is that of adhesiveness to a remarkable extent. I shall probably discover others. Now I'll go and show it to Mrs. West, and find out how far the illusion extends."

He carried the case carefully into the house, for he could not quite get over the common-sensible feeling

that if he tilted it the ring would slide off, went up to his bedroom and showed it to Mrs. West.

"You see that ring?" he said, watching her face anxiously.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. West, looking at it curiously. "What a very bright green it is. Quite pretty it looks on that dark leather case. What is it?"

"Oh, it's just a ring. Take it off the case and hold it in your hands."

Mrs. West tried to obey him, but the ring would not move.

"It's stuck," she said.

"Yes. It's funny, isn't it?"

"Very funny," said Mrs. West, with a suspicious glance at her master. "It's one of your jokes, isn't it, sir?"

"Yes," said Mr. Carling, who did not now want to let Mrs. West know any more about the ring. "But it's better than most of my jokes. I bet you can't get that ring off that case."

"When I was a young girl in Oxford," said Mrs. West, having another try at the ring, "the gentlemen used to stick half crowns on to the pavement with glue, and watch the men in the street trying to pick them up. I used to think it was rather a shame."

"So do I. This is a much more high-class trick than that. And I'm going to amuse myself with it, not mock people."

"Well, I know you wouldn't ever do anything like what they did, sir," said Mrs. West, with respectful

affection. "And now you're here, will you be in to lunch? And will you have it in the studio or the dining-room?"

"I'm going up to town for the day," said Mr. Carling, gazing at the ring. "I shall do no work to-day. Perhaps I shall never do any more."

"Why, sir! Have someone left you something?"

"Yes," said Mr. Carling, in a mysterious whisper. "But I don't quite know what it is yet. And I may have to go on working just the same. But I hope not."

"The other artist gentleman I was with in London, he seemed to *like* working—leastways sometimes he did."

"Well, you see, I'm all gentleman and no artist, and I never like working. Do you like work?"

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. West, sincerely, "if I can get on with folks I work for. I—I suppose you'll be making a change in your way of life, if—er—if the money is sufficient."

"There's not enough money in the world to make me get married, and so I shall always have to have a housekeeper. Now clear out, Mrs. West, I've got to change. I can't go up to London like this."

"No, sir," agreed Mrs. West, glancing at his unclothed limbs.

Mrs. West withdrew, and Mr. Carling took out his razor, put one foot up on a chair and prepared to make a small cut in his leg.

"For," he reasoned, "if I am dreaming I shall feel no pain, or only very little like you do sometimes if

your leg has got stiff in bed and you dream you've broken it."

But somehow he felt very averse from bringing the razor into contact with his calf.

"I should make a rotten Dervish," he thought, and then gave himself a much bigger and deeper cut than he had intended. The pain was sharp, definite, and most undreamlike, but what convinced him most was the feel of the blood trickling fast down his leg. He could not remember ever having felt blood running in a dream.

"Oh, damn!" he said. "Now I've given myself a most horrible gash. I must try the ring."

He touched the ring with his right forefinger and said: "I wish this cut was healed."

The cut healed instantly, its lips closed, it turned into a small white scar, while the blood from it lay yet wet and sticky upon his leg, on the chair and in scattered drops upon the ground. But in his finger he felt a sudden sharp pain, like the pain of a burn. He looked at it, and where it had rested on the ring he saw a sore red mark, open, like a small cut, but it did not bleed. Very cautiously he touched the ring with another finger. This time it did not hurt him, but as he touched it, it sank a little into the note-case and he saw it had burnt its way through the outer covering, through the notes inside (there were but two) and half through the back.

"Good God!" cried Mr. Carling out loud, for he was well startled. "If I play about with this thing much I shall have holes right through me!"

He looked at his finger again, and took a little comfort, for it was obvious that the ring had burnt the leather of the case far more fiercely than it had burnt his hand. With living flesh it was harsh, but not violently savage. He moved it, by spoken wishes, from the ruined note-case on to his hand, and for this it did not burn at all. He next wished it on to the iron fender, and without touching it at all gave utterance to a desire that he might again have a cut in his leg. His leg remained sound and whole.

"Either it can't," murmured Mr. Carling, kneeling down to move the ring again, "or it has to be touching me."

He moved the ring once more on to his hand and looked at the fender rail. It was without mark or blemish.

"You weren't trying," he said to the ring. "Well, I wish I had a cut in my leg."

The ring burnt his hand, the cut opened, the blood began to run.

"It can undo its wishes," said Mr. Carling, much pleased. "And without a very bad burn. In fact, that's nothing."

Without heeding the bleeding gash in his leg, after moving the ring, he examined his hand. It had a red circular mark on it, but it was very shallow and the pain was slight. He put the ring back on the fender-rail, laid his forearm over it and wished once more for his leg to be healed. This time the ring burnt him sharply, his leg was healed, and when he moved the

ring from the fender it had bitten a little way into the iron.

"It likes living things," he thought, "I must carry it always on my body. Not on my hands, or I shall have burns all over them."

By this time there was quite a lot of blood about, on the floor, drying slowly on his leg.

"I wish the blood would disappear," said Mr. Carling, with the ring in a new place on his forearm. But the blood did not disappear, and the ring remained cold and dead.

"Oh," said Mr. Carling, and fell to considering.

"I wish I had a five-pound note," he said next.

Nothing happened, the ring was cold, no five-pound note appeared.

"Damn it!" cried Mr. Carling, in a rage, for he suddenly thought the ring was a three-wish ring, and that he had had them all. "I wish I was ten feet high!"

His head hit the ceiling with a violent blow, and he collapsed on the floor, with his head in the coal-box and his feet far far away from him near the door. And on his enormous arm the little green ring burnt harshly but not cruelly.

"This will never do," he thought, "it's like Alice in the White Rabbit's house. Here, I wish I was my right size again."

He shrank into his right size and got to his feet, rubbing his bruised head, but much relieved to find that the ring was still giving wishes.

"It's no good wishing for untold wealth," he said,

"because it won't. It has no power over things that are outside me. That blood is outside me now, it's inanimate. But if I were to wish all the blood in my body were full of disease germs, it would be—I didn't wish that, you understand? I only said 'if.' The ring can give no wishes except what is to do with me, *myself,* and to do with *itself,* like unsticking it from things. It won't give me money, and I shall have to go on working just the same."

This thought depressed him, for how could any man who had just found a wishing-ring go on doing work in which he had never taken any fierce and thrilling pleasure?

So while he mopped up the blood and washed his leg in the bath he began to think out schemes whereby he might make money out of the changes the ring would work in himself. But he resolved that first of all he would take two or three days just for experiments and amusement.

He cleaned the bath down, set the blood-stained towel to soak in cold water in the basin, and because he was a thoughtful man he called downstairs to Mrs. West that he had cut his leg slightly but was not seriously injured, and that she was to take no shock from the sight of the sanguinary evidence. Then he went back to his own room, where was an old mahogany wardrobe with a long glass. It had belonged to his father, and had stood in his mother's room, and from the age of three he had been accustomed to stand in front of it to see himself, vainly hoping always that he would grow into a great tall

man. He stood before it now in his shirt and khaki shorts, five feet seven in his bare feet, with the ring firmly stuck to his left forearm, and said, in rather a shaky voice: "I wish to be invisible."

And he was. *He* was, but his shorts and white flannel shirt were not. They were outside him, they were inanimate, the ring had no power over them. Neither was the ring itself invisible, but hung quivering in the air on his invisible shaking arm. The shock to a man on seeing his shorts suspended in space with no legs in them, and his white flannel collar ending off abruptly without any neck or head visible above it is not describable in words. Mr. Carling saw the shorts agitated violently with the sudden trembling of his invisible legs. The sight upset him so greatly that he tore at the breast of his shirt in what was nothing more nor less than a blind panic. And he saw the shirt in the glass split from button to waist, open, and reveal nothing but the inside of its back.

"I wish I was visible again!" he cried, in mad fright, and saw himself, very pale, with staring, terrified eyes, half in and half out of his ruined shirt. He moved the ring, which had burnt him sharply, though at the moment of the transformation fear had obscured pain, and sat down on the bed to rest his weak and quivering knees.

He was so shaken that he thought he would, before doing anything else with the ring, go downstairs and get himself a small weak drink. He buttoned his torn shirt, and going to the sideboard in his small dining-room, he mixed himself a most innocuous whisky-

and-soda, and drank a mouthful of it. He was immediately seized with such a racking universal pain that he dropped the glass on the floor and clung, shuddering, to the sideboard. He felt as if every bone in his body had been removed, and red-hot iron bars and plates had been substituted. The pain was in every part of him from his head to his toes, and it increased with hellish rapidity until it was so acute that he felt he must, in another second, lose consciousness. Then it suddenly left him. He was sweating profusely, and trembling so violently that he could not stand, but collapsed, limp and horribly frightened, into a leather-covered armchair. For he was now so much afraid of the ring that he had even a momentary impulse to hide it in some secret place and leave it there for ever. It was no ordinary wishing-ring that anyone lucky might pick up any day, it was a Power. It had a will of its own, it was possessed of a fanatical asceticism. It had half-killed him for taking a mouthful of weak whisky-and-soda, what it would do to him if he indulged in really gross pleasures Mr. Carling dared not imagine. Wine and women were henceforth forbidden to him, and though he had no use for women or wine either, it alarmed him to think that he was now forced to be different from his fellows.

As he lay back in the armchair another thought struck him. He realized that the question was not what he should do with the ring, but what It should do with him. If he did anything It did not like It would put him to ghastly torments or perhaps kill him outright. He felt that childish wishes, such as making

himself invisible, were no part of its plans. Since the episode of the whisky he felt that he might, with more decorum and decency, sing vulgar songs in an Abbey than ask the ring to do anything so futile as make him invisible. And he felt that rather than wittingly offend it he would cut off a hand or a foot. What then, did it want him to do? It must have arrived with some purpose, and he was sure now that idle amusement could have no place in the purpose of such a ferocious Puritan as the little green ring.

"Of course," he thought gloomily, "it wants me to cure people of their diseases. Well," he said aloud, "I wish that John Brough may never have another headache."

Brough, an artist friend, and the man Mr. Carling liked the most in his own cold-blooded way, suffered severely at times from neuralgia behind his eyes. But the ring would not grant this unselfish wish, it remained as cold and as dead as when Mr. Carling had asked it for a five-pound note. A thrill of pride shot through him.

"It's *mine!*" he thought. "It's my ring. It's been sent for me only and it won't do anything for anyone *but* me. But then what does it want me to do? Not cure other people, not make money, not amuse myself —*what?*"

He felt worried and strained, as a man does when he is trying to hurry through a dense fog. Mr. Carling, abjectly afraid of his curious possession, knew that he could not have a peaceful or happy moment until he knew what it expected him to do, and he had

started to do it. Then his roving, scared eyes fell on an old brass door-knocker which was lying on the mantelpiece. John Brough had given it to him only two months before, and together they had thought of the hands, centuries in their graves, which had plied that knocker with loud and merry, or small and furtive taps. Mr. Carling bethought him of another and really most childish wish, the desire to be back in the past. And yet his mind immediately felt less strained, and his fear of the ring diminished. He knew that it had stopped threatening him, that it was pleased. For some reason, known at present only to itself, it wanted him to go back into the past. Mr. Carling lost no time in obliging it. He lay back in his chair, shut his eyes, and said aloud:

"I wish I were back in the past."

The ring burnt him, and he was immediately conscious of a smell sweeter than incense, sweeter than any aromatic herbs ever burnt in the luxurious palace of a king—the smell of an English garden on a hot summer day. He opened his eyes.

He was sitting on the wall of an old square garden he knew well, eating a strawberry which he held in his right hand. The strawberry was large and very juicy, slightly over-ripe. The garden was full of wall fruit-trees and vegetable beds; it had many little gravel paths, and one broad gravel path that led almost from where he was sitting up to the side door of a big square red house of which the bricks had turned with age to a glorious deep crimson. The strawberry beds lay beneath his dangling feet, behind him he knew was

the green orchard filled with pear and apple and nut trees; to his right, outside the square garden, were the lawns, and beyond the lawns the shrubbery. Close to him on his right was the old green door in the wall, leading from the square garden to the orchard, and over it on a trellis work flaunted a crimson rambler rose, shining bravely in the sun. The sweet smell came from two riotous herbacious borders which flanked either side of the broad gravel path.

"I am a boy again," thought Mr. Carling, for he knew that he had left that house and that garden when he was fifteen. But as yet he did not know which day this was of all the summer days when he had sat on the wall of the square, sweet-smelling garden, and eaten strawberries. His body was small but sturdy, he was dressed only in a shirt and trousers and his feet were bare. His head was bare also, and the sun in its zenith shone pleasantly upon the back of his neck. His lack of clothing gave him no clue, as he had always been accustomed to shed his coat and socks whenever it was warm enough to do without them. The ring was burning the right side of his well-developed little chest, but he hardly felt it. He was wondering when, on this summer's day in the past, he had become tired of his own company and jumped down from the wall to search garden and house for his mother. Of his own volition he could do nothing, he must wait upon the tardy desires of that boy in the past. Passionately he hoped it would be soon, the thought of seeing her again after so many years made his mind shiver with the force of his longing and a

kind of terror. For only his mind was his own. Tears could not rise nor laughter spring on the face of the boy who sat so contentedly eating his strawberry upon the wall of the old square garden. Mr. Carling knew he must finish the strawberry, throw away the strig and wipe his fingers on his shirt if in the past he had had no handkerchief. He did all these things, and became aware that he had, for a wonder, a handkerchief, but that he could not use it for it was tied round his left hand. It was bloody, large stains had soaked through the folded linen as from some deepish cut or scratch.

And with a shock that left his mind fainting in agony, Mr. Carling knew what past day this was. He knew that it was two days after his fourteenth birthday, and that in the early part of the morning he had cut his hand with the knife, so sharp and keen, which his mother had given him for a birthday present. He knew that presently, as he sat on the wall wondering what he would do next, a great drunken bumble-bee would blunder on to his bare foot and settle there for a little while. The boy in the past had wondered whether the bee would sting him, but Mr. Carling knew it would not. It would just crawl on his foot for a few seconds, then fly heavily away. After it had gone the sweet mellow chime of the stable clock would ring out the hour of noon, and before the last stroke had died away the side-door of the red house would open and a dark figure would come down the broad path between the tall flowers of the riotous borders. The figure would be his father's, coming to tell him

that within the square red house his mother lay dead, stricken down with terrible suddenness as the result of an unsuspected weakness of her heart. She had tried to move the piano out a little from the wall of the drawing-room to retrieve something which had slipped down behind it, and had fallen down and died while her son Robert was playing in the garden, cutting his hand with the knife that she had given him. So Mr. Carling knew that the boy on the wall could not go to find his mother, and he knew that in the evening, when the first wild burst of his grief was spent he would say to his father: "I shall never love anyone again." And now he knew that the boy had spoken truth. He never had. He knew that upon this summer day would follow months and years of misery, that his father would fail in mind and body and estate, and that in the end he would die and the house and garden would be sold to pay his debts, and the boy Robert would be left at fifteen, nearly penniless, to apprentice himself to a stone mason and discover that he had a sculptor's hand and eye. Mr. Carling had no desire to live through those years again, but he sat on the wall, waiting for the bumble-bee. He made up his mind that when the clock in the stables had struck six times he would wish to go back. So he waited with the ring burning on his boy's chest, and a keener pain piercing through his man's mind. For all the time he knew that Mary Howard, young and beautiful and well-beloved, was lying dead inside the red brick house which stood so tall and proud against the deep blue of the summer sky.

Presently the bee came and crawled upon his foot, and as it flew away the stable clock began to strike. Six of the lovely golden sounds floated to his ears on the warm sweet-smelling wind, but before the hammer fell for the seventh time, he wished.

The scent of the garden faded, the light became dimmer, and he was again lying in the leather-covered armchair, with all the tears of his heart released and springing upwards towards his eyes. He moved the ring, which was still burning him sharply, and very quietly he went upstairs and changed his clothes. All the rest of that day he walked, in a large semi-circle of twenty miles, feeling neither heat, hunger, thirst, nor weariness. Only once he stopped, when he was in a lonely little pine wood, far away from his own home. He drew the ring out and made it stick to the palm of his hand.

"Why did you send me back to that day?" he asked, harshly. "Why *that* day? What did I find there that's any good to you or me?"

The answer was in his own mind, but it seemed to come shouting on a sudden gust of wind in the pines, it surged round his head in a thunderous harmony.

"Sorrow—and Love!"

"Rot!" he cried in a panic. "Rot! Sentimental rot!"

But like an echo the answer came again as the wind died down to a whisper in the pine-needles:

"Sorrow—and love!"

PART II

HERO-WORSHIP

CHAPTER II

MR. CARLING, after that one moment of intolerable dread which seized him in the pine wood, made no more rebellion against the ring. He knew now that it was the ring's will that he should find or do something in the past, all he could pray for was that it might not again be his own past, where he was bound to the stake of his former actions, and must watch his torments coming to him without the relief of speech or tears.

So, after a supper, a sound night's sleep, and a plenteous breakfast, he went up to his room, arranged his clock where he could see it the second he came back from his vision, and lay down on the bed.

"I wish to be back in the past, much, *much* further back than last wish," and as the ring burnt him he shut his eyes.

When he opened them he was lying on his back in a wood or a forest, it was night, and a bright fire was burning a little way off. A man was sitting quite close to him, almost touching him. There were other

men gathered round the fire, and a pleasant smell of roasting meat came to his nose. He looked at the man who was sitting with him as well as he could in the uncertain light. It was a white man, a small man, incredibly hairy, not very adequately clothed, and what he had on was made of the skins of beasts. Mr. Carling had wished to go "*much* further back," and the ring had sent him to a time when white men were savages. He himself was a savage, or a prisoner in the hands of these white barbarians, for when he tried to rise he found that his arms and legs were hobbled. Not tightly bound together, but hobbled with thongs made of leather. The movement he made drew the attention of the man next him, who, Mr. Carling concluded, had been set to watch him. This man immediately ran to the fire for a torch. He came back with a blazing brand and examined Mr. Carling by the bright red light it cast. Mr. Carling looked up into the dark shaggy visage and saw that it was smiling with a friendly gleam of very white teeth.

"That's gnawing the bones," thought Mr. Carling, and smiled back. He was surprised that a wild and hairy savage should smile at a prisoner, and his astonishment increased when the man swiftly untied his leather shackles and dragged him up on to his feet. When they were both standing, Mr. Carling found that he was a little taller than the barbarian. It always pleased him to be taller than other men, for he so rarely was in his own time and life, and he smiled again. The wild man gave Mr. Carling's head a kind

of fierce yet friendly rub with the side of his own, took his hand and led him to the fire. He was received with shouts of applause and laughter. Two or three even got up and danced round him in their glee. Mr. Carling bowed and sat down, and immediately someone passed him a skin bag filled with some kind of liquor that was not water. Mr. Carling dared not drink it, being the wearer of the burning ring, but he made believe to and passed it on to the man next him. He then examined himself and found he was dressed in a tunic of skins like the rest. He put his hand inside the breast part of this tunic and found, rather to his relief, for the pain was severe, that he could move the ring. And by this action he knew that he was in a dream of the past and not in a real past, for of course in his own past life he would not have had a burning ring to move. He put the ring in a comfortable place under his right arm, where it would be hidden in case the barbarians suddenly rent from him his one garment, and pursued his investigation of himself. He had not got his own body. One glance at his bare and hairy legs showed him that. They were very thick and muscular, and slightly bowed. His feet were flat and without much arch to the instep, and the toes were splayed out like the toes of a man who has gone barefoot all his life. But on his chest he could feel all the old ring-burns. His body was very dirty, like the bodies of his companions, and his head and face were covered with a fine thatch of hair. He pulled out some hair and looked at it by the light of the fire. It was very dark, whereas his hair in his own time was fair.

"I *am* one of these people," he thought, as he looked first at his own legs and then at those of the man who sat next him. "I am exactly like them. I am a white barbarian."

A man brought him a rough but powerful bow, some arrows tipped with iron, and a flint axe.

"Thank you," said Mr. Carling, finding his speech entirely unfettered, "but if you've got as far as tipping the arrows with iron, why can't I have an iron hatchet?"

The whole circle, as the sound of Mr. Carling's words came to their ears, burst into wild shoutings. Some of them smote him in a friendly way, some rushed to embrace him, some rubbed their heads on his. They spoke to him, too, but Mr. Carling could not understand one word. The delight of the savages made him feel rather as if he was bottom man in a collapsed rugger-scrum, and he was glad when their transports abated a little and they sat down again in their own places.

"I seem to be very popular, anyhow," he thought. "Why? I am a man they tie up sometimes, and they take my weapons away. Then they untie me, give me a drink and give my weapons back again. I know! I must be a harmless madman or else I throw fits, and they keep me alive because I bring them luck. Or else when I'm not in a fit I'm wonderfully wise and tell them what to do. But they seem to be quite used to me either being dumb or babbling. I must be a mascot."

He pointed to the iron on the arrows and then to

the flint axe, and demonstrated on a piece of leather how much keener was the iron. They understood him, but laughed and made signs he was sure were negative, all saying the same words.

"They haven't got much iron yet," he thought, "and naturally they won't waste it on a lunatic. I expect I habitually ask for an iron hatchet and never get it. I wish I could find out *when* I am."

He looked round, and a bright red colour caught his eye. There was a good deal of red colour about as a beast of some kind had been killed, there were pools of blood on the ground and two of the men were spotted with flying drops. But this bright red colour was all over a man's head. Either he had a frightful wound, or his head was tied up in something that was not a skin. Unless, indeed, it were the raw hide of a skin. Mr. Carling pointed to this man with one of his stubby strong little forefingers, and called out: "Hi, Redcap!"

The man rose instantly, laughing, and came to sit by Mr. Carling's side, who saw to his intense astonishment that the red thing was a piece of scarlet silk. He handled it, the man obligingly bowing his head, but there was no mistake. It was thick silk.

"Now where the devil did you get that from?" he asked aloud.

The man laughed and shook his head, then seemed to change his mind, for he began to unknot the silk, evidently with the intention of giving it to the tribal mascot, for such Mr. Carling now firmly supposed himself to be.

"Perhaps all idiots," he thought, taking the red silk, "are people who are not living in their proper lives at the proper time. Perhaps the dumb man in the Bible was really living in the days of Queen Elizabeth, and when he was healed he was just dragged back again."

He considered this theory for some time, turning the silk over and over in his hands, then he realized where he was, and turning round, put the silk again over the head of the man who had given it to him.

"I don't really want it, thanks very much," he said.

His action called forth yells of applause from the men who saw it, and the possessor of the silk also looked delighted. He knotted it up again, and carefully arranged Mr. Carling's arrows and stone axe in the leather thong which drew his skin tunic together round his waist. He slung the bow over Mr. Carling's shoulder.

"I evidently lose my things if I'm not looked after," thought Mr. Carling. "Now I'll see if I have a keeper."

He rose and wandered off into the darkness beyond the range of the fire. No one followed him, though some called after him, regretfully, by the tone of the voices.

"*Gorrachgu! Gorrachgu!*"

This, as nearly as Mr. Carling could spell it phonetically, was what they called, but he could not pronounce it at all himself, as the word had a kind of

gurgle in the middle more difficult for the foreigner to imitate than a Zulu click. He thought it must be his own name, as he had heard them say it several times, and always when they were talking to him or about him.

"I have no keeper except when in a fit," he thought, as the harsh voices stopped shouting the unpronounceable word. He saw lumps of meat beginning to pass from hand to hand down his side of the fire, and was just going back to get his ration when a thought came to him.

"I wish," he said aloud, "that I was ravenously hungry."

But he felt no more hungry than he had done before the wish, and the ring lay cold and dead against his side.

"It will only give me one wish," he thought, "and that will be to take me back again when I want to go. In these dreams I have no magic power."

He went back to the fire, two men instantly made a place for him between them, and he was given a large lump of meat. He ate it all, though it was very tough and half raw. He did not know when he would get any more, and so far he found this dream-life interesting and amusing, and did not wish to be driven by starvation to go back to a time when he could buy a tough and underdone beef steak in a restaurant. When he had finished his meat they passed the skin full of liquor again, and again he pretended to drink and passed it on. Then he asked for water, as the meat had made him thirsty. He did it by bending his head and

scooping up nothing from the ground with his hands like a man drinking at a stream. They understood instantly, and presently a skin full of water was passed down. Mr. Carling found it very difficult to manage and spilt a lot of it, but had a satisfying draught in the end. It tasted queer, but the ring did not burn him, so he knew it was water of a sort.

After the meal Mr. Carling left the fire again, and as he walked out of the range of its light he saw that the moon had risen and was filling the wood or forest with its pale cold light. He did not dare to go very far away from his companions as he had already heard one or two howling noises in the distance which had made him feel a little cold down his back. They might have been made by a Friend of Man, baying the moon, but on the other hand they might have been the hunting cries of wild and savage wolves. He did not feel able to encounter wild animals armed only with a bow and arrows and a stone axe, and though he thought that wolves were only dangerous to man in the winter, yet, when he heard another howl much closer he jumped and was taken with a slight shivering fit. It seemed to him a frightening thing to be in a time and place where wolves ran about the countryside unchecked, and men, to protect themselves, had only weapons of the most rude and unlethal. But he fought with his cowardice, and in spite of the howlings (though he was now certain in his mind they were made by wolves and not dogs) he went a little distance through the wood until he could smell the wind untainted by the odour of his companions or of the

roasted meat. It was very warm, the leaves were on the trees, and the wind smelt damp and salt, so that he knew he was near the sea. He picked up a leaf from the ground and examined it in a patch of bright moonlight. It was an oak leaf, but it seemed to him that the trees were rather small, stunted and wind-blown, as if they had hard work to live, and no energy to spare for making themselves into fine trees.

"I think it's just a little grove," he thought, looking up through the gnarled trunks. "If it were the middle of a huge forest they'd grow much better. Oh!"

He said the last word aloud, and jumped nervously, for the wolf howled again, and this time it seemed to be only about a hundred yards away from him. Mr. Carling turned and strolled back to the fire, wondering where the huts were, for he felt he would like to get inside one to sleep, with the door securely fastened. But there did not seem to be any huts, and the wild men were throwing themselves down on the ground to take their rest without any regard for wolves. One, indeed, raised himself on his elbow as the wolf howled, and mocked the animal with so exact an imitation of the sad fierce cry that it made Mr. Carling's hair prickle and rise a little on the scalp. The others laughed sleepily, and Mr. Carling was reassured. Wolves were evidently not perilous at this time of the year, and though he knew his comrades were nearly as untamed and far more cruel than any wolf, being men with men's brains, he was certain that he personally had nothing to fear from them. The

absence of huts, women and children, and the picked look of the men, who were all active and young, made him think that it was either a hunting party or a military expeditionary force, and that the oak wood was just a bivouac or one night's camp. But the men seemed to fear no enemies. Mr. Carling could see a pile of things which might be weapons guarded by one man who did not sleep, but the resting warriors were, as far as he could see, all unarmed. They evidently were not afraid of any surprise attack in the night. There was another small group of unsleeping men sitting some distance away from him on the other side of the fire. When he came back after his final wolf scare he had noticed this group and had seen something shining and flashing among them. He thought he would go over to them and see what it was, but the man who howled like a wolf had put it out of his head, and he sat down by the fire to rack his brains for his whereabouts. He knew it was a very long time ago, because the barbarians were white men, but his knowledge of the early history of his kind was so scanty that he could not place himself within a thousand years. They had some iron, and they were in touch with some civilized people who made silk; they were dark, small, stocky men. Mr. Carling believed the Celts were a fair blue-eyed race, though he would never have asserted it in an argument. He remembered vaguely something about a race called Iberians who were small and dark, and gave to the Cornish of his own time the characteristic appearance of squareness. But then he did not know whether he

was in England or some other part of Europe. For all he knew he might be a member of a tribe who had issued from Asia into Europe in the great migration which partly caused the fall of Rome. Staring dreamily into the fire he wondered if Rome had fallen, if she were in the height of her power, if she had not yet risen to fame. Rome! The thought that he might be dreaming in a time when Rome ruled the world made him feel rather as if the wolf were howling at his very back. It frightened him, and yet it gave him a queer feeling of pride. But nothing was more certain than that he was not a Roman. He was a barbarian, and the only way barbarians could know Rome was by the feel of her foot upon their necks.

He was roused from his meditation by the voice of Redcap. Mr. Carling looked round and saw that he was setting another man to guard the weapons, while he himself rose up and went away into the trees. Mr. Carling, on impulse, got up and followed him noiselessly. Redcap went into a small moonlit glade in the wood, and Mr. Carling just at that moment tripped over a dead branch and came down with a crash. He picked himself up and went to the edge of the clearing, but Redcap had disappeared. Mr. Carling, irritated by his own clumsiness, ran across the glade to catch him up, thinking he must be somewhere in the trees on the other side, and fell again, this time down a hole in the ground. He picked himself up once more, unpleasantly bruised, and saw by the moonlight that he had rolled down a steep slope set with stones here and there to give a footing, into an underground

passage or cave. Redcap had gone to ground. He turned his back on the moonlight and saw another light in front of him. He was in a passage, for he could feel the sides with his hands. It was fairly wide, and stretch as he might he could not feel any roof. Then, as he started to walk carefully towards the faint light he could see, all was revealed, for Redcap suddenly appeared with a torch. It was not a brand drawn out of the fire, but a carefully made torch which threw a good steady light and burnt without an undue amount of smoke. Mr. Carling looked up to see how high the roof was, and felt a queer shock, for he knew where he was. In his own proper life and time he had stood in this passage and had touched the stones of the roof, now well above his head, with his fingers. In his own proper person he had commented on the hugeness of the slabs of granite that made the roof, and on the marvellous workmanship of the granite walls.

"It's much higher than it used to be," he said to Redcap. "I expect in my time it had got silted up. It was never used then."

Redcap seemed neither surprised nor angry at seeing him, but he took him by his leather waist thong and began gently but firmly to urge him along the way he had come.

"No!" said Mr. Carling, wriggling away from him. "I know there's a room at the end of this passage. I simply must go and see what it's like now."

Redcap hesitated, then let him go, with a movement

which in a civilized being would have been perhaps a shrug of the shoulders. Mr. Carling knew exactly what he meant, and felt very glad that he himself was a harmless lunatic who could go anywhere and do anything. So he went on, closely followed by Redcap with the torch, and burst into the room at the end of the passage. It was very much the same as he remembered it, except that it also was higher. There were two people in the room, and Redcap spoke to them, crouching on his knees with every sign of reverence and fear. Mr. Carling knew he was explaining the presence of the regimental mascot, and he looked with all his eyes, for he knew that he would not be suffered to remain in this holy of holies for very long. The people were old men, one had a grey beard, and one was perfectly white, and they were both clothed in long dignified white robes, quite unlike Redcap's garment of skin and fur. Mr. Carling stared at them, and for a minute or two wondered what they were. No tribe would have two kings of equal dignity. No savage tribe would have such old kings. Priests! That's what they were. Priests in white robes!

"Druids, by the Lord!" shouted Mr. Carling, at the top of his voice.

Redcap, in obvious terror, made him a panicky sign to keep his mouth shut, but the old men took no notice. One of them was gnawing a bone, the leg-bone of some slender animal, perhaps a deer, and the other was drinking out of a horn. And both were intent upon what Redcap was saying.

"But this place," thought Mr. Carling, remembering what he had been told, "is older even than the Druids. Oh, I wish I could speak their language!"

But the ring could only give him one wish at a time, and after all it had done very well for him. It had put him down in one of the very few places in England which he could recognize in a time when white men wore suits of skins and gave their harmless lunatics old stone axes to amuse them. He longed to be able to tell Redcap and the Druids that their house would still be standing tens of centuries later, and that men would touch the great granite slabs of the passage roof with their hands and marvel at the building of it. But he could say nothing, so he bowed very low to the two Druids, though he thought that the underground house had not been built by them but by a people older still. But of this he was not sure, and was quite willing to give Redcap and his friends the credit. The Briton, for Mr. Carling now knew at least the later racial name of the barbarians, looked pleased and relieved at this sign of reverence in the idiot, and the two priests raised their hands in condescending blessing. Then they said something to Redcap, who gave Mr. Carling a sudden blow in the ribs with his elbow, accompanied by an order of some sort. Mr. Carling thought it was a dismissal and turned to go away down the passage, but Redcap dragged him back again. This time he shook him by the arm and again uttered peremptory words. Mr. Carling bowed once more to the priests, but Redcap jerked him back by his waist thong. He put up a dirty hand to Mr.

Carling's face, opened his mouth, seized his tongue and moved it up and down.

"Oh," said Mr. Carling, much relieved, though disliking the taste of the Briton's hand, "you want me to babble. Nothing easier, and I'd like to tell you first of all that your hand wants washing. Do you know, father," he said to the older priest, "that this stone house will stand for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years and people will come to look at it and the imaginative ones will go off into funny kind of dreams just with looking at and touching anything so old and solid and lasting. But you really ought to try and get up to the temple in Wiltshire if you haven't been there, because it's one of the wonders of the world and always will be. If the ring had put me down outside Stonehenge I should have known I was in England directly, but this place is just as good. This is old Cornwall, and this house is the Carn Bran Fougou Hole, and Redcap got that red handkerchief from a foreigner in exchange for tin. And unless the legend of Lyonesse is true we're quite close to the Land's End, and there are too many sea winds for the sacred grove of oaks to grow very well. Later on this piece will be as bare of trees as Dartmoor, but the climate's certainly warmer than it was in my day. Not even these poor little oaks would grow then, and this house is just in a piece of wuzzy in a little field."

The priests listened with grave interest to this succession of meaningless sounds, flowing from the lips of the idiot, and Redcap stood by with a gratified smile like one who shows off to advantage his performing

dog. Mr. Carling had taken a liking to this dirty hairy Briton who had shown such a generous and ungrasping spirit with regard to the beautiful red silk, and determined to be even more amusing and idiotic. He drew a deep breath and burst into the strains of "*In questa tomba oscura,*" which he felt was an appropriate song for the place. He found that in his early British throat he had a good working bass, and the deep big notes reverberated with tremendous effect in the echoing granite chamber. He sang the song all through in Italian, and when he came to *Lascia che l'ombre ignude,* he let his voice go to its fullest extent. He finished softly, and the last long-drawn *ingrata* died away on a note that was like the humming of an enormous bee. Mr. Carling was delighted with himself. He clapped his hands, kicked his bare heels together behind him, and laughed. But soon he saw that he had made a serious mistake. Redcap was looking awed and impressed, and the two priests, though impressed likewise, were evidently annoyed. They were intelligent men, and they perceived that an idiot who could produce at will such wonderful, solemn, and alarmingly harmonious sounds was not a real harmless idiot, but a man who had some unexplained power. They saw that Redcap was immensely struck by the singing of his lunatic, and good religious Britons were not supposed to be impressed by anything but the majesty and awful power of their own priests. The idiot was usurping the prerogative of the hierarchy, and the Druids decided independently and simultaneously that this was very dangerous.

The older priest, frowning, told the Briton to remove Mr. Carling, for he wanted to discuss the matter with his colleague when they should be alone together in their magnificent stone chamber. Redcap knelt in obeisance, and Mr. Carling, hoping to propitiate the offended fathers, cast himself flat on the beaten earth floor. When he got up again he saw that he had made another mistake. It would have been better if he had snapped his fingers in their faces and gone away laughing and babbling. The priests were now even more doubtful as to the reality of his imbecility. A man who knew, without a word being spoken, that two other men required to be propitiated, was too intelligent to be any longer treated as an idiot. They looked at him with dark, cold, hostile eyes, and Mr. Carling went away crestfallen.

"I am a perfect fool," he said to Redcap, as they went away down the passage. "I was a perfect fool to sing a tuneful song in tune, which is, of course, a thing none of you know how to do, and a still greater fool to have let the priests know I knew they were annoyed. That just comes of trying to show off, though I really did it to please you. Now those priests are probably arranging to have me sacrificed or something, and I shall have to go away."

Redcap stopped when they were outside the priests' underground dwelling, and interrupted his too intelligent fool in his babbling by again putting his hand in Carling's mouth. He took hold of his tongue and moved it up and down, then threw back his own head and emitted a sort of howl. Mr. Carling understood

that he required more of the wonderful sounds he had heard in the priests' rocky room.

"No," said Mr. Carling, when he had recovered possession of his tongue, "if the priests hear me singing again, they'll perhaps come up and try to murder me out of hand. Besides, it wouldn't sound nearly as wonderful out here, and I'm much too conceited to like spoiling a good effect."

Redcap, thinking his fool had not understood, again made what was very nearly a musical sound. Mr. Carling pointed to the priests' house, then trembled vigorously and shrank himself up against Redcap's side. The Briton understood immediately, and his face expressed annoyance, shame and alarm. Annoyance that he could not have what he wanted, shame that he wanted something of which the priests disapproved, and alarm at the thought that they might even now be reading with their magic arts his wicked and insubordinate feelings. He caught hold of Mr. Carling's hand and dragged him back to the camp fire at a quick run. He sat down again by the pile of British weapons, dismissed his substitute, and fell into deep thought, frowning and staring at the fire. Every now and then he glanced at the afflicted of the gods, who was sitting quietly beside him, examining his little stone axe, and Mr. Carling, catching his eyes once or twice, saw that they expressed wonder now, and not the same kindly contempt as they had before the incident in the underground house.

"If you look at me like that in front of any priest," he said, gravely, "I am a dead man. At least I shall

have to go away. And I do think I ought to have a better axe."

The matter of the axe rankled with Mr. Carling, for he now saw it was not even a good stone axe. The age of flint weapons had passed, and this axe was simply an old thing that had been handed down as a curiosity and given to the idiot just to make him think he had a weapon besides his bow and arrows. The bow, though rough, was very strong, and the iron-tipped arrows were sharp. But the axe was ill-balanced and its edge was all worn away. Mr. Carling wondered why he was allowed to have a bow and arrows, as he was not permitted by the tribe to bear either an axe or a sword. He came to the conclusion that he must be such a bad shot that even if he fell into a fit so suddenly that they had no time to disarm him and tie his ankles and wrists, the danger was considered negligible. Also there was only a small amount of iron on the arrows, and the waste of the precious metal was not so great as that involved in arming an imbecile with a sword.

"Now, supposing a wolf suddenly jumps at me at any time," he said, peevishly shaking the flint under Redcap's nose, "what could I do with this?"

He reached out across Redcap's hairy legs and tried to snatch a sword from the pile of weapons. The Briton gave him a sharp blow on the arm with his clenched fist, seized him by the shoulders and shook him, then banged him down in his proper place away from the pile of arms.

"Well," said Mr. Carling, resignedly, "I suppose you're captain and know what you're about. But it's

very terrible to me to be put in a time when wild beasts run about England like rabbits and to have nothing to defend myself with but a dud stone axe and a bow I can't use. I'm sure I shan't be able to stay very long even if the Druids don't have me killed."

Presently he became aware that Redcap was making up to him. He felt a gentle nudge on his arm, and saw that the Briton was smiling. Redcap then rubbed his fool's head with a friendly heavy hand.

"Say no more about it," said Mr. Carling, who never bore malice. "I quite understand."

Redcap stroked him and patted him a little more, then picked a sword out of the pile at his left hand and held it up. Mr. Carling, thinking he had relented on the matter, stretched out his hand to take it, but Redcap held it out of his reach and made a small soft sound, nearly a musical note. Mr. Carling understood that he was to sing for his sword, and he wondered at the power a purely mental desire could have over the mind of a barbarian. Redcap, to enjoy again the sounds which had so tickled his ear, would give his fool a sword against his better judgment, and would even risk the anger of his priests. But Mr. Carling refused.

"No," he said, dropping his hand, "even if your priests don't hear and you don't tell them, one of the others will. I'm not going to sing any more, even for a sword, and if a wolf or other beast bites me I shall go back home."

And to make his intentions quite plain he lay back and pretended to go to sleep. Redcap called him by

his queer unpronounceable name two or three times in low and coaxing accent, but he took no notice, and when he looked at the Briton a little later through half-closed lids he saw that Redcap had given it up and was staring sullenly into the fire. Mr. Carling was not at all sleepy, so presently he got up, laughed in Redcap's face in a truly idiotic manner, and went over to the other side of the fire to see what was the shining thing he had noticed in the group of Britons who were still awake. He picked his way carefully over sleeping forms until he could see this group clearly in the combined fire and moonlight, and then his feet suddenly stopped of their own accord, and his heart leaped like a fish flapping in the bottom of a boat. For there was the group of five Britons, fully armed, and there also, a little way from them, clearly visible from head to heel, was a man whom Mr. Carling instantly recognized. This man's feet were tied together with leathern thongs, and he was not bound mercifully and comfortably as Mr. Carling had been, but so tightly that his feet were swollen and discoloured. His hands also were rigidly bound behind his back, so that he could not move them an inch in any direction. He had a half-healed wound on his arm, another on his leg just above the knee, and a long cut across his forehead. He was dressed in a leathern tunic cut rather like a modern ball dress, with straps over the shoulders, leaving the neck and arms bare, and the shoulders and body part of the tunic were covered with armour, blood-stained, dirty, and beginning to get dull and tarnished, but still shining here and there. The lower

part of the leathern under-tunic was cut into broad metal-covered straps which would hang down, when the man was standing, nearly to his knees, and his shins were protected by things that looked like hockey pads made of bronze. His head was bare and covered with dark cropped hair, and though his face was disfigured by a fortnight's growth of beard, it was evident that he was a shaven man. Mr. Carling recognized him by his dress, but also by his face and the shape of the head and neck. He had seen that head many times before. On old coins, on statues, in pictures, on the shoulders of living men in modern Italy and Sicily. This man had a strong short neck, a head without any bulging roundness behind, a broad, not very high forehead, and a thin hooked nose. His mouth was thin in the lips, cruel, proud and determined, and his chin was bold and resolute. Mr. Carling could now place himself with greater accuracy. The Romans were in occupation of Britain, and this was a prisoner, captured by the wild unsubdued tribes of Cornwall after some foray or battle far away on the confines of Devonshire. While he, in the bodily form of a barbarian, had been sitting on his side of the fire, thinking with terror and ecstasy of the might and power of Rome, not thirty feet away from him this lonely captive, representative of the greatest race in the world, had been keeping bitter vigil, civilized man in the hands of savages.

"And why on earth," thought Mr. Carling, "have they dragged him all the way down here alive?" For there was no doubt in his mind that the Britons meant

to put an end to this son of their terrible enemy, Rome. The man's face told him that much. It was proud, dignified, and unfalteringly courageous, but it was hopeless. The Roman sat staring into the fire, perfectly still, though the pain from his swollen feet must have been intolerable, and every now and then his lips moved a little as though he were whispering to himself.

"He's praying to his gods," thought Mr. Carling, with a sudden uprush of admiration and pity, "though he knows really he's done for. He must be at least a hundred miles away from his own people."

He thought of the unknown gods of his own tribe and of the cold cruel eyes of the Druid priests, and he sat down suddenly on the ground, for his limbs were shaking under him.

"A sacrifice! He'll die down here utterly alone as a sacrifice to the Druids' gods. They must have brought him down just for that."

Mr. Carling had, in his own time, seen old, hollow stones in Cornwall which he had been told were for the purpose of receiving the blood of the human victim. He had been unmoved, unbelieving, a scoffer. He had handled the stones and talked of the action of the weather, attributing the hollows to natural causes. He had said there was no proof that the Druids ever made human sacrifices. But now he was dreaming in the dark age of Cornwall, and the horrible possibilities of that age came very close to him and turned him sick and cold. He had not really believed that the two priests in the underground house would have him

sacrificed for singing, though he did think there was a chance, unless he returned to the meek paths of complete imbecility, that they might have him murdered. But the murder of the Roman could have been accomplished days ago, directly he had been taken. He had been preserved alive, led bound and helpless through the whole length of Cornwall, so that the far Western tribe who took him might pour his blood into the hollow sacrificial stone. A Roman's blood would be a delicate feast for the gods of the Britons. His captors had not even robbed him yet. A thin soft golden coil was wound round one of his bare arms above the elbow. His blood to the gods, and his gold to the priests, and his brave spirit spilled out in loneliness among his enemies.

Then and there Mr. Carling made up his mind that if the thing could be done he would release the Roman and give him a bare chance of life. He considered the ethics of this resolution for quite a while, sitting on the ground watching the Roman's face. He himself was a Briton, and this man and his fellows had stolen his country, slain his comrades, oppressed their women, and sold their children for slaves. He felt it rather mean in himself to betray kindly Redcap and the others by loosing their noble hard-won sacrifice. But he knew that he could not possibly stay in his dream and see the Roman done to death by the cold-eyed cruel priests, neither was he willing to abandon the ring vision and go back to his own life. There was something in the proud fierce face of the Roman that drew him like an iron filing to a magnet. It might

have been simply the attraction between two civilized cultured men in the midst of ignorant barbarians, but to Mr. Carling it seemed more subtle and more personal than that. He did not understand it, for in his real waking life he had never had such a feeling, all he knew was that neither race nor language should stand between him and the Roman, and that he would save him from sacrifice or be pierced by the swords of his own barbaric comrades. But most heartily did he wish that he had learned more Latin during his short scholastic education, or even that he could remember the little that he had learned. All that remained to him was about half a dozen utterly unrelated tags and a little church Latin. Latin grammar was hopelessly entangled in his mind with Italian grammar and construction, and he found he could not compose one simple sentence that he was sure was in Latin all through.

He got up and looked about for the Roman's weapons, as he was certain the Britons would have brought them down. He soon found them—the great spear and shield, a short sword, and a small keen knife without any sheath. The helmet was nowhere to be seen, and he supposed they had lost it, or captured the Roman bareheaded in the press of battle. Perhaps the same stroke that had given him the long cut on his forehead, and stunned him so that he could be taken alive, had also rent from him his helmet. He fingered the arms and made a great clatter, then hastily slid the little knife down the breast of his skin tunic. One of the Britons called to him peremptorily, so he

laughed in a foolish way and sat down by the Roman, chuckling and making faces. He pulled at the Roman's short new-grown beard, then complacently stroked his own wild and luxuriant growth of facial hair. The Britons shouted with laughter, but Mr. Carling noted with delight that each laugh ended on a sleepy yawn. The Roman looked at him with furious disgust and contempt and gave him a savage push with his shoulder. Mr. Carling gathered that on the long, painful, hopeless march the captive had often been annoyed by the attentions of the company idiot. Mr. Carling clicked his fingers under the Roman's fine aquiline nose, sidled up very close to him, and addressed him in Italian. He was fairly fluent in that language, and he thought the Roman might perhaps pick up a word here and there if he turned terminal "o" into "us." The Roman evidently did not understand, and resumed his hopeless staring into the fire. He did not try to push the disgusting barbarian away from him again. He had lost his temper at having his face pawed, but now he had regained his self-control and was too proud to take any notice whatever of his tormentor. Had his hands been free for a single second he would have dealt the creature such a blow that he would be unlikely ever to babble or make faces again, but his futile pushing only emphasized his own helplessness. Besides, it made the other Britons laugh, and to be mocked by barbarians was the bitterest drop in his most bitter cup.

"*Non barbarus sum,*" said Mr. Carling. He pronounced these words in the manner of an Italian

speaking Latin, and the Roman started, shaken out of his impassivity by surprise. Mr. Carling repeated his asseveration, and the Roman undoubtedly understood, for he gave Mr. Carling such a look of withering contempt out of his fierce brown eyes that the latter was extremely irritated. It was not the pitying contempt of a man of intelligence for an idiot, it was the contempt the whole Roman race felt for the uncivilized Britons.

"*Damnonius es,*" said the Roman, sneering.

"I'm not!" said Mr. Carling, smarting. "But you can be before I'll get you out of your mess, King Orgulus. *Cadet Roma! Cadet Roma!*" he added maliciously.

But he still whispered these Latin words, for he was sure he was not supposed to know any, and he knew that however rude and contemptuous was the Roman he would continue to aid him to the limits of his own power.

The Roman knew, of course, that "Rome falls" is a thing that all barbarians say night and morning, before and after meals, and that if all the barbarians in the world were to shout it at one and the same moment it would not make an impossibility come to pass. But he was interested in the signs of dawning intelligence the idiot was showing. Mr. Carling was sure from his face that he had never before heard even bad and wrongly pronounced Latin from the lips of the imbecile. He racked his brains for something more to say.

"*Ego in Roma vixi,*" he said, which was perfectly

true. It was taken by the Roman as a wonderful sign of Rome's immense power over the world. Even a lunatic barbarian's delusion was that he had lived in Rome. A slight smile flitted over his thin lips.

"It's quite true," said Mr. Carling, "but I don't expect you to believe it. *Vero è. Verus est, ego in Roma vixi tre anni.*"

"*Servus,*" said the Roman, with another sneer.

"Certainly not. Free man. Damn it, I don't know the word. *Non servus eram.*"

The Roman looked incredulous, as well he might, and there was a short pause.

"*Hodie mihi, cras tibi,*" said Mr. Carling, suddenly. He did not mean this unkindly, or as a reminder to the Roman of his unfortunate position, it was simply a Latin phrase that sprang into his mind. The Roman nodded, repeated "*Cras,*" and resumed his hopeless gloomy staring. He began again also to whisper to himself.

"Oh!" thought Mr. Carling, aghast. "He knows they're going to kill him to-morrow! It's got to be done to-night, then. *Sursum corda!*" he said, gently nudging the Roman with his elbow.

The Roman turned his head and whispered a long sentence in Latin, of which Mr. Carling could not understand one word. The Roman could understand him, because he was quite used to all sorts of Latin dialects and the clumsy pronunciation of foreign peoples. But Mr. Carling knew very little Latin to begin with, and the Roman's pronunciation was not

quite like any he had ever heard, though he thought it came nearest to the Italian manner.

"*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*" said Mr. Carling, jerking his head significantly at the sleepy, half-drunken Britons. He felt perfectly certain they would presently all go soundly to sleep. They were miles and miles from an enemy, they had their Roman tied up so cruelly that he was utterly helpless, and they would never suspect the idiot, even if they went to sleep leaving him sitting beside their captive. Mr. Carling trusted to the slackness of undisciplined troops when their own safety was assured.

The Roman understood the words, and more than that, he understood Mr. Carling's intention. A great light of hope flashed into his eyes as he realized his prayers were going to be answered. This barbarian, who for some reason of his own pretended to be an idiot who could not even speak his own language, was going to release him, also for some reason of his own. And for the first time the Roman shifted his feet uneasily, as if the pain in them were intolerable.

"*Ave, Cæsar, imperator, moriturus te saluto,*" said Mr. Carling, and he held out his hand with the thumb turned downwards. But even now the Roman would not condescend to plead. The light died out of his eyes, and he turned his face with proud sullen indifference towards the fire. He would not let the strange barbarian see how faint and weak was his heart with this killing of his sudden hope.

"By God!" swore Mr. Carling, repenting him of his experiment. "Sir, you're a fine man!"

The Roman paid no heed to this babble of the barbarian, but in two seconds he felt something touching his hands at his back, and heard a tiny sound like the parting of stretched leather. The Briton had cut his bonds. The Roman fell flat on his back with his hands under him, pressing them to the earth with all the weight of his body. His guards were not yet quite asleep, and the pain of the returning circulation was agonizing. So he lay as quietly as he could, biting his lips, while the dark hairy face of the friendly Briton grinned down at him. Presently he felt the Briton push at him gently, trying to turn him on his side. He yielded and lay on his right side with his face towards his guards and his hands hidden from them behind his back. He closed his eyes, so that he might appear to be asleep in case one of them suddenly aroused himself, and felt the Briton, who was behind him, cut away the remnants of his leather bonds. Then he felt his hands and arms rubbed with strong movements upwards towards the shoulders. The barbarian was doing a skilful best to make his hands usable and comfortable. The Briton rubbed hard, panting a little with his exertions, for half an hour. Once he stopped to cut the Roman's foot bonds, and once he paused a little while to rest his own aching arms. During this short pause he spoke, but the Roman could not make out all the words. Some were certainly Latin, but more were the idiot's ordinary meaningless babble when he was speaking a language that had not been invented by well over a thousand years.

"*Non dubitum est,*" panted Mr. Carling, "*quin*—but that—takes the subjunctive—we must go away—I've forgotten the word for that—*celerime. Celerime, mio caro amico, carus amicus,* I mean. *Celerime, O miles Romano.* Or it'll be to-night for both of us, *oggi, hodie, questa notte bellissima. Hic locus est periculosus.*"

The Roman understood very well the word "*Celerime,*" and he saw its force in the present circumstances, so when the barbarian fell again to rubbing his hands and arms he began himself to twist his unbound feet quietly about to make them supple. They were not in such fearful condition as his hands, as he had had them free all the days and bound only at night. His wrists had been bound almost without interruption for a fortnight, and any soft man would have been dead long since had he suffered all that the Roman had suffered during his long humiliating march through Cornwall. But Rome was as strong to endure cruelty as to inflict it, and her sons were not soft men. Their muscles and nerves, like their spirits, were tough and elastic. The Britons had been unable to subdue the Roman's pride, and his massive beautiful body had taken no lasting hurt. After half an hour of rubbing he was beginning to be able to move his fingers, and his feet were perfectly comfortable and agile without any rubbing at all, though they had been more cruelly tied than his wrists. And by this time all the Britons were asleep—the guards, Redcap beside his pile of arms, and the rank and file without responsibility. Mr. Carling rose to his knees and took

a cautious look round. The barbarians lay as still as death, a reassuring sound of hearty snoring filled the air, the fire was burning low and red. He thought for a moment of creeping up to Redcap and stealing the British weapons, but decided it would be too dangerous to attempt. It would take a long time to steal the whole pile, and it would be too fatally easy to make a noise.

"*Venite!*" he said, as if he were addressing a company of Romans, for he had forgotten the singular, and crept away on his hands and knees to the Roman's weapons. The Roman followed him, and they both stood up cautiously. Not a Briton stirred, but Mr. Carling, looking fearfully away into the blackness of the trees, thought he saw something white fluttering.

"*Sacerdos!*" he gasped, shaking at the knees.

The Roman smiled grimly, and managed to pick up his great spear and put his sword in his belt. Mr. Carling, praying that the white thing might have been a figure of his own excited imagination, seized the shield, wondering at its weight. The Roman darted his eyes this way and that for his little knife, but Mr. Carling had determined to keep that himself. He pulled the Roman's hand gently, whispered, "*Venite*" again, and crept away in an easterly direction. He knew which was the east by the position of the Druids' dwelling-place. The Roman seemed satisfied with the way he was going and followed him noiselessly. They saw nothing more of the white thing, if indeed it had been real, and in five minutes they were out of the oak grove and upon a barren open moor. For five minutes

more they moved cautiously, then the Roman slung his shield on his back and they ran. Mr. Carling found he could run very well indeed. His short, thick legs were apparently untirable, his wind and heart were in excellent condition. But the Roman could run better still. In spite of all his painful experiences and the weight of his armour and arms he kept ahead of Mr. Carling without any undue effort. Mr. Carling was perfectly willing he should go on ahead, for he himself did not know after a mile or two whether he was going towards England or the sea, but the Roman seemed to have chosen a line and be keeping to it. He never faltered for an instant, but ran on and on without a stumble in the deceitful moonlight, with his mouth half open and his thin nostrils flaring, and three of his strides equalled Mr. Carling's four. He was a heroic runner, and Mr. Carling, quite unburdened, had all he could do to keep up with him. But then he was not running for his life.

When they had run, with sundry short pauses for breathing, about three miles, and were again among trees, the Roman suddenly stopped, pointed back in the direction of the camp and gave Mr. Carling a gentle push behind.

"No," said the idiot barbarian. "*Mei fratri me occiderent. Vorrei andare tecum.* You understand? Besides, I'm entirely lost now."

The Roman understood, and actually smiled in a friendly manner. Perhaps he was only grateful for being set free, perhaps he was glad of any company on the perilous journey that lay ahead of him, even that

of an unshaven Briton of wild and barbarous upbringing and instincts. Perhaps he knew in the intuitive part of his mind that his companion's barbarism began and ended with his savage appearance. At any rate he smiled, and Mr. Carling smiled happily back.

"*Avanti,*" he said, giving the Roman a push to make him go in front. "You seem to know where England is and I don't. The country is somewhat changed since I was last here."

CHAPTER III

THEN followed twelve days of such nightmare toil that Mr. Carling wondered afterwards how he ever survived it. He could have got away at any time by means of the ring, but neither his pride nor his affection would allow him to do this. Even in a dream he would not admit that an unsubdued Cornish early Briton could be softer and more cowardly than any member of a Latin race, though that member were an ancient Roman. Yet with this childish half-patriotic pride was mixed a feeling of deep humility and reverence. In his own life and time he was a stiff and unyielding man, not quarrelsome, but not in the least meek or pliable.. He went his own way, he cared for no one particularly, he had never wholeheartedly admired any man. But now, in a magic dream, he had found a man whom he could admire without any reservation, and he accorded him a generous open hero-worship which was far more like the first pure passion of a young boy than the friendship of a mature man. To stay with the Roman until he was either killed by Britons or safe back with his own people he would endure to the utmost, and though the physical exertion was unending and the food mostly

insufficient, he felt perfectly well. His short, hardy early-British fame was evidently accustomed to hardships.

For the first night and day they did nothing but run and walk in turns. They had both been well fed just before they started, for the Britons had not been starving their captive. The gods would not be so pleased with an emaciated ill-conditioned Roman as with a well-fed and meaty man with plenty of good blood in his veins. So for one half night and whole day they hurried on without stopping to look for food. The woods and forests abounded with game, but that day they contented themselves with nuts which they snatched as they went along. The nuts were not ripe, and Mr. Carling expected to have a pain, but neither he nor the Roman suffered any inconvenience, and they were food of a sort. In the middle of this day they stopped to drink at a spring which bubbled up among stones, then lost itself in some soft and boggy ground. Here the Roman carefully rubbed the last shining places in his shield and breast armour with thick and sticky mud, so that the glint of sunshine on the bronze should not betray him. Mr. Carling stood and watched him close by, and saw that on the right side of the armour on his chest there was a little patch of gold inlay work done in a curious intricate pattern. This, taken with the gold on his arm and a seal ring he wore on his left hand, made him think his hero must be a man of some wealth and importance, certainly an officer, perhaps a Roman-born Roman of a great family.

"*Nomen?*" he said, as the Roman diligently muddied his shield.

"Valerius," said the Roman.

"*Duo nomina,*" persisted Mr. Carling, holding up two fingers.

"Marcus Valerius," said the Roman, looking much surprised at this wonderful intelligence of the idiot, who evidently knew that civilized men had more than one name.

"Marcus Valerius," repeated Mr. Carling, then he held up three fingers.

"*Tre nomina habet saepe Romanus.*"

The Roman frowned and shook his head. Either he had only two names, or his third he kept to himself. Mr. Carling, from his face, thought the latter. So, though he wanted to ask Marcus Valerius whether he was British or Roman born, he ceased his questioning and applied himself to daubing the Roman's back armour with mud.

That night they rested for a few hours, and rose at dawn, ravenous. They saw countless rabbits out feeding, and Mr. Carling handed the Roman his bow and arrows indicating that he should try to shoot one. He felt sure that he himself had no skill with his bow. He was not even certain in which hand to hold it. Marcus Valerius carefully stalked a rabbit, shot at it and missed. He did the same again, and after great patience got another very easy shot, but again he missed. He was evidently a poor archer. He came back to Mr. Carling, obviously crestfallen, and handed him back his bow and the arrows. Then he pulled at

the Briton's skin and fur tunic, signing to him that he should take it off. Mr. Carling did so, and sat perfectly naked save for the green ring under his arm while the Roman cut a strip of skin from the bottom of the tunic with the little knife. This had, of course, been exposed when Mr. Carling undressed himself. The Roman bore no malice for the robbery, but he kept the knife and put it in his belt with his sword. Then he gave back the garment to Mr. Carling, who put it on, and fastened up his belt again, and they walked on the way they were going until the Roman heard the sound of running water. He turned aside for this, and when they came to the stream they both drank, and the Roman ransacked the bed of the stream for moderate-sized round pebbles. Mr. Carling helped him when he saw what was wanted, and soon they had a dozen suitable stones, which Mr. Carling carried in his chest between his body and his tunic. They were kept up by his belt, and though they were rather uncomfortable to run with, he soon got used to them. Marcus Valerius kept two of the pebbles in his left hand, and the third he put into the strip of leather he had cut from the Briton's tunic. Then he began walking very softly through the trees and soon came upon a rabbits' feeding place. He slung the pebble with wonderful accuracy and velocity at the nearest rabbit, and though it missed it by half an inch Mr. Carling felt sure that the next one would be murdered successfully. The Roman gathered up his pebble, put it again in the sling and walked on quietly until he got another shot. This time the pebble hit the rabbit

in the shoulder with a fearful thud, and though it was not killed it could not run fast. Mr. Carling soon caught it up and despatched it with his little flint axe. He brought it back in triumph and the Roman had its skin off in three minutes. Mr. Carling struck his flint on one of his arrow heads and produced a little spark, but the Roman frowned. Their pursuers might even now be close upon them, and fire would be dangerous. They ate the rabbit raw, its legs and body and neck and most of its inside, and they sucked its bones. The Roman was scrupulously fair in the division of the carcase, which he carved with the small knife, though he had killed it, and his body, much bigger than Mr. Carling's, presumably required more nourishment. Mr. Carling ate all his portion gratefully, and longed for more, but the Roman would not waste any more time in hunting. All that day they marched on half a rabbit each, rested till the moon rose, marched while she was up, then rested a little before the dawn. After that the Roman began to go more slowly, for he evidently thought the Britons behind them had given up the pursuit, or had gone off in the wrong direction to start with. Mr. Carling, trying to think with their minds, thought that most likely they had all rushed off to the coast to watch ships. The natural thing for the Roman to do would be to go down to the coast and try to escape by sea in the boat of a trader.

However it had fallen out, the Roman now gave up casting perpetual glances behind him, and their task was now lightened to keeping themselves alive, find-

ing their way, and avoiding other Britons who would not at any rate be searching for them. Mr. Carling had no fears at all. The Roman was to him a superman, and his admiration and trust grew hourly. Marcus Valerius, as long as he was on a path, never faltered once in the matter of finding the way. He did not steer by the sun or the stars, he was simply going back the way he had been brought down. All the way his keen eyes had been noting every fallen tree, every peculiar boulder, the direction of every stream, the contour of every hill. Once take him through a country with his eyes open and he could find his way back through that country even if it were a hundred miles long. He could travel by daylight or moonlight, the hours of thick darkness they passed in sleep, securely hidden in a thicket or a cave. The country seemed to Mr. Carling to be absolutely unpopulated, but sometimes the Roman proceeded with such extreme caution that Mr. Carling knew they must be near a village or settlement. Then they had to leave the path they were travelling, and make long careful detours, and during these the Roman was nervous and fidgety, obviously afraid of being lost. He had to trust to his sense of direction to come back again to the path beyond the village or temple, and those were the dangerous times. His wonderful memory for landmarks was useless to him on those occasions, and it is difficult to preserve a sense of direction in thick forest. But he never failed to get back in the end, and with muttered thanks to the gods he would catch sight of something he had passed on

the way down, know he was on the track again east of the village and go swinging along at a quick march, eyes and ears ever ready for the faintest sign of human life.

In the early dawn they did their hunting. The game was moving well then, they were fresh after their short sleep, their hands were steady and their eyes keen. Mr. Carling was better at stalking than the Roman, but though he tried and tried, he never could hit anything except the ground with his bow and arrow. The Roman could not get so near to the rabbits, but if he did get fairly near he could hit them with his slung stone.

Directly he considered it safe he ordered Mr. Carling to make a fire to cook the meat, as he was far too civilized to enjoy raw rabbit as a steady diet. Mr. Carling collected chips of wood and dry grass and leaves and went to work with the flint axe and the small steel knife. He tried for ten minutes, then Marcus Valerius took the implements away from him and got a satisfactory spark in about three. The partially cooked rabbit was so nice that Mr. Carling tried to urge the Roman on to killing another, but he refused. He stamped the fire out with his sandals, picked up the spear, and setting his face to the north-east, resumed the endless quick march. Mr. Carling understood. They were only to have just the bare amount of food, half a rabbit and what nuts they could get going along, necessary to keep life and strength in them. The weather was warm, far warmer indeed than an average modern summer, and the

amount of food they actually needed was surprisingly little. They wanted none of it for extra heat, it all went to give them marching power, and their excellent digestions drew from each rabbit every particle of nourishment. But they grew lean and gaunt as greyhounds. The Roman's bones showed starkly between his shoulder straps, and Mr. Carling had to pull his belt ever tighter and tighter to keep the sling stones in place. They conversed almost entirely by signs. The physical exertion they were undergoing was so great that neither of them felt able even to begin to learn a foreign language. Mr. Carling knew he would not have time really to learn Latin, and the Roman knew that the Briton either could not, or would not even speak his own language. He either babbled, or spoke a few words of very ill-pronounced Latin, and sign-talk was the easiest in the end.

CHAPTER IV

IT was on the fourth day that the grim cold goddess, Necessity, showed to Mr. Carling her features in all their stark and terrifying ugliness. He had seen her before in his own time, during the War, but fairly decently veiled by patriotism, comradeship and other things that make war just tolerable for men. But now he saw her naked face, and it made a different man of him.

They had made one of their painful and anxious detours to pass a village, and had regained the track when Marcus Valerius, who was smiling pleasantly with relief at his little barbarian companion, heard a sound in the bushes on his left. In an instant he looked grim and stern, and noiselessly he moved away towards the sound like a great brown shadow drifting through the forest. Mr. Carling followed him, with his heart beating like an engine, for he, as well as the Roman, had heard the noise, and it was the cry of a small child.

"They may not have seen us," he gasped, in English, needless to say, and he clutched at the Roman's arm.

Marcus Valerius shook his hand off and began to run. He burst into a clearing in the forest, and there,

obviously fleeing for her life, was a British woman with a child on her back. She had seen the Roman on the path.

"Oh, God!" said Mr. Carling, and he turned sick and faint, for he knew that without a shadow of compunction Marcus Valerius would kill both the woman and the child before they could get back to the village and loose the Britons upon him.

The Roman made up his mind in a second. He dropped his spear and hit Mr. Carling a very heavy blow under the jaw with his clenched fist. Mr. Carling fell down on the grass like a dead man, and completely lost consciousness.

When he came to himself he was lying on the bank of a stream, the Roman was sitting beside him splashing water over his face. His spear was clean, but on his breast armour was a small new stain, and Mr. Carling, looking at it, knew that it was blood.

"Oh dear!" he groaned, holding his aching, singing head in trembling hands. "I know you had to do it. I know you don't think anything of it, either. But—oh, dear!"

The Roman watched him silently, and his face was entirely expressionless.

"I wish I knew why you took the trouble to knock me out and then carry me here. *I* couldn't have stopped you. I don't understand you, Marcus Valerius."

"*Locus periculosus,*" said the Roman impassively, dragging him up by one arm. He knew the Briton

understood those two words, for he had used them himself.

"Why didn't you leave me behind?" demanded Mr. Carling. "It was a very dangerous thing to do to have to carry me along so near a village. Or why did you knock me out? I don't understand you."

Marcus Valerius picked up his spear, set his shield on his shoulders and pointed with his left hand towards the North-East. He jerked his dark head in a questioning manner.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Carling, rubbing his aching head distractedly, "I'll come on with you, of course. For one thing if I turn to go back I know you'll stick that beastly spear into me. Besides, I'm not really blaming *you,* but oh, Lord, these times are hard and fierce!"

The Roman went off at his swinging stride, and at first he constantly looked round to see if his barbarian companion were following. The little Briton was always there, padding along at his quick short-legged pace that was almost a run, his eyes on the ground and an expression of concentrated uncomfortable thought on his dark hairy face. Mr. Carling was trying to get things straight in his mind. Marcus Valerius belonged to a harsh and cruel race which kept slaves as a matter of course, thought nothing of beating them severely, and very little of killing them, and which found its chief pleasure in spectacles of strife and bloodshed. The British woman was a barbarian, an enemy, a creature of inferior breed. And it had been his life against hers. He could not afford, in this

journey through enemy country, to be seen by Britons and let them live afterwards to carry the news. Was it likely, Mr. Carling asked himself, that the Roman would throw away his life to save that of a woman of the enemy when all life was held cheaper than are the lives of animals in his own days? According to his own ideas it would probably have been actually wrong to do so. A Roman officer was valuable to his country, a barbarian woman and child of an unsubdued race were not only worthless to Rome but constituted a fraction of a danger. The less of them there were the better, and Mr. Carling, glancing at the tall proud form of the Roman striding along in front of him, was certain that he felt not the slightest pang of conscience for the deed. A Roman was a Roman. Forty barbarian lives would weigh as nothing in the balance against the life of one of the sons of the great ruling race. Internationalism was far away in the future, men were not equal, chivalry was a pale and sickly dream; all that mattered was Rome. Rome's power, Rome's honour, Rome's safety.

Yet Marcus Valerius, ruthless and cruel by birth and upbringing, had in him a sense of mercy and justice. He had seen that his British companion was horrified at the thought of him killing the woman, his safest course would have been to pierce the Briton with his spear, then pursue the woman and her child and despatch them also. His companion was useless in a practical way. He did not know the forest paths, he could not kill game, he could not even light a fire. But he had set him free, and as long as he wanted to

follow, the Roman would not abandon him or cast him off. So he had stunned him, that he might not interfere or raise an outcry at the necessary murder, then had picked him up and carried him, how far Mr. Carling did not know, had revived him, and all this at a certain amount of danger to himself.

"It would have been a very good opportunity for him to get rid of me," thought Mr. Carling. "I eat half of every rabbit and I do him no good. He's a just man, he's a grateful man, and if he is cruel he's very kind to me."

Thus he exonerated his hero, and in a surprisingly short time the tragedy retired into the back of his mind. But there it remained, and the picture of the summer woods, the dark woman flying through the glade with the child on her back, and the grim fierce eyes of Marcus Valerius, stayed with him for ever.

It was on the next day, the fifth of their march, that Mr. Carling got a thorn in his foot. The foot was provided with a quarter of an inch of calloused skin underneath, but the thorn had pierced right through.

Marcus Valerius dug it out for him with the point of the small knife, and let him rest for half an hour by the side of a spring while he bathed the sore place.

"*Cavallo,*" said Mr. Carling, dangling his foot in the water. He pronounced it in the Italian way, with a very decided double "l" and the Roman did not understand.

"*Cavallus,*" said Mr. Carling, trying again.

"*Equus?*" said the Roman, a little doubtfully.

"Yes, that's it. *Equus. Ladrones,*" Mr. Carling

pointed first to himself and then to his companion. "Damn it, why don't we steal a horse? There must be ponies."

"*Timeo Damnonios,*" said Marcus Valerius, very slowly and carefully, so that the barbarian might have a chance of understanding.

"*Et dona ferentes,*" added Mr. Carling.

"*Timeo Damnonios,*" repeated the Roman, who must often have wondered why the idiot Briton's Latin was so seldom to the point. He drew his finger across his bare strong throat with a significant gesture.

"Quite so," said Mr. Carling, regretfully. "*Molto pericoloso. Multus periculosus. Niente cavalli. Felix ambulat. Avanti.*"

On the sixth day they came out of the forest on to a piece of high bare ground which Mr. Carling thought might be the origin of Bodmin moor. It was much smaller than it was in his own time, for the forest now clothed it far up upon its flanks, but still he thought it must be Bodmin Moor, and if so, much more than half their journey was done. Then he remembered that old Cornwall stretched to the eastern side of Dartmoor, and he groaned. Six more days on half a rabbit and some nuts a day would break down even the Roman's iron strength.

"You slack blighters!" he said angrily to Marcus Valerius. "Why the devil didn't you pull yourselves together and conquer Cornwall? You've left an enormous piece of England untaken. About a hundred and twenty miles long. We shall have to

go right on to Exeter before we find any more Romans."

Marcus Valerius, very nervous and fidgety at having to cross the open space where he could so easily be seen at a distance, frowned and started to run.

"It's your own fault," grumbled Mr. Carling, leaping along after him with much shorter strides, "you ought to have conquered Cornwall. *Damnonius* as I am I say it."

They made a cruel forced march of it across the moor, running and walking alternately, and saw no soul. Late in the afternoon they had put the last dangerous yard of open ground behind them, and plunged into the forest on the farther side with a deep sense of relief. They had hardly walked a quarter of a mile among the trees when an arrow rang upon the Roman's breastplate, another whizzed past his head, and a third scored a flesh wound across the outside of his right arm. Three Britons, yelling like fiends, charged out upon them from the thick undergrowth. The Roman killed them all. Mr. Carling had no weapons he knew how to use, but had he been armed with an automatic he would have turned it neither upon the Britons, his own people, nor upon Marcus Valerius, his dream hero. The Roman pierced one Briton through the body with his spear and slew the other two with his short sword. He was better armed than they, cooler-headed, and the stronger man. The issue was never in doubt, unless the dying barbarians could call up reserves. Mr. Carling helped him to drag the bodies into thick undergrowth and hide

them, and then Marcus Valerius suffered a partial collapse. He sat down by the bodies of his enemies and held his dark massive head in his blood-stained hands. He trembled in every limb, and in spite of himself slow tears of sheer exhaustion ran out of his closed eyes. Mr. Carling was not in much better case himself after the killing march across the moor, but he had not fought in the sudden fierce struggle, and the nerve strain of the whole journey had fallen on the Roman alone. He it was who found the way, avoided the Britons, and killed the food.

"We must have more food," he thought, looking with pity on the haggard face of his companion. "We shall never make it on the amount we're getting. He's breaking down. Marcus Valerius!"

The Roman raised his head, and angrily brushed away the tears on his cheeks. He said something in broken, gasping Latin.

"It's all right," said Mr. Carling, soothingly. "I won't hold it against you. We'll just get into another thicket away from *these,* and we'll sleep all the rest of the day and the night too. I can't hear a sound of any more coming."

He got up and Marcus Valerius rose too, and stood, still trembling, leaning heavily upon the shaft of his spear, listening to the noises of the forest round them. Everything was still, save for the movement of trees, birds, and little animals. The three Britons who had challenged Rome must have been a small hunting party, wandering in the forest well away from their village. Mr. Carling relieved the Roman of his shield,

which he carried on his left arm, and put his other arm round his waist. Marcus Valerius was so much taller that he could lean comfortably on the Briton's shoulders with his arm, and in his other hand he held his spear as a staff. Thus supported he managed to walk another half-mile or so till they came to a stream he remembered. Here they drank, and Mr. Carling washed the arrow graze on the Roman's arm, made a dressing of broad leaves and bound it on with another strip cut from his tunic. Then they crawled deep into the heart of a thicket and went to sleep, lying as still as those others in the other thicket half a mile away from them.

They awoke very stiff and tired, and Mr. Carling felt less hungry than usual, which he knew was a bad sign. Marcus Valerius seemed to have recovered his usual equanimity, but he took a long time to come to his senses after sleep, instead of springing up alertly, and as he moved off to stalk rabbits with his sling he dragged his feet a little. Mr. Carling, quite determined that to-day he *would* hit a rabbit with his bow and arrow, stole off quietly in the opposite direction. His bare feet were entirely noiseless, and as he crept softly into a little glade he suddenly saw a deer quite close to him, feeding. It was a perfect shot, and the deer, though not quite grown, would be meat for five days or more. Mr. Carling aimed, and sped the arrow with all the force of which the bow was capable. It missed the body of the deer and would have missed it altogether but that the animal suddenly raised its head. The arrow caught it a severe

blow on one horn and it fell to the ground, stunned. Mr. Carling leaped upon it, caught it by the horn that was uppermost and sat heavily upon its neck.

"Marcus!" he yelled, so that the forest rang, "Marcus! *Venite! Venite! Celerime!* I've got a deer, come and kill it! Marcus Valerius!"

He made such a clamour that the Roman, thinking he was attacked by a bear or a wolf, came running up at full speed with his spear held at the charge. He cut the deer's throat with his sword just as it began to struggle and kick, and patted Mr. Carling's shoulder as he might caress a clever dog or favourite horse.

"'What shall he have who killed the deer?'" sang Mr. Carling, wild with delight. "'His leather skin and horns to wear, so sing him home!' Yah! you proud beast! *You* can't kill deer with your rotten sling. I shot him with my little bow and arrow! A-hoo! Who-oop!"

Marcus Valerius, alarmed by all this noise, which might well bring the Britons down upon them, hit Mr. Carling a violent blow on the back as a hint to him to cease his wild barbarian yellings. Mr. Carling took the hint in good part, but continued to dance round noiselessly, grinning alternately at the deer and at the Roman. Nor did he stop until Marcus Valerius slung the deer on to his shoulders and began to walk away with it.

"Well, if we can't eat it here," said Mr. Carling with disappointment, "let's carry it between us on the spear."

Marcus Valerius would not do this, as he might

need his spear in a hurry, but he cut a stout long stick, slit the legs of the deer and slung it over the pole. Then they carried it quite a mile from where Mr. Carling had made such a perilous shouting, and he was getting extremely tired of its weight and was staggering with fatigue before Marcus Valerius suddenly dropped his end of the pole and started getting leaves and sticks for a fire. Then they had a royal meal of steaks off the body. Mr. Carling had often read about the danger of completely filling a half-starved stomach, but all his appetite had returned at the smell of the roasting meat, and he felt that if St. Peter at the gates of Heaven suddenly called to him to hurry up and come inside he would not go until he had finished his meal of tough and tasteless deer meat. And besides, he was sure by this time that a barbarian's stomach was proof against any ill-treatment. They both ate enormously, and afterwards put out the fire, carried the carcase of the deer into a thicket and slept for four hours. They arose new men, stiff and tired of limb still, but bright-eyed, determined, with hearts steeled to endurance. Marcus Valerius jointed the deer with his sword, and indicated to Mr. Carling that he was to carry the four legs along with him for future eating. Yet another strip had to be cut off the Briton's short tunic, and with this he tied the legs of the deer together and slung them over his shoulder. Then he had a new idea. He put the legs down and threw all the sling stones out of the breast of his tunic. He borrowed the knife and cut large hunks of meat off the body of the deer, which

he wrapped in a piece of the creature's own skin. He put this bulky parcel up his tunic and tied the belt firmly underneath it. He presented such a peculiar appearance that Marcus Valerius, to whom levity of character could not possibly be imputed, burst into a fit of laughter.

"You may laugh," said Mr. Carling, complacently stroking his bulging chest, "and I'm very pleased to see you *can* laugh. But the point is we need no longer waste hours every morning in hunting rabbits. The higher venison is the better. I believe it ought to be hung for a fortnight. Even sweating it along on my back and in my chest it ought to be eatable for four days, and that should see us clear, if we're where I think we are. *Avanti!*"

"*Avanti!*" repeated Marcus Valerius, quite gaily. He knew this word well now, and probably thought the barbarian imagined it to be Latin.

So in great heart they set out, and though Mr. Carling found the deer meat extremely heavy he would not complain. The Roman was carrying a greater weight in his armour, spear and shield, and Mr. Carling thought it would be unfair to burden him any further. They crossed a fairly large stream, late in the evening, and Mr. Carling thought it might be the Tamar. If it were, they had perhaps only forty miles more to go, and every day they could march all the light time on good meals of meat.

Next morning the barbarian devoured his deer-meat at a terrific rate, disgusting the Roman for the first time by his table manners, and walked away by

himself into the forest. Marcus Valerius heard him moving softly in the bushes near for a while, but when he had finished his own more graceful meal and was ready to continue the march, the Briton had vanished. The Roman searched round for a little time, getting angrier and angrier, and presently espied his companion picking up bits of bark, examining them, and dropping them again. He strode straight up to the erring barbarian, and seizing him by his long black hair began to drag him back to the bivouac where he had left his precious deer-meat.

"Damn you! don't do that!" cried Mr. Carling, in a rage. "I'm just coming. Let go, you beastly gorilla!"

The Roman, unheeding of his babble, kicked him into a bramble patch with such force that the unfortunate little Briton went flying face downwards into the worst of all the prickles. Marcus Valerius then jerked him out by one leg, stood him on his feet, cuffed his head, and despatched him with another hard kick in the direction of the bivouac. Mr. Carling, grumbling and cursing, went to fetch his meat, and registered a vow that he would never enter the service of Rome.

"Discipline is discipline," he said to the Roman when he came back, with his face bleeding from bramble scratches, "and I know I ought to have been ready to go on. But an officer is not supposed to pull a private's hair nor kick him into the brambles. I suppose that Rome is the most bullying, iron-handed militaristic power that will ever be known in the

world. And I *will* find a nice piece of bark. *Cadet Roma!*" he added viciously, for his head was still ringing from the cuff he had received.

"*Cadet Damnonius,*" said Marcus Valerius, raising his powerful fist.

"Oh, shut up," said Mr. Carling, looking up at him defiantly. "You're wasting time. *Avanti!*"

Marcus Valerius, soothed in his temper by the scratches that adorned the countenance of his companion, dropped his hand, and the day's march began. All through it the barbarian travelled with his eyes on the ground, picking up bits of bark, scratching them with his nail on the under side, and dropping them again. The Roman took no notice of these antics but strode along in front, ever watchful for signs that would tell him he was on the right path, ever listening and looking for the presence of Britons. The light was failing, and he was beginning to think of finding a safe place for the night, when a wild yell from the barbarian made him turn round. The idiot Briton was dancing about and shouting, holding in his hand a large smooth piece of bark. Marcus Valerius cuffed him for making such a noise, and took no interest in his discovery, which he regarded merely as an outbreak of childishness.

"Now I'll astonish you," said Mr. Carling, avoiding a second cuff. "I'm sorry I keep on forgetting about the Damnos."

He followed the Roman submissively, carrying the bark very carefully in his left hand, for his right was supporting the bundle of deer's legs. That night they

slept in a little cave formed by boulders and overgrown with brambles, and the next morning followed the new routine—no hunting rabbits at dawn, but march till the sun was high and the light at its strongest, then a halt for a fire and a meal of deer-meat. The venison was more tasty now, but still quite good. Mr. Carling would have preferred it higher yet. On this day again the barbarian bolted his food in a most uncivilized and greedy manner, and Marcus Valerius watched him, grimly ready to fell him to the ground with his fist, should he wander off again and give more trouble. However, he did not try to go away, but spread his piece of bark on a big flat stone and made signs of asking for the small knife. The Roman handed it to him, then lost interest in his companion's doings, for he began to make childish scratches on the bark with the point of the knife. Marcus Valerius went on with his meal, and Mr. Carling drew a map of Cornwall and Devonshire. It was a very good map of modern Cornwall and Devonshire, because Mr. Carling was in his own life a master-draughtsman with a singularly good memory for line, and he found that none of his craft had departed with the changing of his body. But he did not know how much the outline of the counties had changed in sixteen or seventeen hundred years. Still, he thought perhaps the long thinness of Cornwall and the broad bulginess of Devonshire might be somewhat the same, and the Roman could never have seen a very accurate map of anything. He called the Roman to look, and Marcus Valerius, well-fed and indulgent, sat down to see

what his idiot companion had scratched upon the bark.

"*Mare,*" said Mr. Carling, touching the bark outside his outline. "*Terra,*" indicating the part within the line.

The Roman, suddenly enormously interested, pored over the map, breathing hard.

"*Terra,*" he repeated, drawing a broad forefinger up the middle of the counties.

"Yes. *Finis terrae,*" Mr. Carling went on, touching the Land's End with the knife. "*Finis terrae Damnoniorum. Mare, mare, mare.*"

He waved his knife in a wide gesture to signify an immense tract of sea. Then he made a little round hole in the middle of Penwith with the knife point.

"*Locus maximi periculi a Damnoniis,*" he said, wildly searching his mind for genitives and ablatives. "*Locus horae vostrae—cras—Cras.* You understand?" The Roman nodded, touched the "place of greatest peril" with his little finger, then took the knife from Mr. Carling and made signs of cutting a bond off his left wrist.

"Splendid!" said Mr. Carling, delighted with him. "When two men of intelligence get together, though there are sixteen hundred years of time between them and terrible linguistic difficulties, there's no saying what they'll be able to do."

He took the knife again, and with very quick little jabs, to represent men moving at speed, he made a dotted line up towards Truro. Then he drew the knife more slowly along to where Bodmin Moor

would be on a modern map, and there he drew a circle.

"*Locus periculosus,*" he said, "*sans arbores. Locus periculosus apertus, sans arbores.*"

The Roman nodded and drew the knife very quickly with little jabs across the circle.

"Quite," said Mr. Carling, taking the knife again. "Hell-for-leather. Now look here. *Locus mortis tre Damnoniorum,*" and he made a little hole close to the edge of the circle.

Marcus Valerius, to show he understood, clapped his hand on his sword and half drew it.

"*Volo nomen urbis ubi sunt multi Romani,*" said Mr. Carling, very slowly and carefully.

"*Isca,*" said the Roman, rather doubtfully.

"That's it!" cried Mr. Carling. "I knew I really knew it all the time."

He marked Exeter with a hole.

"*Isca,*" he said, "*Multi Romani.* Now you make the line. *Ubi sunt alii Romani?*"

Marcus Valerius rubbed his dark head, took the knife and drew an uncertain line northwards from Exeter towards Tiverton, then took it north-west to Barnstaple. He looked at it doubtfully, then made another line west of the first which skirted the eastern edge of Dartmoor, took in some of the low-lying land between Dartmoor and Exmoor, then passed through the middle of Exmoor and so to the north coast.

"I hope the second one's right," said Mr. Carling, studying the lines carefully. "It gives us about ten miles less to go."

"*Vallum,*" said Marcus Valerius, touching that portion of his second line which lay between the two moors.

"*Hodie ubi sumus?*" asked Mr. Carling, after more study of the Roman's second line.

Marcus Valerius pondered deeply, then made a little hole about half-way betwen Launceston and Okehampton.

"*Hodie,*" he said.

"Well, that's about what I think, but of course we may both be entirely wrong. *Tre giorni forse—Romani?*"

The Roman held up three fingers, and waved his arm three times to represent the arc of the sun.

"*Romani,*" he said.

"I hope so, I'm sure," said Mr. Carling, and prepared to throw his map on to the fire. Marcus Valerius seized his arm, talking excitedly. He took hold of the bark and signed to the Briton to put it in the breast of his tunic, which was now empty of meat and sling stones.

"It's no particular use, but I'll keep it if you like," said Mr. Carling, putting it away.

Marcus Valerius touched Mr. Carling's forehead, and spread his hands out in a wide gesture.

"*Homo sapiens,*" said the barbarian, chuckling.

The Roman nodded, and poured out another long stream of Latin. Mr. Carling thought he was probably asking why he pretended to be an idiot who could not even speak nor understand his own language, but as usual he could not make out one word.

"*Barbarus stupidus sum,*" he said, grinning. "*Romanus es. Roma regit terram. Ave Roma immortalis. Adoro, imploro ut liberes me.*"

He had never before got off so many Latin words all at one time, and he laughed delightedly into the face of the astonished Roman.

"My dear fellow," he went on, "it would take so wise a man to understand me as I now am that he could not exist for a single day under the weight of his brains. You have shown far more intelligence than I have to-day. You can understand my Latin, which is a feat in itself, and you could read my map. I take off my hat to you."

Mr. Carling bowed low, since he had no hat to take off, picked up his meat and prepared to walk on. The Roman stamped out the fire, slung his shield on his back and took up his spear, but did not immediately start. He was evidently trying to say something in signs, and could not think how to begin. Finally he made up his mind, and walked up to the barbarian with such a set face that Mr. Carling, expecting a cuff, held up the two remaining deer's legs to protect his head. But Marcus Valerius only touched the breast of the Briton's tunic, pressing the bark against his chest, then put his hand in Mr. Carling's long black hair and pulled it gently. Then he knelt on one knee with his hands clasped.

"My dear chap!" cried Mr. Carling, horrified. "Get up at once! I appreciate your motive and thank you very much, but a Roman must not kneel to a barbarian even if he can't say what he wants to in

language. And I assure you I never gave the matter a second thought."

He had pulled the Roman up long before he finished this stream of babble, and shaken him heartily by the hand, and Marcus Valerius, though it had been a most painful effort, was glad he had humiliated himself before the Briton. He felt he really had no business at all to pull the hair of a man who was searching for the wherewithal to make such a wonderful map. He was a just man, and repenting himself of his harshness, had the moral courage to say so in the most humble signs.

In the afternoon of that day Mr. Carling climbed a tall tree, and saw to his intense joy that the ground had risen to his right into a great bald-topped lump which could be nothing else than Dartmoor. He came crashing down to tell Marcus Valerius, slipping from branch to branch in noisy haste, and the Roman frowned at him, but did not according to custom either cuff his head or prod him with the shaft of the spear.

"*Locus periculosus apertus,*" breathed Mr. Carling, and waved his arm wildly towards the South. "We must be nearly there if your line is right. But this decayed deer won't last another day. It is too high now, even for me."

The Roman inspected the commissariat and his aristocratic nose wrinkled involuntarily. He turned aside from the path they were following and proceeded cautiously through the forest towards the moor for about half a mile. There, in a little hollow, they built

a fire, roasted the best portions of the two legs and ate them, swallowing the meat in great lumps so that they should not taste them overmuch. They felt no ill-effects, either then or next day, but Mr. Carling, who had been very fond of venison, registered a vow that hereafter he would never even sit at table with it. If venison came in, he would go out, in sentimental memory of the creature who had saved his life in his dream. The remainder of the meat they threw away, and next morning marched forward breakfastless. They had eaten well while the deer had been good, and both of them knew how to fast.

That day, the last whole one of the journey, was the most painful of all. Mr. Carling had reckoned they had not more than eight or ten miles to go, but it was all through the thick primeval forest. Marcus Valerius had abandoned the path for ever. He was no longer afraid of getting permanently lost, for his way lay between the track and the rising ground to his right, and so long as he kept between the two he must come in the end to the Roman line. But the strain of avoiding his enemies for these last miles when he was so near safety, was appalling. He never spoke, even by signs, he breathed very quickly through flaring wide-open nostrils, the sweat ran off his face in a continual stream. Mr. Carling, in pity for his distress and nervousness, was very careful not to annoy him in any way, but stole along at his heels like a small dark shadow. That night they lay in a thicket, and all night long whenever he woke up he heard the Roman whispering prayers.

"*Sursum corda,*" he said sleepily. "*Cras, cras redibimus domum. Requiescas in pace.*"

In the pale grey of the very early dawn Marcus Valerius rose from his sleepless couch of dead sticks and damp leaves, woke his companion with a gentle kick, and crawled out of the thicket.

"If we don't get there to-day," said Mr. Carling in a low voice, looking at the Roman's face in the faint light, "we're done. This is our last march, whichever way it goes. It's like the snow sleep. You struggle and struggle, you do more than you thought you ever could, and then everything gives way at once, muscles and nerves, heart and brain. By sun-down to-day our hearts will be broken."

Marcus Valerius stared at him with dull bloodshot eyes, and though the barbarian was only babbling, it was evident that they were both thinking the same thoughts. The Roman made a tiny little altar with three stones, and laid upon it the gold from his arm and the ring from his finger. He covered these offerings with bracken, and kneeling down, he said a prayer.

Then he turned to go, stumbled, and fell down full length in the fern. He had never fallen before, and Mr. Carling knew that he had only fallen now because he was too excited and nervous to take proper heed to his steps. But Marcus Valerius, his mind full of superstitious terror, rose with a wild white face, and trembling limbs.

"Never mind," said Mr. Carling, showing him the thick bracken stem over which he had tripped, "in

another eight hundred years or thereabouts a man will come to take England, and he'll trip getting out of his boat and fall on his nose, just like that. And everyone will take it for a bad omen, just as you take this, but he'll go on and conquer the whole of England for good and all. *Sursum corda!*"

Marcus Valerius pulled himself together, sighed deeply once or twice, then walked on, swiftly yet cautiously, with long reaching strides, his faithful Briton padding along behind him like a dog. For two hours they marched, still in the thick virgin forest, then suddenly they burst into bright sunshine and an open space, and there, three hundred yards across it, Mr. Carling saw a dark high line.

"*Vallum!*" said the Roman, shrinking back into the shadow. He listened intently, breathing as quietly as he could, but there was no sound except the song of birds and the natural noises of animal and insect life. Marcus Valerius drew a deep breath, charged into the open, and fled across the space like a driven deer. He seemed to gain a sudden wonderful strength from the sight of the wall, and this time he so completely outran his smaller and shorter-legged companion that he arrived quite thirty yards ahead of him.

"There is no hurry now," gasped Mr. Carling, as he jumped down into the deep ditch on the British side. "And how are we going to get over? Isn't there a gate? *Porta?*"

Marcus Valerius seized the barbarian under the shoulders, and with his access of nervous strength still

on him, literally threw him up the wall, which was made partly of felled trees, partly of stones and earth. Mr. Carling deliberately let himself fall back again.

"Strongest first," he said, signing to the Roman to climb on his shoulders. "I may be able to stand under your weight, but I certainly can't pull you up."

He did stand, groaning, while the massively built Roman, whose emaciation was more than made up for by weight of bone and his arms and armour, climbed on to his shoulders and with a spring managed to reach the top of the wall. Mr Carling collapsed in the ditch and lay there, unable for the moment to make any physical effort of the smallest kind.

"What a weight!" he murmured, looking up at the face of Marcus Valerius, now far above him. "I suppose when you're full fed and in condition you have two horses—or an elephant. Rome's foot is heavy on my neck. It's no good poking that spear down to me. Go away and get a rope, a pulley and a crane. One of your catapults will do, perhaps. I'm going to lie here on and off, for days and days."

The peremptory voice of Marcus Valerius roused him from this babbling lethargy, and his habit of obedience to his hero forced him to get up and grasp the shaft of the spear. He dug his bare toes into the packed earth of the wall, the Roman pulled lustily, and in two seconds he was standing beside his companion. The wall was not so high on the Roman side, being without a ditch, and they sprang down easily on to the coarse grass that grew right up to it.

Marcus Valerius fell on his knees and spread his arms out, praying aloud.

"*Deo gratias,*" said Mr. Carling, rather sadly. He sat down to wait until the Roman should have finished his prayers, and a more depressed little barbarian could hardly have been found in the length and breadth of Britain. However, he said nothing, either in babble or in Latin, and when the Roman got up and signed to him to come, he went. He had sworn to see Marcus Valerius safe with his own people, and he knew they must in time meet with troops patrolling the wall. Then he would go. They walked a couple of hundred yards and came to a road. Not a path, nor a track, but a road made by a people who knew the value of roads, a road nine feet wide, hard and dusty. It was straight as if it had been ruled, and in either direction they could see along it till the view was blocked by the gentle undulations of the country. Away to the south Mr. Carling saw a body of men, marching towards them. He saw gleams and flashes in the bright morning sun, they were armoured men. It was the wall patrol.

"*Romani,*" he said, with a little catch in his throat.

"*Noli timere,*" said Marcus Valerius. He unslung his great shield, and held it across the body of the Briton.

"Oh, I know you won't let them kill me," said Mr. Carling unhappily. "I'm not afraid of that. But now I shall have to go. I have no place in this dream any longer."

For a while he stood silent with downcast head, drawing patterns in the dust with one bare foot.

"I can't go back to the Britons," he went on presently. "Redcap and my own people—and I can't stay with yours. I'm an unconquered Cornish Briton who has never paid tribute, and I won't serve under Rome and be knocked about by Roman officers and be always despised because I am a barbarian. You see, the fact is, I'm not a barbarian, really. I wouldn't mind so much serving under you, but you'll have to go back to your regiment, which may be Gaulish auxiliaries or regular Roman soldiers for anything I know, and I should be drafted off into a British regiment. I couldn't stand that. I wouldn't like this life at all unless you were in it. You're a wonderful man. You've come slap through well over a hundred miles of wild enemy country with no provisions, and no weapons but your shield, spear, sword and a sling, travelling a road you'd only been over once, and not always even that. And you've done it all yourself, for the only help you've had from me was just the killing of the deer. I don't believe there's a modern man who could have done what you have done. I've seen the world in its youth, I've seen the greatness of Rome. I've seen a hero. And now I must go back."

The patrol came nearer and nearer. Mr. Carling could now hear the tramp of their sandalled feet upon the hard road. The road ran from north to south, east of it lay Roman Britain, west lay the great forest, the big country of the unconquered Damnonii, who had never bowed the knee to Rome. But nowhere

was there any place for the idiot Briton who could not even speak his own language. Marcus Valerius leaned upon his spear, looking down at the little barbarian with a kindly light in his eyes, listening indulgently to his childish ravings.

"Your Empire will fall, the barbarians will run through the gates of Rome and into the city, the lands you rule now will fall back into the most horrible chaos and darkness. But the name—the name will endure, and shake the hearts of men through centuries. Rome! The only city in the world where all the Western nations go like pilgrims to a shrine."

The patrol came nearer, the men were singing now in time to the steady tramping of their feet. Mr. Carling gave the ordinary modern salute from a private to an officer.

"*Te saluto,*" he said.

Marcus Valerius drew himself up and gave the barbarian the full Roman salute, which Mr. Carling knew was an almost intolerable honour for one little wild, unsubdued Briton to bear.

"I must go now," said Mr. Carling, with a sore catching in his breath.

Marcus Valerius could not understand the words, but perhaps he read the Briton's intention in his eyes. He caught him by the hand and said something in an urgent passionate voice. The patrol was almost on them now.

"*Vale,*" said Mr. Carling, and with his hand still clasped in the Roman's hard strong grip, he wished.

CHAPTER V

THE sound of the marching patrol died away, the sound of their sandals on the road, the rough but sweet noise of their singing. The Roman's hand fell away from his palm, leaving it cold and empty, and he came to himself, alone, lying on his bed with his face turned towards the clock. The hands had not moved. He knew that if he had been in a cataleptic trance for exactly twelve days he would have awakened either in a hospital or in a coffin, and even to himself he had not been away exactly twelve days. It was evening when he met the Roman, but full morning when he had parted from him by the wall. To other people he had not been away at all. His dream of the past had occupied no time at all in the present. At five o'clock he had laid him down to dream, and when the long dream was broken and gone it was still only five o'clock.

"Well," thought Mr. Carling, lying quite still with his eyes shut, "now I can prolong my life indefinitely by means of dreams of the past."

But even as the thought came into his mind he knew that the ring would allow of no such juggling with time. Twelve days of the present had not passed, but twelve day of his own life were gone, and he was

twelve days older. The toil and fatigue of his terrible journey, though he had not endured them with his own body, were now reacting upon it through his exhausted mind, and he felt flat and slack as a man does when he has used his reserves of energy to the limit. But worse than this feeling of tiredness spreading through every limb was the depression of his mind. He was alone, and for the first time in his mature life he felt lonely, and there was no soul in the world who could comfort him in his loneliness. It was not an enchanted sadness put upon him by the ring, it was a natural grief, the grief of a man whose friend is dead. Life seemed worthless to him without the Roman. He had escaped all the pains and penalties of love in his waking life only to find them in a dream. He longed for his large-boned, large-brained, stern and overbearing comrade, he knew that in the twelve days' march through the perilous forests of Cornwall he had found a happiness he had never known before.

He sat up on the bed and took the ring from his side. He put it in the palm of his hand and looked at it, afraid.

"You bring me sorrow," he said, and he did not feel the ring upon his palm, but the strong clasp of the hand of Marcus Valerius, imploring him to stay in his dream, holding him back from his own life. A wild longing for his hero beset Mr. Carling, and he said aloud:

"I wish I were a Roman myself, and with Marcus Valerius in a magic dream."

But the ring lay cold and dead, and he knew that a broken dream may not be mended. Then he remembered the voice in the pine wood wind.

"Good God!" he muttered, still gazing at the ring. "This is the beginning of it—and there's worse to come. I shall ask for no more dreams of the past."

But all the while he knew he would. It was the ring's will, he felt that after a while it would be his own will, too.

However, for three months after his Roman dream he made no magic, and the little green ring lay placid, asleep as it seemed, against his side. He spent passionate hours in his studio, working for the first time on something that interested him, a marble head of his lost hero. The rest of the time he wandered in solitary gloom about the countryside. The only people who saw him during these weeks were Mrs. West and Fanny, but even they, though not particularly observant, noticed a change in him. He was silent and absent-minded, he joked less, and most significant of all, he was sometimes irritable on being called out of his studio to have his meals. In other days he had been as willing to abandon his work to eat as a navvy who digs a trench for a drain.

He finished the head of Marcus Valerius, and was being driven by sadness, ennui, and curiosity to the point of asking for another dream of the past, wherein he might find forgetfulness of his hero, when he had a wire from John Brough, asking if he might come down the same day to dinner and spend the night. John was not married, and had been accustomed for

years to make these sudden descents from London upon his somewhat peculiar friend. Mr. Carling had not given Brough a thought since he had vainly tried to cure him of his neuralgia, but the telegram made him think he would like to show the artist the head of the Roman, and he decided to postpone his next dream until after Brough's visit. For though the dream would take no present time at all, even if he were to stay in it for a year, he knew he might return in a frame of mind in which he would be fit to see no one. So he wired John that he would be delighted, and lit both the stoves in his studio, for the heat-wave had passed long ago and the weather was very cold and damp.

Brough, an elephantine man, running quite cheerfully to fat, arrived in the evening, and went straight into the studio where Mr. Carling was sitting, with his shoeless feet nearly in the stove, reading a detective story, blessed refuge of the sad and lonely.

"Hullo, John!" he said, jumping up. "Car go all right?"

"Rather. I wish you'd build a shed, though. I may have a new car some time and then I shan't like to leave it standing in the rain."

"I can't afford to go building new sheds. I see the workhouse gaping for me."

Brough examined his friend, expecting to see one of his hands in a sling, so serious and gloomy had been his tone.

"Why, what's the matter, Bob? You always get plenty of work."

"I can't do that sort of work any longer."

"You look tucked up," said Brough, after another examination. "What's the matter? You can't have been working too hard. Have you been ill?"

"I've been dreaming too hard."

"*You* dreaming?" said Brough, with a smile of relief. "I suppose this is just one of your elaborate leg-pulls. Well, I don't mind."

"What an awful thing it is to have such a sure and solid reputation of never being serious. Come here, John. I've got something to show you."

The head of the Roman, finished some days before, was standing on a table with a cloth over it to keep the dust off. Mr. Carling withdrew the cloth from the bust, and Brough stared in ever-growing wonder.

"Why, it's modern, Bob!" he said at last.

"What did you think it was?"

"I thought it was one of the old ones. But I can see it's new. By Jove, what a feat! Who did it?"

"I did."

"Oh, shut up with your idiocy!" said Brough, almost angrily. "You seem to think I'll believe *anything*. Who did it?"

"I did," repeated Mr. Carling, wearily.

Brough turned away from the Roman, and shot one piercing glance at his friend. Mr. Carling's face was grave, and there was a sadness in it which Brough had never seen before.

"Will you swear on your honour that you did that head?"

"There isn't another man alive now who could have done it. Yes, I swear it."

"Bob, I am astounded," said Brough, unable any longer to doubt.

"Is it different from my other work?"

"Can't you see it is yourself?"

"No. But I know I liked doing it. Do you know what it is, John?"

"It's a Roman. No, it's more than that. It's Rome. I look at it, and I can feel in myself the whole power and majesty and terror of Rome when she ruled the world. It has everything in it that I always thought you lacked completely."

"Imagination, vision and feeling," said Mr. Carling, in a peculiar tone.

"Yes," said Brough, still intent upon the bust. "All your other work is as dead as last year's leaves. This man is alive."

"No, he isn't," mumbled Mr. Carling, covering the marble with the cloth. "He's been dead for hundreds and hundreds of years. There are no men like him now, not one."

"Take that infernal thing away!" said John, snatching the cloth off again. "And go away yourself if you can't be quiet. What a beautiful face it is! Why have you scarred the forehead?"

"He had a cut in his forehead that showed the bone," said Mr. Carling, fidgeting and uncomfortable. "And of course he would always have a scar there. But I didn't put in his beard, because he was a shaven man under ordinary circumstances. I could see always

exactly what his face looked like without the beard. Here, let me cover it up, John. Perhaps I'll tell you more about him after dinner and perhaps I won't. Let's leave it now."

"Just tell me what you mean to do with it."

"Keep it."

"You're not going to exhibit it?"

"Never."

"Oh, you're mad, you're mad!" Brough groaned, pulling the cloth carefully over the bust. "You fool about for more than half your life wasting your talent in the most horrible way, and when you do create something worth while you want to sit on it like a hen with one egg."

"Quite right!" said Mr. Carling, chuckling. "Your simile is most apt. That is my one egg, except that later on I'm going to do a big thing—the whole man in his armour, carrying his spear, his shield on his back, and no helmet. I can't do the helmet. And I'm not going to do any more rotten memorials of foul men in trousers. I'm—well, that's my last memorial."

"But you'll have to do hack-work to live."

"There is certainly coming a time when I shan't want to live any more. But anyway, whatever I decide to do it won't be this mechanical art business."

"You're talking wildly, but I don't wonder. I should talk wildly if I'd just finished a piece of work like that. Feet on the ground but head in the stars, eh?"

"No. In a dream."

"You must tell me more about it, Bob."

"Oh, perhaps. But after dinner."

After this meal, at which Brough was unusually silent, and seemed to be studying his friend, Mr. Carling led the way back to the studio and called Brough over to the far wall.

There, on the smooth pale surface, were twelve charcoal drawings of the head of Marcus Valerius done from different angles of sight.

"I did those first," explained Mr. Carling, "and then I made the model, and then I chipped him out of the marble."

"Why did you have to do so many drawings?"

"I had no living model. Where in England would you find a man with a head like that?"

"I thought it must be some extraordinary Italian organ-grinder you'd picked up."

"Oh, no."

"But you have *seen* that man, the Roman?"

"Yes. But I think I have idealized him a bit. But it's like enough—like enough."

"You did this from memory, then?" asked Brough, more and more astonished.

"Yes. You know, John, that my memory for line is my strongest point."

"Anyone would be hard set to say, *now, what* is your strongest point. Those drawings—God, what a change! Where did you see this man?"

"I saw him in a dream. Come back to the stove, John, and I'll tell you about it. And don't interrupt me or I shall forget things."

They sat down by the stove, and Mr. Carling told

Brough the whole story of the Roman, but without any mention of the ring. Brough never interrupted him once, he simply sat staring at his friend, constantly letting his pipe go out, every now and then glancing at the sheeted bust of Marcus Valerius, as if to make sure it was still there.

Mr. Carling finished his tale, and poured himself out some soda-water, for his throat felt dry and swollen. The telling of the story had brought back his grief with renewed force, physically and mentally he was ill at ease.

"And so, you see," he added, as Brough did not say anything, "I lost him, and there isn't a man in the world now living who's fit to pick up his spear for him."

"You never *dreamed* all that, Bob," said Brough. "No one ever heard of a dream so clear and full of detail and that went on for twelve days. You've either imagined it, which I can't believe, or you've read it in a book."

"I didn't read it in a book, and I didn't imagine it. I have no imagination. You feel the force and terror of the Roman rule when you look at the bust because I felt it in my own person in the dream. When I stood by the wall and heard the Roman patrol marching down the road my inside turned over and I felt an empty hole where my heart ought to be. And the head of Marcus Valerius is a good piece of work because it's a real true memorial of the only man I've ever really loved."

"You seem to be much more human in your dreams

that you are in reality," said Brough, rather jealously.

"I'm myself. But leave that for a bit. I have a theory. Supposing you could have a dream made up of all the things you knew and had forgotten or hadn't forgotten? All set out very clearly, so that you didn't only know them, but also felt them?"

"If you'd thought about it beforehand would you have thought the Penwith men of that date were dark, hairy and uncivilized?"

"I can't tell you what I would have thought, now."

"Because I'm sure Diodorus says somewhere that they were bright-haired pleasant people and quite fairly civilized from contact with the tin-traders. I don't think your dream was at all historically accurate."

"Perhaps not. It's all symbolical. But the central figure—the Roman—he was real, as real as the power of Rome itself. And realest of all was the effect he had on me. Now, supposing I have another dream and fall in love with a woman? It would be deplorable."

"I don't see why. Then you'd wake up and do a wonderful female statue. I think it would be a splendid thing."

"Och!" said Mr. Carling, making a sound of utter disgust. "As if any woman's statue could be anywhere near as beautiful as Marcus Valerius. Anyway, it would never *do*. Women are different, and you don't love them in the same way as men."

"No," said Brough, meditatively. "This dream-love is simply childish hero-worship."

"Well, but he was a hero," said Mr. Carling, passionately. "There aren't any now, and so, of course, hero-worship is called childish. I read an American novel the other day which was so full of 'real he-men' that it made me feel sick, but they don't any of them know what a real man is like. My Roman was worth half-a-dozen modern men of any nation whatsoever. For courage and endurance and resource and sheer power of brain and body he was more like a god than a man. If a man's just brave nowadays they call him a hero, because they've forgotten what the word means. I've lived too late. The world as it is now sickens me, because I know what it used to be like—when there *were* heroes."

"Oh, well, Bob, you've lived through a bigger war than your Roman ever fought in. That ought to comfort you a lot."

"Modern war is stinking and poisonous and unsporting. I want to fight in a war where they have shields and spears and bows and arrows, and the stronger man, provided he's not stupid, is a better soldier than a weaker one."

"Still your primitive worship of physical strength. Your weird dreams haven't changed you much really. You'd better try to dream you *are* a Roman, and lead a cohort against the barbarians."

"That dream's broken," said Mr. Carling, sighing. "I shall never have another Roman one. Talking about the possibility of the dream, do you think it's in the least likely that a Roman could ever have been taken right through Cornwall to Carn Bran?"

"If they'd had a rally of all the Cornish tribes against the Romans and then been defeated or pushed back, they'd go home like savage tribes always do after a defeat, and they'd divide up what prisoners they'd been able to take. And your tribe naturally wouldn't kill the Roman up in Devonshire if they wanted to sacrifice him with the aid of their own proper priests. It strikes me as much more wonderful that he should have been able to find his way back, and avoid the Britons so successfully."

"Well, as to avoiding Britons we crept round the villages, and the country, compared with these days, was almost unpopulated. And as to finding his way, he could do it just because he *was* wonderful. Rome ruled because her men were supermen. The Roman Empire is the only empire there's ever been that's worth two straws."

"You've got an awful Roman complex out of this dream," said Brough, laughing.

"Yes, I have. And that head is the result of my complex. I don't believe any man could have done that head but me, because he'd only have read about Rome in a book. He'd never have *felt* Rome like I did."

"But you mustn't stop there, Bob. You must have a Greek dream and see Pallas Athene."

"I won't do a statue of a woman," said Mr. Carling, peevishly. "And it'll never do for me to fall in love with a woman in my dreams. The result would be catastrophic."

"I can't see why, but don't let's worry about it,"

said Brough, soothingly. "You'll have plenty of work for months doing the big statue of the Roman. You'll have a model for that, I suppose."

"Yes," said Mr. Carling, more cheerfully. "I want a perfect man about five feet eleven, though the height to an inch doesn't matter. But he must be perfect, because the Roman was the most beautiful man in his body that I've ever seen. I don't want any lumpy, muscle-bound athlete, nor yet a pretty boy. I want a man with *every* muscle well-developed and supple, and as beautiful a skeleton inside as you can think of."

"You don't want much, do you?"

"Well, he can have a head like a gorilla. But I won't have my eye distracted by any faults in the body of the model for the Roman. I will have the best, and I'll pay him what he likes. I think to-morrow I'll start drawing the armour and the shield and spear, so as to get them made. They can be made of wood or anything so long as the lines are right."

"I'll tell people you want a model," said Brough, "but I don't suppose we shall get anyone as perfect as all that."

"No," said Mr. Carling, gloomily. "There isn't anyone now-a-days who could do *all* the things the Roman could do with his body. Oh, John, it is a pity you couldn't see him!"

"I shall see him when you've done the statue, and if it's as good as the head, your name's made. Can I go and have another look at it?"

"Yes. Cover it up again when you've done. Oh, to think that I've wasted my time in doing horrible men in trousers!"

Mr. Carling, his Roman complex very strong on him, groaned and shuddered.

PART III

FRIENDSHIP

CHAPTER VI

ON the next day, when Brough had departed for London, Mr. Carling made drawings of the armour, tunic, and sandals of the Roman, and went upstairs to his bedroom to ask the ring for another dream. He lay down on the bed and said:

"I wish to be back in a dream of the past."

As the ring burnt he shut his eyes.

When he opened them again he was in a room he knew very well, for it was the entrance hall of the old George Inn in the village two miles from his house. It was different in many ways, there seemed to be fewer doors in it, the floor was without mats and sanded, and the furniture was enough to make a collector's eyes ache, all good solid sixteenth century oak, without a gimcrack or badly made piece anywhere. Mr. Carling recognized the room by one beam, which had a long shallow depression in it, and by a curious holed stone which had been built into the fire-place. The panelling of the walls was the same and he thought that the new iron fire-back he was

now seeing was to last, with the designs getting less and less clear, into the twentieth century. In the George Inn also there had hung over the fire-place an old wooden shield with an entirely undecipherable coat of arms upon it. Now he saw, hanging in the same place, a shield of the same size, glaringly new and freshly painted with a coat of arms that seemed to be nearly all azure and sable.

So he knew that he was somewhere between 1649 and the present time, for the inn had been built during the Protectorate. He was not sure whether it had always been an inn, but he did know that its name had been changed from the "White Bull" to the "George" by someone who felt a passion of loyalty to the Protestant Succession.

After a swift glance round he moved the ring, which was hurting him, and examined his clothes. He was dressed in rather full breeches of sober dark blue cloth tied below the knee with ribbon and decorated with a rosette, a coarse linen shirt with a broad collar which lay outside his coat. This was also dark blue, not very long, and girt with a leather belt. He had on dark blue woollen stockings and leather shoes fastened with a strap. He felt his head, and found it covered with crisp short curling hair. He had no sword, but on his leather belt jingled a bunch of large keys.

"It is an inn," he thought, "and I am the keeper of it. My clothes are eminently respectable, and by the look of them I am somewhere between Charles I, and Anne. He was dead when the inn was built,

though. Between Cromwell and Anne. I greatly fear I am a Roundhead."

He was thus meditating, and feeling his head, which was indeed exceedingly round, when the inner door of the room burst open and a young girl of very pleasing appearance rushed in.

"Father!" she screamed, and poured forth a torrent of speech to which Mr. Carling paid no heed whatever.

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned aloud, seizing his head with both hands. "The worst has happened! I'm a married man!"

"Not marred, Father, but made!" said the girl, mistaking his meaning. "I tell thee——"

"Tell me if my wife is alive!" cried Mr. Carling, in terrible anxiety.

"Oh, Father! What dost thou mean? Is it the fever? Oh, art thou sick? Tell me, tell me."

"Tell *me,*" said Mr. Carling, "whether or no my wife is alive. I *am* in a fever until you tell me that."

"Why," said the poor girl, her lips beginning to tremble, "thou knowest well she is dead these two years. Oh, father, what hath come to thee? Shall I send out for the chirurgeon?"

She cast herself into his arms, and Mr. Carling, immensely relieved, kissed her kindly on the forehead.

"Why, no, my lass," he said, patting her shoulder. "I have been dreaming, I think. I saw your dear mother sitting in that chair as plain as I see you now, and it seemed to me she might never have died at all."

"God have mercy!" gasped the girl. "It bodes a death!"

"It bodes nothing of the kind," said Mr. Carling, soothing her in a fatherly manner. "It was just a waking dream. Now tell me what you came to say."

"Why," said the young girl, her words hopping over each other in her excitement, "a messenger hath ridden in to say that our lord the King, God bless him, and two of his gentlemen will lie here to-night."

"If it's James I won't have him in my inn," thought Mr. Carling. He had never liked James, chiefly on account of his debased taste for ugly women.

"His Majesty is sick, and can ride no further than this village, but his other gentlemen and most of the attendants are to go on to the great inn across the heath."

"He can't die here," said Mr. Carling, groping in his mind for facts, "whichever it is."

"God save thee, sir! Talk not of him dying! They say it is but a slight sickness. Shall I bid the messenger come and speak with thee?"

"No, give him a drink though. I suppose he came hell for leather. Where is the King going to?"

"Why, to London."

"I thought he always travelled in a coach."

"Sir, at this time of the year the roads in Hampshire would hold fast a coach with eight horses."

"I see there's a fire," said Mr. Carling, wondering if it were autumn or spring, which he supposed to be the worst times of the year for coaches. "How many are coming altogether?"

"His Majesty, two of his gentlemen, and twelve of the Guards."

"Have we room for all those? What will happen to the Guards?"

"Why, they will be set round the house and in the passage at the door of His Majesty's room. And though twelve guards and an officer is little enough, yet will it be a sore hard matter to place all their horses within shelter and cook meat for such a company. They must dine after the King."

"And will the officer require a room?"

"I will make ready a room, but I expect that he will wake all night."

"This seems to be a very dangerous place."

"Sir, his Majesty must be *guarded,*" said the girl, looking at him wonderingly. "He takes little care enough, God knoweth."

This characteristic of the king did not help Mr. Carling much, for he could not remember any Stuart who was a coward except James I, and he was sure William of Orange was among the bravest of men.

"Well, and what about wine?"

"There is enough out for the Guards in the chest in the public parlour, and should they be the Dragoons they will likely all drink ale."

"Why, are the Dragoons different from the Guards?"

"Sir," said his daughter, again looking puzzled, "thou knowest well that many of his Majesty's Life Guards are men of gentle blood, but that the Dragoons attached to each troop are not so."

"I had forgotten it for a moment. Well, then wine will have to be got out of the cellar for the King and his gentlemen. I should think about a dozen would be enough, that's four each, or three each for the gentlemen and six for the King. Is he a drinking man?"

"Sir, I have heard it said that never hath the King been seen the worse for wine."

"Oh, damn!" Mr. Carling said to himself. "It must be William then. I'm sure Charles and James drank like fish. Well, my lass," he went on aloud, as the young girl looked ready to cry, "what's the matter? I'm very glad he doesn't drink!"

"Sir, thy speech is very strange," said the girl, falteringly. "I still fear thou art ill."

"I really am not, but a little mazed with the dream I had, and with the King coming. My dear, will you get out the wine?"

"Sir, thou art displeased with me."

"I'm not!" said Mr. Carling, giving her a hearty kiss. "What makes you think that?"

"'You' is for strangers or when I have offended thee," said the girl, rather incoherently.

"Oh, my dear!" said Mr. Carling, very penitent, "I mean nothing at all by it. How couldst thou think so?"

"Father, I am very foolish," she said, instantly comforted. "But as to the wine, how can I get the rooms ready, and help Dolly and the wenches to cook the meat and get out the wine also? Thou must get out the wine, and tell the horse boys to put down new

straw in the stables. That is all there is for thee to do. Then thou canst wash thee and doon thy best suit."

"When will they be here?"

"In an hour. His Majesty's pain is so bad he can scarcely ride a league further."

"Now what in the devil can be the matter with him?"

"The messenger saith he hath a pain in his neck and is so faint with it he can scarcely sit his horse."

"Poor fellow!" said Mr. Carling, much to the scandal of his daughter. "Well, we must do what we can. Now off with you to your work, and send me a lad with a candle. This wine business is going to take a long time."

Mr. Carling, guided by a rough-headed youth with a tallow candle, descended to his cellar and looked about him in the dim flickering light. He did not know where the best wine was kept, he could not taste any, being the wearer of the ascetic burning ring, and as all his liquor seemed to be in casks there were no labels to help him. Then he espied, lying on a little shelf by themselves, as if they were something rather good, six dark bottles which were proved on examination to contain some kind of red wine.

"When glass is expensive," Mr. Carling argued to himself, "no one is going to waste bottles on bad wine. This must be the old '51 all right. Now, if I could find some brandy we should do."

He found brandy, in a small cask, and to his untutored nose the liquor seemed satisfactory.

"Now, my lad," he said to his stolid-faced retainer, "find two empty bottles with corks."

He thought that very likely he had asked for the moon, but the boy, after giving the candle to his master, shuffled off into the gloom and presently returned with two bottles, clean and shining, and when Mr. Carling had filled them with brandy and corked them he felt that he was over his first big fence.

Aided by the lad he carried all the bottles up to the parlour and arranged them on a small side table where he saw his daughter had set some glasses and a silver cup. Then he went out to superintend his stable lads. There were three of them, all obedient, respectful and handy, and an old man who was well past his work. When the stables were made ready for sixteen horses he went in to help his daughter if he could, but found that she would not allow him to do anything at all except make up the fire in the inn parlour. He did this, then went up to his bedroom to put on his best clothes. He had some difficulty in finding the room, but once he was sure of it by the sight of two pistols hanging on nails in the wall, he felt justified in calling his daughter to ask what he was to wear. She ran into the room, laughing with excitement, and in a twinkling had laid him out a clean linen shirt and his best suit, which was as sober and respectable as his everyday one, but richer in material, beautifully neat and spotlessly clean.

"My dear," said Mr. Carling very gratefully, "thou art a daughter any man would be pleased to find."

She kissed him and sped away again. Mr. Carling put on his suit and looked at his face in a small mirror. He was clean-shaven and red-haired, his features were plain but not at all repellent. He thought he was a fair height, about five feet nine, and judging by the age of the girl he must be over forty years of age.

"I am no beauty," he thought, as he stared at the strange face in the glass, "but I am certainly taller than my real self or the Briton. I'd much rather be big and ugly than small and pretty. I'm very strong, too. If I have any trouble with this King I can throw him out of the window."

He turned away from the glass, for it gave him a peculiar feeling to look into it and fail to see his own fair hair and sharp-nosed, sharp-eared face, and went downstairs to the parlour to wait for the coming of either Charles II, James II or William of Orange. Naturally no one had mentioned the King's christian name, and he had not dared to ask. He thought that very likely a man who did not even know the name of the reigning monarch would be strapped to a board and done to death by chirurgeons before he could even make his peace with God. He was still afraid it must be William from his daughter's remark about the King's sobriety, and the thought depressed him. He knew even less about his reign than he did about the other two, and he had an idea that Dutch William could not speak English. Then he remembered that men who are very much addicted to the pleasures of love are rarely heavy drinkers, and he took a little hope. It might yet be Charles.

Presently he heard the sound of a great many horses' hoofs and was springing up to go and greet his King (whoever it was) as a loyal subject should, when a great log fell forward right out of the fire and on to the floor. He had to stop to pick this up lest the King should be stifled and blinded when he came into the room, and he could not immediately find the tongs. So he had to waste a minute or two looking for them, as he did not feel loyal enough (especially if it were William or James) to burn his hands for the sake of being outside in time. He found the tongs mixed up with a pile of logs that lay on the floor by the fire and hurled the log on with an irritable crash. Then he ran to the door, but before he got there it opened from the outside and a man, apparently unattended, advanced into the room. Mr. Carling knew instantly that this was the King himself, and he knew which King it was. He looked up, for the man was tall, into a dark-skinned heavy face of singular ugliness, lit by a pair of sad lustrous eyes of great depth and beauty. The features were drawn into lines of pain, and the swarthy complexion was the colour of putty.

Mr. Carling was so enormously relieved by the fact that it was neither cold-hearted James nor foreign Wiliam, but the rake Charles, that he said and did nothing. The King, either surprised by this or startled by the amount of smoke there was in the room, also said nothing, and they just looked at each other.

"Host," the King then said, stretching out his right hand, "God give you a good evening."

"Sire," said Mr. Carling, remembering his manners but forgetting his period, "welcome may you be."

He knelt to kiss the King's hand and Charles looked down at him with a smile that changed his face most wonderfully.

"That is a pleasant greeting," he said, "and one that I have never heard before."

"I think it's further back," said Mr. Carling.

"Well, if you think that enough of the smoke hath now passed through the door, I pray you to shut it."

"I thought," said Mr. Carling, jumping to obey, "that your Majesty's gentlemen would be coming."

"I sent them to see to my horse. And now, mine host, I must pray you to send out one of your lads to fetch a chirurgeon, and for God's sake speed him, for I cannot any longer endure this pain."

Mr. Carling thought that if the King's pain were fairly simple he would probably know more about its cause and cure than a seventeenth-century doctor, so he drew a bow at a venture and said: "Sire, the s—— the chirurgeon lives five miles and more out of the village."

"Then send the lad the more speedily," said the King faintly, and he reeled where he stood.

Mr. Carling sprang forward and supported him to a chair, then seeing that it was too far from the fire he pushed the King and the chair together until it was near enough for him to get thoroughly warm. He had to take his strength to do it, for Charles was a big man, and though not fat, well-boned and heavy. Then he gave him brandy in the silver cup his daughter had set

out for his use, and drew off his long and heavy riding boots. He knew this was a liberty, but he knew also that when a man is faint it is a good thing to get his feet warm. Charles drank the brandy, curled and uncurled his toes as if he liked the warmth and forgave the liberty, and said: "I thank you."

"Sire," said Mr. Carling, very respectfully, "where is the pain? I have some skill in surgery—chirurgery, I mean."

"Why," said the King, looking a little the better for the brandy, "I have a boil in my neck, and the head of it is as big as the top of my little finger, and it will have to be lanced. Can you lance it?"

"I can, but I shan't lance it if I can help it."

"The chirurgeon I saw yesterday said it must be lanced if it grew no better in twenty-four hours, and he let me blood until, with that and the pain, I could scarce sit my horse. So lanced it must be, for it is no better, but far worse."

Mr. Carling saw that the King looked far more ill than he should have done for one boil on the neck, however large.

"Sire," he said urgently, "I pray you to go to no more chirurgeons until the boil is well. A man in these days needs to be in sound health to go safely to a chirurgeon."

The King, in spite of his faintness and the pain in his neck, threw back his head and burst into a roar of laughter.

"Odds-wounds!" he cried. "Master landlord, you have a pleasant wit! I shall tell that to the chirurgeons

about my court and pass it off as if it were a saying of my own. Well, so it please you, look at this great boil."

He took off his hat and coat and waistcoat and the lace collar round his neck and sat down again clad only in his shirt and breeches, holding his wig up with one hand.

"Sire," said Mr. Carling tentatively, "I could do it better if you take off your wig."

"Well," said Charles, taking it off, "I pray that none of your women-folk come in."

"I have none save a daughter and she will not come in unless I ask for her," said Mr. Carling, as he looked with interest at the King's close-cropped dark head. It was of a good shape and large, the head of a clever man, and Mr. Carling thought privately that it was a pity he ever wore a wig. His face did not look much uglier than it did with a wig, and his head was a fine one.

He unwound a bandage from the King's neck and disclosed a sore boil, which, if not quite so big as Charles thought it, was yet of a most painful size. The last chirurgeon had smeared it with some horrible smelling ointment and put a dry dressing on top.

"It's a beauty," said Mr. Carling, gazing at it with respect, "and just about ripe."

"Landlord, what is beautiful to your eyes is deplorably painful to my neck. Can you do anything for it?"

"Yes, of course I can, but I'm not going to lance it."

"What will you do then?"

"Put a blazing hot cloth on it."

"Burn it, you would say?"

"No, a hot wet cloth. Will your Majesty take any more brandy first?"

"No. I pray you to get the hot wet cloth, though I have never heard of such a thing being put on a sore."

"It's the same as a poultice," explained Mr. Carling.

"The chirurgeon said nought about poulticing it," said Charles doubtfully.

"Sire, he must have been a country chirurgeon," said Mr. Carling, as if that settled the matter.

"Naturally," said the King, who looked as if he were trying not to laugh. "My own chirurgeon was taken sick, or he would be here with me. But you are not one at all."

"Sire, of course that is true," said Mr. Carling rather hopelessly. He was perfectly certain that he could relieve the King in ten minutes if he were allowed to, but he did not know how to make him believe it.

"Well, get your hot wet cloth," said the King. "Perhaps it will do me no harm."

Mr. Carling waited for no more, but went out of the parlour and called his daughter. He first warned her not to come in unless he sent for her, and then told her to get him a saucepan of boiling water, a sheet, and a pair of scissors. She brought these things in two minutes, and Mr. Carling went back to the parlour, set the saucepan on the log fire and cut some squares out of the sheet. He folded up one square for a fomenta-

tion, used one for a wringer and got three others ready for a pad to keep the heat in. Then he put the fomentation into the saucepan and waited for it to boil up fiercely again.

"Sire," he said, when the bubbles were jumping energetically, "when I put it on it will be very hot."

"I see it will," said Charles, looking rather anxiously at the furiously boiling water. "It will raise me some miserable blisters on my neck."

"It will not raise any blisters or hurt at all more than for a second or two, and the hotter it is the better for the boil."

"Well, I will trust you, for almost any sort of pain is better than the one I have now. So put it on."

Mr. Carling found that he had cut the wringer too small, and he hurt his fingers almost as much as he would have done if he had picked up the hot log in his hands before the King came in. But he bore it in silence, thinking it would not be manners to swear in the presence of his sovereign, and swiftly had the fomentation well wrung and clapped, beautifully hot, on to the royal boil. The King did not wince, and even while Mr. Carling was putting the dry pads on and bandaging it up he exclaimed at the marvellous lessening of the pain in his neck.

"Landlord, your remedy is pleasant and powerful," he said, gazing up at him with grateful dark eyes.

"It's a sovereign remedy for boils, sire."

"I wager," said Charles, laughing, "that I am the first sovereign that you have ever put it on. Whence got you your skill in chirurgery?"

"I was wounded in the war, and lay so long sick in a hospital—no, I think I mean a lazar-house—that I had time to learn quite a lot of things."

"Ha!" said Charles, pricking up his ears. "The Civil War? You look not old enough to have fought in the Civil War."

Mr. Carling knew neither his own age nor the number of years that had elapsed since the last battle of the Civil War, and he did not know of any other wars he might have taken part in, so he was deeply thankful when an interruption occurred in the persons of the King's two gentlemen. One was an oldish man of sober and wise appearance, the other was a very gay young spark richly dressed, in an auburn wig which contrasted strangely with his sandy eyebrows. He was a handsome fellow enough, but he looked as if he drank. These two exclaimed at the sight of the King, dressed only in his shirt and breeches, being attended by an amateur physician in the form of a crop-haired innkeeper, but the King waved aside all their anxious enquiries and reproaches.

"The landlord," he said, standing up full six feet tall in his stockinged feet, "has put me such a dressing on my neck that I have the first relief I have had these two days past. I want no other chirurgeon. Presently he shall put me on another. Now I will have another sip of brandy and then go to rest until it shall be dinner time. I will have it in an hour, so please you, mine host, and I thank you fervently for your ministrations."

He put his wig back upon his head and arranged

his collar as neatly as he could. The younger of the two gentlemen helped him into his coat and waistcoat, and the other served him with his brandy, then sent his companion flying out to get the King's shoes. While he was waiting for these Charles drank off the brandy and examined the cup in which it had been presented.

"That is a marvellous lovely cup," he said, turning it about in his big thin hands. "It is Italian work of the early fifteens. Where did you get it, host?"

"Sire, it has been with my family a long time," said Mr. Carling, hoping this might be true, "and as to where it came from I cannot say."

"You have done me great honour in allowing me to use it," said the King, with his charming smile. "I have never seen such a fine example of the Italian silver work of that date. It might even be a Cellini cup, and I trust that you do not have it out for everyone to see, though there are many without doubt who would not know its worth."

"Sire, I would not let it be used for anyone save yourself and your family," said Mr. Carling, again hoping he was speaking the truth, though he knew that very likely neither he nor his daughter realized that the cup was a precious work of art.

The King's shoes had by this time arrived, so he put them on and was conducted upstairs to his bedroom by Mr. Carling and the two gentlemen. Mr. Carling left them at the door after seeing that all was in order inside the room, and went quickly down to the parlour to look at the cup, which he had hardly noticed when

he first picked it up, being intent on keeping the King out of a fainting fit. It was indeed a lovely goblet, tall and slender and of a graceful shape, very heavily decorated with cherubs' heads in low relief. On one side there was a little crucifix.

"This is a chalice," thought Mr. Carling, as he looked at the crucifix, "and some rascally Puritan has stolen it out of a church. Very likely I stole it myself. The King must have seen it was a chalice, and that's why he asked me where I got it. Well, it's mine now and I certainly won't let anyone but Charles touch it, and only him because he appreciates it."

He went out, bearing the cup with him, to give his daughter the order about dinner. He washed the cup so that it should be ready for the King's use and set it on the side table in the parlour. Then he cleared up his surgical arrangements and put them aside, and made up the fire. The gentlemen came in soon after he had finished doing these things, the older man first and the younger close on his heels.

"Get me a glass of wine, fellow," said the young man with what was evidently habitual insolence to his inferiors. "No, I will have it in the silver cup you make such a to-do about. Bring it here. And take a bottle of wine or half a pint of brandy for yourself."

Mr. Carling said nothing, remembering that he was, after all, only an innkeeper in an undemocratic age, but he contrasted with annoyance and contempt the graceful manners of the King with the rudeness of one, at least, of his courtiers. He did not, however, get the Italian cup, but placed on the table two bottles

of his red wine, the bottle of brandy which had been started, and the two glasses.

"Wine and brandy, gentlemen," he said, and set for them two chairs on the side of the table nearest the fire.

"Get me the silver cup, you knave!" said the young man, who was in a bad temper for many reasons. He had a headache, as he had exceeded even his generous allowance of liquor the night before, he was bored with having to stay behind the rest with the King in this small country inn where there was no hope of amusement, and he had heard that day from a friend he had met on the road that the lady he loved, *par amours,* had almost certainly turned her eyes upon another man.

"Well, damn you!" said Mr. Carling, also losing his temper, "I won't get it! You heard me say that no one was to use it but his Majesty. And I warn you not to speak to me like that."

"You foul crop-haired Puritan!" shouted the young man, red with anger. "Get me the cup, or I will spit you like a chicken!"

He jumped up in a towering fury and half drew his sword.

"Spit as much as you like!" said Mr. Carling, glaring at him. He was willing even to abandon this interesting dream and wish himself back to his own time the moment the young man's sword entered his body, rather than give in on the matter of the silver cup. "I won't get you the cup, I won't let you get it for yourself, and I won't serve you at all if you don't

speak courteously to me. I never realized before what a swinish lot you later Cavaliers were. The King has his faults, but at least he's a gentleman. As for you, you're just a drunken bully. Now come on with your spitting!"

"Sit down, Chesney!" said the older man, in a very peremptory voice. "What will the King say if you brawl with the innkeeper who is to cure his boil? If you kill the man before the boil is cured he will be likely to banish you."

This was a new side-light on the King's character, and one that made Mr. Carling laugh and recover his temper. The young man sat down, growling and muttering, and started to drink his wine at a furious pace. The older man, sipping his slowly, turned his discourse towards the innkeeper.

"Landlord," he said gravely, "I have no doubt that you have the right to reserve your precious cup for his Majesty's use alone, and I say nothing about that. But it seemeth to me probable that you are, as my companion saith, a disloyal and dishonest Puritan. What mean you by your most discourteous remark about the later Cavaliers, and by saying that his Majesty hath his faults?"

"My lord," said Mr. Carling, for he had heard Charles call him so, "what I said about the King was very bad manners, I mean to say it before you, and I know that I should not say he has any faults at all. As for what I said about the Cavaliers of this time, I didn't mean it for you, and I admit it was a hasty generalization."

"A what?"

"A hasty and ill-considered statement. I am not disloyal, and as far as I know, not dishonest, and I never have liked Puritans of any date. But I will say that the manners of the gentleman you call Chesney are such as will not very long be tolerated by the free men of England."

"You hear that!" said the young man, explosively. "The canting knave threatens us another Civil War. Now, what do you say, my lord?"

"I do not threaten a Civil War," said Mr. Carling, before the older man could speak. "There won't be another Civil War in England like the one you've just had for hundreds of years and perhaps never. But if ever I've seen a man that went the right way to stir up a revolution, you're the one."

"Landlord," said the nobleman, still perfectly calm and judicial, "how can you expect that after the Restoration things can be as they were during the usurpation of Cromwell? To every man his day. This is ours."

"I see that. You mean that the gentleman is rude to everyone he thinks may be a Puritan. But I hadn't opened my mouth."

"And now you have opened it," said the nobleman, changing his ground quickly, "I warn you that your freedom of speech is such that there is no one who would not take you for a Puritan of the most vicious and disloyal type."

"I don't know what to do about it," said Mr. Carling, much harried. "But I am not a Puritan.

I don't speak in texts, or want to cut maypoles down, and I consider Charles the First was murdered."

"As for your speech, I have never heard any man, either Puritan or Cavalier, speak like you. And I think that if you are a Puritan you are a very strange one. So now I pray you to ask pardon of my companion for calling of him a drunken bully."

"Well, I will do that, because I'd lost my temper and no one ought to descend to abuse. Sir, I am sorry I called you a drunken bully."

The young man received this with a mutter that might have been anything from a blessing to a curse, and refilled his wine-glass.

"And now take a glass of wine for yourself" said the nobleman courteously.

"Thank you, my lord, but I never take anything until my day's work is done. Is the wine good?" he asked anxiously.

"It is very well."

Mr. Carling, much relieved, excused himself, took up the silver cup and departed. He had explored the inn thoroughly before the King arrived and found that the downstairs portion consisted of a big public parlour (the modern dining-room) for labourers, soldiers, servants and packmen, the smaller private parlour for gentlemen and merchants, the kitchens, and a tiny little room where his daughter did her sewing. The horse-boys had been warned to tell any gentleman or merchant who might come that the small parlour was reserved for the King and his escort, so Mr. Carling

could sit down with a quiet mind in the little sewing-room or closet to try to find out who and when he was. The King had the appearance of a man of forty or thereabouts, but Mr. Carling, knowing the kind of life he had led ever since he was sixteen, thought he might be years younger than that. He was unwilling to ask the age of the King, as he thought he would certainly be supposed to know it. He called to his daughter, who was bustling about in the kitchen with the cook and the serving maids, and he could now call her by her name as he had heard old Dolly address her as Mistress Alice.

"Alice!" he shouted. "Come in here."

"Sir, what may I do?" asked Alice, running in.

Mr. Carling looked at her and noticed for the sixth time her exceeding prettiness and freshness.

"First of all," he said, "I forbid you to go near either the King or his gentlemen."

He had two reasons for this. He distrusted the morals of the man in the auburn wig, and also he did not want Alice to get talking either with the King or his gentlemen, for he feared that she might say he had never fought in any war, or she might reveal the true history of the silver cup.

"Oh, sir," said the poor girl, who was, of course, dying to see the King at close quarters. "May I not even carry in some of the meat?"

"None of the meat," said Mr. Carling, sternly. "You are as pretty a girl as ever I've seen in my life, and the King has a proper scoundrel of a man with him, and he himself is no better than he should be,

though I think he would leave a girl like you alone. But the other I wouldn't trust a yard."

"Oh, sir!" said Alice, hastily looking round for listeners, for the door was open. "Do not speak such words with the King's gentlemen in the small parlour! They might hear you."

"Well now, surely you're not all under the impression that Charles II is a good man?" asked Mr. Carling, rather astonished.

"No, father," said Alice, blushing very prettily, "but we do not say he is not where his gentlemen might hear us."

"Well, that's quite right, of course, and I won't say any more. But you're not to go into the small parlour, and anything there is to be done in there or in the bedrooms must be done by old Dolly. I won't run the risk of you meeting the fellow in the red wig. He's as nasty a man as I've ever met anywhere, he's in a poisonous humour, and he'd be quite likely to get frightening you just to spite me. Now, you understand, Alice."

"Sir, I will obey thee," said Alice, with a sigh, "but I would have liked very well to see the King."

"He's very ugly," said Mr. Carling, consolingly. "His body is well-made and pleasing, and he has a good head, but his face is uglier than I'd ever imagined it or seen it in a picture. He has fine eyes, though."

"Father, thou art likely to bring the house down on our heads if thou speak such words of the King when he is in the house himself. They will calls us Puritans!"

"They do call me a Puritan, and it annoys me very much. We're not Puritans, are we?" Mr. Carling added this as if he were stating a fact that really called for no comment.

"No!" said Alice, with shining eyes. "We are King's men, and always have been. But thou hast ever been so free with thy tongue that it makes me afraid. And yet I would not have thee changed."

"Well, I will be more careful if I can, though it's very difficult for me, as I am a man far in advance of my age. But now get me my books where I record the takings and expenses of the inn."

Alice went to the cupboard and brought out two or three big books which she put on the little table.

"Shall I get the pen and the ink, sir?"

"No. I want to look at them only."

"Then I may go, father?"

"Yes, thank you, my dear," said Mr. Carling absently, taking up the nearest book.

He found it very neatly kept in a crabbed and difficult handwriting, but the figures were plain enough. The date of the last entry was October 12th, and the year at the top of the page was 1668.

"Well," thought Mr. Carling, much relieved, "now I know where I am. The King is thirty-eight, and he has been on the throne for eight years. He has been married six years and he has sold Dunkirk, but he has not yet signed the Dover treaties and Querouaille hasn't blown in yet. Clarendon is either fallen or just going to—I can't remember. Did he last seven years

or eight or perhaps nine? The Dutch War, the Plague, and the Fire are all done, thank goodness. I expect my wife died in the plague—no, she didn't though—Alice said two years. She died in the Fire year. Anyhow the woman is dead. I wouldn't mind if she'd died last week. The chief women are Castlemaine and Nell Gwynn, and if Clarendon is gone the chief man is Buckingham. I am going to Court to see all these people."

Mr. Carling meditated for a while on how he would manage this, and the more he thought of it the more possible did it seem. He felt attracted to Charles, and knew that the King was interested in him. Charles could never have met such a man before, and surely with his marvellous prophetic gifts and knowledge of the King's mind it would be possible to deepen his interest to such an extent that he would desire to keep the extraordinary innkeeper near his person. The only question was, would there be time? With his advantages he could do more in an hour than another man could do in a year, but he must have the hour, alone with the King. But he neither schemed nor worried about it. The ring visions seemed always to go according to some kind of plan which he himself could not alter or interfere with in any way. So he stopped thinking about the King and proceeded with his investigation of the account books. He found in them hay and corn accounts, meat accounts, wine and ale accounts, records of wages paid and a long list of sales and purchases or horses. The books went back over seven years, and he was fascinated by the plague

year because he seemed to have spent all his substance in vinegar.

"Did we drink vinegar?" he wondered. "No, there's far too much even if we drank nothing else. We must have had rich vinegar baths and washed the floors with it. And it was horribly expensive and not much coming in. I must have been very nearly ruined that year."

He looked at the wages record, and felt that if his ostler lads were to initiate a strike with violence and rioting he would not blame them in the least. Five shillings a week seemed to be the largest wage he had ever paid to anyone. He hoped that he at least fed the lads well, and he remembered with relief that they had all appeared healthy young men, not at all discontented with their lot.

The horse sales next engaged his attention, and here he felt was the real source of his prosperity. Only ten times in the whole record had he sold a horse for less than he gave for it, on most he made a good profit, and here and there a remarkable one. These very successful sales were marked by a kind of chuckling wavy underlining. Mr. Carling remembered seeing an angular dapple grey in his stables which the lads had referred to as "Master's new horse," and decided that Alice's father must have an eye for a horse which amounted to a sixth sense. He in his own proper person would never have looked at the dapple grey twice in a salesman's yard or anywhere else.

Presently he put all the account books away and took out from the cupboard an old and heavy Bible.

Here was treasure trove. If he were not an absolutely self-made man the record of his family would be in it. The date on the Bible was 1530, but when he turned to the blank leaves he found that the entries, in various handwritings, mainly very illegible, went back a good deal farther. He was evidently of most respectable ancestry. He looked at the end of the record first and found that his name was Richard Field (for that was how the family had finally elected to spell the name) that his wife's name had been Mary Oke of Nottingham, and that he had had two sons and a daughter who had died in infancy. He felt rather glad of this. Alice was all he needed in the way of children. The last record was of his wife's death in 1666. Then he started at the beginning, and with a good deal of difficulty and eyestrain made out that the Fyldes, Fildes, Feltes, or Fields, had been gentlemen and men of property up to the reign of Queen Mary. The first date given was 1476, and up to 1554 they had lived at a place called Oden, without incident, except one that interested Mr. Carling very much indeed. A record dated 1545 told of the presentation of a silver cup to Edward Filde by the King "for his greate servisse." There was also a solemn short combined curse and warning pronounced against any Field who should sell the cup. Mr. Carling was relieved that it had not been stolen out of a church by his own family, but there was little doubt that Henry VIII had robbed some abbey or priory of its new Italian silver chalice, and given it to Edward Filde for his great service, whatever that might be. But the curse of the Church,

if indeed anything so new as the chalice must have been at that time could hold a curse, had fallen heavily in Mary's reign. Oden had been sold, probably to pay some stupendous fine, and later Protestant sovereigns had done nothing to restore the fallen fortunes of the family.

"But that accounts for the furniture," Mr. Carling thought, "they saved out of the wreck some good bits of oak and the chalice, and the shield is my coat of arms. Very interesting."

After the sale of Oden there were no more records except just names and dates of births, deaths and marriages until January 30th, 1649. This fatal date was scored heavily with lines underneath, and someone had written beside it: "The monstrous and cruelle death of His Majesty King Charles at the hands of his wicked enemies and Oliver Cromwell the bloudie deyvel."

"If these fellows go on calling me a Puritan much longer," thought Mr. Carling, as he gazed at this rather pathetic record of an immense indignation and pity, "I shall have to show them the family Bible."

He looked again at his own name and date and found that he had been born in 1630 and was the same age as Charles himself. He might have fought in the battle of Worcester at the age of twenty-one, but he was married in that year, so it seemed rather unlikely.

"Perhaps I am a sharp and shifty rogue who gets rich with cheating over horses and keeps out of all trouble. But Alice is certainly a very nice girl, and she seems very fond of me, so I may be all right."

He was thus meditating, holding the Bible lightly on his knees, when the young man Chesney, who was apparently just outside the door of the sewing-room, bawled as loudly as he could: "Ho! Innkeeper!"

Mr. Carling started, and dropped the Bible.

"Damn that chap!" he grumbled, as he picked it up. "Whatever can he want now?"

He glanced up at the clock and saw that he had spent more than three-quarters of an hour looking at the records, though the time had passed like five minutes. The King had come down again to have his boil dressed before dinner. Mr. Carling ran to the kitchen for a saucepan of boiling water and went to the parlour, encountering on the way the young Cavalier, who swore so horribly at him for lingering that Mr. Carling was quite startled.

"You have a marvellous gift of profanity, sir," he said pleasantly, as he spilt some of the boiling water on the courtier's foot. "It beats anything I've ever heard."

"You have scalded my foot, you——!" cried Chesney, hopping with rage and pain.

"So sorry," murmured Mr. Carling, "your language made my hand shake."

"You dog of a Puritan! Some time I will return here and kill you!"

"Can't be done," said Mr. Carling, placidly. "I have a charmed life."

"Ho, there! Chesney!" called the voice of the King from within the room. "What in the devil's name are you doing?"

Chesney moved out of the way with a last curse and preceded Mr. Carling into the parlour. The King was sitting by the fire ready for his dressing, except that he had not yet taken off his wig.

"Oh, I see you have the water ready," he said, and removed his wig.

"Sire, I ask your pardon for the delay in fetching it."

"Is the fire where it is boiled just outside the door?" asked the King drily.

"No, Sire. But if it had been cold I could have boiled it very well just outside the door."

Mr. Carling was unable to resist this pleasantry, nor grinning cheerfully at Chesney when he said it.

"I would ask you," said Charles, with a small cough, "to look at my neck and, so it please you, keep a guard on your tongue."

"I will try, your Majesty," said Mr. Carling, contritely. He undid the bandage and unwrapped the boil. It had broken, and with all the zeal of the amateur he wanted to hasten the recovery by squeezing it out.

"Is it better?" Charles asked.

"Yes, Sire. But it would be *much* better if I might give it a little pinching."

"Will it hurt?"

"Sire, it will hurt most damnably," said Mr. Carling, who had had boils pinched himself. "But it will be well much quicker."

Charles braced himself with one foot against the hearthstone.

"Landlord, I am ready," he said.

Thus encouraged, Mr. Carling gave the boil a sound pinching with his two strong hands and looked at the result with satisfaction. Charles had not even twitched his shoulders.

"I thank you," he said, when Mr. Carling had ceased to torment him, "but I pray that it may not have to be done again. It is very shrewd."

"Not to this one, Sire," said Mr. Carling, wringing the fomentation, "but if this is your first you'll very likely have two more."

"It is my first," said Charles gloomily. "May heaven preserve me from another two like it."

"They nearly always go in threes," said Mr. Carling, firmly. "It's poverty of blood."

"Poverty of blood!" cried Charles, in surprise. "Why should I be suffering under any poverty of blood?"

"Because, Sire, the chirurgeons let it all out of you directly you have the least thing the matter with you. I don't say," Mr. Carling went on, too much interested in his theme to notice the amazed countenances of the two gentlemen, "I don't say that an occasional bleeding may not be necessary in these days when every man, however sober, drinks wine or ale at every meal. But I'm sure they've bled you for something else until you've got boils, and then they bleed you to cure the boils, which is sheer idiocy. You must be a man of wonderful constitution or you'd have been dead long ago, considering all things."

The King was also amazed at this extraordinary

freedom of speech from an innkeeper, but at the same time his neck, with the new dressing on it, felt delightfully comfortable. Neither was the landlord's manner insolent or offensive, but detached. He seemed to be a man with no particular reverence for anything, and yet when he had kissed his sovereign's hand at the first entrance he had done it with a kind of enthusiastic charming grace which had warmed the King's heart towards him. Charles knew there were many men in his kingdom who would not have been half so pleased to see him.

"Landlord," he said, "your heat against chirurgeons frees your tongue of all restraint, and by your tone only I could believe you to be a Fifth Monarchy man."

"Are they a rival society of chirurgeons?" asked Mr. Carling, with interest. He had forgotten for the moment what they really were.

"They are men who plot to kill me," said Charles, sternly, far more sternly than he felt. The innkeeper's impertinences were so very obviously not meant as such, and besides, they made him want to laugh.

"Your Majesty," said Mr. Carling, very earnestly and respectfully, "I do pray you to believe I am not a Fifth Monarchy man, and that you are in no more danger from them than from your own chirurgeons. Not as much."

"I am pleased to hear it," said Charles, and this time he did laugh. "And that you yourself are well-disposed towards me. It is a great weight off my mind."

"Sire, how could you ever think otherwise?" said Mr. Carling, rather distressed. "I am as well-disposed towards you as I ever have been in my life towards anyone."

Charles glanced up at him gravely, then smiled.

"Well," he said, "let us have dinner."

Old Dolly had only laid one place at the long oak table, thinking that the King would dine alone, but he now signified his desire that his gentlemen should dine with him and that the landlord and his daughter should wait upon them. But Mr. Carling was determined that Chesney should not set eyes upon his young and charming girl, and see in her an easy means of vengeance upon her father.

"Your Majesty," he said, "I am desolated at being unable to obey you, but my daughter has scalded her hand in a pan of boiling water and is in too great pain to stand."

Charles looked at him as if he did not believe him, and Mr. Carling just moved his head sideways in the direction of Chesney, who was standing sulkily by the fire, stirring a log about with the heel of his shoe. He had offended the King that morning by staying behind a moment without leave to ask after his lady, and Charles was not disposed to take his part in any way.

"I regret it deeply," he said aloud, then in a much lower voice, intended for Mr. Carling's ear alone, "but will you let *me* see her?"

"Sire, she and I will be honoured beyond measure," whispered Mr. Carling, who knew that he

could keep Alice off dangerous subjects with a cough and a glance.

Mr. Carling went to the kitchen and selected the neatest of his serving-maids, who was overcome with nervousness and delight, and while two stable lads brought the dishes to the door, Mr. Carling and the girl served inside the room. Mr. Carling found that his neat-handedness and natural quickness of movement made him quite a good waiter, even without any practice, and he was able to serve the King entirely himself, do butler for all of them, and yet spare time to carry some of the dishes from the door to the side table. To his great relief they all elected to drink brandy, for he feared that the two bottles of wine already consumed by the gentlemen might be the only good ones in the half-dozen. The King and the nobleman diluted their spirits with water, and Mr. Carling, forgetting he was not supposed to speak unless he was spoken to, said regretfully: "I wish there was some soda-water."

"What kind of water is that?" the King asked.

"Sire, it's not invented yet, but it will be later on."

This answer tickled Charles, though Mr. Carling had not meant to be the least funny, and he laughed till he began to cough.

"I cannot tell what there is about you," he said, when he had recovered a little, "but I have never met a man so strange or so amusing. But as to the soda-water, if you yourself know what it is, why do not you invent it?"

"I have the idea in my mind as to how it might b made, but I don't think I can do it."

"You are something of a chemist, then?" the Kin asked, looking up at him with interest.

"Sire, I am no more a chemist than I am a chiru geon. I know a little about both, but very little."

"Yet your knowledge of chirurgery is so great th you despise all others."

Mr. Carling put three chickens down on the ur occupied end of the table and started to break ther up with extraordinary swiftness and skill.

"Sire, it is only on this matter of bleeding peopl continually that I think they are wrong. But in ever age physicians will always have some favourite remed In some future time they may use the knife for ever thing, instead of bleeding."

"They will never do that unless they find som method of making pain not pain," said the King, si ping from the chalice. "Bleeding is not painful, bu to be strapped down to a table and carved as you carv those birds must be a foretaste of the torments of hell."

"Sire, it must indeed," Mr. Carling agreed fee ingly.

When the last dish, which was pancakes, had bee handed round, Mr. Carling sent the girl out of th room and stood quietly behind the King's chair, think ing that if he wished to give up his art he could a least earn good money as a waiter.

Presently the King drank his last mouthful c brandy and water, rinsed out the silver chalice, refille it with neat brandy and beckoned Mr. Carling wit

one finger to stand beside him. He offered him the cup with the smile that so marvellously lit up his dark, ugly face.

"Now, landlord," he said, "you shall pledge me in your own beautiful cup. Leave not a drop in the bottom of it and take it without breathing like a man. You have the look of a man who can do all things well."

"Sire," said Mr. Carling, kneeling on one knee to take the cup, "I thank you with all my heart for your kindness and graciousness, but this is one of the things I cannot do at all."

"Cannot drink?" said Charles, looking very much astonished. "It is as mild as milk. Well, sip it then. But I will be pledged."

"Sire, I may not even sip it."

"I wager he may not," said Chesney, with a sneer. "Sire, this is a rascally Puritan fellow who thinks that if he drink a drop he will burn in hell forever."

"I asked you not for your opinion, Chesney," said the King, in mild reproof, "and in any case your words lack sense. What man who thought drinking was evil in itself would spend his life selling it to others?"

"I am not a Puritan!" said Mr. Carling, emphatically. "And I don't think drink is in the least wrong. But as for burning in hell, if I were to take that brandy I should burn to death, and perhaps burn in hell afterwards, or perhaps not."

"It injures you in the body?" asked Charles, curious and interested.

"Sire, it does indeed."

"Then I hold you excused, save for one smal
to pledge me with."

Mr. Carling looked at the King, and looked at
brandy. Then he looked at the King again, and n
up his mind.

"Sire," he said, "to show you that I am
Puritan and loyal to yourself I will drink this he
But I ask you, my lord," and he turned to the nc
man, "to catch me if I get faint. I really don't k
what a mouthful of pure brandy will be like."

"Whatever it does," said Charles, staring at
in astonishment, "it is not likely to make
faint."

"King Charles!" shouted Mr. Carling, in a v
that thundered among the rafters, and he too
mouthful of the brandy. Chesney, the King, and
nobleman saw him set down the cup and stand r
and white-faced, his features horribly contorted
pain, his lip between his teeth and his eyes tight s
Then he began to sway, the beads of sweat sprang
upon his forehead, his face grew paler yet and
lurched against the table with a jar that set everyt
rattling. He recovered himself, but began to to
over in the opposite direction, and it was the King
sprang up from his chair and caught him in his str
arms just as he fainted right away and would
fallen to the floor.

"Alas, poor soul!" cried the King, holding
Carling up easily against his broad chest. "No
have killed him with drinking of my health!"

The nobleman opened Mr. Carling's coat and put his hand upon his chest.

"It is a dwaum," he said after a little while, "his heart beats. Lay him on the floor, Sire, and let us open his shirt and sprinkle his breast and head with water."

But Mr. Carling came to himself with a gasp and a sob before the King could lay him down.

"It was like that before," he said, wriggling feebly in the King's arms. "It gets just awful and then it goes and I feel faint. Oh, it's you, Sire?" he went on, as he discovered who it was that was supporting him. "I thank you very much, and I ask your pardon for being so unmannerly."

"It is I that must ask yours," said Charles, setting Mr. Carling gently down into a chair. "But indeed I had never a thought that a sip of brandy could cause any man such terrible torture. Why is it?"

"Sire, it is a most accursed nuisance, and a dreadful misfortune in almost any age for a man not to be able to take one drop of drink without such fearful results. It seems very unnecessary to me."

"Unmannerly!" murmured Charles, as if he were talking to himself. "I know a many with worse manners than thee. It is the height of courtesy and loyalty. Chesney," he said, in a louder voice, "have you ever before heard of a Puritan who would pledge his King though the doing of it were to put him on the rack? Would you do it? Would you, my lord?"

"Nay," said the nobleman, "just for the drinking

of a health I would not. I would do it to save y
Majesty his life, or that anything might accrue
real benefit. The landlord hath a stout heart to d
for nothing."

Chesney said nothing, but for a moment or two
looked a little ashamed.

"Well," said the King, taking up the silver cup,
will now drink a health, for thank God I can dr
without these strange and terrible pains catching
Landlord, in your own lovely cup I pledge you, I w
you a long life and health and happiness and all y
desires granted."

He drank, set down the chalice and looked at
Carling with friendly melancholy dark eyes.

Mr. Carling, still very white and shaky, stood
and bowed deeply, then leaned trembling upon
back of a chair.

"Sire," he said, "I thank you for your gracio
courtesy and kindness. But of all the rum start
ever—Marcus Valerius, and then you. Great snak
if that doesn't beat all!"

"What do you say?" said Charles, complet
puzzled by the strange slang and stranger oath.

"Your Majesty, my head is not clear and
speech will not come as I want it to. But I tha
you most fervently for the honour you have sho
me. I will, if it please you, now clear away
dinner things."

"It does not please me. Send some other to
that, and go to rest. But return again in an hou

Mr. Carling bowed, staggered rather than walk

out of the room, and in his weakness and muzziness of brain, fell heavily into the Guardsman who was posted near to the parlour door to see that no unauthorized person could come at the King.

"I beg your pardon," muttered Mr. Carling, "this place is infernally dark."

"What ails you?" asked the Guardsman, fraternally propping him up. "Hath John Chesney run you through in the King's presence?"

"I've run myself through in the King's presence, but I'm damned if I ever will again. A more idiotic, childish piece of sheer inanity—however, it has cleared things up. It's not a woman *this* time."

Mr. Carling mumbled these words not exactly to the Guardsman, nor quite to himself. He was in a condition of shock and faintness, and he would have talked to a lamp-post just as readily, and leaned upon it in exactly the same way.

"I see no blood," said the Guardsman.

"Blood!" repeated Mr. Carling stupidly. "Why should there be blood?"

"You said you had run yourself through."

"It feels like that. It's—oh, it's a heart attack. I feel better now, I think."

Mr. Carling straightened himself up, and though his knees still felt rather weak he managed to get to the little sewing-room. There he sat down and called for Alice.

"Alice," he said, when she came in, "go and tell Dolly or someone to clear the dinner things out of the parlour."

Alice sped away obediently, but in a momen two was back again, looking at him with anx eyes.

"Father, thou art very pale," she said.

"I'm all right, or shall be in a minute or t How are things going? Shall we be able to get soldiers fed?"

"Sir, we shall do very well. Margery and J have come from the mill, and Hal with them."

"What will Hal do?" asked Mr. Carling, see by Alice's face that Hal of the mill was someone of the ordinary to her.

"All that I bid him, father," said Alice demur "And now will it please thee that I bring thy dinner

"Very much," said Mr. Carling, with satisfacti

"Then thou art not ill?"

"No, lass, no. In five minutes I shall be perfe all right."

"Thou hadst better have a little brandy with dinner, instead of ale."

Mr. Carling shuddered.

"No brandy, thank you. I'll have water."

"*Water,* sir?" asked Alice, not believing her e

"I'm off drinking just for now."

"I heard thee drink the King his health."

"Why, what a noise I must have made," said M Carling, rather surprised.

"Sir, we all heard you. And I thought of the t of my grandfather, and how he drank the King health with Cromwell's soldiers within the ro where he drank it."

"What a sportsman," murmured Mr. Carling, longing to ask whether immediate death had been the result of this unseasonable display of loyalty to the crown. "'King Charles, and who'll do him right now?' Eh, Alice?"

"Sir, there will always be men to stand by the King," said Alice, proudly.

"Well, I daresay that's true enough. But now about this dinner. I have to go back to the King in an hour."

"Father, thou must have pleased him in some wonderful manner," said Alice, surprised and delighted.

"He's very easily pleased. I should have had a much harder job with some of the others—and then I shouldn't have wanted to. And he wants to see you, Alice."

"Oh, sir!" cried Alice, yet more delighted.

"But mind, no peeping into the parlour before I take you in."

"Sir, I would rather lose my life than disobey thee," said Alice, reproachfully.

"Children in these days are wonderfully well brought up," was Mr. Carling's comment.

"Were there ever any days when children disobeyed their fathers?" asked Alice, wonderingly.

"I don't know, but there will be. Now get my dinner, my dear, and your own if you haven't had it, and water to drink. Plain pure water from the pump. I expect the drains are all wrong, but I must risk typhoid."

"Risk what, sir?"

"Oh, a fever."

"Thou wilt get no fever from the water in well, but I have heard physicians say water-drink is bad for the stomach."

"It suits mine as it is just now."

Alice looked at him doubtfully, but when she turned presently with his dinner tray there was o a large earthenware jug full of water. Mr. Carl seized it and drank about a pint without stoppi because one result of overstepping the ring's rule life in the matter of intoxicants was a most intolera drought in his throat and mouth. Then he ate dinner alone, for Alice declared she had no time e to think of eating, and after he had finished it he asleep with his head on the table.

He dreamed a dream within a dream. This nothing new, for when he had been in the very l past time with the Roman, he had dreamed nea every night, either of pursuing Britons, of the Ron himself, or of his own present time. In this n vision of the seventeenth century he dreamed that and the Roman were still travelling, with incredi toil and pain, through the primeval forest of Cornw with an addition to their party in the shape Charles II, dressed as Mr. Carling had just seen h in wig and lace ruffles, with rosettes on his shoes a a rapier by his side. Mr. Carling was dressed in ordinary twentieth century clothes, but for so reason he had dreamed himself into a Sam Brov belt, through which was thrust his little stone axe a

his iron-tipped arrows. The Roman, irritated apparently by Charles, rushed upon him with his great spear with intent to kill him. Mr. Carling sprang at him to prevent him, and the Roman seized him by one arm and shook him.

Mr. Carling woke up with a start, to find Alice shaking him, respectfully but energetically, by his right arm.

"Alice," he said, rolling his eyes at her, "these dreams are enough to send a man off his chump. When I'm through with them all I shall be daft."

"Sir, what hast thou dreamed?" Alice asked, not understanding any more than that her father had had a nightmare.

"Why, I dreamed that a friend of mine tried to kill the King. I'm very glad you came and woke me up."

"It is the quarter past five, father, and I dared not let thee sleep any longer."

"I feel as if I could sleep for a week. When shall I be able to go to bed?"

"When his Majesty hath retired."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Mr. Carling. "What an awful thing it is to have to wait on another man's pleasure for everything you do! I always seem to get placed in a subordinate position. However, the King will not kick me nor pull my hair."

"Nay, but he may be displeased with thee for tarrying beyond the hour. Surely it is a great honour that he wishes to hold converse with thee."

"I suppose it is," said Mr. Carling, and he smoot his shirt collar, settled his belt comfortably and rub his hands over his thick short curling hair.

He went into the small parlour to find Charles ting alone by the fire, reading a small book. T room was pleasantly lighted by two lamps and so candles set on the table and in sconces on the wa Old Dolly had kept a fine fire burning, and the c tains over the windows were drawn. The ro looked so comfortable and was so familiar to M Carling that for a moment he felt as if he had s denly come out of his dream and was back in his o time. But the sanded floor, the sixteenth centu furniture, the candle-snuffers and Charles' dress so reassured him, as did also the shining newness of iron fire-back which was to last for another t hundred and fifty years.

"Landlord," said Charles, with a smile, "welco may you be."

"God give your Majesty joyful adventure," s Mr. Carling, with a low bow.

"An adventure I have," said Charles pleasant "and at present I see nothing grievous about it. A now, as I have sent the others away to play at dice the big parlour, I pray you to let me see your daugh whom you guard so carefully."

"Sire, it shall be my pleasure and hers. She h been dying to see you these last three hours."

"And yet," said Charles, with twinkling eyes, "m face is not of a sort to give any woman much pleasu in the seeing of it."

"Your Majesty's loyal subjects know better than that," said Mr. Carling, also twinkling.

Charles burst out laughing, and slapped his knee with his hand.

"Landlord," he said, "there is in your face, your strange manner of speech, and in your whole self, something that pleases me so well that I have no desire to part with you. But fetch me hither your lass, for I am curious to see all the family."

Mr. Carling went out, and after making sure that the door of the big parlour was shut, he called Alice. She came down from upstairs, where she had been preening herself in the usual feminine way, and showed no signs of nervousness at the idea of being presented to her sovereign beyond a faint and most becoming blush. Mr. Carling tucked her arm under his own and led her up to the King.

"So please you, your Majesty," he said, letting go of her arm, "this is my daughter Alice, and if I had had all the women in the world to choose from for a daughter I would still have chosen her."

Alice curtsied with charming grace, blushing more than ever at this tribute from her father, and kissed the King's hand. Charles raised her, and kissed her himself on the cheek, and asked her a few laughing questions to which she returned modest yet frank replies. But Charles, for once, was more interested in a man than in a pretty woman, so he cut a ribbon knot off one of his sleeves and gave it to her for a remembrance, then dismissed her kindly. Alice received the knot with fervent gratitude, curtsied again and

once more kissed his hand, and departed to tell Hal all about it, the proudest girl in England.

"She is as pretty as a spring morning," said Charles, when she had gone. "There is no prettier maid at my court."

"Are there any at all?" asked Mr. Carling, absently and innocently. He thought vaguely that a King who could afford unlimited wages' bills would be waited upon entirely by men in rich liveries. But he was not really thinking of the Court at all, but of the old motto, "Manners makythe man." He was wondering if Charles, without his manners, could have held on to his throne for five and twenty years, and whether James, given the personal character and address of Charles, could have persuaded the English people that a bigoted Roman Catholic king was exactly what they most needed.

The King looked at him sharply and seemed undecided for a moment or two whether to laugh or be angry, but in the end he laughed, and so heartily that Mr. Carling began to understand why, in spite of his sad eyes, he had been called the Merry Monarch.

"Landlord, your wit is more cutting than a razor, also it is very bold. But there are maids at my court, though you may not think it possible."

"Oh," said Mr. Carling, now realizing he had misunderstood, "I meant no disrespect to your Majesty at all. All the same, I would not like Alice to be there."

"You are very wise. She is not like you."

"She has red hair like me."

"As to her appearance you can lay claim to her

very well. But there is, in her, nothing remarkable. Landlord, draw that great chair near the fire, and sit down. I have some questions to ask you."

"Sire, you do me too much honour," murmured Mr. Carling, with a deep bow. He drew the chair up, sat down in it, and began to memorize the designs in the fire-back.

The King seemed to be in a withdrawn and dreamy mood, perhaps induced by relief from pain and a feeling of comfortable weakness, or perhaps the result of some subtle emanation from the brain of the man who sat beside him, the man who so emphatically was not what he seemed. He said nothing for some time, then suddenly asked Mr. Carling his name.

"Robert Carling," said Mr. Carling, without thinking, then added in some confusion: "I mean Richard Field."

"Only a rogue hath two names," observed Charles, glancing round at him.

"Sire, I am not a rogue, yet it is very true that I have two names, because I have two lives."

"But only a rogue leads two lives."

Mr. Carling saw that he must account more particularly for his two names, and the pleasant path of romance opened green and flowery at his feet.

"Sire, in a time of trouble I had to take the other name, and I like it the best because one I loved used to call me Robert. But that I have two names makes me neither disloyal nor dishonest, nor unready to serve you with heart and hand."

"Well, I believe that, and I will call you by the

name you like the best. And in what part of England were you born? "

"In Gloucestershire, Sire."

"You speak not at all like the Gloucestershire folk. Indeed, your way of speaking is one that I have never heard before."

"Why, what does it sound like? "

"It sounds like a man in a great hurry, and more nearly than that I cannot describe it."

"Does it sound ill-bred? "

"Not at all ill-bred. But you run your words one into another and bite off the ends of them until sometimes I can scarcely understand you. But for all that it is so hurried, it is a quiet gentlemanly way of speaking."

"Sire, if my way of talking displeases you I can amend it if I think very hard all the time. But if I get at all excited I shall be certain to slip back into it."

"It does not displease me, and I can understand you now better than I could at first. But your speech is only a small part of your strangeness. I would have you tell me, if it please you, why your tone in speaking to me is sometimes entirely lacking in respect, when you are willing to incur mortal agony for the sake of drinking my health. I know," Charles went on, with a keen glance from his dark eyes, "that you have no more respect for a king, because he is a king, than the most rampant and virulent Fifth Monarchy man who now prays daily for my death. And I know also that you are neither a Puritan nor a Fifth Monarchy man."

"Sire," said Mr. Carling, rubbing his hands backwards over his curls, "it is very hard to explain. But the badness of my manners is unintentional. After all, I am only an innkeeper."

"Nay, you are *not* only an innkeeper. And your manners, when you remember them, are unexceptionable. They are the manners of a gentleman. But you are detached. You treat my gentlemen as your equals, and me you treat sometimes with perfect graceful courtesy and sometimes with a detachment which borders on familiarity, and yet is not insolence."

"Sire," murmured Mr. Carling, "it is because I know you so very well. As to your gentlemen, against the older one I have not a word to say, but the younger is my inferior, and if I treat him as an equal it is too much honour for him."

"You are as proud as the devil," said Charles calmly, "you have no respect for me as the King, you have no respect for gentle blood. Are you also an atheist, and have no respect for God?"

"Why, no, Sire. I'm a member of the Church of England. But as to respect for the Crown, there must be people even in these days and will be many more as time goes on, who have an affection for the Crown, but no belief in it as a governing power. I am a man who would take up arms to fight for the King if his life were in danger or anyone wanted to depose him unjustifiably, but would also take up arms just as quickly against him or anyone else who tried to overthrow the constitution and the law of England. I am

a Cavalier, I suppose, though I'm not interested in politics really."

"A Cavalier!" said Charles, with a slight smile. "A strange Cavalier. If all the Cavaliers were like you, who would protect me from the Puritans? You are a Roundhead, a Republican, a dangerous rogue. But now I will try you. Had you met Oliver, would you have had respect for him?"

"Why, yes," said Mr. Carling, seeing it was hopeless to try to deceive Charles, "but only as a man. Not just *because* he was Lord Protector. I would have had no particular respect for Richard Cromwell."

"Then," said Charles, looking straight at him, "do you respect me as a man?"

"Sire," said Mr. Carling, much worried, "that is not a fair question."

"Then you do not?"

"No, Sire."

Mr. Carling stood up, expecting that the King would have him arrested and flung into irons, or at least send him out of the room, but Charles pointed to the chair.

"I am too fond of my own pleasure," he said, in his usual pleasant, rather sarcastic way, "to banish a man from my presence who is more interesting than any drama that was ever written. But now you shall tell me why, since you respect me neither as a King nor as a man, you drank that most painful health."

Mr. Carling sat down again with relief.

"Well, Sire," he said, trying to get his own motives straight in his mind, "I have enough sentimental

affection for the Crown to drink the health of any King of England if he made a particular point of it, even if it was going to hurt me a bit. But I would rather drink yours than any other King's. And supposing it *had* been Oliver Cromwell who came to this inn and asked me to drink his health, though I respect him, I wouldn't have put myself out to do it, because he wasn't the King nor the rightful ruler of the land, though he was a fine man."

"I never thought to live to hear Cromwell called a fine man in my presence," observed Charles calmly.

"Sire, I ask your pardon most fervently. I keep forgetting things so. I am a man without political passion of any sort."

"Except a sentimental attachment to the Crown?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And to my person?" said Charles, glancing round at his subject with unfathomable, sorrowful dark eyes.

"Yes, Sire," said Mr. Carling, with much more enthusiasm.

"You would protect me against other villainous rogues like yourself?"

"Sire, there are no other rogues exactly like me. I am a peculiar rogue."

"You are," said Charles, and he fell into deep thought, but it was obvious that he was not angry.

"Robert Carling," he said presently, gazing dreamily into the fire, "there is a fairy tale about a man who went riding in a wood on a summer's day, and he came upon a little hut in a glade. And instantly he knew that in that little common hut lived

something strange, perhaps evil, perhaps good, but of might and power beyond humanity. So he went up to the hut and knocked, and therewithal came out to meet him a fairy man. Well, when I rode up to this inn of the 'White Bull,' in faintness and weariness, I thought of that old tale, for it seemed to me that within the house, so new and raw, there dwelt something strange. So I sent the other two away from me that I might go in alone, and see, without any other there, what might be inside the inn."

Mr. Carling was surprised. Certainly there had been something in the inn of the "White Bull" more strange than any witch or wizard, but he would have thought Charles the last man on earth to be open to any psychic influence. Then he remembered that the King's blood was very old, that it was mainly Scottish, and that he and all his family certainly lay under a supernatural curse. Even a materialistic Stuart, in a time of physical weakness, might well be able to feel the presence of something even more remarkable than a fairy man.

"Sire," he said cautiously, "there is in the inn nothing more strange than myself. I fear that you were disappointed."

"I was—at first. But now, I am not so sure. I have never met a man so disaffected and at the same time so loyal. I have never met a man so detached, and yet so willing to hurt himself to pay me a courtesy. I have never met a man who dared to speak well of the usurper in my presence, or dared tell me to my face that he had no respect for me. And I sit

here in a kind of pleasant dream, and resent nothing Now you shall tell me why that is."

"Sire, one reason is because, whatever I think o kings or governments, to you I am as loyal as you most devoted Cavaliers. You are a Stuart."

"But I feel," said Charles, darting a keen glance a him, "that you are *not* loyal to the House of Stuart only to me."

"Sire, that is so, but I meant that any Stuart migh be able to see things that are not obvious to othe people."

"But what *is* the thing—the thing that makes yo different?"

"Sire, in this life I am a fairy man, and when yo rode up to the inn you felt me inside it."

"Never saw I any man who looked less like it," said Charles, laughing. "You—a fairy man!"

"Sire, it is true. When I was a young boy I wa lost in Chedworth Woods in Gloucestershire on a Ma Eve, and I saw the Green Man."

This was partly true. Mr. Carling had been los in Chedworth Woods as a child, and he had imagine or seen something that gave him a great fright. H had thought privately that it had come out of th Roman Villa, and he had never been into the wood alone again, except in broad daylight.

"The Green Man?" asked Charles.

"Sire, it is Pan," explained Mr. Carling, no romancing freely, "and the tallest tree bowed dow to his feet."

"You are no good Protestant, but a pagan."

"Sire, the earth of England is older than the Christians. But I will make no long talking about the hing I saw in Chedworth Woods. It frightens me ven now, whatever I call it."

"And this—this thing you so evidently believe in, ;ave you some strange power? It is a curious tale."

"He gave me the gift of prophecy and the detachıent which makes me neither Cavalier nor Roundead. For he took me to a little still pool in the /ood, and having passed his hand across it I saw the ;ivil War, all small and pale and cold, as if it were a ıing long past that I had read of in a book. And he ıowed me in the pool the figures of Kings and rinces and Emperors, all small and colourless, and ıe figures of great men, and the rise of factions, and ıe struggles for power there should be in England, ıd many other marvels, so that when the visions 'ere past I could no more have any passions in ıis life."

"You saw the Civil War before ever it happened?"

"Sire, when I was lost in the Chedworth Woods I as a boy of nine years old," said Mr. Carling, this me speaking the unvarnished truth.

"How could a child understand such visions?"

"I understood them as I grew older, yet there are :ry many things I saw in the pool which I have now rgotten."

"It is impossible," said Charles to himself, yet loud ıough for Mr. Carling to hear. "You saw the King y father—his death?"

"Yes."

"And the rise of the usurper?"

"Yes."

"This is easily said. These things have happened. But now tell me of something you saw in the pool which hath not yet come to pass."

"Sire, I have never yet told my visions to anyone in this life."

"But you will to me?"

"If it please you."

"Then tell me of my death and the fortunes of my house."

"I would rather tell you of wonderful things I saw that will be made, or about chirurgery or architecture, or about future wars."

Mr. Carling wanted to hold the King's interest so that he would take him up to London, but the doom of the Stuarts he would have preferred to leave enshrouded in a decent veil.

"I have been told fortunes by wise women in England, in Scotland, in France and in the Low Countries," said Charles, gazing at the fire, "but never yet have I heard any but an ill one to the men of my house and blood. There lieth a curse upon us. But all the world knows that, and it takes no great gift of prophecy to repeat it. Tell me the year of my death."

"But how will you know that I speak the truth?"

"Why, I shall not," said Charles, smiling, "unless you tell me that you yourself intend presently to assassinate me, and then I should do my best to make you into a false prophet."

"Well," said Mr. Carling, after a moment's thought, "will you give me your promise that you will tell nothing of what I say to any other?"

"Ay, I will. But why?"

"I do not want to be known as a seer, for even in this dream of a life my prophecies might get me into trouble. There is no man in England, save yourself, that I would dare tell my visions to."

"You are not afraid of me getting you into trouble?"

"No, Sire," said Mr. Carling, placidly.

"You place a singular trust in a man whom you do not know and cannot respect. Would you have thus trusted Oliver?"

"No. I think he very likely might have had my head off. But if it had been Oliver Cromwell, I should have gone back again at once. I should be most unlikely to find a friend among the Puritans."

"Surely," said the King, astonished, "you have no lack of friends. You seem to me to be the sort of man who would have more friends than he knew what to do with."

"I make friends quite easily, but I don't really care about any of them. To find my real friends I have to travel a long way."

"And do you ever make friends of women?"

"I have no use for women, thank God," said Mr. Carling devoutly. "If I ever come to find my friend is a woman I shall be in a deplorable position."

"But then, if you have this distaste for women, why did you ever marry?"

"I have no recollection of the circumstances that led to my marriage, but I suppose I had some reason."

Charles threw back his head and laughed until the tears ran down his face.

"Robert Carling, for cracking right good jests with a serious face you have not your equal. 'Some reason!' Well, men marry for more than one reason, but whatever it is they can usually remember it with either gladness or shame."

"It may have been awfully shameful," Mr. Carling admitted, "but it's a fact that I can't remember it now, and my wife, thank God, is dead. And I don't like to ask Alice."

"The Green Man," said Charles, still laughing, "left you a passionless, cynical rogue. So passionless that even those you have felt make no mark on your memory, and so cynical that you thank God for the death of your wife."

"Most men," said Mr. Carling, looking absently at the King, "think that women are necessary to them. It is not true."

"Is it not?" said Charles drily. "You will not find many men to be in agreement with you."

"Sire, I do not wish to convert other men to my views. Women are not necessary to *me,* and if my wife were still alive I should be bothered to death over it. But now that I find I *can* love people, I feel as if I were always walking on a knife-edge."

"And what of your friends you find after long travel? What kind of men are they?"

"Sire, I have had only two."

"Well, describe me them."

"One," said Mr. Carling, turning his eyes from the King to the fire, "was a man among men. He was most beautiful, and strong in his body as a young lion. He had endurance, wisdom, resource and courage. He had but two abstract ideas in his head."

"And what were they?"

"His own honour and the honour of his country."

"A very paragon. Had he no faults?"

"He was as proud as Lucifer, he was overbearing, harsh and cruel."

"I wager he never overbore you."

"He did, though. He overbore me continually."

"I should much like to meet him," said Charles, with a whimsical little smile, "but you speak as if he were dead."

"He is dead."

"Well, and what of the other friend? Is he living?"

"Yes."

"And is he like the other?"

"Sire, in many ways he is exactly the opposite. He cares neither for his own honour nor the honour of his country, and day by day and year by year he casts his talents upon a dunghill."

"Then how is it that he can be your friend?"

"Sire, my friend is always my friend, wherever I find him, and whatever he is, if it is to be. And that is why I say Oliver might have had my head off, for morals in the ordinary sense I have none. I was not shocked at my first friend's harshness and cruelty, I am not grieved by my second friend's crimes and

faults. Men are what they are. Some you like and some you don't. Some, one or two, you love."

"Will you, at some time, bring to me the living man?"

"Some time I will."

Charles was silent for some time, and once or twice he sighed. Then he said:

"Tell me, O most strange prophet, of my death."

"I will tell you of your life first. The Green Man showed me in the pool a vision. There was a man on a great throne wearing a crown."

"Myself, perhaps?" asked Charles, smiling.

"Sire, the crown on the head of the man was a triple crown."

"A triple crown!" muttered Charles, and his dark face changed extraordinarily. It grew a curious grey colour, for all the blood in his body had flown to his heart, and his skin was too dark to go pale in the usual way. His eyebrows drew together, his thick lips looked pinched and thin because he held them together with his teeth, and his dark eyes were wild.

"A triple crown," Mr. Carling went on placidly, watching the King's face. "A man in a crown stands beside the man on the throne, and he holds in his hand a piece of gold."

"Wounds of God!" said Charles, and the colour came back into his cheeks in a great burning blush.

"There is a third man, Sire, and he also is crowned. He kneels at the feet of the man who sits on the throne, and he stretches up one hand to take the piece of gold from the King who stands beside the throne.

"Well, describe me them."

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"There is a third man, Sire, and he also is crowned. He kneels at the feet of the man who sits on the throne, and he stretches up one hand to take the piece of gold from the King who stands beside the throne.

I saw, in the vision the Green Man showed me in the still pool, a great company of people standing by, but all their eyes were blindfolded."

"Ah," said Charles, but the noise he made was more like the snarling of an angry dog. "I know one man who is more likely to be altogether without eyes. There will be no need to blindfold him."

"Sire," said Mr. Carling, unmoved, "if you blind me you cannot stop that which will come from coming. Even in this dream of a life which is now, I am sorry that I see things and cannot prevent them happening. I have never been sorry before. I have never cared before. But I have not finished with the vision. The man in the triple crown is the Pope, the man who holds the piece of gold is the King of France, the man who kneels is——"

"Well," said the King, as he paused, "you dare not say it!"

"Sire," said Mr. Carling, rather sadly, "I see now that I am ashamed to say it. What you will do is to me already done. Yet when I saw these things in the pool that made all Kings and Princes small and colourless I never cared at all. There is a sadness in these dreams."

"There is a danger in these dreams, Prophet."

"But," Mr. Carling went on calmly, "that we may not start with misunderstanding each other, I will say that the third man is yourself, and that you are to take money from the French King on some secret understanding which has to do with Roman Catholicism among other things. And I think you have taken

money already, but of that I am not sure. Now, Sire, will you have me blinded? "

"I will consider the matter," said Charles, regaining his self-control. "But I believe in a thing I have never before been quite sure of. The Green Man is the devil, and you are his servant."

"Sire, I am your servant, and no other's. I am not a spy, I am not an agent, I am myself. But I am a man with peculiar powers—in this life. And so what will you do with me? "

"Why, I will run you through with my sword, and say afterwards that you set upon me to kill me."

"Sire, that will advantage no one. If you look at me, and think of nothing *but* me, you will see that I have no interest in telling any other of my visions. You have a sense beyond the ordinary five, or you could not have felt me in the inn."

The King looked at him in silence for a little while.

"I feel you speak the truth," he muttered, passing his hand across his forehead, "but it is a thing I cannot understand. And even for you there must be a price for which you would sell your knowledge."

"It's perfectly true that every man has his price for which he will sell his convictions, but it is not always gold. Sometimes it is the lives or well-being of others. But I've never yet discovered what my price is because I don't in the ordinary way care for anything very much. But as to selling this knowledge, what good would it do? Sire, what is a prophet? "

"A man who can foretell the future."

"He is rather a man to whom the future is the past.

And what is done cannot be undone. When Christ lamented over the fall of Jerusalem, the city, for Him, was already fallen. So what could He do, but weep? And what else can any prophet do? Men's ears are closed against any true prophet, for what man can alter what is predestined? God Himself cannot do it. And so, even in this dream of a life I am in now, I know that I cannot change you, or your reign, or prevent you from doing any of the things you have, to me, already done."

"You are a Calvinist, then," said Charles, wonderingly.

"No, Sire. If there is any such thing as hell, certainly some men are predestined to go there and can't get out of it wriggle they never so madly. But no one knows *who* they are, and I expect there are lots of Calvinists going, anyway. However, I don't think I believe in everlasting hell. It makes God less merciful than the very worst man."

"You are the most dangerous man in the three kingdoms," said Charles, moodily. "I would God I could have you to the Tower. But I cannot do it. I look at you, and like a silly credulous child I believe you mean me no harm. Then one day you will sell me to the Puritans and I shall lose my throne and my head."

"In the vision in the pool you sat on your throne to the end of your life. And you know now that I am a true prophet."

"I do not. I know you are a reader of men's inmost secret thoughts, and that my mind is no longer

my own property. As to your prophecies, no man can ever prove their truth until they come to pass."

Mr. Carling sighed rather hopelessly.

"Sire," he said gloomily, "if you will not take the verdict of your heart upon me, and persist in referring me to your brain, which, of course, tells you not to trust me, I pray you take your sword and pass it through me, and I will go back to my own place. There's no one else here I care two damns about. And if you'd rather not do it yourself, have Chesney in and let him stick me. He'd love to do it, I'm sure, and I won't raise a hand to stop him. I'm fed up. It's no earthly use me staying here if you won't trust me."

"I will not have you killed," said Charles, looking at his remarkable subject with a smile. "But I will keep you under my own eye. I will not leave you here in your magic hut in the glade to hatch plots against me. Now tell me more things."

"Then you do trust me?"

"I do, but I am all amazed. Thirty-eight years have I lived, and hundreds upon hundreds of men have I met, but never one like you. Never one."

"You wouldn't be likely to, for I am a man born out of his due time. I wish that I had really belonged to this age."

"But you say that there is no man in this age you care for save only me and your second friend."

"Sire, you and my second friend would have been quite enough for me. One to serve and the other to love."

"It is not the part of an honest servant to know

what his master is going to do long before he does it," observed Charles. "I have no great hopes of you as a servant. I am sure that I shall only have to tell you to do a certain thing for you to make up your mind that that thing is not to be done. Prophets have always been the bane of kings."

"Herod!" murmured Mr. Carling dreamily, "Sire, will you be Herod and have my life danced away by a girl? That would be a most pitiable end to my dream."

"I am, perhaps, not quite as bad as Herod, and you are not, perhaps, so holy as St. John the Baptist. So there may be a different issue. But I fear that I have saddled me with another Clarendon."

"Sire, place and power are no more to me than thistledown."

"I was not thinking of Clarendon's place and power, but of his interminable lectures."

"Your Majesty, how can you think that I should ever presume to lecture you?"

"I can think, without at all straining my imagination, that you would presume to do anything that came into your head."

"Well, Sire, the truth is that I would rather spend my time reciting the *Iliad* to a blank wall. I am not given to lecturing. I have met all kinds of men in all parts of the world, and I came to the conclusion long since that you can't alter anyone in any way."

"Ah, you have travelled then?"

"I have been in Italy, France, Prussia, the Low Countries—oh, nearly all over Europe."

"Apart from your gifts," said Charles, glancing up at the shield over the mantelpiece, "you are not an ordinary innkeeper. Those are your arms?"

"Yes, Sire. And the cup you thought I had stolen out of a church was given to one of my ancestors by Henry VIII."

"Then why did you not say so?"

"Well, *he* stole it out of a church. I can't see myself that it's anything to be proud of. We're receivers of stolen goods, anyhow. Henry hadn't any right to give away chalices."

"In the name of God!" cried Charles, much astonished. "Are you of all religions? You say you are Church of England man, you believe in predestination like a Calvinist, and now you talk like a Catholic. What good Protestant would ever boggle at receiving a stolen chalice?"

"Sire, I am a Protestant, but my mother was a Howard, and, of course, a Catholic. But in those days the children could be brought up some one way and some another, and my father was a stout Church of England man. Neither was my mother, though a Howard, at all a bigot, and she knew pretty well I should change later on. But she died, and so I didn't. Still, I can't help having a feeling against using a chalice for ordinary things, though I don't now in the least believe in trans-substantiation. And, of course, I think Henry VIII was a thief. Oh, Lord," Mr. Carling added, suddenly realizing that he had left one life for another, "now I have mixed it."

The King did not understand this slang, but he

was very much interested in the rest of the prophet's story.

"I knew you were a man of gentle blood," he said.

"But I don't *believe* in it," Mr. Carling said, persistently, "I don't believe it does anyone any good at all. Sire, what real use is it to you that you are a Stuart?"

"It is this much use, Prophet, that I am the King, which I should not be were I not a Stuart."

"But what good is it to anyone to be a King?"

"None, with the country swarming with pestilent rascals of principles like yours. In other days it was different. I should have had them all to the stocks and gallows, and you only would I have saved alive. Now tell me more things shown you by your master, he whom you call the Green Man. For myself, I think his livery was more likely red and black."

"Sire, I saw a very fair woman come over the sea," said Mr. Carling, having searched his memory for a cheerful prophecy. "The King of France will send her."

"What for?" asked the King, in his pleasant sarcastic way.

"I suppose," said Mr. Carling, delicately, "that he thought you might like her. She was, in the vision, very small and pretty, like a child."

"What is her name?"

"The people in the visions had no names."

"And what will she do?"

"Oh, she'll just be there, and in the end she will do

your Majesty a greater service than ever she did the King of France."

"What is that?"

"She will remind the Duke of York that you wish to die in the Catholic faith."

"Prophet," said Charles, with a slight start, "I trust you, but are you sure that no one can hear from this room into another?"

"Sire, I am sure, and besides I've been whispering all the time. If there's anyone up the chimney he will be well roasted."

He cast another couple of logs on as he spoke and blew at them with a great pair of bellows. The flames roared, and showers of sparks flew up the wide chimney.

"Why could not James remember that without being told?" the King asked, rather as if he were speaking to himself.

"His own position will be very insecure, at least he will think it is. Because, of course, before that there will have been the Exclusion Bill."

"Prophet, do you know that the Duke of York is a Catholic now?"

"Of course I do," said Mr. Carling, who for some reason thought that Charles's brother had always been an open Catholic.

"You are the only Protestant in England who knows it. I have not long known it myself."

"Oh," said Mr. Carling, rather taken aback.

"And they will try to exclude him from the throne?"

"Yes, Sire."

"It is likely enough," muttered Charles. "That prophecy hath a good honest sound about it. But tell me more of this death. I have always feared I might die in my sins ringed round by heretic divines."

Mr. Carling's knowledge of history was chiefly derived from tales told him by his mother when he was quite a small boy, and the death of Charles II, naturally interesting to a Catholic, had been one of the favourites.

"Sire, I saw the fair woman weep beside your bed, but when the Queen came of course she had to go away. So she could do nothing for you. But presently, when you had been for some hours tormented by the chirurgeons——"

"Prophet," Charles interrupted, with a slight smile, "I will not have this interesting and curious story spoilt by your mania you have against chirurgeons."

"No, Sire. Well, the fair woman sent word to one of her countrymen, and he, when he had talked with her, went to the Duke of York, who all uncaring for the soul of his brother, was intent only upon himself."

"Ah," said Charles, nodding his head like a man who hears only what he expects.

"And in the vision the Duke of York came to the room, and he turned out all the heretic divines so that they should not hear nor see, and he had a priest up by the private staircase. And so in the vision in the pool I saw your Majesty confessed and shriven and happy, and it was all through the fair woman sent by

the King of France, for very likely the Duke of York never thought of it at all."

"And when is this?"

"Sire, there were no dates in the pool, but you were, in that vision, a man much older than you are now. Perhaps nearly a score of years."

"And did my people weep for me in the vision?" enquired Charles, with his attractive and charming, but cynical smile.

"Sire, they wept by the bucket, but up to now I have always thought it was because they were so much afraid of the Duke of York."

"And what do you think now, O discourteous and ungallant Prophet?"

"Why, I think that they wept, not so much because the Duke of York was alive, as because you were dead."

"Yet how can people weep for a King who was neither lovely nor pleasant in his life, and in his death was divided from them—if the vision be true."

"Sire, it is one of the mysteries of character; Queen Mary of the Scots was the same. Some of the Stuarts have the same power as Johnnie Faa, to 'cast the glamourie.' It never dies, it never fades. Mary had it, you have it, Monmouth had it, Charles Edward had it. With the curse, goes, sometimes, a kind of magic power."

"Who is Charles Edward?" asked the King, but absently as though he were thinking of something else.

"Sire, my visions of the Stuarts ended with your death," said Mr. Carling readily.

"Prophet, you lie," said the King, glancing at him. "You shall finish me this curse that lies on the Stuarts, for that you know it I am well aware. Tell me of this Charles Edward, and of James, Duke of Monmouth."

"Sire, I saw your brother crowned," began Mr. Carling, cursing his unwary tongue for mentioning the King's ill-fated son, "and the next vision was of a foreign King who drove him out by force of arms."

"God in Heaven!" cried the King. "A foreign King? Can Louis live so long?"

"Sire, he is a Protestant by the device on his banner, and his soldiers are dressed in the Dutch fashion I have so often seen."

"The Stadtholder's son! Oddsfish! It is the young Prince William!"

"It may be. I saw him and his queen sit together to rule over England, and their thrones were equal, and their crowns also."

"*That* is not possible. A man and his wife cannot have equal titles to any throne. Prophet, you have overstepped your vision. And who is this wife he hath?"

"Sire, how do I know? She may be a Stuart, she may be a Dutch fish-wife. Yet is she Queen of England, and has equal rights with the King who sits beside her."

"Well," said Charles, after a pause, "I see now something that might happen if James—well, what comes next?"

"A Queen who reigns in her own right."

"Their child?"

"It might be, or it might not," said Mr. Carling, cautiously.

"And after her?"

"Foreigners who take a hundred years and more to become English."

"And the Stuarts? Are there any left?"

"Sire, they are in exile for good and all until they are all dead, and the curse is ended."

"I am to do well, for a Stuart," said Charles, with a bitter little smile. "I am not to be murdered, I am not to be executed, I am not to be destroyed accidentally, I have only spent a few years in exile. Prophet, why am I thus favoured?"

"Sire, I have forgotten most of the history of the Scottish Kings, but of late years it seems to me that the curse falls the most heavily in every other reign. Yet there it is, all the time, waiting. They said the Angevin Kings had to their father a devil, I think that the Stuarts are descended from the Black Grief, Hela. I see the sorrow of the Stuarts even in your eyes."

"Other men might give you another explanation," said Charles, looking round at him with a half-smile.

"Sire, it is not that," said Mr. Carling, shaking his head. "I know men very well."

"I think you do. And now, tell me of my son."

"I know nothing of him, save what I have heard."

"But you do. You have seen a vision concerning James, Duke of Monmouth, and you will tell it to me."

"I saw him rise to great power and an honourable place."

"So. Now tell me the true vision. Prophet, do

you think that I do not know him? There is one man in the world James cannot deceive, and I am he."

"Well, he will be very greatly loved," said Mr. Carling. He found Charles, in his gentle moods, almost impossible to resist, but he was determined not to relate the whole history of Monmouth. Nothing the King could forecast from his knowledge of the boy's character could ever be as bad as the actual facts.

"Yes," said Charles, smiling, "the Stuarts are easier to love than to honour. Robert Carling, I pray you to tell me more of the vision you have seen."

"Sire, I will not, and I ask you to pardon me."

"You are a very contumacious prophet," said Charles, gently, "and still I pray you to tell me."

Mr. Carling was silent, but he looked so imploringly at the King that Charles laughed.

"What? Have I 'cast the glamourie' already? Robert, be not so stubborn and wilful with me. I know very well that neither anger, nor threats, nor bribes will open thy mouth. But thou wilt tell the vision to me, because I am myself, and for some reason —well, tell it me. Tell me of my son."

Mr. Carling yielded, angry with Charles for making an unfair use of his power, and furious with Monmouth for having such a damnable future.

"Well, Sire," he said shortly, "Monmouth will begin by trying to make you recognize him as the rightful heir, he will be in banishment when you die, he will raise a Protestant rebellion against your

brother, and King James will have him executed. He is weak, wavering, treacherous, and two parts of a coward. King Monmouth!"

Mr. Carling, had he been of a different class, would have spat into the fire in his passion of rage, which was, however, mostly on the King's account. He could not bear to think of all the sorrow that was to come to Charles through his worthless idolized son.

"I—I thank you," said Charles, with a small gasp. "It is worse than I had—had thought."

"Well, I knew that," said Mr. Carling, sullenly. "I didn't want to tell you. Sire," he went on, with a complete change of manner, "I am more sorry than I can say. I will never give in to you in any matter again."

"Be not too sure of that," said Charles, recovering himself. "It may be that you are too proud and independent to obey any *commands,* even mine, but I think that you will always do what I ask you, unless it were against your conscience."

"I have none, Sire."

"But you have. Every man has a conscience. Even I have. It bids me keep my word to you to say nothing about your prophecies, and the more so that they are so exceedingly lamentable that if they were published abroad my enemies would outrage me with public rejoicings and roasting of oxen whole. So I will keep my word, and brood over them in secret."

"Sire, why do you believe in *them?* I could have made them up, imagined them."

"You could not have imagined the plans I have in

my mind. And more than that, your prophecies concerning the Stuarts are so probable that I find no difficulty in believing them. I have not entirely forgotten the history of my ancestors. The first James Stuart was murdered, the second was destroyed by the bursting of one of his guns, the third was betrayed by his own son and killed, the fourth died on a stricken field in the knowledge of defeat, and the fifth by the breaking of his heart. Never has such a monotonously miserable royal family existed since the days of the Merovingian Kings. I think that I am the most cheerful, and according to you the most fortunate, of all of them. But now to another matter. It is my will that you should ride with me to London, and I pray you to forego your republican principles and your intolerance of monarchs for this once and do my will like any other."

Mr. Carling rose from his chair and knelt down on one knee.

"Sire," he said, "your wishes are commands, and it is my greatest pleasure to obey them. I thank you from my heart. But what will your Court make of me?"

"Why," said Charles, with a smile, "it is going to be *my* greatest pleasure to discover that. I cannot guess."

"I am not of noble blood, and though I am not an innkeeper born, yet I have kept an inn."

"Well, I cannot present you as the King's Prophet-in-Chief, because I do not desire you to use your gifts for anyone but myself."

"I am, besides being a prophet, an artist, and I can, if it be your pleasure, do pen or charcoal drawings of your courtiers."

"Do me a drawing of my face," said the King cautiously. "Then we will see."

Mr. Carling rose and asked leave to fetch materials. He presently returned with one of his account books and a pen and ink, and with his usual wonderful speed and decision he drew a rough but powerful likeness of the King.

"Sire," he said, presenting it on his knee, "that is just to show that I can draw. With better materials and more time and light I can do better."

"Oddsfish!" said the King, astonished. "It is very boldly and skilfully drawn. Neither are you by any means a flatterer. How will the ladies like it if you delineate them with such ungallant honesty?"

"I'd better only draw the beautiful ones, I think, because I never can do anything except exactly as I see it."

"You have an excellent bold pure line," said Charles, still gazing at his portrait. "It is masterly. Can you work in colour?"

"No, Sire. My eye is only for line. But I can do statues and busts in stone or marble, though I would rather start with just drawings, till I see what tools I can get."

"You shall do me my head in marble," said the King, as he shut up the account book.

"Sire, I will do as you bid me," said Mr. Carling meekly, but his artistic conscience, active in his dreams,

compelled him to add, "but it will not be a success. I would always rather draw your face. A statue is blind. The eyes, and the expression of the eyes, are not there."

"You mean," said Charles, not apparently offended by this frankness, "that my face without my eyes is intolerable."

"Sire, I mean that your eyes, to an artist anyhow, are so remarkable, so expressive, and so beautiful in setting and form that your face without them is not *you*."

"I think you will do very well at the Court," said the King, laughing. "To express a depreciation in the form of a compliment is the height of Court manners. Well, you shall go to Whitehall with me, and you shall do drawings of me and the others—but what of your daughter? Can you safely leave so young and pretty a maid?"

"Sire, I must often be away at the horse fairs, and I will make the same arrangements."

"I shall present you as Robert Carling, the artist, though I cannot prevent Chesney from putting it about that you are Richard Field, an innkeeper. But in all those things you must make your own way, with help of your master, the Green Man. I doubt not he will show you how to terrify my whole Court into submission."

"Sire, I do not wish to terrify anyone, but I would like, under your favour, to come as myself, and neither alter the fashion of my dress nor wear a wig."

"They will call you Roundhead and Puritan."

"They will call me Puritan in any case. I cannot drink wine, I don't care for women, and I don't gamble. And I'm so peculiar anyhow that just dressing like a Cavalier isn't going to make much difference."

"That is so. Well, you shall alter nothing. But I have a fear," said the King, glancing round with a whimsical smile, "that by the morning you will have vanished away entirely, or be nothing but an ordinary innkeeper."

"Sire, I shall never vanish unless I am killed or fall into your displeasure. Those two things only can end my dream."

"Ah, you saw then in the pool this my coming so strangely to your inn."

"No, Sire. In the pool you were as small and colourless as all other kings. Yet your favour is a dream to me, and if it is withdrawn I shall wake up sorrowful, and never again be able to get back into my dream."

"I think you are more likely to be killed than lose my favour," said Charles gravely. "What King ever had such a favourite, since Arthur's days? I would give many polished, graceful, seemingly respectful courtiers for you."

CHAPTER VII

ALICE received the news of her father's summons to the Court with tears of pure affection which soon gave way to an immense pride and delight. Mr. Carling discovered, without asking any direct questions, that he had a brother-in-law living on a farm near by who was accustomed to take charge of the inn on the occasions of its master's absence at the horse fairs, and the arrangements for his incoming could be made immediately. He discovered also that he had, in a box under his bed, nearly a hundred pounds saved either by roguery or honest horse dealing and making, so he took with him seventy-five pounds, the clothes Alice packed for him in a saddle-bag, and the silver chalice. He also girded on his sword, but after an examination of his two pistols he left them behind. He did not want to be blown up by heavy artillery like Charles's ancestor, and he was quite sure that even if he could succeed in letting one off safely he could never hit anything at which he aimed. He rode on his dapple grey, and though the King, who desired to travel quickly, changed horses at the large inn where the rest of his train was awaiting him, the grey strode across London Bridge in the dusk of the evening as fresh and steady as if he had only gone five miles.

"Sir," said the old nobleman, who either by the King's orders or under his own inclination had been very kind and courteous to Mr. Carling all the journey, "that is a horse worth very much money."

"Yes, my lord," said Mr. Carling, gazing at the Bridge with round and astonished eyes. "He is a horse in a thousand. I only wish that I could, without offence, offer him to you as a small mark of my appreciation of your kindness."

"Sir, that would be a very handsome return for a very little service."

Mr. Carling with difficulty removed his eyes from the Bridge and fixed them gratefully on his benefactor.

"My lord, it is not at all a little service, and I am very sensible of the honour you have done me. You have ridden with me nearly all day, and you have taught me so many things about Court etiquette that it is impossible I should now make any serious error. Good as this horse is, he would be really no repayment at all. I shall be always in your debt."

"It has been my pleasure to instruct so courteous and gallant a man," said the nobleman, who had been well-disposed towards Mr. Carling ever since he had, to his own severe detriment, drunk the health of the King. "And so I do not need any return. But if you ever think of selling the horse you shall let me know."

"My lord, I am deeply honoured by your graciousness," murmured Mr. Carling. "But oh! holy cats! How London did smell in the seventeenth century!"

"What did you say?" asked the nobleman, observing his expression of astonishment with a certain pride. "You have never been to London before, I believe?"

"No, my lord. And astounding as was the country we passed through, and the roads, this is much more amazing. I am all taken aback."

"It is a fine bridge," said the nobleman, complacently.

Mr. Carling had wondered why the bridge and all the houses thereon did not collapse into a grimy ruin under the weight of the calvacade, and his senses had been deeply offended by various things he saw and smelt, among them some decaying heads of traitors.

"It's a marvellous bridge," he agreed, with a slight start. "I—I think London, the streets, the houses, the—well, I have never imagined anything like it. What a good—I mean what a tragedy that so much of it was burnt. I shall spend a lot of time exploring if I can ever stand the—I mean can find my way."

Fortunately, perhaps, most of these remarks were lost in the noise made by an enthusiastic and frenziedly loyal crowd who jostled and yelled on all sides, filling every cranny and corner of the narrow darkening streets, and hanging bellowing out of every window.

"This world," mused Mr. Carling, trying to breathe as little as he might, "is most horribly unfair—Charles is a rake of a man and a most indifferent king, and they're all mad about him. William is a better man and will be a far better King, and they'll all hate him. But, however well I get on at Whitehall, I shall

not stay to see William in, or James either. But I will stay, if I can, till the morning Charles is taken ill when he's dressing."

So Mr. Carling began his life at the Restoration Court. He was lodged by the King's orders at Whitehall, and in forty-eight hours everybody knew him by sight. His Puritan dress and his wigless curly round head would have made him conspicuous even without his abrupt and marvellous leap into the highest favour of the King. Everyone heard the tale of the King's sudden illness and enforced stay at the tiny country inn of the White Bull, and everyone was dying with curiosity to know more of the extraordinary innkeeper who had, in the space of a few hours, made such an impression on Charles that he had admitted this low-born plebeian immediately to his closest friendship. And as no one could talk to Mr. Carling for five minutes without wishing to go on talking to him for an hour, he soon found himself so continually and eagerly sought after that he did not know how to get five minutes to himself. When he came to think of it, this interest was not surprising. He was without any doubt the most remarkable man in the world, and though he kept faithfully to his determination to indulge in no prophecy which could be recognized as such, except when he was alone with the King, he knew that all the courtiers must catch some strange emanations from the thoughts of a man who was two hundred and fifty years before his time. What surprised him much more than their interest was their ready cordiality. He had always been able to get on

well with men, and he found the men of the seventeenth century very much like any others, but he had feared they would cold-shoulder him without trial, simply because he was the King's favourite and not up to the Court standard of birth and breeding. But they did not. His manners, though a little eccentric at times, were courteous, unassuming and graceful, he had a ready and charming smile, he was entirely unaffected, and he never presumed. Even his hurried manner of speech was not held against him as plebeian, and the strange oaths he used in moments of excitement became rather fashionable. The political men, who feared that his amazing influence over Charles might upset all their choicest schemes, quickly discovered that his blank ignorance of public affairs was only equalled by his utter lack of interest in them. Not even the most suspicious of the King's advisers, the brilliant, sharp-witted Buckingham, who thought at first that Charles' favourite was a most unusually cunning rogue, could long entertain the idea that this indifference was assumed as a mask. After two interviews, during which he carefully sounded the artist-innkeeper to discover, if possible, whether he was pro-French and friendly to the Catholics, or pro-Dutch and eager to shake a cudgel at the mighty Louis XIV, he decided that this Puritanical King's-friend had no convictions of any sort whatever. In religious matters he was tolerant to a degree that was then almost unknown, though he would go so far as to say that he thought the Church of England, taken as a whole, was the best Church for English people. But he regarded

Roman Catholics and Nonconformists without any prejudice at all and said they were good Christian men. Buckingham's cautious pumping on the question of foreign policy produced nothing but grins, non-committal answers and an exposure of wonderful ignorance. Mr. Carling knew a few things that were going to happen which would have interested the Duke intensely, but there were great yawning gaps in his knowledge of the past. Buckingham, towards the end of his second talk with the King's favourite, began to wonder whether he was a natural, being now convinced he was honest. He was speedily undeceived, for Mr. Carling, who was bored with trying to talk with reasonable ease on the questions of the day, suddenly asked the Duke whether he had ever heard of a mechanical invention for the recording of bets on horse races. The Duke had not, so Mr. Carling explained to him the principle of a wonderful machine he had heard of as used by the French, which he called a totalisator.

"Only," said Mr. Carling, when he had finished his lecture, which left the Duke rather puzzled but quite sure that his companion had the full use of his brain, "the odds are never so good, particularly on favourites."

"Are you interested in horse-racing, sir?" asked the Duke.

"My lord Duke, I am more interested in horse-racing than politics. But I am not really interested in either. I beg you to believe me."

"Why, sir, I do," said Buckingham, with a laugh.

"And you say the French use this remarkable invention you call a—what was it?"

"Totalisator. But I do not think that as yet it is in general use anywhere. Neither do I know who can claim the credit for having invented it. But the French are a wonderful nation—without prejudice," he added hastily, with a twinkling glance at the Duke.

"Sir, all that you say shall be taken by me without prejudice," the Duke assured him.

"I thank your Grace for his kindness," murmured Mr. Carling, and bowed.

After that no one bothered him any more to find out which side he was on, for the Duke let it be known among his intimates that the Puritan was an honest thorough-going neutral who was on no side and entirely uninterested in either. He would talk about books, art, music, military tactics, the drama, agriculture or science, but directly the conversation turned upon foreign policy or the vexed question of religion, he either went away or sat silent and inattentive, rubbing his cropped head sometimes with a large powerful hand. His favourite subject of conversation with men of a serious turn of mind was soldiering. He evidently knew a good deal about it, but some of his ideas were eccentric. He rather despised cavalry, and his notion of warfare was to sit in a deep trench until you were ready to come out, and, guarded by a method of artillery fire which he called a creeping barrage, rush into the enemy's trenches, kill them, and turn the trench back to front. He maintained that a knife

fixed to the muzzle of a gun was a better weapon than a pike, and he pinned great faith to incessant gunpowder plot acts carried on under the enemy lines. His queer notions amused some and made others look thoughtful.

"Sir," said one old Cavalier, when he was holding forth to a small circle in a corner of one of the galleries, "how under these conditions, if the enemies were evenly matched, could you come by a decisive battle?"

"Well, it's very difficult," Mr. Carling admitted. "It might take years of absolutely continuous warfare."

"It could not be done at all unless some marvellous new cannon is made," pursued the Cavalier.

"That is true, sir, but I still think something might have been done at the siege of Gloucester with mining under the walls of the town."

Here, John Chesney, who had been listening with a sneering smile, put in a word.

"Sir, where did you gain your large military experience?" he asked.

"In the war, sir," said Mr. Carling, mildly.

"And on which side were you fighting?"

"For the King."

"And what engagements did you take part in?"

"Sir," said Mr. Carling placidly, "that has entirely slipped my memory. If it comes into my mind later on I will let you know by special messenger."

Chesney was silenced. He hated the King's favourite most bitterly, but he did not dare to force a

quarrel upon him. He had meant only to discompose him before the Cavaliers, but the upstart had refused to be discomposed, and had met his very offensive tone and manner with a polite and rather amusing impertinence which made the other men laugh. Chesney flung off with a mutter of rage, and Mr. Carling resumed his war-like conversation.

But he did not spend a great deal of his time with the old and sober cavaliers. He liked the wild and riotous young men much better, and they received him with open arms after their first natural suspicion of his supposed Puritanism had died away. He was a man such as they had never either seen or imagined. He would neither drink, make love, nor gamble except for ridiculously small sums, but it was soon evident that the purity of his life came from no moral conviction, but from sheer distaste for the ordinary pleasures of the Restoration Court. Though he would drink only water he was not in the least shocked by the sight of a gentleman far advanced in the worship of Bacchus, though he would not gamble himself, he taught them new and fascinating games, and though his lack of interest in women was complete he had no desire at all to lay down rules of conduct for other men. Many of them tried with all their arts to lure him into practices more consistent with his theories, but all failed. The most persistent of these lurers was the wild poet, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, and with him Mr. Carling soon made firm friends. He read his satires with pithy comments, gave him one or two ideas for new ones, drew his portrait with exquisite care and told

him long and fascinating stories about parts of the world Rochester knew only by name. In return Rochester took him to cock-fights and the play; and introduced him to an endless succession of charming ladies in hopes that something might come of it. With the women Mr. Carling was not nearly so popular. He was absolutely courteous, but their feminine airs and graces ran to deplorable waste, and their lively glances were shattered on an armour of indifference which was as hard and cold as black ice. He was perfectly willing to talk to them, but he would not be gallant and he would not make love. Even so, none of them acutely disliked him, except the violent and passionate Lady Castlemaine. Charles' friendship had not made any essential difference to his way of life, but he did sometimes forego half-an-hour of absolutely idle dalliance in her apartments in order to spend it with his Puritan favourite, and she was jealous and furious. Not so Nell Gwynn. She liked Mr. Carling both for himself and because Lady Castlemaine hated him, and she treated him simply as a good comrade, wasting none of her fascination on him, but giving generously from her affectionate good heart.

Charles' own legal family received him in manners diametrically opposed. The Queen was kindly, gracious and condescending; the Duke of York was cold, suspicious and contemptuous. Mr. Carling cared for neither of them, and his intercourse with them was practically confined to bowing, kneeling, and kissing their hands. He sympathized so absolutely with James in his suspicious contempt that he accorded him

a beaming smile, which surprised the Duke and, as he regarded it as an impertinence that his brother's plebeian favourite should smile at him in a friendly way, made him very angry.

Mr. Carling spent his mornings drawing, unless he was commanded by the King to attend him on his walks in St. James' Park, his afternoons in more drawing and fencing lessons, and his evenings in pleasures which varied from sitting alone with the King in his sitting-room to teaching Rochester and others how to play poker. Sunday morning he went to church, though he found the sermons appallingly long and incomprehensible, and Sunday afternoon, unless otherwise commanded by Charles, he spent in wandering by himself in the Chelsea fields or exploring the uninhabited country on the north side of Oxford Street. He took one walk through the burnt city to the Plague Field, and afterwards examined the ruins of St. Paul's, but after that he never went again into the streets unless he had to go to his tailor's. He could not endure the dirt and the evil odours which assailed his nostrils on every side, and the condition of the common people seemed to him so appalling that as he could neither end it nor amend it, he thought he would rather not look at it.

He was perfectly happy. He had the deep affection of the King, the friendship and backing of Rochester, and the good-will of nearly all the other men. He knew the enmity of Lady Castlemaine was dangerous, and he regretted it, but he never allowed it to worry him. His own time faded away from him to a large

extent, and he wanted nothing better than to live at the Restoration Court until Charles died in seventeen more years. He could not see why a dream should not go on just as well for seventeen years as twelve days, and though he knew the ring would, by some subtle means, make him seventeen years older in fact, if not in appearance, immediately he woke up, he felt he did not care. As the days went on he began to treat Charles more as a reigning sovereign and less as a well-known and frequently criticized historical character, but his better manners did not make him any the less affectionate, or any the less a real friend. When the King came to his rooms he served him kneeling with wine out of the silver cup, and never, in absence of mind, sat down unless Charles told him to, but his smile was frequent, and if the conversation was very interesting he always fell back into the speech of "a man in a great hurry" which Charles had begun to love.

Very early in his Court life he was confronted with the problem which is always before the favoured friend of a man who has great power. It was obvious from the first that he was not going to use his undoubted influence with Charles for any political purpose whatsoever, but Charles was more than his own foreign minister and official head of the Church. He was the King, his word was law in Whitehall, he could give places, titles, money and land. He could banish, he could receive back into favour. In all these matters, the crop-haired artist might be of immense assistance. He had the ear of the King, he saw him alone for a

few minutes nearly every day, and often for far longer, and probably no person, certainly no man save Monmouth stood higher in his affections.

In the first week Mr. Carling received overtures from men who wanted to get something from the King. He returned noncommittal but courteous replies. In the second week he was cajoled more openly, and in the third he was delicately offered a large bribe by the noble friend of a gentleman who was languishing on his estate in the bitter knowledge of the King's displeasure. Mr. Carling was a little annoyed at being offered a bribe. He had steadily refused to accept large presents from the King, and had only taken a small fixed salary to enable him to live and be well dressed in his own quiet Puritan fashion. Twenty favourites of like habits, tastes and character would not have cost the King as much as one of his more expensive women, and Mr. Carling was irritated that anyone should think he had come to Court to collect money.

"My lord," he said to the delicate briber, "there is some mistake, if you will pardon me."

The nobleman looked at him, and bowed.

"Sir," he said courteously, "I see there is. I regret it deeply, and I beg you to forgive me."

"It's of no consequence at all, my lord," said Mr. Carling, smiling. "It's very natural. But I wish that you would do something for me."

"What can I do, sir?"

"I wish you would use your influence to make people understand that—well, that I can do nothing

for them. I am not one of you, I can judge no case on its own merits because I have no knowledge, and I cannot ask the King for things when I don't know what I'm asking for. I think it sounds rather discourteous and priggish, but I really can't help it. You must put it down to my Puritan conscience."

"Sir, I will put it down to your unfailing honesty," said the noble friend of the languishing gentleman. He felt he had committed a social error in trying to bribe a man who considered bribes an insult, and he was willing to make any reparation he could.

"I thank you, my lord. And will you speak a word or two in season?"

"It shall be my pleasure."

"I shall be always in your debt," said Mr. Carling, with the courtly graceful bow which now came quite naturally.

The King, always pressed for money, was glad enough that his favourite refused to make himself into a champion of needy courtiers, but he was not pleased that Mr. Carling, by reason of his simple tastes and sturdy independent temper, should ask nothing for himself. Charles would have been delighted to divert some of his French gold from the hands of men and women whom at heart he despised to the pockets of his eccentric but honourable prophet friend.

"Every day," he said once, rather sadly, "I give things to men who are nothing to me, and who deserve nothing from me. I would give you a title, I would give you land, I would give you money, I would give you in marriage any woman you had a desire to, and

you will accept nothing at all. You are as proud as Lucifer, as I told you when we first met."

"Sire, it is not pride, except perhaps in the matter of the title. I am not born to one, and I have done nothing to deserve one. But the other things I just shouldn't know what to do with. I've no use for money at all, except to live comfortably, and I don't want to go and live on an estate. As for marriage—you know that I thank God daily that my wife is dead. But if I had not been a fairy man," he went on, looking at Charles rather sorrowfully, "I should have been very different perhaps. I should have been born a Cavalier; I should, perhaps, have known you when you were a boy, and though I should never have been violently interested in public affairs, I should not have been quite so indifferent."

"You might have been a great hindrance to me," said Charles, candidly. "If you had not had your gifts, which come certainly either from the devil or from God, would you have been yourself?"

"Yes, Sire. In all time there is me, in all time there is you. But I think that only once are we on earth. 'The times are out of joint.' And so it is only in a dream that I can find my——"

"Friend," the King finished for him.

"Sire, I would not presume."

"Robert, you are acquiring a court veneer. However, I can still generally guess at your meaning. But it seems not possible to me that had you been nobly born and by my side all your life, that you could be any dearer to me than you are now. I have spent all

my life without a man, not of my kindred, whom I could really love."

"Sire, you did so spend all your life. Because I was not there. Every man has a friend; but sometimes it is not possible that they should ever meet on earth. But, had I been on earth with you we should have drawn together as surely as derelict boats drifting in a fog."

"Robert, I understand you so little that I think you mean me not to understand. So I will not question you. But now tell me. Hath any other King that you have seen either in the past or in the visions in the pool even had a friend who was neither a worthless minion nor a man set on making his own way?"

"Why, yes, Sire. The Prince William of Orange has such a friend, and his name is Bentinck. But had Bentinck not been there at the right time perhaps the Prince would never have had a real friend. They are rare."

"Aye, they are," said Charles. "And it is more rare for a King to have a real friend than any other man. Robert, do you offer me no wine this morning?"

"Sire, I ask your pardon."

He poured the King out some wine into the chalice, and while he was doing this Charles left his chair and began to turn over some sketches which were lying on the table. He suddenly pounced on one with a cry of surprise and delight.

"*Now* I have caught thee!" he cried, holding it up

to see it better. "Here is a most dainty and licentious picture to show any who may still call thee Puritan. Robert, thou art a hypocrite."

"What!" said Mr. Carling, so astonished that he nearly dropped the chalice. "Sire, I have never drawn a licentious picture in my life. I don't know how you begin."

He served the King kneeling with the wine, then quickly jumped up to see what he was looking at.

"It is very quaint and pleasant," said the King, sipping the wine and regarding the picture with great interest. "Have you shown it to Rochester?"

"Sire, that is not at all licentious. It's a girl in an evening dress."

The King hastily put down the chalice and fell into a fit of laughter.

"Now, that is the first time I have ever heard that a shift and a pair of stockings and shoes is an evening dress, or indeed any dress. Besides, she hath cut off her hair for very shame."

It was a little fancy sketch of a woman Mr. Carling had seen about the Court who had a very modern, rather masculine type of face. He had drawn her with bobbed hair and in twentieth century dress, standing against a Japanese screen, holding a feather fan. It was a neat and dainty little piece of work, but in Mr. Carling's opinion not such as to raise a blush in the cheek of the most modest.

"Sire, it is an evening dress of the future," he explained.

"How can it be a dress when it does not come two inches below her knees?" protested the King. "Now you will tell me you saw a vision in the pool with the women dressed like this."

"Well, I did."

"And with their hair all cut off?"

"Very many of them had it short."

"I find it hard to believe you," said the King, shaking his head. "When will women ever cut off their hair? And when would any woman, even a whore, show her legs up to the knee? In the vision what sort of women were they?"

"Very respectable women, Sire."

"Oddsfish! What wicked times are those!"

"Sire, they will very likely look back and say what wicked times are these."

"Then they will be all out, for I never saw anything so immodest as this picture. Yet she hath very pleasing and shapely legs though a little thin perhaps. And now I come to look at her face I see that it is meant for Mistress Hobart. So are all your evasions in vain, and you have had her in here dressed in nothing but her shift and stockings."

"Sire, I have never had any woman in here dressed in a shirt," said the innocent artist. "And though the face is meant to be rather like Mistress Hobart's, all the rest is imaginary. I did it just to amuse myself."

"That is just what I said," remarked Charles, glancing round at Mr. Carling with merry twinkles in his eyes, "you have an imagination beside which

Rochester's is like a pure lily, and you sit in here with the door locked, making subtle and immoral sketches which are all the worse because they are so daintily and finely drawn."

"Sire," said Mr. Carling, now beginning to laugh, "if you really think that is immoral I must try to do one like Kirschner's. But anyway," he added, feeling driven to defend his own times under this fierce assault, "I cannot see that there is anything more immodest in that dress than some of the dresses I see every day now. Some of the ladies wear their clothes so low in front that I don't know which way to look. These girls," he went on, tapping the picture, "only have them cut low at the back."

"What object can there be in having them cut low at the back?" asked the King.

"I don't know. But they are more decent. Now the ladies of your Court——"

"Well," said Charles, taking up the modern picture, "they are very beautiful, and all women have them except this woman you have here."

"Sire, all women have legs, at least I never met one without any. And you say you like that girl's legs in the sketch."

"I may like it myself, but I would not for my life show this picture of yours to a divine. And I am going to take it away with me lest you leave it lying about."

"Sire," said Mr. Carling, who was rapidly getting into a hysterical state of suppressed laughter, "in the vision I saw in the pool I saw a man dancing with his

arm round a girl's waist who was dressed just like that, and a divine looking on without a blush."

"Oddsfish!" said Charles, admiringly. "Robert, you have a profligate imagination. If it grows more feverish still it will burn down Whitehall."

"Sire, you do me much injury," said Mr. Carling, resignedly. "But I know I shall never be able to make you believe it."

The King laughed, finished his wine and went away, with the sketch under his arm.

Mr. Carling did no more sketches of women in modern clothes, indeed, he had not often the time for drawing simply to amuse himself. The light of the short winter days was fully taken up with drawing his portraits and taking his fencing lessons. He was determined to become as proficient in this latter art as was possible to a man whose body and limbs were beginning to stiffen, as he knew that he might at any time be involved in a duel with Chesney. But though he was very strong and quick, and had his own boxer's eye and brain, he knew that he had started fencing at too advanced an age ever to be more than an average swordsman, and even to attain that he would be obliged to have at least a year's tuition and constant practice.

But his portraits were another matter. They instantly became popular, and he had more sitters than he knew what to do with. Artistically, his drawings were of little worth, being cold and hard, and absolutely without feeling for character or atmosphere, but in an age when photography was unknown their

extreme accuracy and honesty, and the speed with which he executed them, gave them a value which they could not have in later days. And even Lely, who naturally despised such cold and machine-made productions, admitted that the black-and-white artist had a bold pure line and powerful touch. This was when he saw the drawing of Rochester, on which Mr. Carling had spent a good deal of time, partly because he liked to have the Earl sitting in his rooms posting him in Court scandals, and partly out of affectionate gratitude. Yet the drawing, though done with meticulous care, was just as cold and lacking in feeling as any other.

"He is not an artist," was Lely's last comment.

Later on the great Court painter saw a drawing, one of many, which Mr. Carling had done of the King. Charles himself showed it to him, and Lely for some few moments said nothing at all.

"Sire," he said at last, "it is very remarkable. It is different from all the others."

"Is it worse, you mean?"

"Sire, it is so much better that though I recognize the style I can hardly believe it was drawn by the same man. I think now that it is a pity he cannot paint, where before I thought it was a good thing. It hath in it all that the others lack. This is the work of an excellent draughtsman who is also an artist. It is very strange, and a very sad thing, for what use is it only to be an artist for one face?"

"He might well have chosen a more pleasing face," said the King, with a half smile.

"Sire, it is worth more than all his others put together. They are nothing but exercises in drawing. This is a portrait."

The King looked up and saw the red round head of his favourite in a knot of men who were lingering near the door of the room where he was sitting talking to Lely.

"I pray you ask him to come hither a moment, Sir Peter. I would hear his own opinion on this curious matter."

Lely, nothing loth, bowed to the King, and went to fetch Mr. Carling.

"Sir," he said, bowing, "his Majesty desires your attendance."

Mr. Carling bowed, and followed him back to the King. Then he bowed very low and looked with rather a rueful smile at the portrait and then at Lely.

"Sire, I await your command," he said.

"I want you to give me your opinion on this drawing."

"Sire, I think it is a little better than the others," he said cautiously, "but one swallow does not make a summer, nor one picture an artist."

"You know, then," said Lely, "that all the others are only drawings?"

"Yes, Sir Peter. They are worthless except just as likenesses."

"And have you ever done one like this before?" asked the King.

"Sire, I have done a marble bust which is as good as that."

"Where is it?"

"It is not anywhere so that I can come to it."

"That is a great pity," said Lely.

"I thank you," said Mr. Carling, bowing.

"What is it?" asked the king.

"It is the head of an ancient Roman."

This reply staggered both the painter and the King, for each had formed in his mind the perfectly correct idea that Mr. Carling was only an artist when he had for a model someone he loved.

"Sir, can you yourself account for the very strange caprice of your talent?" asked Sir Peter, after a moment.

"I fear I cannot."

"Sire," said Lely, a little doubtfully, "Mr. Carling might try his hand at a statue of yourself, or at any rate a bust."

"He hath already told me he will not do that," said the King, laughing.

"Oh, Sire!" said Mr. Carling, much upset. "I never said I would not. I will begin at once if you command me."

"We shall see," said Charles, and he dismissed Mr. Carling, keeping Lely with him.

Later on, when Lely had also left Charles, the painter sought out Mr. Carling, and asked him why he did not want to do any sculpture of the King.

"I cannot do a blind statue of him," Mr. Carling explained, after a little hesitation. "I can't bear to do him without his eyes."

Lely nodded, as if he understood and agreed.

"Sir," he said, "it seems a pity that your intermittent artistic sense does not include the Duke of Monmouth as well as the King."

"The Duke of Monmouth!" said Mr. Carling, with a most peculiar intonation. "My God!"

"He is very beautiful," observed Lely.

"As beautiful as all the angels in heaven," agreed Mr. Carling. "I have drawn a sketch of him."

Lely had, quite unconsciously, reminded Mr. Carling of a thing he tried to keep out of his mind as much as possible. This was his intense and bitter hatred of the King's best-loved son, James, Duke of Monmouth. It had come to him in a flood like the breaking of a dam when he had first been presented to the Duke, and the feeling had astonished him and frightened him. He had never before either hated or despised any man, and he was appalled at the malevolence of the human mind when it is obsessed by a passion which is essentially evil. He hated Monmouth as much as he loved Charles, and the main reason for his bitterness of feeling against the Duke was that in the future he would be a disappointment and a grief to his father.

When he had been at the Court about six weeks, Monmouth had asked him to draw his portrait, and Mr. Carling, unable to refuse, had spent a most miserable morning with the object of the only hatred of his life, trying to return courteous and easy replies to the Duke's friendly and graceful conversation, and committing to paper, line by beautiful line, the features he could hardly bear to look upon. Yet never had he

seen so comely a man, and though he never doubted, as did many, that Monmouth was a Stuart, he wondered much that so ugly a father should have produced so fair and lovely a son.

The strain was so great upon him that when he had finished the drawing and the Duke had left him, expressing himself as more than satisfied, Mr. Carling sat down at his table and buried his face in his hands, lost in a gloomy meditation upon the dark, hitherto unknown evils of his own character. It seemed to him that in his dreams he was both a better man and a far worse one than in his waking life.

He never heard his servant open the door and announce the King, he did not move nor raise his head until Charles came up to him and touched him on the shoulder.

"What ails thee, Robert?" he asked, anxiously.

Mr. Carling sprang up in confusion and bowed.

"Sire, I ask your pardon. I didn't hear you come in."

"I came in but for a moment to see your portrait of James. He hath told me it is almost finished."

"I have only to cut it and mount it."

The King went to the easel and looked for some time in silence at the drawing.

"He told me it was very good," he said presently. "Now there is a face which well suits thine unflattering accuracy."

"Sire, as John Evelyn says: 'He is lovely in his person.'"

"I thought you told me you did not know John

Evelyn," said the King absently, still looking at the drawing.

"Yet I know that he has said that of the Duke."

"He might well," said Charles, and he faced round, looking intently at Mr. Carling with his sad deep eyes.

"Robert, what were you thinking of when I came in?"

"Sire, I was thinking there was much evil in being a fairy man."

"Were you thinking of what you told me would happen to—to *him?*"

"Yes, Sire," said Mr. Carling, though what would happen to Monmouth had been the least part of his thoughts. He had been far more intent upon what was happening to himself.

"Robert," said Charles, impassively, "you hate my son."

Mr. Carling was aghast at the King's penetration, but he knew it was useless to try to deceive him. He said nothing.

"Why do you?"

"Sire, in part it is because I know that he will bring sorrow to you. But also it is because the Green Man, when he showed me the visions and took from me all interest in the fate of nations, yet left with me, sharpened and intensified, all the passions of the human heart. He will not be satisfied that I love. I must hate, too."

The King went to his chair and sat down, and for a little while he said nothing.

"Have you never hated any other man?" he asked.

"No, Sire."

"And is your hatred for him a measure of your love for me?"

"I think it is, but I wish I could do one without the other."

"Robert," said the King, without looking at him, "when will you show me your other friend who is yet living?"

Mr. Carling took up a small mirror which lay always on his table and knelt down beside the King's chair, so that when Charles looked up he saw his own dark face.

"Is it I who am the man without honour, thy second friend?" he asked, with a smile that was both pleased and wondering.

"Sire, forgive me, but I did mean you."

"Prophets are allowed a licence," said Charles, still smiling, "and I have always known that you do not respect me, for you told me so. But how could you know so soon that I was to be your second friend?"

"That is because I am a fairy man, and I knew it as soon as I came to after the brandy and found you were holding me up."

"Ah," said Charles, and thereafter was silent until a few minutes later he said he must go.

CHAPTER VIII

AS time went on, Mr. Carling cared less and less for prophesying, as it made him miserable to think that at any moment he might be forced by an accident or an attack of small-pox to return to his own comfortable super-civilized time when coaches did not stick in mud and the second Charles had been for centuries in his grave; and though he would, at the King's command, talk to him of marvellous visions seen in the pool, he liked far better to improve his knowledge of the time he was now living through, and hear Charles tell tales of the Civil War and of his wanderings on the Continent. But discussions of the Civil War were fraught with danger. Mr. Carling had, in his own proper life and time, a hereditary bias in favour of the house of Stuart. No Carling boy since 1714 had ever been called George, and the names Charles and James were scattered bountifully as manna in his family tree from the middle of the seventeenth century. His father's name had been Charles, and his own full name was Robert James. He never intended to have a son, but if he ever did he would call him Charles or James and certainly would not call him George. But this one tradition was all that remained to him. From his small knowledge of history he had

made up his mind that the Stuarts were a thoroughly unsatisfactory family, and the one man in history who roused him to enthusiasm was the Stuart's deadly enemy, Oliver Cromwell. He knew that had he lived in the time he was now dreaming he would have been a red-hot Cavalier, for the family loyalty to the Crown would at that time have made it impossible for him to see Oliver Cromwell as anything but the most devilish tyrant. But in his own modern brain he could judge by the cold light of reason, and the only thing he accounted to Oliver as a crime was the execution of Charles I, which he had not tried to prevent, and had finally consented to.

In talking to Charles's son he was naturally most careful to give no offence by criticizing his father's conduct of affairs, but now and then he could not quite suppress his admiration of the man whom the King, quite justifiably, regarded as his father's murderer. Yet his only quarrel with Charles, which nearly ended in Mr. Carling's abrupt departure from his dream, was not over the Lord Protector at all, but about a man whom Mr. Carling admired nearly as much, and Charles hated even more. But it started with Oliver Cromwell.

The King had been talking of his Restoration, and he made some passing reference to the opening of Cromwell's grave. Mr. Carling, moved beyond himself, burst out into an extremely violent denunciation of the men who had maltreated the corpse of one whom they dared not face in his lifetime. Charles took this as an insult to himself, for the implication

that he who allowed the outrage to be committed was as bad as those who had done it was obvious. He did not usually mind his favourite's candour, but this time he was angry, though not furious. Mr. Carling apologized for offending him, but he would not take back his words concerning the actual perpetrators of the outrage. Charles only half accepted the apology and sat frowning and sullen, staring into the fire. Mr. Carling wished he would get up and go away, but he could not suggest it, for the King was obviously not in a mood in which he would allow a liberty to be taken, and he could not ask leave to go away himself for he was receiving Charles in his own rooms. He stood up, however, and the King sharply told him to sit down again. Mr. Carling began to feel annoyed himself, and became still more so as the King preserved his sullen silence from minute to minute.

"Well, Prophet," Charles said at last, in an unpleasant tone, "is that my worst crime that I shall do?"

"Sire, I never said you did it. I said they——"

"Answer me," said Charles, coldly.

Mr. Carling, looking at the King's dark, angry face, went suddenly back into his own childhood. He was sitting on a grass bank in the old garden, and his beautiful young mother was telling him a tale of a gallant man, treacherously done to death by a King, the tale of a man so brave that he had defied Oliver Cromwell himself, whom all men feared. His boyish adoration of that hero swept over him, and with it

something of his boyish hatred of the cruel, treacherous King.

"Sire, that is not the worst crime," he said.

"What is it, then?"

Mr. Carling said nothing, but stared at the King with a curious cold judicial hardness in his eyes.

"Have I done it yet?" asked Charles, beginning to tap with one foot upon the floor. His long, thin hands were clasped together almost as if he were praying.

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"You must know."

"I will have you tell me," said Charles, and an expression that Mr. Carling had never seen before gathered in his dark deep eyes.

"Very well, I will tell you!" cried Mr. Carling, still half in his childhood and half in his dream. "The judicial murder of Sir Harry Vane!"

Charles sprang to his feet and burst forth into such a torrent of profanity and invective that Mr. Carling was startled. He had seen the King angry before, and he had heard him swear, but he had never seen him in a blind fury, and he had never heard him speak with complete lack of control. Charles's face seemed to swell, his eyes were bloodshot, his speech for the most part was mercifully unintelligible. He raved up and down the room like a madman three times, then suddenly swung round, drew his sword in a flash, and held it hard against his favourite's breast. The point of it happened to rest upon a ring burn, and the pain was so great that Mr. Carling went rather pale.

"On your knees, you lying hound!" cried Charles. "Ask my pardon on your knees or you have not another minute to live!"

"Well, I haven't then," said Mr. Carling. He knew the King would be deeply grieved if he did kill him, and once the dream was broken he could never come back again. Neither did he see his way to living in any century with a hole right through his body. But not even to stay with Charles would he beg pardon or say that Sir Harry Vane had been justly executed. He looked straight into Charles's furious, blood-shot eyes with the sword point still pricking right through his clothes and on to the ring burn, then covered his own eyes with one hand. He did not want to remember Charles as a raving maniac. This simple, rather pathetic gesture brought the King partially to himself. He seized his sword in his strong hands and broke it across his knee. Then he threw the pieces on the floor and walked up and down, muttering and cursing, darting furious glances at Mr. Carling out of the ends of his eyes. Mr. Carling said nothing and did nothing, and Charles gradually quieted down, stopped walking about and sat down again in his chair.

"Robert," he said, in a low growling voice, "see that you do not again mention in my presence the name of the Regicide, Sir Harry Vane."

"I will not, Sire."

"Yet you shall name him once more now, and call him what he was."

Mr. Carling said nothing to this, but he felt thankful the King had broken his sword.

"Name me Sir Harry Vane for what he was," said Charles, in a louder voice.

"Sire, I ask your pardon for angering you, and I pray you let the matter bide."

"Let it bide! I will not let it bide. Are you still so hardy as to say what you said before?"

"No, Sire. I will not say it again."

"Then what was Sir Harry Vane?" cried Charles, stamping his foot upon the floor.

Mr. Carling sighed, but he saw that the King would have an answer of some sort from him.

"Sire," he said quietly, "Sir Harry Vane was a gallant man, and no more a Regicide than I am myself."

Then he drew his own sword and, kneeling down he presented it with the hilt towards the King's hand. Charles gave a slight start at the swish of the steel, perhaps he thought for a second that the fairy man, who had so stubbornly defended Sir Harry Vane, was now going to prove his guilt in murderous fashion. But though he started, he made no move to defend himself, and the next instant the sword was his to use as he pleased. He looked at the hilt lying on his knee, and at the clear quiet eyes of the man who knelt before him. Then, in unbroken silence, he brushed the hilt of the sword aside, rose up and walked out of the room.

For three days he made no sign at all. He did not dismiss Mr. Carling from the Court, but he never spoke to him if he saw him, he never commanded his attendance on any occasion and he never came to his

room. Chesney was jubilant. Lady Castlemaine passed him one day with a positive flare of triumph in her eyes. Rochester was worried and very curious, and Mr. Carling himself was miserable, though he showed it to no one but the poet.

"My lord," he said to the latter, at the end of the third day. "If this goes on one day more I shall have to go."

"Then I pray you call me by my name before you set out," said Rochester lightly.

"It is too much honour," said Mr. Carling, absently polite. "Rochester, this is the devil of a business. He is waiting for me to tell a lie."

"Then tell it. What a pother to make about nothing! Have you never told a lie before?"

"Hundreds. I am a very ready and cheerful liar. But this time it is such a lie that I cannot tell it, and if he waits for me to do that he will wait sixteen years and in the end the lie will not be told. And I'm not going to stay here for sixteen years under the King's displeasure. What's the use of it?"

"Why, none. And no one is overjoyed about it except Chesney's friends and Castlemaine's. And the King is in such a mood that even I cannot come near him. For God's sake go and tell your lie."

"I won't," said Mr. Carling, unhappy but obstinate. "He knows I'm in the right. If I give in he'll always think the worse of me. And I wouldn't anyway, no, damn it! I wouldn't!"

"Let me compound you a drink I know of," suggested Rochester, "and then you will be in such a

pleasant state that you will no longer know what is the truth."

"If I could ever drink one of your compounds," said Mr. Carling, laughing, "which I cannot, I should be so drunk that I shouldn't be able to speak at all. Think of something else."

"You will write a letter to him, praying him most humbly to give you an audience here, and name an evening time. We will put out all the lights but one candle by his chair, and I will take my wig off, dress in your clothes and dye my hair red. Then I will fling myself at his feet and very quickly tell your lie for you. I can imitate your way of speaking very well now. But what is the lie I am to tell?"

Mr. Carling shook his head with a grin.

"What would you say after you'd told the lie?"

"If he forgave me—you, I mean, I would feel faint and ask leave to go to the bedroom for a glass of water. Then you would come out, and I would lie on your bed and make up a poem until he had gone. I could make a very fine, noble and amusing poem about a man who would rather lose a King's favour than tell a lie."

"It isn't just *a* lie. I often tell him lies. I don't known that I've ever told so many to one person before. But they aren't any of them of any account at all."

"Tell me what it is," said Rochester, very persuasively, "and I will inform you as to whether it is of any account."

"Well," said Mr. Carling, "I trust you not to

speak of it to anyone else. Do you think that Sir Harry Vane was a Regicide? "

"No," said Rochester instantly, "but he was a pestilent fellow. Are you out of favour with the King simply because you will not say he was a Regicide? And what in the devil's name made you say anything about Vane at all? "

"We started with Oliver Cromwell," explained Mr. Carling.

"Perhaps," Rochester asked hopefully, "you said *he* was not a Regicide? By God, I would give a fortune to hear you talking to the King."

"I didn't. I know he was a Regicide. All I said about him, *that* time, was that he oughtn't to have been dug up. And the King took it as meaning that I thought he oughtn't to have let them dig him up. And I don't really know whether he could have prevented it, even if he'd wanted to. Well, and after that I said Sir Harry Vane was murdered."

"And you said that the King murdered him? "

"Well, he did."

"You must go to the King and say that Vane was a Regicide, that he was not murdered, and that if he was the King had no hand in it, and you might add that he was a horrible and desperate traitor and wretch."

"Everyone knows that he was not a Regicide," said Mr. Carling, obstinately. "The King knows it himself."

"You are a clever man in many ways," said Rochester, with a sigh, "but you lack sense. If Vane

was *not* a Regicide he was murdered, if you can call it murder to kill a man like that. He was unjustly executed after he had been granted his pardon."

"That's just what I say."

"Yes, but why in the name of God must you say it to the King? Why not have said it to me?"

"Well, he meant me to say it, and so I did. He got half angry and he deliberately made me say something that he knew would make him furious."

"But what can it matter to Vane, who is dead, if you do say he was a Regicide? That is all the King wants you to say. And why are you so tender of Vane?"

"I don't care a damn about him in comparison with the King, *now,* but I just can't say he was what he wasn't. I can't. And so I shall have to go."

"I fear you will," said Rochester, gravely. "I said something about you to the King this morning while he was dressing, and he looked at me as if he had never heard of you and could not understand what I said."

"Well," said Mr. Carling, sighing, "I will give him three more days, and at the end of them I will ask for an interview."

"And tell him your lie?"

"No. I will take leave of him."

"God!" said Rochester, amazed. "Was there ever such a man?"

"No, never," said Mr. Carling.

But on the evening of the fourth day, when Mr. Carling was sitting gloomily in his room alone, for he

had told his servant that he would see no one, not even Rochester, the door was opened and the King came in. Mr. Carling kneeled to kiss his hand, but he said nothing.

"Robert," said the King, as he sat down. "I will take a little wine in the silver cup."

Mr. Carling gave it to him, still without a word.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" asked Charles, in his usual pleasant voice, as he took a sip of the wine.

"Sire, I am very pleased to see you."

"I believe you are," said Charles, glancing at him over the rim of the cup. "Well, last night I dreamed that I had killed you."

"Oh," said Mr. Carling.

"And so I am here to-night."

"I thank you from my heart, Sire. I—I did not think that you would ever come again."

"And what would you have done?"

"In two more days I should have gone."

"Whither? Back to the White Bull?"

"No, Sire. Right away."

"If you ever again have it in your mind to go 'right away' you must see me first. Give me your promise."

"I give it, Sire. But now perhaps I shan't have to go for years."

"I said that you would be more likely to be killed than lose my favour, and since I am not now of a mind to kill you myself, and no one else would ever dare to, you shall stay with me until I die."

"Sire, I shall go before you die."

"But not long before," said Charles.

. . . . . .

Yet it was, long before.

It was only a week after the end of the quarrel when Mr. Carling received his first warning. He was walking in St. James's Park with the King, his spaniels, and several other gentlemen, when Rochester slipped up to him and pulled at his sleeve.

"Come further away from the King," he whispered.

Mr. Carling went aside a little way with him.

"Last night," said Rochester, "John Chesney spent an hour and a half with Castlemaine."

"Well, it's no good telling *me* about it. If you think the King doesn't know already you might tell him."

"You may jest," said Rochester seriously, "but it is not a jesting matter. *I* think she hath promised Chesney her protection. She is desperate because the King hath received you back into favour. Chesney will kill you and go away. Castlemaine will work with the King until he is so weary of her importunity that he will recall him. Who hath so much influence with him, once you are gone, as Castlemaine?"

"She's got more influence with him now than I have."

"She hath not, or you would have been dismissed long since."

"I only mean he can do without a friend, as he did, but he can't do without women. But will Chesney assassinate me?"

"He will insult you, so that you have to fight him. And he is a far better swordsman than you."

"I bet he can't think of an insult that I can't turn off somehow so that people will just laugh at him. He's got no more brains than a haddock."

"Castlemaine will have told him what to say. You must not meet him. When he comes in, go out."

"He may come in without my noticing him."

"Well," said Rochester, shrugging his shoulders, "if you will be killed, you must. I ask you only to be careful for a few days. I am going to have him sent away if I can. But I can do nothing very suddenly."

"I will be careful," said Mr. Carling, gratefully. "Thank you very much for warning me."

Mr. Carling kept on his guard and avoided Chesney studiously for four days. But he could not always be thinking of him, and on the fourth evening after Rochester's warning in the Park, Chesney came into one of the card-rooms, partly drunk, and sat down between Mr. Carling and the door. Neither Mr. Carling nor Rochester, who had been with him much the past few days, saw Chesney come in, for Mr. Carling was telling the Earl an amusing racing story which he had heard on one of his many voyages.

"Here he is," whispered Rochester, suddenly breaking off in the middle of a roar of laughter. "He is looking at you."

"Oh, damn! I told you he'd get in sometime without me seeing him."

"Sir," said Rochester, rising in a casual manner, "shall we go and watch the dancing for awhile?"

"With pleasure, my lord."

Chesney got up from his chair when they did, but though he let the Earl pass to the door he planted himself solidly in front of Mr. Carling, blocking the way.

"Scusi, Signore," said Mr. Carling, with a bow.

Chesney looked at him contemptuously, but he neither spoke nor moved.

"Sir, will you let me pass, of your favour," said Mr. Carling, still very courteous.

"Where are you going?" Chesney asked, rudely.

"I am going with my Lord Rochester to watch the dancing."

"You are going because you are afraid of me, you coward dog."

"Sir, you are indeed a fearful and terrifying sight," said Mr. Carling, placidly.

Rochester, behind Chesney, burst into a laugh, which he tried to turn into a cough.

"Are you not a coward?" cried Chesney, losing control of himself.

"No, sir."

"Will you prove it, then?"

"Yes, sir, I will. I challenge you to spend a night in the Plague Field with me."

There was a gasp and a murmur from all the men who were standing round, and Chesney turned rather white. There was no one of them there who would not sooner have faced the most hopeless duel than a night in the Plague Field. Mr. Carling himself hoped that he would not have to do it, though if he did catch

he plague he need not suffer its horrors to the nd.

"Chesney," said Rochester, judicially, "you must ake back your words or accept his challenge."

"He is not a coward," said Chesney, sullenly.

"Well, then that's all right," said Mr. Carling, ıfter a pause, and he made a movement as if to pass ıis adversary.

Then Chesney said something which was a direct nsult to Mr. Carling, and an indirect one, implied ›nly, to the King. Rochester made an inarticulate ›ound, and what followed on Mr. Carling's part was nost unconventional. He knocked Chesney down with a terrific drive under the jaw that might have felled an ox.

"Odds wounds!" said Rochester, appalled. "Now you have broken his neck!"

"I'm very sorry," said Mr. Carling, looking round ıt the others apologetically. "I know I oughtn't to have done that. I was taken by surprise. He'll come to in a little while, I daresay."

Rochester pulled him by the arm and dragged him to a corner of the room, more upset than Mr. Carling had ever imagined he could be.

"You fool!" he said, too agitated to be in the least polite. "You might have known that that was the next thing he would say. Directly he had admitted you were not a coward you should have pushed past him and come away. You could have held your Plague Field challenge over him if he felt himself insulted. You could have refused to fight him with

a sword. Now you have struck him in the face, and if you have killed him you will be imprisoned, and if he is not dead you will have to fight him."

"Oh, he's not dead, only knocked out. But—well—I never thought he would say that because it's so absurd seeing the kind of man the King is. I never even thought of it. I knew he'd call me a coward, of course."

"Castlemaine told him to say that if the other did not succeed."

"Oh, she is a charming female. I hope that some day the King will find one he likes better."

"You will not live to see it," said Rochester, gloomily.

"Why can't I still refuse to fight him?"

"Because now they will call you coward if you refuse. You struck him in the face."

"I did that," said Mr. Carling, in some satisfaction. "I've never been able to hit a man so hard before."

"They will say, if you refuse to fight him now, that your Plague Field challenge was what you call a bluff, as when you sit at poker holding nothing and pretend you have four aces. Why did you strike him?"

"I couldn't think of anything else to do, just at that moment. What would you have done?"

"I told you. I should have come away directly he had admitted I was not a coward. Well, may I be your second? I offer, because I think you do not know enough to ask me."

"I don't know enough to come in out of the rain," said Mr. Carling, looking gloomily at his dissipated handsome friend.

This saying, which was one he had not heard before, amused the Earl so much that he burst into a loud laugh, causing the men who were trying to restore Chesney to look round in surprise.

"I should never have asked you," Mr. Carling went on, "and I thank you very much. Can we go now? There's something else I want to talk to you about."

"We must wait until he hath delivered his challenge. That is, I must. You need not."

"Will you come up to my rooms?"

Rochester nodded, and Mr. Carling passed out of the room, followed by many curious glances. He went to his own apartments and dismissed his servant, then sat down in the big carved chair the King always used. He pulled it up close to the fire because the fever of battle had died down in him, and he was cold, trembling, and full of despair. He could not hope that he might be able to defend himself, for he knew very well that Chesney in his sleep was a better swordsman than himself when in full possession of all his faculties. The only thing he could hope for was some unforeseen accident that should prevent the duel taking place, and on this slender chance he determined not to take his wish until he should be at the point of death. Then his dream would be broken, he would be back in his own time surrounded by super-civilized luxuries and comforts, and without Charles.

Presently Rochester scratched at the door, and Mr. Carling jumped up to let him in.

"How's Chesney?" he asked, trying to speak lightly.

"They had work with him to persuade him that Whitehall had not fallen in on him, but in a little while, after some wine, he seemed to be as well as ever."

"His wig saved the back of his head," said Mr. Carling, absently, "and a hit under the jaw in itself is nothing."

"God preserve me from such a blow," said Rochester piously. "If you were to fight him with your fists I should have no fears for you."

"Neither should I. My lord, I ask your pardon for being so unmannerly. Will you take some wine?"

"I thank you, sir," said Rochester, bowing. "I will now sit in the big chair and play that I am the King. Robert, welcome may you be!"

"Oh, please don't, Rochester!" cried Mr. Carling, wincing violently. "I—I can't stand it."

"The devil take me!" said Rochester, jumping up. "There, I am sorry indeed. I always forget that *you* are fond of *him*. It seems to me often that it is the other way."

"It's both ways, and how can I see him to-night?"

"Would you seek his protection?" asked Rochester, flicking a tiny piece of fluff off his silken sleeve.

"No!" said Mr. Carling, most emphatically. "But I gave him my word that I would never go away without seeing him first."

"You are going no further than the riven oak ·hich stands in the fields behind old Clarendon's alace."

"You know well enough that I am going to my .eath."

"I think it likely," Rochester admitted. "And I m sorry about it as I have ever been about anything. ʒut as to seeing him to-night, it is impossible. His Majesty hath retired."

"He hathn't!" said Mr. Carling, angrily. "He's nessing about with some of those hellish women, ›robably Castlemaine herself."

"It is easier," said Rochester, looking at the ceiling, ' to drag a monarch from the arms of Morpheus than o—er—well, what would you have me do?"

"I would have you use your brains."

"You are a masterful man, sir."

"Well, I can't see him to-morrow, unless the duel s very late."

"It is at half an hour after seven, which is lawn."

"Rochester, I must see him to-night, and you must ell me how it is to be done."

"Well, there is but one man in the Court who can ıelp you, and it is not I."

"Who, then?"

"James."

"The Duke of York?" said Mr. Carling, stupidly.

"The Duke of York! No, the Duke of Monnouth."

"Oh, Lord! Well, it's all up then, for I will leave

the King without seeing him rather than ask Monmouth for anything."

"I will do the asking. But why have you this aversion to young James?"

Mr. Carling made no reply to this but took several turns up and down the room like a man in a fit of indecision.

"Well," he said at last. "What shall I do?"

"Write me a letter to the King. I will give it to Monmouth, and he, if he can, will get it to Charles. But I can promise nothing, for I am not even quite certain whether I can find Monmouth."

"You are such a drunken, disorderly, and disreputable crowd that no one can ever be certain of finding anyone anywhere," was Mr. Carling's comment.

"Sir," said Rochester, quite unruffled, "I have not noticed that your friends at Whitehall are by any means among the quietest of us."

"My lord, you have all been very kind to me," murmured Mr. Carling, as he rapidly wrote something on a piece of drawing-paper. "And particularly yourself. I wish you would explain it to me."

He handed his letter open to the Earl, who folded it and put it in his pocket.

"I can explain it very well," he said. "It is because you are the strangest, most pleasant man that any of us have ever seen. You are the King's favourite, and yet no man is the worse for it. You never presume on your position, you are never insolent, you never try to interfere with Buckingham and the others, you never make yourself out to be anything but what you

are, and you never use your influence with the King for any purpose whatsoever. There never hath been, in all the world, such a favourite. And then there are the tales you tell, and the jests, and the new and amusing expressions, and the games you have taught us, and the pictures you draw, though the best of all was the one you did for the King of a girl in her shift."

"I didn't do it for him at all."

"Well, he hath it, for he showed it to me, and he told me that you said the shift was a dress for the evening."

"And that made you laugh, I suppose."

"It made me laugh, and the King laughed so much at something else you had told him (but he would not say what it was) that the tears rolled down his face. Oddswounds! It hath been a merry time with you here," Rochester added, with a sigh of regret. "I hope that Castlemaine and Chesney will be bound together in the hottest corner of hell, for there is no doubt in my mind at all that you will be killed in the morning. I see no way to prevent it, unless you claim the King's protection."

"I can't do that."

"No. You are a gallant man."

"I'm not as gallant as I seem, but oh, Rochester, I am miserable. Do try hard to find Monmouth."

"I will. If I cannot I will return and tell you, but if I can I shall not come back again. I have an engagement. And I will wait upon you early in the morning."

The Earl bowed and departed, and Mr. Carling waited for an hour in an agony of mind that aged him a year for every quarter of an hour. He knew that Rochester might very well be unable to find the Duke, and even then the affair was but half done. He was beginning to pray that Rochester, having failed, would return to put him out of his suspense, when the door opened and Charles came in, sat down on a chair and began to laugh.

"Robert," he said, "thou knowest that I am at thy beck and call day and night. But I would beg thee another time to be more tactful. What is this urgent matter?"

"Sire, will you tell me what happened?" asked Mr. Carling, who very much wanted to know how much or how little Monmouth had done.

"Why, I was drinking a cup of sack in the apartments of my lady Castlemaine, when one of her ladies, more terrified than a hare at the mouth of a dog, comes in to say the Duke of Monmouth is outside and must speak with me immediately. So I went outside, and there was James on his knees already to beg my forgiveness, and he gave me this letter from you, which is written so very ill that I could scarcely read it. But as it saith 'Come, for God's sake,' which is something clearer than the rest—why, I am here."

"Sire, I gave you my promise that I would not go away without first seeing you."

"Robert! What is this?" said Charles, now grave and anxious.

"I am to be killed in the morning."

"Killed! Wounds of God! Who will dare to kill thee?"

"Sire, it is a duel."

"A duel!" muttered Charles. "A duel. Oh, Christ!"

"Yes. And as I'm certain to be killed I shall have to go, and the dream will be ended. But dream or none, before I go I will give you the silver cup, because had it been no dream but a real life I would have given you anything or everything I had. And I ask your forgiveness for anything I may ever have done to offend you, and so I will take my leave."

He kneeled down and gave the chalice into the King's hands, who received it without a word.

"I will stop this duel," said Charles, after a silence.

"Sire, you cannot. If you stop it everyone will say I called on you for protection, and I should have to leave the Court. You know you can't stop a duel. I hit the man so hard in the face that when he came round he thought Whitehall had fallen."

"That is very like thee," said the King, with a little laugh. "You must always do everything with too much heart. But what had he said to rouse your so wild anger?"

"Sire, it was just a cause of quarrel. He meant to quarrel, anyway."

"Nevertheless, I bid you tell me what he said."

Mr. Carling told him.

"So," said Charles, looking at him with his sorrowful dark eyes, "thou wilt fight for the honour of thy King, who hath no honour, according to thee."

"Sire, I would fight for you as readily as any Cavalier that was ever born. Oh, God! These dreams—these dreams."

"This time thou shalt not fight, either for me or for thyself. Who is the man?"

"It is Chesney."

"I thought as much. In all my Court thou hast made but one real enemy. What other, favoured by a King, could say as much?"

"Sire," said Mr. Carling, kneeling down again at the King's feet, "my one enemy is enough. If you disgrace me by stopping this duel I shall go. I swear it on my soul. Not even for you will I live in a place or time with every man calling me a coward. You must see I can't do it. Promise me on your word of honour not to stop this duel."

"I will not promise."

"Sire, I am a fairy man, and if you will not promise then I shall go, and I shall never be able to think of you as I should like to. I shall go now."

"I command thee to stay."

"Sire, I will not obey you. But will you not do one thing for me, who have asked you for nothing?"

"I will promise on my word of honour," said Charles, after a silence. "And this is the second time thou hast fought against me and beaten me. Who is thy friend in this duel?"

"Rochester, Sire."

"He will stop it when thou art wounded if it may be stopped. And where is the duel?"

"By the tithe barn in the fields over towards

Chelsea," said Mr. Carling, to be on the safe side. He knew that Charles's word of honour was not inviolable.

"And the time?"

"Nine of the clock."

The King nodded, and smiled. Mr. Carling could not quite understand the smile, for his faculties, usually so keen and ready, were dulled by misery.

"Sire, you must go back," he said, urgently.

"Thou art very ready to send me away to others."

"Well, damn it, in three minutes I shall be crying. I cry terribly easily and I like to do it alone."

"Art thou weeping for me, Robert?"

"Oh, no. I'm weeping because I'm afraid Chesney's sword may hurt me a bit. It'll be like an extra strong brandy peg, I expect."

The King suddenly got up from his chair and went to the window. He drew the curtains back from the casement, and opened it.

"The snow is falling," he said. "It is lying thick in the garden. Robert, do you know what day it is?"

"No, Sire."

"It is the 29th day of January, and to-morrow it will be——"

"Good heavens!" murmured Mr. Carling, as the King did not go on. "Chesney must have forgotten. Sire, I will tell you a last vision from the pool. I saw far into the future time, as far as ever I saw at all, and there were people who laid wreaths upon the statue of the King, your father."

"It was snowing when he died," said Charles, watching the soft slow flakes drifting down past the

window. "Robert, Chesney could not have forgotten. He is not like you. Of a set purpose hath he done this, for what better day could he have to kill my friend? Now, if he kill thee indeed, I shall have a double mourning for every thirtieth of January, and a double mourning every time I see the snow fall."

"Sire, only one part of it is true. This is but a dream."

"Not even thou, fairy man, may say what is true and what is a dream. I know that I, Charles Stuart, have a friend, and that he may leave me. What didst thou say, Robert? In all time there is me, in all time there is thee. But only once are we on earth. Well, had we never met on earth, yet would there still be, in all time, me—and thee. I shall find thee again, and welcome shalt thou be."

"I believe that is true," said Mr. Carling. He came to the window to look at the snow, and it struck him as a strange and a sad thing that in the morning he might be in the height of a summer.

"Sire, it is cold," he said, though that was not what he meant to say at all.

Charles shivered.

"I feel as cold as if I were in my grave," he said. "Shut the casement, Robert. What will they say of me when I am in my grave?"

"Sire, they will say of you that you never loved anyone but women and the Duke of Monmouth."

"Yet it is not true."

"In a fashion it is true, and in another way it is not true. Things," said Mr. Carling, with a sudden

sob, "might have been arranged so much better. My friends are all in dreams of the past and my own time is empty. And now I wish that you had killed me the day I spoke about——"

"Sir Harry Vane? So do not I."

"It would have been done then. Sire, you must go back."

"Ay, I must," said Charles, as if he had suddenly remembered something. "I bid thee farewell, Robert."

Mr. Carling kneeled to kiss his hand, but Charles would not have it.

"What is a King?" he said, holding his hands behind him. "For this night we are equals. I will have no more of thy good manners. How do you bid farewell to a friend?"

"Why, Sire, I shake him by the hand," said Mr. Carling, and he did so.

"That is a cold custom. This is how I bid farewell to a——to you, Robert."

Charles bent his head and kissed his friend, then in silence he went away, and the door closed softly behind him.

. . . . . .

Rochester, coming in the early morning to lead out the innocent to his doom, found him lying on his bed, half dressed, very pale, but cheerful and whistling.

"My lord, I bid you a good morning," he said, springing up. "I thank you most fervently for finding Monmouth last night."

"Have you slept?" asked Rochester, regarding him with a sympathetic and friendly eye.

"Devil a wink. I'm not the Duke of Argyle."

"Sir, what hath the Duke of Argyle to do with this?"

"Oh, I forgot. That hasn't happened yet."

"I do not understand you."

"No matter. Let us get along to the execution."

"There is no haste," said Rochester, looking at his watch. "There is time for you to dress and take some food and wine, I mean water. I think you will be the first man that ever fought a duel on water."

"I'm not going to fight it on anything. I couldn't possibly eat anything, and I'm sure you don't want to eat as early as this."

"That is true," said Rochester, who looked nearly as pale and much more haggard than his companion. "I will await you in the other room."

"Have a drink," said Mr. Carling, as he went out.

In a quarter of an hour the duellist was ready dressed in his best clothes and wrapped in a thick horseman's coat, with his sword by his side and his hat under his arm.

"My lord, I am ready," he said.

"There is no hurry. We shall have to wait for a long time in the snow."

"It's not snowing now."

"No, but it is very cold to the feet."

"Then we'll walk about. Rochester, if you know what a night I've had you wouldn't refuse my lightest wish. I want to get out of Whitehall. In fact I'm

going, and if you don't come I shall fight a scandalous duel without a second."

"Very well, we will go. But we shall be half-an-hour too early."

But Mr. Carling became calmer when once he had left Whitehall behind him, and they walked very slowly northwards till they were past Clarendon's great house and in the open fields, white with snow to the depth of three inches. They were twenty minutes too early at the big lightning-blasted oak, and Rochester filled up ten minutes with scandalous stories, some of which had as their chief figure King Charles.

"He will go down to history as a man ruined by women," said Mr. Carling, at the end of the last, "and you men of the Restoration Court as the most pernicious set of rascals who ever walked about a palace. But I cannot myself see that you are any different from other men except that you are not hypocrites. All men are much the same inside. And here is this man who is to murder me."

Rochester looked across the field and swore.

"They are ten minutes too soon," he cried, looking at his watch.

"All the better. I want to get it over."

Rochester swore again, but after that he could not manage to waste more than three minutes. Chesney and Mr. Carling were both determined to get at the work without any delay, and very quickly their outer cloaks and coats were off and they were facing each other with the wind blowing cold through their linen shirts, their swords in hand.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" said Rochester, after one more glance at his watch.

"Oh, good God, yes!" said his impatient and unmannerly principal. "For goodness' sake let's start. Seconds out of the ring!"

Chesney signified his prepared state in a more gentlemanly manner, and the duel began. Chesney was determined to kill his antagonist at once, but for five minutes Mr. Carling by combined luck, strength, agility and sheer determination kept his opponent's sword away from his person. Then he was wounded in the arm, and Rochester, who was standing by with his sword drawn, stuck up the two jarring rapiers of the duellists.

"He is wounded," he said to Chesney's second. "Is your friend satisfied with that?"

"My lord, he is not. It must be to the death, unless the gentleman pray his pardon for striking him."

"Damned if I do!" said Mr. Carling, much annoyed at the pain in his arm. "He can pray mine for saying what he did."

"I would ask you to warn your friend that it will be better for him if he carry this matter no further," said Rochester, very slowly and carefully.

"My lord!" cried Chesney, flushing very red. "Doth his Majesty's favourite seek his protection?"

"No, you bloody assassin!" shouted Mr. Carling, with complete loss of temper. "Rochester, get out of the way, man!"

Rochester shrugged his shoulders, like one who has done his best surrounded by difficulties, and stood

aside. The duel went on, and Mr. Carling knew immediately that he was finished, and that Chesney had him absolutely at his mercy. He ground his teeth and lunged furiously. Chesney parried easily with a broad smile. Mr. Carling lunged again, and as he did so he heard a voice he knew well crying, "Hold! Hold!"

He saw the smile fade from Chesney's face and his mouth set in a grim and desperate line. Then he felt a pain like the worst kind of ring-burn pierce red-hot through his body, and looking down at his chest he saw Chesney's hand immediately below his chin. He felt an agonizing wrench as Chesney drew the sword out of his body, and he staggered into Rochester's arms. He heard a man beside him breathe quickly as though he had been running, and close in his ear he heard the voice of Charles, and yet he scarcely recognized it, it was so deadly quiet and cold.

"Chesney, for this you shall pay, and pay, and pay. I know not when you shall have finished paying this your debt to me."

Then Mr. Carling suddenly lost consciousness for a little while, before ever he had thought of using the ring.

When he came to himself he was lying half on the trampled snow and half supported by a man who kneeled behind him, holding him in his arms. Rochester was on the ground in front of him, opening his white linen shirt, through which a red stain showed, small and round.

"It's no good, Rochester," said Mr. Carling, faintly.

"The whole bundle of chirurgeons can't save me now. It's through the lung, and when I cough I shall go. I know it's a very bad wound. Where's the King?"

"I am here, Robert," said the man who was holding him. "Let be, Rochester. Leave us alone."

"Good-bye, my lord," said Mr. Carling, as Rochester rose up. "No devil's as black as he's painted. I'll tell them all you were a jolly decent chap."

Rochester said nothing, but he took one of Mr. Carling's hands in his own and pressed it gently. Then he went away, and Mr. Carling tried to turn his head.

"Sire, you broke your word of honour," he said.

"Ay, Robert, I have no honour. I meant to stop the duel when you had fought a little while, so that no one might call you coward. I was too late."

"Rochester did his best, but we got here early, and the others got here early, and I was very impatient, and when I was wounded I lost my temper. He might have spent a bit of time tying me up. Sire, you should not kneel in the wet snow. Let me down and stand up."

"I would kneel in my own blood to save thee."

"Sire, it is only a dream."

"Ay, it is the dream I had that night. But it was I who had killed thee. Yet thus didst thou lie, and thus looked."

"Sire," murmured Mr. Carling, looking away over the fields, "the ground is red. Is it another Great Fire?"

"It is the dawn breaking on the snow."

"It is very beautiful, but I can see that at any time. Will you turn your head round this way, or lift mine up. I can't see your face."

Charles turned him a little in his strong arms so that when he looked up he saw the King's face, and the King's beautiful eyes full of tears which yet did not fall.

"Surely my face is an ill sight to take with thee to the grave," he said. "The sunlight on the snow is better."

"I shall see many other things yet, but nothing I like so well."

He coughed on the last word, and the blood sprang out upon his lips.

"Sire, I must go," he whispered, in the shadow of a voice. "I dare wait no longer. The pain has ceased, and it is growing dark."

"Robert! Robert!" called the King, and his voice came as it were across a great space, or through a great time.

"I must go," said Mr. Carling. "It's no good calling me. I can hardly hear you—it's so long ago. Now I can hardly see your face. Well, there is nothing else to wait for—Sire, good-bye."

So, with the King's arms round him, and the King's kiss upon his forehead, he wished.

CHAPTER IX

MR. CARLING lay on his bed with his eyes still fast closed, and sighed. It was a long sigh, and in the middle of it he caught his breath, like a child after a long fit of crying. He was vaguely surprised to find he could breathe without any pain, that his mouth had no taste of blood in it, and that his legs were warm and dry instead of being cold with the soaking bitter cold of thawing snow. He moved his body a little and knew that the arms which had held him were gone, and that he was alone in his own room, alone in his own time. He sat up upon the bed, and in spite of heroic efforts presently began to cry.

He had felt depressed and unhappy when he had returned from his dream of the Roman, but the brooding weight of melancholy that now lay upon his heart was so dolorous that he wondered how he was going to endure his life. Between himself and the Roman there had been a gulf of racial difference which could only be bridged when they were quite alone together, sharing hardship and danger in the perilous forests of Cornwall. When the painful and heroic journey was over the friendship was hedged about by too many difficulties to continue any longer, and the parting had

at least the comfort of inevitability. But between himself and Charles there had been no gulf of race and language, and he found most bitter the knowledge that he need not have left that dream for sixteen years had Lady Castlemaine been less maliciously jealous, and Chesney less deadly in his skill of fence. The fact that Charles was an Englishman and that their language differed only in a few unimportant details had made it possible for him to get to know the King far better than he had ever known or ever could have known his first dream friend. He had been with Charles much longer, and apart from his friendship with the King he had thoroughly enjoyed his life at Whitehall in the seventeenth century. There had been things about his earlier dream which he had not altogether liked, such as the incessant physical exertion on an insufficient amount of food; but he could not remember any hours in the whole of his court life that he had not found fascinatingly interesting and amusing, except the morning he had had to sit drawing the beautiful face of Monmouth, the four days of his estrangement from the King, and the dreary slow hours of his last miserable night.

So for a little while he sat and cried with his head in his hands, too unhappy even to feel ashamed of his childishness, and when he stopped it was not because his heart ached any the less. He felt too exhausted in his mind even to go on crying. Though in his own body he had suffered nothing, his mind, in the body of Richard Field, had been shaken by almost all the violent passions known to manhood in the last twelve

hours of his dream. He was tired out, his first burst of grief for the loss of Charles spent itself in a few minutes, and he sat dry-eyed, hating the glorious shaft of summer sunlight that lay across the bed. And yet he knew that had he dreamed in the winter and come back to find the snow falling, or lying white upon the ground, he would have been more wretched still. He felt that he could never bear to see the snow, again, or to live through another thirtieth of January, Charles's mourning day, and the death day of his own dream.

Presently he glanced at the clock. It had moved on twenty minutes since he lay down and wished to be in the past, and for those twenty minutes he had been back in his own time. He got up and went to look at himself in the glass. It gave him a queer sensation to see his own now rather unfamiliar face instead of the plain humorous features and curly red hair of Richard Field, but as he went on looking the feeling of strangeness passed away and he began to realize that this was his own true face, and that it was, since his last dream, subtly different. He thought it looked older than he remembered it, and the eyes were changed. They were no longer placid, happy, and cold.

"This love," he thought drearily, "is ageing me years for every dream. I am getting an old man, and before I was never even grown up."

He sat down on his bed again and began to think about Charles Stuart, his friend, who had been dead for so many years that nothing would be left of him but his long and shapely bones.

"I'm sure," said Mr. Carling aloud, "that I could recognize his skeleton by his hands. What would the Home Secretary say if I sent in a request to exhume the body of Charles the Second. Bodies are nothing. Where is *he?*"

He became aware that he was talking to himself, and washed his hands and face in cold water to try to bring himself to a more normal condition. Then he brushed his hair with his beautiful modern brushes and looked with a nauseating distaste at his clothes. He had grown to like Richard Field's style of dress very much, and though he thought some of the Cavaliers over-dressed and effeminate, Charles's outward man from the chin downwards had never failed to rouse his admiration. He would have liked to hear his friend's caustic comments on the masculine dress of the twentieth century. Charles might like to see a picture of a woman dressed, as he thought, only in her shift and stockings, but could only be repelled by the sight of men who clothed their legs in shapeless tubes, their necks in hideous small white collars, and their feet in boots.

"Boots!" said Mr. Carling, talking aloud again, as he caught sight of his winter foot-gear. "Boots! My God! What would he have said if anyone had showed him a pair of modern boots? Oddsfish!"

Mr. Carling, at the sound of his King's favourite profanity spoken aloud by himself, started violently, and then collapsed on the bed with shaking knees.

"This ring," he thought, "will end by driving me into a madhouse. I could have sworn it was Charles

who said that. I am in a state of nerves, and what shall I do to get myself out of it? "

For a little while he dallied with the idea of devoting himself to a study of the historical Charles, Charles as he was left for Englishmen to read about. He dismissed it very soon. He would only read variations on the theme that Charles II was a bad man and a very indifferent king, that Rochester was a clever scoundrel, and that the Restoration Court stank in the nostrils of every decent person in England. But he himself had loved Charles, he had found a good friend in Rochester, and the only thing that had stunk in his nostrils at all disagreeably was the filth of the seventeenth century London streets. He was, as he had told the King in the inn of the White Bull, without any real moral sense, and as all historians have to be moralists, he knew he would find neither pleasure nor profit in seeing his friend through their cold and critical eyes. He had seen a side of Charles's character which no historian had ever seen, for the King's wonderful capabilities for friendship had lain dormant and hidden throughout his life. Mr. Carling's dream was broken, his friend was gone, and a cold-blooded raising of part of his personality through the medium of other men's knowledge would be as unsatisfactory and horrible as the sight of the bones which had once supported his comely, graceful body.

" I shall find thee again, and welcome shalt thou be! "

Mr. Carling was this time perfectly certain that he had not spoken aloud, and equally convinced that he

heard Charles speak in the same quiet voice he had used when he was standing by the lattice in the room in Whitehall. He fled as from a haunted place, and rushed off down to the studio to look at the Roman. The sight of that noble, beautiful head comforted him a little, and he knew that his interest in the big statue he was to make was not permanently impaired by his last adventure. No honour due to Marcus Valerius should be nullified by his second lost friend, now he had come back. But how willingly he would have stayed away for sixteen dream years, wasting all his artistic skill on dream drawings of Charles's ugly face. But the studio was haunted, too. Even as he looked at the Roman the bust seemed to melt and change and come alive. He saw before him the dark and heavy face of Charles, flesh and blood it seemed to be, but when he looked upwards to the eyes he saw that they had no life in them. It was a dead face, and Mr. Carling cried out and shut his eyes. When he opened them again the vision was gone, and he could see nothing but the head of the Roman standing quiet and beautiful upon the table.

"I am growing an imagination," he thought, as he covered up the bust. "I see things and hear things and none of them are really there. I will draw Charles."

He spent the whole of the rest of the day and evening making a charcoal drawing of the King. He set it and put it aside to dry, and as he did so he remembered that it was the seventh. Five drawings had he made of Charles in Whitehall, and one in the

inn of the White Bull. This was the seventh, and as he looked at it he thought it was the best.

"The last and the best," he murmured, then went away to his miserably comfortable twentieth century bed.

But though he hated the bed, and the furniture, and the electric light, and his beautiful hot bath, he fell into a dreamless sleep as soon as his head touched the pillow. His sleepless night in Whitehall, his grief at parting from Charles, the intense pain of being run through by Chesney's sword, had all affected his real body through his dreaming brain, and he was utterly exhausted.

In the morning he arose, with a sore heart, but in a more normal condition of nerves. He looked at the Roman, and saw only the Roman, and made up his mind that he would go up to London to see John Brough to find out if he had heard of a suitable model of the big statue, and to show him the charcoal drawing of King Charles.

So the sunset found him dreaming on the little wooden bridge in St. James's Park. His elbows were on the parapet, a flat parcel leaned against it at his feet, he was waiting till all the working light should be gone before he went to his friend's flat. It seemed to himself years since he had seen John, so completely had his Restoration dream severed him from his ordinary life, but he remembered that to John a day was a day, as he, as commonplace mortal, could not interlard his dull hours with month-long thrilling dreams.

There was very little wind, and a light autumnal mist had crept upon the city from the river, changing the sunset from the deep golden of summer to a faint enchanted rose like winter sunsets over snow. He looked through the trees uniformed in the sad dull green of their decline, to the tall white buildings of the Horse Guards, and the still taller towers and cliffs of architecture which lie behind towards the east. Hundreds of feet high they looked in this glamour of mist and low sunlight, and every stone which in the broad day was dirty white or sickly yellow-grey, took on itself a magic unearthly tinge of pink. So that Mr. Carling saw, where Whitehall had stood, a fairy palace, like the enchanted towers of Fata Morgana, which seemed not so much to rest upon the earth as to float above it, soaring upwards into the misty evening air.

This sudden miraculous beauty of modern London comforted him, and he would willingly have stayed on the bridge until the fairy palace should have vanished into darkness, but a man, crossing the bridge behind him, hailed him, clapped him cordially on the shoulder, and asked him in gratingly modern slang to go with him and take a drink.

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. Carling, annoyed but absently courteous in Restoration style, "but I have an engagement."

"Now, Bob, what's the joke?" asked Mr. Carling's intrusive acquaintance, puzzled by being addressed so stiffly as "sir."

"Oh, well, Harry, I'm sorry," said Mr. Carling,

coming to himself. "I was thinking of something else. But I don't want a drink, thanks very much. I'm just going up to see Brough."

"It's not like you to linger dreamily on bridges in the sunset," observed Harry. "I thought you must be feeling sick."

"I am," said Mr. Carling, regarding his companion's appearance with great distaste. "Your clothes are enough to make anyone feel sick."

"They're very ordinary," protested Harry, and to do him justice, they were—neither shabby or obstrusively new, not dull and not over-smart.

"Oh, it's everyone," said Mr. Carling, wearily. "Good-bye."

He snatched up his picture and fled, leaving his friend, who had been, in past time, almost as intimate with him as John Brough, astounded on the bridge.

"I shall never be able to live in the world as it is now," thought Mr. Carling, as he made his way towards Chelsea. "I simply can't stand it. I shall have the last dream, and then I shall come back and do the big statue of Marcus. These fantastic past-complexes are too much for me. I suppose now I shall find John has installed a wireless set, or something equally foul and modern."

But he found John sitting in his big arm-chair as might any gentleman of the seventeenth century, reading a book.

"Sir," said Brough, beaming at him through horn-rimmed spectacles, "welcome may you be."

"Oh, John! What have you been reading?"

"*The High History of the Holy Graal,*" said Brough, showing him the book.

"And so had I."

"Then you know what you ought to have said, instead of saying, 'Oh, John!' in that peculiar tone."

"God give you joyful adventure," said Mr. Carling, and he sat down in a chair with a long sigh.

"I've got lumbago, otherwise I am joyful enough. I never expected to see you so soon again. Have you dined?"

"I had a sort of high tea. I don't want any dinner. What about you?"

"I crawled to a restaurant, being tired of lonely meals in the flat. You'd better stay with me until we find a model for the Roman. I heard of a man who might do at dinner to-night."

"Oh, well, I'll stay with you, if you go on having lumbago. Are you immovably fixed?"

Brough, painfully and with difficulty, moved his large bulk in the chair.

"I'm getting rather fixed," he admitted. "It gets worse and better. But you can't carry me if I am."

"I can drag you about, perhaps. But you don't want to go to bed yet, do you?"

"Oh, no. Show me that picture you've brought. Is it the drawings for the armour and things?"

"No," said Mr. Carling. He unwrapped his drawing of the King's head and gave it to Brough.

"Who is that, John?"

"That," said Brough, gazing at it in amazement, "is Charles the Second. But, my God! what an

ugly, horrible-faced fellow he was! That's much worse than any picture I've ever seen of him."

Mr. Carling covered the bottom part of the face with his hand, so that Brough could only see the eyes and the forehead.

"What do you think now?" he asked.

"Marvellous!" murmured Brough. "Perfectly beautiful eyes and perfectly bestial face. Take your hand away, Bob. I can't look at his eyes without the rest of him."

"Why?" asked Mr. Carling, without moving his hand.

"Because his eyes are so dreadfully sad they make me feel miserable."

Mr. Carling removed his hand, and Brough looked at the drawing for some time in silence.

"It's a dream face," he said at last. "You've seen him in a dream. There, take it away. I can't bear to look at it. There's something terrible about the sadness of that drawing. Bob, what's happening to you? You, of all men in the world, to be acquainted with grief!"

"I'm not the man I was," said Mr. Carling, and he put the picture on one side, and told Brough of his second dream. The tale took a long time, and of course he left out a great deal. But he told him the main facts and incidents, and of his love for Charles, his hatred of Monmouth, and his friendship with Rochester.

"Bob," said Brough seriously, when the story was finished, "if you know what brings these dreams on

you, you'll have to stop doing it. You're quite right. You're not the man you were at all. You're even looking older. And I can see very well that this dream has made you more miserable than the last. You were much fonder of your rake of a king than of your splendid Roman."

"I knew him better and I was with him longer. But I like better to honour the Roman than to honour Charles. But as for not having any more dreams—I must have the last. I think there will only be one more."

"I don't like it, Bob," said Brough, shaking his head. "Even if these weird dreams take no present time they take all your life-force. If you stayed in one for a long time you'd come out an old man."

"It wouldn't matter if I were a hundred."

"You couldn't do the statue of the Roman if you were a hundred."

"No, I couldn't do that. But I'll see that you get the head of the Roman and the drawing of Charles."

"I don't want Charles," said Brough, hastily.

"Why? Don't you think it's a good drawing?"

"It's extraordinary and astounding, and no one who knew you as you used to be would ever believe you'd done it. But I couldn't hang it up and keep on looking at it. It would haunt me and drive me silly. It's too sad, and besides, I don't like his face. I don't care whether it's the real Charles Stuart or just a dream Charles Stuart, he's a nasty fellow and it annoys me that you should have made friends with him."

"Oh, John," said Mr. Carling, rather astonished, "you're jealous."

"Well," said Brough, still more heatedly, "I've got a jealous nature, and if you'd ever been a human being you'd have found it out long ago. You've got as good friends in your own waking life as ever any man had, and you don't care two damns for anyone, and go off chasing blackguardly kings in dreams. It's enough to annoy the mildest man. You've been jealous yourself, so you ought to understand."

"Eh?" said Mr. Carling, astounded. "I've never been jealous in my life!"

"No, my lad, but you were in your dream. Why did you hate Monmouth?"

"It was a natural antipathy."

"There's no such thing. You were most humanly and sinfully jealous because Charles loved him so much."

"Well, John," said Mr. Carling, after a silence, "I never thought of that before. But I certainly hated him out of all reason. Now listen to this, John. I'm going to tell you something I've never told anybody yet."

"Not even Charles in the dream?"

"Not even Charles. When I was two days over thirteen years old, my mother died, very suddenly. It's thirty years ago now. I was terribly fond of her. I see now that the thing was such an appalling shock and such a desperate grief that it arrested for good and all my emotional development. You know that's true. I've never been a whole man, only part of a man."

"So that was it," murmured Brough. "I've often wondered why you were so different from anyone else."

"That was it. I didn't love my father particularly, and I was too young then to have anyone really in my life except my family. I was an only child, and when my mother went I had no one. And I never had anyone else. I liked some of the boys at school, but I never loved any of them, I never had a hero-worship, I have never made a real friend, I never fell in love with a woman. Though some men, like you, John, have made friends with me almost in spite of myself. I feel it very kind of you."

"But in the dreams," Mr. Carling continued, as calmly as if he had been discussing someone else, "I am the man I was meant to be. I'm myself, but I'm different. I can love people, and I love them pretty hard. I wasn't meant to be a passionless man or a cold man, I wasn't a cold-hearted child. In the dreams I'm the man the child would have grown into if—if things had been different. And now here's another queer thing. The dreams are not the same love each time for a different person, they're different kinds of love. When a boy's mother has ceased to be the only thing in his life he falls in love with other people. Any normal healthy boy's first love is pure hero-worship. It may be a master or it may be some wonderful athlete in the sixth, but it's someone he can look up to, admire, and delight in serving."

"The Roman," said Brough, under his breath.

"Yes. He was my superior. It wasn't an equal

love, it wasn't friendship, it was just hero-worship. But my friendship for Charles was quite different. I didn't feel him my superior, except in accidental things like rank and wealth, and I didn't look up to him particularly, neither did he look down on me. That was another kind of love. Well, but there's another yet to come."

"You've got to love a woman?"

"I expect so. That's the last thing, isn't it? Hero-worship, friendship, love."

"But why in the name of all devils," cried John Brough, giving his rheumatic back a most painful twitch, "can't you find a real woman?"

"I can't," said Mr. Carling, sadly. "Mother's the only woman for me in this life. It's only in the dreams I can love, it is only in the dreams I'm really myself. Out of them I can't do anything but miserably long to be back in them again. My hero is in the past, my friend is in the past, my lover will be in the past, too. I shall find her, as I found the Roman, and as I found Charles. And I shall know her directly I see her."

"You told me you didn't want to dream of a woman, and now you do seem to want to."

"It's no good wanting or not wanting. And, anyway, whatever difficulties I get into in the dream it'll be a change of sorrow, for one dream drives out another. I mean I shan't go on thinking about Charles all the time and how inexorably dead he is."

"Bob, don't have another dream," said Brough, urgently. "Chuck it and stay here. I don't like it.

These dream-loves of yours are so horribly real, I can see they are from the head and the drawing. I warn you that a woman will be worse even than Charles, you'll be so miserable if you have to come back."

"Oh, I know that."

"Then don't do it."

"I must."

"Well, not yet, anyway. Man, you'll end up in an asylum, or you'll shoot yourself."

"I shan't do either of those things. And I'm going to have my last dream—to-morrow night."

Mr. Carling had made up his mind to have it that night, but he suddenly thought Brough might be so anxious about him as to stay awake.

"I'll help you to bed now," he said, getting up. It's very late, nearly twelve. How's your back?"

"Oh, damn my back!" said poor John, groaning with pain as he tried to move. "You worry me much more than any lumbago."

Mr. Carling said nothing, but helped him to get up and walk into his bedroom, then took his shoes off and aided him in his undressing. He did not leave him till he was in bed, with his back packed comfortably with pillows.

"Bob," said Brough gratefully, but rather sadly, "even in your waking life you've changed a lot. I wish you'd stayed jolly and merry and inhuman. I'm afraid for you."

"It's no good even me wishing for that now. Good-night, John."

"Good-night. Oh, Bob, that bed's not been made up."

"I'll make it presently. I know where all the things are."

Mr. Carling shut the door and went away to his room, and as he went he wondered if he would want to make the bed up when he came back from his third dream. He lay down on it just as he was, and just as it was, with uncomfortable lumps of pillows and blankets beneath him, and said: "I wish I were in a dream of the past."

PART IV

LOVE

CHAPTER X

MR. CARLING opened his eyes and found that he was sitting on the back of a chestnut horse with an uncut silky mane. The ring was hurting him, and when he put his hand to his breast to move it, he found he was dressed in a tight doublet which sat close to his body and finished in a point in front of him. He had no time at the moment to make any further investigation of his dress, for he was startled by a man's voice close behind him.

"Robert!" it said, sharply. "Open the gate, boy! Art thou dreaming?"

Mr. Carling, still rather dazed, as he always was at the beginning of a dream, looked round his horse's head and saw a wooden gate, at which the chestnut was gently nibbling with young short front teeth. The gate barred the way across a woodland lane, and behind him, as he glanced round, he saw an old gentleman with a grey beard who was gazing at him with an expression of mingled annoyance and anxiety.

"Sir, I ask your pardon," muttered Mr. Carling, and jumped down to open the gate. When the old gentleman had passed through on his fine bay horse, Mr. Carling shut the gate again and managed to undo his unfamiliar doublet, get his hand inside his shirt and move the ring. Then he made closer examination of his clothes. They were of fairy green, against which colour he had a deep-rooted superstitious prejudice, and consisted of the doublet, very full breeches reaching nearly to the knee, and long stockings or tights. On his feet he had leather shoes strapped round the ankle, but the old gentleman, his companion, was wearing long riding boots. Round his neck Mr. Carling could feel a small starched standing ruff, and from his shoulders depended a little cloak, which for all practical purposes was very nearly useless.

"I am an Elizabethan," he thought, and he hastily felt his face to find out whether or no he had a beard. He did not like beards, and was relieved to feel himself clean-shaven, though he knew by past experience that the razors of the old days were none of the best. However, he thought that by the feel of his cheeks and chin he would not require shaving very frequently. Indeed, for one awful second he wondered if he could possibly be a girl dressed up in boy's clothes, his face felt so soft and smooth, but that fear did not last for more than a lightning flash. He was a man or a boy of eighteen or thereabouts, well-grown and tall, with broad shoulders and long, strong limbs. He felt his head, which was uncovered, and found it closely cropped as it had been when he had occupied the body

of Richard Field. He managed to catch hold of a few hairs on the top of his head and pull them out. They were very dark and fine. He then looked about on the ground for his hat, thinking he might have dropped it near the gate, but could see it nowhere.

"Sir," he said to the old gentleman, who was sitting quietly on his horse, watching him with ever-increasing anxiety, "did I come out without a hat?"

"Alas!" said the old man, and his expression of anxiety turned to one of resigned and sorrowful certainty. "Robert, the forgetful fit is on thee again. I feared it was so. It is not an hour since thou didst put thy hat in the bag at thy saddle to let the wind blow on thine uncovered head."

Mr. Carling remembered how, on a former occasion, the ring had arranged that his peculiarity and ignorance should be hidden under a seeming veil of mental abnormality, but then everyone had been quite pleased he should be an idiot. Now it was different, and the handsome old Elizabethan gentleman looked so sad and disappointed, that Mr. Carling longed to say something that would cheer him up.

"Why, sir," he said, smiling up at him, "it is true that the forgetful fit has taken me, but I feel both well and happy. I think that—that it is a different kind of fit this time, and not so bad perhaps."

The old gentleman looked at him intently, and his face grew much happier, though he seemed astonished by something.

"Why, boy, thou art right!" he said. "Thine eye

is not vacant, nor thy glance dull and heavy. Thou lookest at me as if—come now, and we will try thee. Who am I? "

Mr. Carling had made a shrewd guess that nothing but parental anxiety for a very well-loved son could have so clouded the old man's brow and eyes, and though it seemed strange that a man of sixty (for that was his apparent age) should have a son whose beard was still in the future, yet he might have married late in life, or have had a long family, of which the boy afflicted with forgetfulness was the last member.

"You are my father, sir, for whom I pray ever a long life and happiness," said Mr. Carling, cheerfully.

"I have known thee forget even me," said his father, looking pleased. "I have known thee gaze at me in that dull vacant way thou hast always had till now, and know me no more than a stranger who passes by. But come now, and we will try thee further. Get on the horse and ride by my side."

Mr. Carling mounted, and guided his beautiful chestnut so that his father could comfortably see him and speak to him as they rode up the wooded lane. He was interested and amused by this guessing game, and he knew that nothing now could sadden the old man, his father, so deeply as if his son had failed, in his affliction, to recognize him.

"Who reigns over England?" was the next question.

"Queen Elizabeth, whom God preserve," said Mr. Carling, thanking heaven for the length of that monarch's reign. Had he dreamed himself into the

Wars of the Roses he would have been much more likely to guess wrong.

"'Fore God!" murmured the old man, "this is a strange fit indeed. For at other time, when any have questioned thee, it takes more than a minute for the question to reach through into thy clouded brain. And then comes a sigh, and a mutter—'I do not know.' Robert! Art thou playing with me, boy? Didst thou pretend to forget about thy hat? By God! I will take a switch to thy back if it be *so!*"

"Father, I am not playing at all," said Mr. Carling, gently. "And is it my fault that the fit is different this time? I have forgotten nearly everything, but I feel now, that if you tell me things, I shall not so readily forget them as I am wont to do. My brain feels clear and strong, and though my memory is gone that can be amended if thou wilt help me. And so I pray you to do so, and look not angrily upon me for what I cannot help."

"Why, I will not, Robert," said the old man, penitently. "But thou hadst then such a sharp and roguish look as thou saidst 'Queen Elizabeth' that I thought it was a game to plague me and make a fool of me. Well, to amend thy memory we must find out first where the gaps lie. What year is it?"

"I have forgotten the year," said Mr. Carling, as the chances on this guess were too heavy against him.

"It is the summer of 1590. Hast forgotten what passed two years gone?"

"The Armada passed."

"Ay," said the old man sadly, so sadly that Mr. Carling divined a deep personal sorrow connected in some way with the sea-fight against Spain.

"Sir," he said tentatively, "my brother——"

"Ay, Robert, the strange hand which passes over thee presses less heavily. It hath this time left thee thine affections. I have known thee forget Dick as if he had never been born."

"Sir, my affections are unaltered," said Mr. Carling, earnestly, for he was beginning to like his father very much indeed. "But I have forgotten my own name and the name of the house where we live."

"Venne of Elmesley thou wilt be when I die," said the old gentleman, pronouncing the name of his manor in three syllables.

"Elmesley!" cried Mr. Carling. "Elmesley on the hill?"

"It hath never yet been in the vale."

"Why, father, that name strikes a chord in my memory even in my forgetfulness. I know Elmesley."

"Yet at other times thou hast been lost and wandering over the hill, knowing no more where to go than a blind man in strange country. How wouldst thou go to Elmesley from here?"

Mr. Carling looked about him and saw that the track they were following was rising steadily and that the whole wood was on a western slope, for the low sun was shining through the trees at their left hand rear side. The season was high summer and the sun would be setting in the north-west.

"I would ride up through the woods," he said, "till

I came out upon the down grass at the top of the hill. Then I would turn me towards the north and ride till I came to a gully or fold in the hill, and down the gully I would ride until I came to Elmesley Manor."

"Boy!" thundered the squire, his handsome old face suddenly scarlet with wrath. "Now I *know* thou dost go about to make a fool of me! Get down and cut me one of those hazel switches, and I will see how much dust I may fetch out of the shoulders of thy doublet, for with those new-fangled breeches of thine I may scarce come at thee on any other portion. Nay, it is too late to beg my pardon and say that it was but a jest. It is a jest that shall cost thee something if my arm hath any pith in it."

"Father," said Mr. Carling, apologetically, "if I am to be beaten for remembering some things and forgetting others, I shall have to be beaten three or four times in every day."

"It is *not* for forgetting things," said the squire sharply. "It is for mummery and play-acting, and pretending thou art in the forgetfulness when thou art not. It is for insolence and lack of respect to me, which I will tolerate neither in son, daughter, nor servant. What, will you disobey me now?"

For Mr. Carling had as yet made no movement to supply his irate father with an instrument of punishment. "Why, no, father," he said, getting off his horse. "I will get you a switch, and we will tie up the horses while you beat me. But I think I am rather old to be beaten."

"Then thou art too old to play such ape's tricks with me," said his father, inexorably. "It is more like a boy of fourteen than a lad of nearly twenty, and to be married in three months."

"Married!" cried Mr. Carling, appalled. "*Me* going to be married! Oh, my God!"

The squire could not for a moment longer doubt that his son was really in a fit of forgetfulness, so genuine was the look of amazed horror on his face.

"Why, Robert," he said, all his anger changed in a breath to tender solicitude, "of course thou art to be married. But long ere that this fit, so strange and different, will be away from thee. So get on thy horse again, and I—I am right sorry I said thou wast pretending. Come, boy, come. What is there in the thought of marriage that so frightens thee? Get on thy horse and ride with me, and tell me."

Mr. Carling did as he was told, and they rode on up the woodland track.

"Father, how can I not be aghast at the thought of marriage when I cannot remember the name nor the face of my bride?"

"But thou wilt remember when the forgetfulness leaves thee."

"But then, as the fit this time is different, so its duration will be different perhaps. And in any case I am a sort of idiot and not fit to be married."

"Thou art no sort of idiot," said his father, shortly. "Thou hast as good a mind as any man in England when thou hast the full use of it. Hugill is as anxious

for the marriage as I am myself, and the maid hath no objection, but loves thee well enough. It is a right suitable marriage, and thy fits are, in a manner, accidental. They are not in the blood."

"Is her name Hugill?"

"What else? The only child of Hugill of Stonegate, and by the marriage the manors will be joined in one. There is nought against it."

"How old is she?"

"Seventeen."

"Oh, father, I'm sure she can't want to marry me. She's too young."

"Maids must marry where they are bidden, but in this case, as I say, the bride is willing enough. Never fear, Robert."

"Why, does she love me, then?"

"I think she loves thee as well as she does any man. But she is a wild lass, and all for hunting and hawking, and breaking young horses and training dogs. Well, she herself must be broken and trained, for what profit is there in maids living like boys? She grows too old for follies. Not that I have any word to say against Mary Hugill. She is a brave and comely maid, and gentle-hearted as our own Jane."

"Does Jane want me to be married?"

"I tell thee, Robert, that when thou art thyself thou seest Mary's face in every strange-patterned cloud that hangs in the sky. And so, of course, Jane, like everyone else about thee, wants thee to have thine own desires. And," the old squire went on, with a sharp side-long glance at his son's face, "thou art a youth

who is well married young married. I would not for a fortune have thee live a bachelor longer than need be."

"Am I an evil youth, father?" asked Mr. Carling, with anxious interest.

"Nay, but thou hast a face which might well cause thee to become one, being helped on the road by every woman who ever sets eye on thee. And if thou hast forgotten thine own face that is a matter that may easily be mended. It will be no surprise to anyone to find thee standing before the mirror in the hall."

"I must be very vain," said Mr. Carling, in a depressed tone.

"Young men are all alike in these days," said the squire drily, "they must be for ever putting new feathers in their hats, altering the set of their cloaks, preening their ruffs like cock-birds, or stuffing their breeches till they look like two wine casks walking on legs. I say not that you are more vain and silly than any other young man."

"Well, sir, I'm sure I have more cause to pad my breeches, at any rate, than other young men. I shall ask Jane to put some pads under my doublet."

"Let be, boy, let be," said the squire, in an affectionate grumble. "Must I beg pardon on my knees? And what is a switching more or a switching less? England will be come to a rare pass when fathers may not chastise their sons. My beatings have made thee into a courteous well-mannered lad, and not undutiful."

"Father, I would ask you a favour," said Mr. Carling, seeing the moment was propitious.

"Well, what is it?"

"I beg of you that this marriage of mine may not take place until my fit of forgetfulness has passed away from me."

"It will never last three months."

"It might. But even if it did, I know I can be very happy living with you at Elmesley. Father, I want no marriage in my dream. I—I cannot be married while I am as I am to-day."

"Well," said the old squire, sighing, "I will promise you that neither Hugill nor I will urge the marriage upon you until you are yourself again. And as for Mary, next month or next year, it makes little difference in her mind. She is not holding back from it in any way, but neither is she pressing forward. If she were betrothed to the greatest baron in the land she would be thinking more of a new horse or a young puppy than of him."

"I think I shall like Mary," murmured Mr. Carling, who was now quite sure that his betrothed wife could not be the woman the ring had sent him to find. He was no longer certain that he was to find a woman to love at all. He felt perfectly happy and unafraid, this riding on a summer evening in Elizabethan England filled his heart with such a sudden ecstasy of pleasure that he clapped his heels into his horse's side and began to sing.

The animal bounded forward, cannoned into the squire's spirited bay, which also began to kick and

prance, and for a moment or two there was confusion in the narrow lane.

"I must have spurs on," said Mr. Carling, breathless and apologetic. "I only gave him a little kick."

He looked down at his shoes and saw that he had a small pair of steel spurs attached to them, quite large enough to wake up a horse who at no time suffered from lethargy.

"I pray thee to keep them in thy memory," said Mr. Venne, chuckling. "It is as well thou wert not wearing thy riding boots with the big spurs. Now get behind me, for the track is too narrow here to ride together."

They climbed, one behind the other, up the last piece of narrow stony track, and having now left the woods beneath them, came out upon the short springy turf which clothed the top of the hill. The squire put his horse into a canter, and Mr. Carling's chestnut, still fretting over the unwarranted spurring in the lane, immediately bolted. Mr. Carling let him go as he would, knowing there were miles of grass before him on which the horse could take no hurt, and when the animal was a little breathed he turned him in a large circle, stopped him and rode back to his father, laughing, with wind tears running down his cheeks.

"Shall we have a race, Father?" he said. "I seem to remember my horse can give yours three lengths in three hundred yards."

"It is not so much the horse, as the weight,"

grunted Mr. Venne. "But I will not race Oliver to-day, and Roland has had enough just for this while, so we will go along at a reasonable and steady pace. I cannot scamper over the hill as I did in the days that were."

They cantered along for another half-mile or so, along level ground and up a small shallow rise. At the top of this rise they saw a number of horsemen riding towards them, and the squire pulled up his horse so sharply that the creature tossed up its head and half reared.

"It is she!" muttered Mr. Venne, more to himself than his son. "She is riding over the hill to see the sunset."

"Is it Mary Hugill, sir?" asked Mr. Carling, though wondering why a country squire's daughter should ride with such a train of followers.

"Mary Hugill? No. It is the Queen."

"The Queen!" repeated Mr. Carling, astounded. "Queen Elizabeth? Why, what is she doing down here?"

"She is staying at the castle."

"At Sudeley? I'm sure she never went back to Sudeley," murmured Mr. Carling.

The squire did not hear this sentence quite as it was said, and he turned upon his son a face that was absolutely changed, so cold it was and stern.

"Why should she not go back to Sudeley, Robert? Hast thou been talking to old John Graves, the Roman traitor? If thou hast, and believest ought that he tells of, no son art thou of mine."

"Father, I have talked to no one, and I have no idea of what you mean. But I just thought that the Queen never—I mean never would go back to Sudeley. I had forgotten she was there."

"Well, well," said the squire, and his face changed from sternness to a sort of melancholy, "she hath come back to Sudeley. And she rides over the hill to see the sunset as she used to do, though I believe it is many years now since she hath ridden a horse. I pray that it be a quiet and gentle one that will not tire her overmuch."

"Father, are you the same age as the Queen?"

"I am three years older than she."

"And you were always just three years older?"

"Ay, Robert," said the squire, still in his sad yet peaceful dream.

"And when the Queen was a princess, and lived at Sudeley, did you ride to the edge of the hill to see the sunset?"

"Ay, boy. Often I used to ride to the edge of the hill in the summer time."

"And did you meet the Princess Elizabeth at the edge of the hill?"

"I saw her sometimes."

"Was she a fair Princess?"

"Fair enough, lad. Fair enough."

"And have you seen her at all since?"

"Robert!" said the squire, suddenly realizing the impertinence and impudence of his son's questionings. "What mean you by your insolence? What is it to thee?"

"Why, it is just very interesting and fascinating. I wish you would tell me how long it is since you have seen her."

"It is fifteen years," said Mr. Venne, his unreal anger evaporating in a breath. "And that was only for a bow and a kiss her hand at the Court. But it is many more years since she was at Sudeley."

"So I have never seen her?"

"No."

"Father, why have you not been to the castle to pay your respects and humble duty?"

"Why, lad," said the old squire, rather sorrowfully, "she hath given orders that she will see no one, save she send for them, for that she desires rest and quiet. Yet I thought perhaps she might have sent for me. But she hath not. And now take your hat out of the bag on your saddle, that you may hold it in your hand, and get down from your horse."

Mr. Carling did so, and as the horsemen approached them and he could see a dark small figure riding in front of the rest, a queer feeling of panic overtook him. He had not been in the least alarmed at the thought of meeting Charles or James Stuart, or William III. When he had met Charles he had been able to look him in the eye without faltering, he had smiled at James, Duke of York and even the lovely Frances Stuart had not been able to put him in any way out of countenance. But of Elizabeth, England's last real monarch, he felt afraid. He did not want to see her, he was annoyed with the ring for bringing her so unnecessarily into his dream. He admired her

tremendously as a Queen, but he did not want to see her as a woman. He was afraid of illusions being shattered, and that he would see, instead of the wonderful legendary figure of his childhood, an old painted woman in a red wig. And at the same time he felt that the frown of Elizabeth, however old and however painted, would be terrible, and that even her passing glance would be enough to set the marrow in his bones quaking. After his Carolean dream he had in his mind dismissed the Tudors as uninteresting, and yet now, when in another dream he saw the last and greatest of the Tudors approaching him, he felt humble and shy and alarmed as might the real Elizabethan Robert Venne.

"Well," he said to the squire, as they stood by their horses, waiting. "I always knew she was a really great woman. Charles and James were nothing, and so of course I wasn't afraid of them."

"Hold thy peace," said Mr. Venne, without paying attention.

As the Queen came up to them the squire knelt down on one knee, holding his reins in one hand and his hat in the other, with his fine old grey head up, and his eyes on the small woman who rode upon the white horse. Mr. Carling kneeled down likewise, but his shyness and humility were so heavy upon him that he did not dare to look up, but counted the grass stems near his right foot. He heard a voice say, sharply and questioning:

"Elmesley?"

"If it please your Majesty, it is John Venne, of

Elmesley," he heard his father say, in a small voice, unlike his usual robust tones.

"Come you hither to me, John Venne, of Elmesley," said the Queen. "Why have you not been down at the castle to attend me?"

The squire hurled his reins at his kneeling son, and went up to the Queen, hat in hand. But still Mr. Carling did not dare to look up, and he knelt on one knee, holding both the horses, and watched them crop at the short sweet hill grass.

"Your Majesty gave orders that no one was to come for whom you had not sent," said the squire.

"You might have known I had forgotten you," replied the hard, small voice.

"I knew very well your Majesty had forgotten me."

There was a little chuckle, and the Queen amended her discourteous speech.

"I mean you might have known you were not included in the order, John Venne."

"I like better to hear it from your Majesty's own lips."

"Well, now you have heard it, and I command you to come down to the castle in the morning and await my orders. Elmesley, you were a young fool, and now you are an old one. Who is that boy who is stricken with a palsy?"

"He is my son, so it please your Majesty."

"Can he stand on his legs? Come you hither, young sir. You are not at your prayers now. Charles, hold the horses."

The Queen beckoned with one finger behind her,

and a richly dressed page sprang off his horse and relieved Mr. Carling of his bunch of reins. And now his case was grievous indeed, for he had nothing to occupy his hands but his unfortunate hat, and he had to walk ten paces over the grass upon feet and knees which almost refused to bear him up. And still he could not look at the Queen. He bowed low when he thought he was near enough and stood still, counting the grass blades round the off fore hoof of the Queen's white horse.

"Is he blind?" asked the harsh voice high above him, but through its hardness and severity Mr. Carling thought he could detect a subtle tenderness which was, however, not for him. But he thought that Elizabeth would have been a little sorry if Venne of Elmesley had had a blind son.

"Nay, your Majesty. He is shy."

"Look up, boy," commanded the Queen. "It is not like the Vennes to hold their heads down in the presence of a woman."

Thus encouraged, Mr. Carling did look up, and both he and the Queen received a slight shock. Both shocks were pleasant ones. He saw a small woman, plainly and beautifully dressed in a very dark red velvet robe with a small standing ruff like a man's round her neck. She had on a black cloak, held on the shoulders by two wonderful ruby and diamond clasp brooches, and on her head, perhaps for a disguise, or perhaps because she knew the hill winds were apt to be rough and boisterous, she wore a plain countrywoman's hood, which hid her hair and shaded

her face. Her gloves only, besides the clasps of her cloak, proclaimed her as a woman of rank. They were of fine supple leather, richly embroidered in gold and sewn with precious stones. The face which looked down upon him from inside the hood, was old, indeed, and lined, but no paint made age ugly, it was left to its own fine dignity and gravity. It was a proud, severe, sad face, and the eyes, too, were hard and sad. Mr. Carling, looking at her fine clearly-cut features, realized that the Princess Elizabeth must indeed have been "fair enough," and he thought that perhaps the plainness of the Queen's dress to-day was a tribute to those other days when she had had no need of paint or beautiful clothes to enhance her young well-favouredness—the days when she had ridden out to see the sunset with little thought of her real destiny, which in itself was a long summer's day that yet must end in darkness.

The Queen looked down at the boy she had thought must be blind, and in a little while she smiled.

"Art thou sure he is thy son, Elmesley?" she asked, turning to the squire.

"I am as sure of it as I am of anything, your Majesty," said Mr. Venne.

"Well, thy family is a handsome one. But this boy is more handsome by a great way than ever thou wert at thy very best. And I suppose he is as vain as a peacock, and I do very ill to praise him to his face. What is your name, young Paris?"

"Robert, so please your Majesty," said Mr. Carling, wishing he knew what his own face looked like.

"I like the name Robert," said Elizabeth, and he wondered if she were thinking of Robert Dudley. "And how old are you?"

"I am nearly twenty."

"Elmesley, it is many years since you were nearly twenty, and rode on the hill in the evening time in a scarlet doublet and hose and a green cloak with a silver lining."

Mr. Carling shot a twinkling glance at his father on hearing this revelation of his youthful extravagances in dress, and had he not been still too much in awe of the Queen to speak unless he were addressed, he would have made some reference to stuffed breeches. Elizabeth saw the glance, and laughed.

"Well, I know what he says to you, Robert," she said. "'Why, what are the young men coming to? When I was your age I never did thus and thus, or wore this and that, or used such oaths and speech, or——' but I could tell you some tales. Young men are always young men. I like them very well. Now which of you two, the young or the old, shy Robert or bold John, will lead my horse to the edge of the hill? The sun is nearly gone. What! Neither of you? Well, I never thought to be refused anything by any Venne among ye."

"Your Majesty, it is that both of us would like to lead the horse," said the Squire.

"I will not have both of you. And since ye cannot choose, I will. I will have young Robert to see the sunset with me, and you will not take it amiss, Elmesley, for you are to come to the castle in the

morning. But I will not have Robert to Sudeley, for I have some very silly maids there with me, and if they saw him their heads would never cease from turning round and round. So, Robert, I pray you cast your shyness, for after this evening it is very like you will never see me again."

"Your Majesty," stammered Mr. Carling, a deep blush burning in his cheeks, "it is too much honour to have seen you once. It is a—well, I cannot say what it is, but it is a—it is a thing I never thought would happen—like it has happened."

The Queen looked sharply at him, but she made no reply to this incoherent muddle of a speech. She signed to him to walk on her left side, and with a slight movement of her right hand she indicated to the others that they should remain where they were.

So, Mr. Carling led the white horse with one hand lightly on the rein, to the edge of the Cotswold hills, where they could see down into the broad green wooded valley of the Severn, and away over it a score or more miles, the steep curved line of the Malverns. Mr. Carling marvelled to see how little the big things of the earth change in a few centuries. The valley looked the same as it always had to him save that it was more thickly wooded and there was, of course, no town in the beautiful hollow which lay beneath the hill upon his left hand. But he could see Gloucester Cathedral, rising out of a mist, as usual, and the pale tower of Tewkesbury, and the little church of Prestbury close to his feet, and far away the noble outline of the Malvern Hills. And the sun was setting at the

north end of the hills, and in the sky he could see St. Brandan's Islands, dark, ringed with golden surf, in a sea of gold.

The Queen looked in silence upon her beautiful country, sitting very still on the white horse, whose silky mane shone in every thread like fine gold wire. Very quiet and grave was her face, her cold eyes took warmth from the coloured light, her thin worn features were ennobled and glorified into the magnificent hard asceticism of a saint. Mr. Carling wondered greatly what she was thinking, but not to save his life could he have intruded himself upon her thoughts. There was in this dream figure of the last despot of England, something so chilling, so powerful, and so terrible that his usual assurance withered away like a flower in an east wind.

"Robert," said the Queen at last, "can you see the Welsh hills?"

"No," said Mr. Carling, finding his voice with difficulty.

"Yet I can. In your mind, which is the most English county in all England?"

"They say Sussex," said Mr. Carling, his wits still wandering, and yet, after all, what was beside him but a little old woman on a white horse?

"Nay, they say wrong, Gloucestershire is the most English county, and it is because it lies on the borders of Wales. Who should know better than I? Who has cared for England better than I have? And who will ever care? Ah, but who will keep England safe when I am gone?"

"The English people," murmured Mr. Carling, half under his breath. But the Queen heard him.

"The people?" she said, scornfully. "The people must be ruled, not rule. Stiff-necked, stubborn, tenacious, self-willed are ye all. Yet ye must be ruled —by a Scot."

Mr. Carling had never before heard the name of Scot used with blighting contempt as a term of pure opprobrium, but as he thought of the Scots lords of the unhappy Mary Stuart's reign, he realized that there was some excuse. To Elizabeth the inhabitants of the northern part of the island consisted of barbaric Highlanders, scarcely more civilized Lowland and border moss-troopers, and false barons without number. He was even more startled by Elizabeth's mention of the future King of England, for he remembered that even on her death-bed she had refused to name her heir. So he dared make no comment of any sort, for by this time, so potent was the effect of Elizabeth's personality upon his own, he was almost ready to credit her with magic powers.

"Ay," Elizabeth went on, as if she were speaking to herself, "when I am dead and buried, they will say this and that evil thing of me, and my name will be blackened by priests, and they will tell every truth and every lie that will aid them to their work. But what is a woman's name worth that she should care for it so tenderly? Women of good name are as common as daisies in the grass. But a sovereign's good name is a rare and precious thing, and few enough there are who

have been able to keep it. I am not a woman, but a Queen. And so, when they say this and that, I shall lie quiet in my grave in the cold dark Abbey, for there are two things that none will ever say. One is, 'she was a foreign Queen,' for of all the men and women who have ruled England I am the most English. And the other is, 'she took no care of her people.'"

Mr. Carling hardly dared to breathe, far less speak or move or do anything that might interrupt the current of the Queen's thoughts. He was afraid she might remember how young he was and how much a stranger, and either be angry that she had told so much of her real mind, or at the best relapse into complete silence or more ordinary conversation. Elizabeth, still gazing over the valley, took off first one and then the other of her beautiful jewelled gloves, and crossed her bare hands over them upon her knee. Mr. Carling had never seen such wonderful hands, never had imagined such beauty of bone or fair white skin. They were small, yet larger than he would have thought from the size of her body, very powerful, with a good width of palm, and long sensitive fingers of marvellous slenderness. They were not like an old woman's hands, yet neither were they like a young girl's. They were almost masculine in the impression of power they gave, and yet their strength was too refined, too subtle to be merely masculine. They were like the hands of a spiritual being who has taken to himself temporarily a robe of flesh and bone. With any other woman—with Elizabeth herself in different

mood—the removal of the gloves would have been a deliberate action to display her one perfect physical beauty. Mr. Carling knew she had done it in absence of mind, and he gazed with passionate intensity at the hands, for she might at any moment put on the gloves again and hide them.

"It will be many years," said Elizabeth, "ere any of ye will know all I have done for ye. Many years after I am dead. But, before God, ye will find a change before I am a week in my grave. Ye shall know the difference between an ill rule and a good one. Spain is broken, Mary is dead, England, in a manner, is safe. But the people are growing hard to hold, and if *I* feel it, what think ye Mary's son can do? Nay, there is no one alive now, man or woman, who can hold them save me alone. I am the last Tudor, and by God's head, I think I am the last real King of England. What think ye, young Robert?"

Mr. Carling sighed, for he knew by the Queen's tone and her use of two of her favourite oaths in one speech that she come back to her usual self. She looked at him, too, and he wished earnestly that she had kept her eyes on the Malvern Hills and continued to speak about herself and England in that quiet, still, detached voice.

"Why," he mumbled, looking at his feet, "there will be many more kings of England. Yet is your reign like a long summer's day which grows ever more glorious until the sun sets."

"Ay, young courtier. But how if it sets into a night that hath no day-dawn? Well, well. If I speak any

more in this strain you will be telling the other boys and girls that the Queen is in her dotage. Will you tell them that, Robert? "

"Your Majesty, I shall tell them nothing at all."

Elizabeth gave him such a long and piercing glance from her cold hard eyes that there was time for one blush to come to its full strength, fade away, and give place to another.

"Nay, I know you will tell them nought, because you are too respectful. You are more than respectful, you are afraid of me."

"Yes, I am."

"I could never have done what I have if I had not been able to make men fear me. Love—that is nothing. But fear is all. It is a powerful weapon. And because you are afraid of me, you shall tell me something. Your eyes are the eyes of a young man—a boy."

"Your Majesty, I am a young man."

"But the thoughts that look out of your eyes are not the thoughts of a young man. And so, why is that? "

"I—I am not what I seem."

"I know that. Robert, have you ever loved a woman? "

"No."

"You have had love in your life, and grief in your life, and your thoughts are old. Well, I tell you now that no love is worth the sorrow it carries with it, except the love that has been mine. I have given my life for it, and I have been happy in it."

Yet Mr. Carling, looking up at her, thought he had never seen so sad a face.

"Eh," said the Queen, suddenly smiling at him, "but there is more than the sadness, Robert. There is the triumph. That is worth all, and more than all. Come."

She held out her left hand to him, and he bowed low and kissed it. Then she turned the horse, and with their backs to the darkening valley they returned to the others. But the Queen spoke no more to him, and when he and his father left her train at the head of the little valley in the hill which runs down to Elmesley, he felt as if he had dreamed within his dream.

CHAPTER XI

IT was nearly dark when Mr. Venne and his afflicted son, who was now genuinely withdrawn and vague, came to the Manor; and Mr. Carling's head was so full of the sunset, and the Queen's face and her hands, and the Golden Age, and the peculiar melancholy beauty of this his third ring dream, that he made no attempt to examine the outside of the house, but threw his reins to a groom who came running at the sound of the horses' feet, and marched straight into the room on the left of the entrance hall, which had been in his own day, the dining-room.

He stood for a moment blinking in the light of two tolerable lamps, and then he saw, sitting on a settle side by side and very close together, a boy and a girl. The girl he recognized instantly, from her likeness to the squire, as his sister Jane. He concluded the boy must be his younger brother, though none such had been mentioned, and the lad was fair, and blue-eyed, in no way like the beautiful dark-haired Jane. He seemed to be about fifteen, tall for his age, slim and well-made, well-dressed also in a suit of dark blue, with a very new-fashioned falling lace collar round his neck instead of a standing ruff. He had a high-crowned hat with a very gay feather held by a brooch,

and his hat was on his head, which Mr. Carling considered peculiar manners.

"Robert!" cried Jane, startled perhaps by something strange in her brother's air. "What ails thee?"

"Oh, Robert!" cried the boy, in a strangely sweet husky voice. "What ails thee?"

But it was easy enough for Mr. Carling to see that while Jane was really anxious about him, the boy was only mocking both of them.

"It's the forgetfulness, Jane," he muttered, to cover his confusion, and he took a step towards the door, intending to rush out into the darkness again. For it seemed to him that the ring had been seized with a spirit of railery, and had sent him into this third dream to pour out his heart upon an impertinent brat of a younger brother. But he got no farther than the first step, for Jane ran to him and held him by the arms.

"It is not," she said, after one look at his eyes. "Robert, it is very ill-done of thee to say it is when it is not."

"Very ill," said the fair boy, with a virtuous look. "Say that to thy father, and he will dust thy doublet."

"And I will dust yours," said Mr. Carling, but he could not help smiling, the boy was so handsome and had such merry blue eyes and so sweet a voice.

"Fie upon thee! Surely thou wouldst never beat me?"

"And why not?"

"It would be unseemly for thee to beat me, until we are married."

"Married! Good—boy—what!" Mr. Carling

gasped, choked, strode up to the lad, and without using any ceremony, plucked the hat off his head. Then it was to be seen plainly that the boy was a girl, a young, strong, coltish creature, dressed in all points like a man save for the plaits of fair hair which were twisted tightly round her head.

"Oh," said Mr. Carling, in a low voice. "Oh!"

"Robert, what is it?" asked the girl, now rather frightened.

"Child, are *you* Mary Hugill?"

"Who else? Jane! Jane! What does he mean? He is not in a fit, and yet he does not know me."

"I understand it now," said Mr. Carling, and he took one of Mary's slim hands, rough and brown with out-door use, between both his own. A faint shiver of pain passed through his whole body.

"It is beginning," he said, looking at Mary's round astonished blue eyes. "I thought it would be a woman, and it is—it is a faery's child."

"God be with us!" gasped Mary. "What is it, Jane? It is not a fit, he hath gone out of his mind!"

"Hush!" said Mr. Carling. "I hear father in the hall. Listen, Jane, and—and you, Mary. I *am* in the forgetfulness, but the fashion of the fit has changed. It is only partial. I remember some things and forget others. And I am remembering new things all the time. I know that I have known Mary Hugill all my life, and yet when I first came in I thought she was a boy. So you——"

He was interrupted by the entrance of the squire, to whom Jane dropped a little curtsy, and Mary also

urtsied ridiculously, holding out the sides of her full reeches.

"What, Mary!" said Mr. Venne. "Still in boy's lothes? Well, you must learn to bow, then."

Mary put her hat on her head, and swept it off again n a bow of exaggerated courtliness. Mr. Carling per-eived by his father's manner that he was quite used o seeing his son's betrothed in masculine attire, and lisapproved of it no more than he would of a child's nerry and irresponsible antics.

"Sir," said Mary, who seemed to have recovered her pirits, "how could I ride my mare, Wind, in any ther clothes? She could not tolerate a great kirtle lapping round her belly. She would either run away lind, or lie down and roll, and I should be caught in he horn of the saddle and there would be an end of ne."

"Nay," said the squire, "I do not think that thou houldst ride Wind in a kirtle, but rather ask thy ather to buy thee a quiet palfrey."

"Then should I fall far behind the dogs in the hase."

"A maiden should think of other things than the hase. Of needlework, and spinning-wheels, and rdering the household, and tending children."

"Sir, it would be unseemly in a maiden to have any hildren to tend," said Mary, demurely.

"Away with thee!" said the squire, with a roaring urst of laughter. "Well, thou wilt settle down anon nd be done with these follies. Jane! Why, where s the child?"

"She hath gone to order supper for thee and Robert, I doubt not. We have had ours this long time past. And I am to lie here to-night, so it please you, sir, for my father hath ridden down to Gloucester."

"And on the morrow in the morning," said Mr. Venne, with but ill-concealed pride, "I am to ride down to Sudeley."

"Oh, Robert!" cried Mary, clapping her hands, "Hast thou seen the Queen?"

"Ay, indeed," said the squire, answering for his tongue-tied son. "We met her riding on the hill."

"And what manner of horse did she ride? Oh, I would I had been there!"

"I think that the Queen would like your dress but ill," said the squire, a trifle drily, "unless, indeed, she took you for a boy. And Robert here, she might well have taken for a girl, so fiercely and passionately did he blush."

"I have heard it said," observed Mary, with a defiant little tilt of her round chin, "that her Majesty likes *women* but ill, however befitting and modest is their dress."

"Mary," said the squire sternly, "carry not your licence of speech too far. Within this house and in my hearing I will have no light talk made of the Queen."

"I ask your pardon, sir," said Mary, meekly. "I think I meant it not very evilly."

"The tongue is an unruly member," said the

quire more gently, and he went out of the room and as presently heard in the hall calling for Jane.

"Robert," said Mary, wrinkling her forehead, "*all* my members are unruly, and now thy father is displeased with me."

"He is not," said Mr. Carling, looking across the dark oak table at her. "He loves you well. And so does Jane."

"And so dost thou," said Mary, and she shot him a glance which was both merry and affectionate, but as uncoquettish as the smile of a child.

"And so do I."

"Well then, if thou wilt kiss me, thou canst."

"I will not do that—not yet."

"Robert, thou are ungallant," said Mary, pretending to pout. "Thou art generally all for kissing, and all for not kissing—until we be wed, and then I must bear with it as best I may, as with these heavy beatings thou art to give me."

"I will not beat you, but I think I will not kiss you rather."

"What! Not when we are married? Well, Robert, I will marry thee in the morning, then."

"Child, are you afraid of the kisses of Robert Fenne?"

"Child thyself," said Mary drily. "Thou hast but three years advantage of me. And I am not afraid of my kisses. I am not afraid of anything. Kiss me and see if I am afraid."

"It will hurt me to kiss you."

"Then, if my lips are so baneful to thee I must

even take them to another market," said Mary, but though she tried to look very haughty and dignified, her blue eyes were as happy and smiling as ever.

"No, it will not hurt me at all to run another man through with this sword I have here."

"Wouldst thou indeed run a man through if I kissed him?" asked Mary, and she seemed surprised by something.

"I would rather you didn't do it, anyhow," said Mr. Carling, suddenly returning to his modern speech. "I should be pretty wild, I expect."

"I cannot understand thee."

"Well, I should be jealous. Have I never been jealous before?"

"Thou hast had no cause, and never shall have," said Mary, placidly. "And if thou desirest not to kiss me, why, I care not. Tell me of the Queen. Is she —hath she ever been as beautiful as some say?"

"She has the most lovely hands I have ever seen."

"But her face?"

"She has a harsh, sad face, and cold eyes."

"And what is she like?"

"What is she like, Mary? Well, I never knew really until this day. She is great. She is not just only a remarkable woman, she would be so even if she had been a man. She is more than a woman, and more than a man. She is Queen Elizabeth. She is England. And she is only a small old woman with a beaky nose."

"I knew not that she was *small,*" said Mary, in some astonishment.

"Judged by my standard, she is. Are you a big woman, Mary?"

"Why, yes, I am very tall."

"But I think you are only middle-sized."

"Then thou hast been consorting with some giantesses," said Mary, indignantly.

"Well," said Mr. Carling, soothingly, "I have always liked little women, though in this dream I am a decent size and could do with some bigger ones."

"I am not a little woman!" cried Mary, stamping her foot on the floor. "I am as tall as a great many men. Proper men, not lanky, spindle-legged, board-chested, clothes-line-props like thee, Robert!"

"I am a very proper man," said Mr. Carling, looking at the calf of his leg. "What I can see of myself. The Queen said I was very handsome."

"The Queen thinks that everything that wears breeches is handsome," said Mary, and then she clapped her hand to her lips and looked guilty. "Oh, Robert, what if thy father heard me! I should be sped. Tell him not, and even I will say thou art handsome."

"You know very well I would never tell him. However, I wish you would say it."

"Robert Venne, my betrothed," said Mary, very solemnly, "thou art the most beautiful man in all England. There! And, for a marvel, it is the truth," she added, and ran laughing out of the room.

Mr. Carling was by this time so curious about his own face that he felt he could not exist much longer without seeing it. He snatched up one of the lamps

and went quickly out into the hall, avoiding by very little a collision with a serving man who was carrying plates and dishes into the dining-room. He speedily found the mirror mentioned by his father, and holding the lamp so that it would throw the best light he made minute examination of a face which for comeliness he had never seen surpassed, except perhaps by the beautiful features of the Duke of Monmouth. Robert Venne had fine dark hair, and dark eyebrows, and large shining eyes of a warm hazel colour, with lashes so long and curling that Mr. Carling felt quite ashamed of them. His face was square, with a good line from the point of the jaw to the round chin, his nose was short and straight, his mouth, as perfect in shape as a man's mouth may be, was of a deep dark red. He had a white skin, but it was burnt by exposure to the sun to a lovely even brown, with a faint warm flush of red on the cheeks. He could see now that he was like the squire, and like Jane, but better-looking than either of them. In him the handsome Vennes had reached their highest point of beauty. And then, for the first time in the dream, he began to wonder about his dream-mother. He felt quite sure she was dead, for no one had mentioned her, and he thought she must have been a pale, colourless kind of woman, for on neither of her offspring that he had seen had she been able to impress anything of her physical personality. But he felt that in Jane there was something peaceful and gentle, yet unyielding, which she could not have derived from the choleric, mercurial character of old John Venne. Then he

tried to construct the real Robert's character from the face he saw in the glass, but he could do nothing with it. It was too beautiful and flawless to have any character at all. It made him think of Helen of Troy, who was so lovely that no man ever got any further with her than looking and desiring. And then it made him think of the Golden Age of England, where poets were as common as blackberries, and the Master Poet was living and writing, and English seamen were flinging girdles round the world, and the English Queen watched them as might Jove the sporting of the gods. And he thought he would like to live for ever in this Golden Age with Mary Hugill, but then he remembered the faint shiver of pain which had run through him when he took her hand.

"Ha! Robert!" said the robust bass voice of his father just behind him. "Art thou recalling to thy memory thine own face?

"I had forgotten it, sir."

"Then it must be a right pleasant thing to see it for the first time," said Mr. Venne, kindly and tenderly. "But never fear, boy. This fit of thine is so different from all the others that I feel it may be the last thou shalt ever have. So come away to supper with me."

The supper was very plain, and cold, as the squire had refused to wait while something should be cooked. It consisted of cold beef, bread, a dish of cold boiled peas and plenty of strong ale. Mr. Carling immediately asked for water.

"What new fad is this?" grumbled his father.

"Drink thine ale, boy. Whoever heard of drinking water save in sickness?"

"Father, I wish to try whether drinking only water will cure my fits."

"It is more like to give thee green-sickness. Whoever heard of drinking water only, like the beasts? Hath not God given us the juice of grape and grain?"

"But I know there is good water in the deep well in the yard."

"I say not the *water* is bad, I say that water-drinking, save in fever, is bad."

"Father, I pray you to favour me in this," said Mr. Carling, seeing that argument was useless with anyone so bull-headed and set on his own way as the squire.

"Bring water, Adam," Mr. Venne ordered, and as the man went out of the room he said, "And wilt thou drink water on thy wedding day?"

"Nay," said Mary Hugill, who had slipped into the dining-room unperceived, even by her lover. "On our wedding day we will drink a quart of sack to our lost youth."

She sat down by Mr. Carling, and began to prick out cold peas on the point of her dagger, taking them off the heap that lay on his plate. The squire looked at his son's face, and smiled, as if he were well pleased.

CHAPTER XII

IN the morning Mr. Carling went out riding with Mary, and he found out from her why his father had been so certain that his son had been deceiving him as to the genuineness of his forgetful fit. Robert Venne had been afflicted with spasms of complete loss of memory, in which, though he could speak and move and do as he was bidden, he knew no one and no place, and had to be watched as if he had been a child. The fits had started when he was fifteen, after an occasion when he had fallen from his horse on to his head, and had come upon him at varying intervals even in this Golden Age with Mary Hugill, but then and with varying durations. Mary seemed to take them with great calmness, and explained that she had been frightened the evening before because she had thought from the brightness of his eyes and the alertness of his manner that he was not in a fit at all.

"And though thy speech in this fit," she added, "is very strange, so that at times I scarce understand thee, yet it is not the old whispering mutter."

"And would you rather I were in one of the usual ones?" asked Mr. Carling.

"Why, no, of a surety," said Mary, and for quite a long time after that she was silent and thoughtful.

This was only the first ride of many. Mary was determined to extract the last ounce of enjoyment out of her dwindling time of freedom, and would do nothing but ride, hunt and hawk, and though Mr. Carling knew nothing of the chase as pursued by the Elizabethans and nothing of hawking in any age Mary seemed always to like his company. She put down his stupidity and forgetfulness as all part of his fit, together with his strange blurred speech, his mispronunciation of some words, and his occasional expressed wonder at the stark discomfort and lack of what he considered necessities in even a well-to-do Elizabethan household.

She wore her boy's clothes always, and Mr. Carling, once he had seen her ride, admitted that if ever a woman deserved to wear the apparel of a man, that woman was Mary Hugill. But though she could control her wild animal, the mare Wind, in a way that struck Mr. Carling as nothing short of marvellous, though she could strike down a deer with her crossbow, though she was expert in all the mysteries of hunting, hawking, and the tending of birds, horses, and dogs, and though many of these delights were to be snatched from her upon her youthful marriage, she was entirely unresentful, either against God or man.

One day, when Mr. Carling had been in his dream for about a fortnight, they were returning to Stonegate Manor after a day spent in a wood down in the vale where Mr. Hugill and his daughter had leave to hunt deer, alone together save for the old huntsman, Martin.

Mr. Carling asked Mary, when they were on the open grassy top of the hill, whether he might try Wind.

"She will throw thee," said Mary doubtfully. "Never hast thou been able to ride her. And now I think thou art a worse rider than ever before. How think you, Martin?"

The huntsman grinned and chuckled, but would give no opinion.

"Oh, but she's not fresh now. Come, Mary, do let me just see if I can stay on."

"Then take off thy spurs. I will not have thee hold on by *them*."

Mr. Carling dismounted and removed his spurs. Mary dismounted also, and let down her stirrups. Then she jumped on to Roland, Mr. Carling's horse, and rode away, with her toes just touching the irons, in the direction of her home.

"Where are you going?" Mr. Carling called after her.

"To catch Wind when she hath thrown thee," shouted Mary. "Once Roland hath seen her tail endlong he can give up all hope. But I will cut her off. She will bolt straight for her stable. Wait my signal!"

Mary waved her hat when she thought she was in a good position to catch the flying mare, and Mr. Carling, with Martin to aid him by holding Wind's head, managed to get on to her back. The mare reared straight on end, but he was able to stay on by holding to the mane, praying the while that she would not go over backwards. She did not do this, but

resumed the proper position of a horse for an instant, and then started to kick.

"Aha!" said Mr. Carling. "She doesn't know how to buck. Oh, you can kick all day, my girl."

But the mare, though not a buck-jumper, had one more trick to try, quite unsettling enough for a rider like Mr. Carling. She stopped kicking, sprang at once into full gallop, and just as Mr. Carling was beginning to enjoy the pace and her wonderful easy motion, she propped, slid a little and turned sharp round. He flew out of the saddle over her right shoulder, and away she went, mane and tail streaming out on the wind of her going, straight across the hill for home. Mary, watchful as one of her own hawks, had Roland in full gallop in three seconds and was thundering down upon the mare from the side. Wind saw her, just too late, and tried to turn, but Mary leaned out of her saddle and caught the flying rein. Then, after a minute's fierce struggle, she subdued both the excited horses, and led the mare back to where Mr. Carling was sitting, unhurt and fascinated, on the short green turf.

"Now, Robert, get on thine own fat beast," she said, laughing. "I feel I might be riding upon an elephant."

"Roland is a good horse, but Wind is among mares what you are among women, Mary. And that is unique."

Mary chuckled, as she shortened her stirrups and sprang up on Wind's back.

"Have done with thy compliments," she said.

"Wind is barren. Three times have we tried her under different horses."

Mr. Carling was by this time quite accustomed to Mary's frankness of speech, and merely observed that it was a pity.

"Ay," said Mary, philosophically, "but then so are many things. It is a pity that I am not a boy. But it cannot be amended any more than Wind's barrenness. So what use in repining?"

"No. But it seems to me that it is better to be a girl in this time than any other that will be for a long time. Do many ladies hunt and hawk and ride across the horse in men's clothes?"

"Scores of ladies," said Mary, confidently, "and were it not that my father and thine are old and set in their ways I could ride thus after we are married. But they both think that when a maid is full-grown and married it is a wrong thing to do. And I shall be quite old then, for I shall be eighteen."

"And what will you do when we—we are married?"

"I will ride hawking, sitting sideways on a fat palfrey," said Mary placidly. "And I will dress my hair high, as Jane does, and wear an open ruff to show my neck, and wear robes and kirtles and farthingales, and learn how to order an household, and gather flowers in the garden, and work on a tapestry, and tend children. And so I pray I be not barren like poor Wind, for I might find it a dull life but for the children. I like children better than young horses, and nearly as well as little puppies. I doubt not that

when I have one of my own I shall love it more than a puppy."

"But then don't you hate me for being the means of stopping you doing what you like best?"

"Hate *thee?* Nay, Robert. Never think I hate thee because I am not—have not been for kissing and holding hands, and like matters. Why, when my father told me I was to marry thee I knelt on my knee to thank him, for I feared it was in his mind to marry me to old Sir Richard of the Priory land, who hath cast his squinting eyes at me more than once. Nay, where can a maid marry better than with a man she hath always liked? And perhaps once in a while when there was a full moon we might rise in the night, and I would do on my doublet and breeches again, and saddle Wind, and thou wouldst take Roland, and we would ride out over the hill and down into the vale and so through the woods in the moonlight. How would that be, Robert?"

"It would be very well," said Mr. Carling. "It would be paradise."

But he sighed, and fell into a silence that lasted until he parted with Mary at the gates of her own manor.

CHAPTER XIII

FAIR June passed, and a scarcely less fair July, then August, that sad month of the slow, inevitable death of summer, came in with a fortnight's rain. Roland and Wind only plied between the manors of Elmesley and Stonegate, Mary fretted at this curtailing of the uttermost joys of her last holiday, and Mr. Carling spent the time comforting her as best he could, mainly in the dry straw barn of Elmesley, with four or five dogs for solemn, attentive audience.

Then came a fine sunset, with promise of fair weather for the morning, and they both rose at dawn, put food in their saddle bags, met at the old British barrow, their trysting-place, and rode off together for the Colesbourne Woods, without huntsman, hounds, or hawks—just Mary and Robert, Wind and Roland. At the ford in the woods they dismounted and tied up the horses, for Mary said she was tired, and Mr. Carling made no comment, though he did not altogether believe it. So they sat under the trees by the still pool below the ford, and Mary suddenly said she would like to bathe.

"Well, you bathe," said Mr. Carling, quite agreeable, "and I will watch the road and warn you if anyone comes. No one is likely to. But you'll never catch me bathing with all these infernal points to undo

and do up again. I don't believe I *can* do them by myself. Old Vickery always does them. Can you do your own points, Mary? "

"Ay," said Mary absently. "Women can always tie things better than men. But I do not want to bathe. I said it to hear what thou wouldst say."

"What should I have said? "

"Once thou wouldst have been all of a blush."

"Oh, I—I'm awfully sorry. But I don't see why you shouldn't bathe if you want to. I'd just sit behind that bush and watch if anyone came."

"Robert," said Mary, rather tragically, "thou lovest me no longer. Thou art changed."

"I am—I am in a fit," said Mr. Carling, cautiously. "Naturally, I am rather changed."

Mary turned upon him a pair of blue eyes that were merry no longer, but grave and troubled.

"It is the Queen," she said.

"What is the Queen? "

"It is since the day thou wert with her to watch the sunset. She is a witch. She hath cast a spell on thee. And the more I believe it because thou wilt not tell me what she said. Robert, why wilt thou not tell me? "

"Because I don't believe you appreciate her. And, anyway, I would never tell anyone in this life."

"Well," said Mary, sullenly, "why should I get myself into a fever about the Queen? She hath always been *there.*"

"That's just it. You're too close to her to see what she is."

"They say," said Mary, sinking her voice, as if the

old squire's hearing could reach for miles, "that thy father loved her when she was a Princess and lived at Sudeley."

"Well, I think he sort of half-loved her. But what has the Queen to do with you or me, Mary?"

"Since thou hast seen *her,* thou hast never kissed me, never held me in thine arms, never even touched my hand. And so I say that she is a witch, who delights, old and haggard as she is, in parting—young—lovers!"

"Mary, darling, you're being awfully silly," said Mr. Carling, helplessly. "And, anyway, you're not my lover, because you don't love me. I wish you did—no, I don't."

"Robert, dost *thou* love *me?*"

"I love you as—as no woman has ever been loved before."

Mary cheered up immediately, and began to laugh.

"All lovers say that," she said. "But only once in all time can it be true."

"Well, this is the one time. I love you, Mary, as no woman has ever been loved before. And I love you very violently, too. But even the ring," Mr. Carling went on, in a kind of triumph, "couldn't make me fall in love with an ordinary woman who swings her hips and makes eyes. I tell you, Mary, women are nothing. 'Le peu que sont les femmes.' *You're* not a woman. You're a boy-girl, a sprite, and a faery's child. And I love you."

"Then kiss me," said Mary, sensibly. "Then I shall know."

"I thought you didn't like to be kissed."

"That was before you had seen the Queen," said Mary, in a cold, reserved voice.

"Child," said Mr. Carling softly, "have you fallen in love with me, and forgotten Robert Venne?"

"Ay," said Mary, with all the candour of heaven in her blue eyes. "I love thee as thou art now, Robert. And I pray that never, never, *never* wilt thou recover from this thy last fit of forgetfulness, and be the old Robert I only—only liked. So now thou knowest, and I pray thee kiss me, and make not such ado about nothing."

"Then this is our betrothal."

"Ay, the second one. So take off the ring, and place it again on my finger, and swear to me that thou wilt be true, and I will so swear to thee, and then thou shalt kiss me, and I will be happy again. For I have not been very happy these—these last weeks."

Mr. Carling drew Robert Venne's betrothal ring off Mary's finger, and threw it into the pool. It flashed through a patch of sunlight and fell with a tiny splash into the water.

"Alas!" cried Mary. "Thou hast thrown it from thee, and our love is drowned in the pool!"

"I have another ring, Mary Hugill, and I will put it on your finger and swear to be true to you for ever, and then I will kiss you, for after all a kiss is nothing. If *you* want me to kiss you there is nothing else to be done."

Mr. Carling took the ring out from where it lay upon his heart, and as he touched it he felt that it was

an ordinary ring, and that he could move it without any spoken wishes. So he slipped it on to Mary's little finger, for it was too small for any other, and looked at it. And it was no longer green, but red, like a cut in which the blood begins to well. Mary moved her hand in the sunlight to see it the better, and now colour after colour passed through it and vanished, until at last it shone a pure, pale gold.

"It is a wedding-ring," said Mr. Carling. "But it is too small for a wedding-ring."

"Nay," said Mary. "A wedding-ring is not a plain gold band. It is a love-ring. Robert, take thy vows."

"I swear to be true to you."

"And I to thee."

"And to love you only."

"And I only thee."

"And I ask God to bless us both, wherever we may be."

"We shall always be together," said Mary, and she turned towards him.

Mr. Carling took her in his arms and kissed her hair and her cheeks, and then her lips. For a little while he felt nothing but a fiery ecstasy which was in itself almost pain. But soon a true, bitter pain drove through him, in his limbs, in his head, but most of all in his heart.

"Mary!" he cried, in panic. "It won't have it! It won't let me even kiss you! Mary, hold me back, or I shall be gone!"

But the sun went out, and with Mary's arms round him he fell into a pit of rushing darkness.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. CARLING opened his eyes and found himself lying on the unmade bed in John Brough's flat, with the uncomfortable lumps of pillows and blankets beneath him. He knew the ring had gone. Never before had he come out of a dream without wishing. He got up off the bed, and standing in front of the glass he took off his coat and waistcoat and opened his shirt. All the burns made by the ring were gone, his skin was white and clear like a child's.

He put on his coat and waistcoat and went away into John's studio. He put the light on and found a drawing-board, and for the sake of having something to do he cut names on the board with a little keen knife he carried always in his pocket. There were three names:—

MARCUS VALERIUS
CHARLES STUART
MARY HUGILL

Then, as he still wanted something to do, he painted in the names in various colours. The name of the Roman he painted in red, for war. The name of the King he painted in black, for the curse of the Stuarts. But the name of Mary Hugill he painted in the pure and shining gold which Brough used for touching up frames, because the green ring had been golden on her finger.

FICTION

The Exile — MARY JOHNSTON
Author of "*The Old Dominion,*" *etc.*

Due Reckoning — STEPHEN MCKENNA
Author of "*The Oldest God,*" *etc.*

Sirocco — ROSITA FORBES
Author of "*A Fool's Hell,*" *etc.*

The Mob — VICENTE BLASCO IBANEZ
Author of "*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,*" *etc.*

Summer — ROMAIN ROLLAND
Author of "*Annette and Sylvie,*" *etc.*

Jeanne Margot — SOPHIA CLEUGH
Author of "*Matilda,*" *etc.*

A Family Portrait — GLENWAY WESCOTT
Author of "*The Apple of the Eye.*"

Terry — JAMES HILTON
Author of "*Meadows of the Moon.*"

Madame Iago — ALFRED TOOSÉ

The Sardonic Smile — LUDWIG DIEHL

The Defeated — LUDWIG LEWISHON

Power — NAOMI JACOB
Author of "*Rock and Sand,*" *etc.*

Tomek the Sculptor — ADELAIDE EDEN PHILLPOTTS
Author of "*Lodgers in London,*" *etc.*

Gabrielle — W. B. MAXWELL
Author of "*Fernande,*" *etc.*

The Wife of Evelyn Strode — LUCIEN SMITH

Sleet and Candlelight — ENID WOOLNER

Unholy Depths — GERTRUDE DUNN

Race of Leaves — M. H. SÉE

After All — MARY CAIR

Passion and Peat — A. DE CHATEAUBRIANT

Hell's Playground — IDA V. SIMONTON
The Novel from which the Play "White Cargo" was adapted.