

THE SILVER BELL.

—OR, THE—

HEIR OF MOTCOMBE MANOR.

A ROMANCE OF MERRY ENGLAND.

~~~~~  
BY DR. J. H. ROBINSON.  
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THE SILVER BELL.

CHAPTER I.

ALBERT CASSIDE. DENIS WETZEL. THE STROLLER.

"LOOK up, sir, and show a more cheerful face to the sun. Melancholy is a very absurd thing!"

The individual to whom these words were addressed, turned quickly towards the intruder, and made a hasty and significant motion towards the hilt of his sword.

"Keep your temper, my lad. He who speaks cares little for the flash of steel," added the man.

"I desire to be left to my own meditations," replied the other, sternly.

"You are not over-courteous; good words are just as cheap as bad ones, and, in most cases much cheaper. I'll wager a half crown to a Mount Palladore farthing that if you knew me better, your courage would ooze out of your fingers' ends, and your lofty demeanor change," continued the stranger.

"You deceive yourself; were you the Earl of Kent, or even King Edward himself, I should

not fear you!" exclaimed the young man, casting a menacing look at the intruder.

"Come, sir, I mean you no ill; smooth down that threatening visage, and let it assume something akin to good nature," resumed the pertinacious stranger.

"It does not matter a straw to me whether you mean me ill or not. At this particular time I care little for the opinions of men. I ask for no new acquaintances. I only wish to be left to pursue my fortunes as best pleases me," he answered, in a voice less stern.

"But," he added immediately, "if you would like to cross swords with me, I am ready; and in fact, I rather think that would suit me as well as anything."

"If you cannot wield some implement of industry better than the weapon you speak of, I'm greatly mistaken; however, we will not quarrel about that. I rather like your appearance, and I fancy something may be made of you."

"Indeed! you do me too much honor!" replied the other, ironically.

"Not at all; I have a happy faculty of finding out what kind of material people are made of."

"An extraordinary person, truly!"

"Right!" exclaimed the man, in a more serious tone; many persons call me extraordinary, and have good reason to think so. And now, young sir, I will tell you why I have addressed you. I perceived that you were a stranger in this part of the country; for few acquainted in this vicinity venture hither alone, especially at this hour when the sun is hiding himself in the west. Your dejected air, and moody looks, assured me that the world had gone wrong with you; and your dress was proof sufficient that you were not of high rank, but very probably some ambitious, though disappointed adventurer."

"How very flattering the man is!"

"Gently, sir, gently! we shall know each other anon. I spoke to you, thinking it might be very possible that I could throw something in your way that would advance your fortunes."

"You appear to me like one who has yet his own fortune to make!" retorted the young man.

"Gently again, my rustic knight; you must not judge by the outside."

"I only follow your example in doing so."

"I said something about your apparel; I admit; but being your senior by several years, I believe that I may safely say that I am a better judge of human nature."

"To cut short this conversation, if you will show me the way out of this forest, and to the nearest inn, you will advance my fortunes, I doubt not, better than you can in any other manner."

"Be it so; I am going to the 'Silver Bell,' and will willingly be your guide."

"Lead on," said the young man, and the two walked away together.

"It would be convenient, if nothing more, to know by what name to address you?" continued the stranger, pausing.

The young man hesitated a moment.

"If you should ever have occasion to want a name to address me by, call me Albert Casside."

"And to be equally civil, I will inform you that I will not be offended if you should call me at any time Denis Wetzel."

While these two personages are in search of the "Silver Bell," we will attempt to give some description of them.

The young man who had given his name as Albert Casside, was apparently but little past twenty years of age. He had evidently attained the full stature of manhood, as his goodly height and well-developed limbs could testify. Nature had by no means been niggardly in her endowments, in regard to personal advantages, although his dress was not such as to set them off in the most happy manner; he being clad in the habiliments of the common people, according to the style of the time of Edward the second, who was then king of England. At his side the young man wore a sword that did not seem in keeping with his russet frock; it being elaborately ornamented, and heavily mounted with silver.

The personage who had so unceremoniously addressed our hero, was probably past thirty, of a bold and reckless bearing, joined to a sort of good-natured and rather obtrusive familiarity, that was not exactly consonant with the feelings of Casside, who did not relish the idea of being addressed as a mere lad, without experience or spirit. Whatever his life and history might have been, it was obvious that he meant to keep it secret, inasmuch as he believed such matters concerned only himself. Who Denis Wetzel was, or for what object he was desirous of making his acquaintance, he was sublimely indifferent; for he had reached a crisis in his existence when ordinary occurrences could not easily attract much of his attention. Casside appeared to be in a transition state, and anxious to work out some important problem, without any officious interference from the curious and the sympathizing. To that plane of thought to which he had been forced, by circumstances,

he felt that common minds could not attain; and he shrank from the curiosity of the vulgar, as much as from the pity of the more refined.

"You were over-venturesome, in good sooth, to trust yourself in this forest when the sun was so near the verge of the western skies," said Denis Wetzel.

"I see not why," rejoined his companion.

"This is called the 'Donhead Wood,' on account of Mark Donhead, of whose exploits you are not ignorant, doubtless," added Wetzel.

"I have heard of Mark Donhead, certainly—the leader of a band of freebooters," answered Casside, carelessly.

"I thought no one in this part of the country could be wholly ignorant of Mark Donhead," continued Wetzel.

"I have often wondered why a few men-at-arms have not been sent hither to punish his audacity," resumed Casside.

"Could a few men-at-arms punish him, think you, young sir?"

"With a score of them at my back, I would undertake to purge the country of Donhead and his villains," added Casside.

"I shouldn't be the one to envy you such a commission. There would be but little hope of success in an undertaking, where your superiors have failed. Men who have earned their spurs have tried it and failed."

"I should desire no better recreation than to hunt this redoubtable Mark Donhead out of Dorsetshire, providing I had twenty men-at-arms to follow me."

"You talk like a beardless boy," said Wetzel, drily.

"Fair and softly, sir; I am not very good-tempered, but subject to sudden outbursts which are sometimes dangerous," returned the young man.

"There is the Silver Bell," rejoined Wetzel, carelessly. "You perceive that it stands on the bank of the Stour, with Donhead Wood directly in the rear. I wonder why you wandered so far from the direct road. I presume you never travelled in these parts before?"

"You are wrong there. I am by no means

a stranger in Dorsetshire, although not familiar with all portions of it. I have heard of the Silver Bell, I assure you."

"I can't dispute you, certainly. But here we are at the door. Let us enter and see what mine host has for weary and thirsty travellers. Sit you down here in the tap room, and I will speak a word to Joachim Capet, the worthy proprietor of the Silver Bell."

Denis Wetzel left Casside and spoke a few words, in a low tone, to a short, portly-looking, bustling man, with a red face, and then rejoined our hero.

"What will your honor please to order? We have a quantity of all sorts, sir. We keep the best house in Dorsetshire, if not the best in England. The Earl of Shaftsbury has dined here, and so has the Earl of Kent. Sir Hugh Spencer passed a stormy night here, and praised my wine and the accommodations of the Silver Bell generally," said Joachim Capet, approaching our hero.

"You are too good, sir; I am but a plain common person, and need but little. If you should chance to have a small room to spare, I should like to occupy it," replied Casside, modestly.

"Just as you please. Shall I show you to the square chamber where Lord Beaumont breakfasted when on his way to Somersetshire; or shall—"

"Something snug and comfortable is all I ask; keep me away from the lords and nobles, by all means," said Albert, hastily.

"Bring us a bottle of your best wine, Capet; don't you see the young gallant is dry, and his countenance is heavy?" said Wetzel.

Then turning to Casside, he added.

"Come, sir, you must drink with me and quench your thirst, and drive away that absurd melancholy."

Before Casside had time to object to this arrangement, mine host was on his way to the cellar.

"This wine has great age," said Capet, when he returned. "It has been praised by lordly lips, and has power to cheer the most despond-

ing heart that ever beat beneath a steel cuirass, or a russet frock.

"Here's to a better acquaintance!" said Wetzel, tasting the wine.

Casside filled his glass and drank in silence.

While the two were discussing the sparkling beverage, a person meanly clad entered the tap-room. He was considerably past the prime of life, and his figure was somewhat bowed by the weight of years.

"What do you want here, my good man?" asked the host, in tones not very inviting to the seeker of charity.

"A crust of bread and a place to lay my head," replied the beggar, in a tremulous voice.

"This is the Silver Bell, where people get all they have money to pay for," added Capet.

"I am old, and these eyes have not seen the light for very many years," continued the mendicant.

"The old story—the old story! England is full of sturdy beggars, and every one has some excuse for not working like other honest people. You had better go out as you came in. I don't want the like of you hanging about the Silver Bell," replied Capet.

"It's very hard that an old man should be turned away from the door of a Christian, when the night is setting in. Well, well, I must sleep in the open air; or run the risk of losing my way in the Donhead Wood. May God bless the charitable, and protect the needy this night; and may none of you ever know what it is to be blind, old, and poor," added the beggar, with a sigh.

"There that will do; now away with you; we harbor no canting vagabonds here!" retorted Capet.

"Stay!" cried Casside to the mendicant, as he was turning to go. "I am willing to feed and lodge you for the night. Come here and warm your old body with a brimming glass of this generous wine."

"It's a kindly voice that I hear," returned the old man, pausing upon the threshold. "I would that I could let a little light into these

sightless balls, that I might look upon your face, young gallant. It is a frank and manly one, I trow. Ah, I was young once, myself, and little did I think that I should ever come to this. But life is changeable, changeable; and most of the living will find it so before the grass grows over them."

"Here is an overflowing goblet," said Wetzel.

"I want it not; it is not for such as I. Set a pot of ale before me and a wee bit of bread, and I'll be perfectly content," rejoined the blind man.

"Bring it, sir, bring it!" added Casside, somewhat authoritatively, to the burly and watchful landlord.

"The saints bless us!" exclaimed Capet. "The gallant speaks like a lord, and not like his equals. Perhaps he's better than his betters!"

"Don't you hear?" continued the young man, in a voice so stern that it made the master of the Silver Bell start with surprise.

"As you will—as you will; but as I told you, I keep a respectable house, and the Earl of Salisbury, and the Lord of Motcombe Manor, and—"

"Well, never mind the rest," interrupted Wetzel. "Innkeepers should not be over-talkative."

Not very well pleased that his importance should in any manner be lessened, the host proceeded to set before the mendicant a foaming tankard of ale, and a piece of bread.

"Add a slice of cold meat," said Wetzel.

"I was always charitable," resumed Capet.

"Nowhere in England do beggars fare so well as at the Silver Bell."

"And small credit to Joachim Capet for the same," retorted Wetzel, drily.

"What are you called?" asked Casside, for the purpose of keeping up a conversation, and making the old man feel at his ease.

"Where I am known, I am called Strolling Willie," answered the blind beggar.

"And how far have you walked since the morn?"

"This morning I ate my crust at Motcombe Manor."

"At Motcombe Manor!" exclaimed Casside.

"Yes, young gallant; and is there aught remarkable in that?"

"O no, certainly not," replied Albert.

"What news do you bring from thence?"

"The great have their troubles and afflictions as well as the mean, the blind, and the poor."

"No doubt, no doubt, old man."

"The Lord of Motcombe Manor is in sore distress."

"Indeed! is it possible? and after taking a hearty lunch at the Silver Bell—the best house in the kingdom!" said Capet.

"His grief is on account of his son," added Strolling Willie.

"A good for nothing fellow! I have seen him often, and indeed I have spoken with the lad in regard to his evil courses," resumed the host, gravely.

"Bravo, Capet! modesty was never among your virtues," said Wetzel, laughing.

"From what the tenants of Motcombe Manor say of him, I should not pronounce him a vicious young man, although he may be a bit wild now and then," replied the old mendicant, in a quiet tone.

"He'll come to some bad end," added the host, shaking his head. "I remember that he found fault with my wine."

"Audacious youngster!" exclaimed Wetzel, with mock solemnity.

"But little more wine will the young lord be apt to drink, unless he win a fortune with his sword; his father has disinherited him," continued the stroller.

"But what is the cause of all this difficulty?" asked Wetzel.

"The young lord was imprudent; he loved one much beneath him in rank—the daughter of a peasant. His father remonstrated with him in vain, and finally went into a great passion, and a terrible scene ensued. Young Ethelbert was firm, and declared that in all other matters he was willing to obey his father's command; but in matters pertaining to his affections, he would acknowledge no authority,

but that found in his own breast. The result was that Ethelbert left his ancestral halls to return no more. My lady, his mother, is nearly distracted, and his sister but little better; so that Motcombe Manor is a sad place," answered the stroller.

The conversation was here interrupted by the arrival of two persons, who seemed to be men of rank, although both were plainly clad and wore no badges to denote their degree.

"Mine host, let our horses be well groomed and generously fed," said the elder of the two, who was somewhere between thirty-five and forty years of age.

"Ay, don't let the grooming be clumsily done," added his companion, who was much younger, and could not have numbered more than twenty summers at the most.

"Now show us to a comfortable room, and don't keep us waiting here for idlers to stare at," added the man who had first spoken.

Casside colored and bit his lips, and Capet began to enumerate the illustrious names that had honored his house; but he was peremptorily cut short, and obliged to lead his guests without farther exaggeration, to what he called "my lord of Shaftsbury's chamber."

"I will talk farther with you in the morning," said Wetzel, as Casside arose to leave him. "A bold lad like you needs active employment; and perhaps," he added, lowering his voice almost to a whisper, "I may know of something that will suit you. You appear like one who wants both friends and money. Nay, do not frown and take it ill, for you may need my assistance sooner than you imagine."

Albert Casside changed color, and there was a slight twitching about the muscles of his mouth; but he made no reply, and Capet conducted him to the apartment, in the praise of which he had been so eloquent.

"The saints keep you, young gallant, and may you never want a tankard of ale and a crust of bread," said the beggar. "In the ups and downs of life, you may chance to meet Strolling Willie again, and who knows but, in the order of God's providences, he may have it in his power to do you a good turn."

CHAPTER II.

THE SILVER BELL.

A WAXEN candle was burning dimly in the small room which had been assigned to Albert Casside; some fagots were also blazing upon the hearth. His first care was to secure the door, a thing not easily accomplished; for the bolt was so rusty that it could not be moved. He therefore was obliged to content himself with placing two lumbering chairs against it, in such a position that any attempt to open it would be likely to make considerable noise.

He then seated himself by the small, oaken table upon which the light had been placed by Capet, and abandoned himself, apparently, to the same unpleasant train of reflection that had imparted such a sad expression to his countenance in the Donhead Wood.

"Strolling Willie uttered a good thing when he said 'life is changeful!' he exclaimed, striking his hand heavily upon the table. "However," he added, after a pause, "I am young yet, and fortune, I have heard, is apt to be with the young. I have a sword; it is strange if I cannot make my way through the world by my own exertions."

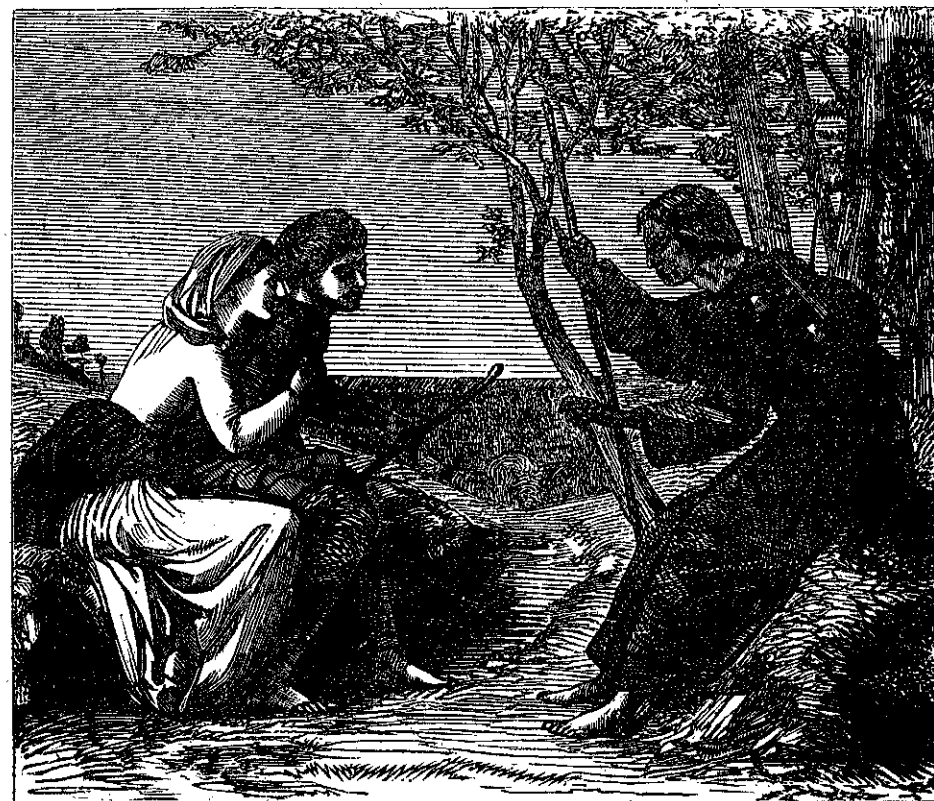
Casside drew his sword from its sheath, examined its edge and workmanship, and then fenced round the room with it, in order to assure himself that he was yet master of the weapon.

"My adverse fortunes have not deprived me of the power to cut, and thrust, and parry, according to art; and there are those upon whose bodies I will prove it. My good sword, thou shalt henceforth be my best friend!"

The young man laid the polished weapon upon the table beside him, and putting his hand beneath his frock, drew a purse from his doublet. He emptied the contents of the same into his hand. They consisted of gold and silver pieces, with the head of Edward the second upon one side, and the English arms upon the other, and amounted in all to fifteen pounds.

"A great fortune to begin the world with, truly!" he said, with some bitterness of manner. "Where will the next come from, I wonder?"

He carefully replaced the money in the purse, and returned the latter to the pocket of his doublet. Casside sat and mused awhile longer, and then, without divesting himself of his garments, laid down upon the bed prepared for his



THE SIBYL READING THE FUTURE TO LOUIS AND ISANDRA.—See Chap. III.

accommodation. He was endeavoring to compose himself to slumber, when he was aroused by a gentle knocking upon his door. Without hesitation he arose and opened it, and much to his surprise beheld Strolling Willie.

"Hush! speak not a word!" said the latter, in a whisper, laying his finger upon his lips.

Impressed with the mysterious manner of the beggar, Casside allowed him to enter his room and to close the door.

"Now, my good man, what do you want?" asked our hero.

"I told you, young gallant, that it might come to pass, in the order of Providence, that a poor blind man might have it in his power to do you a service; it has happened so, much sooner than I expected," replied the beggar.

"Proceed with your story," said Albert.

"When I had finished the ale and despatched the food which your kindness procured for me, I left the tap-room and groped my way to the stable where the horses of travellers are kept. Thanking heaven that I was so well provided for, I threw myself upon some straw, and should soon have been asleep, had not two persons entered the stable and began talking in low tones. One of them I knew by his voice to be the host; but the other I knew nothing about. I soon discovered that they were planning a robbery, and that you were to be the victim. Capet affirmed that he knew you had money, for he listened at the door and heard you counting it. They then arranged the details of the operation. It appears that there is a private entrance by which they intend to enter your room, about midnight, when you will be most likely to be asleep."

"Let them come," said the young man, grasping his sword. "Let them come; I will be ready for them."

"Capet will not come, but his accomplice. But I have not told all. In the morning when you go to settle your reckoning, and discover your loss, mine host will feign to be greatly exasperated and say it is a trick to cheat him out

of his just dues; thereupon the servants will unceremoniously thrust you out of doors."

"The villain!" exclaimed Casside.

"If you will take the advice of a blind beggar, you will let them rob you."

"That's blind advice, truly!" replied Casside, with a smile.

"I will explain; take the gold and silver from your purse and fill it with copper coin like this I have in my pocket," resumed Strolling Willie, producing a handful of copper coin. "All this trashy stuff does not amount to the value of half a crown. When your purse is filled with it, lay it on the table, and go to bed, and to sleep."

"I like the idea very well," returned Albert. "But I think it would be best to put in a few small silver pieces."

"Not a single piece!" said Willie; "because you wish their disappointment to be as great as possible."

The young man immediately proceeded to empty his purse and fill it with the comparatively useless coins, which the beggar had received at different times from the hand of stinted charity.

"We who subsist upon the benevolence of others seldom feel the touch of silver," said the stroller.

"Selfishness has outgrown charity," replied Albert.

"Good reason have I to know it. Now lay your purse upon the table and go to bed unconcernedly."

"What will you do?"

"Go back as I came."

"But it perplexes me much to know how you can go about from place to place with such facility, your eyes being, as you say, entirely sightless."

"You must know, my young friend, that when nature takes away one faculty, she gives another to supply, in some measure, its place," answered strolling Willie.

"There is some wisdom in that observation," said Casside.

"I can do many things, which some persons who profess to have better sight than myself, cannot do. Ah, sir, nature is not always in the wrong; she is not always a hard mistress. My sense of hearing and of touch is strangely acute; I can hear sounds to which common ears are deaf, and take impressions of objects around me before other eyes have seen them. I go by instinct, sir—and what's more," added the beggar, with peculiar emphasis, "I seldom go wrong."

"Instinct does more for you than she does for me, if that be the case," replied Albert. "Remain where you are," he added. "I fear you will not be able to leave the room without being seen."

"Never fear, sir; I can grope about strangely. I will go so softly that my steps shall not awaken a sleeping cat. This is not the first time I have crossed the threshold of the Silver Bell," said the stroller.

"Go, if you will; but be sure that you do not leave the inn till you see me again," rejoined Casside.

The mendicant opened the door gently, listened a moment, and then making a parting gesture to Albert, passed out and closed it after him. Our hero replaced the chairs, and presently retired as directed by the stroller. But he was not destined to sink immediately to sleep, even had his mind been in a condition calm enough to do so. Added to the weight of anxiety that preyed upon his spirits, and the incidents of the evening, were the sound of voices in an adjoining room. Those sounds had been but indistinctly heard while he sat by the table, but the moment his head pressed the pillow, they fell with greater clearness upon his ears; which circumstance was partly accounted for by the fact that he was considerably nearer the wall that separated his room from the adjoining one, than in his former position. Casside strove to shut out the murmur of voices, forget his cares, and soothe his perturbed mind to a state of slumber; but the increasing earn-

estness of the conversation carried on within a few feet of him by the unknown persons, effectually kept him awake. He had no difficulty in understanding that the individuals whose voices he heard were those who had recently arrived at the inn.

"It was a daring affair," said one, whose voice Albert recognized as that of the younger of the two, it being much less heavy than that of his companion.

"Most daring," replied the other.

"What can be done?" continued the first.

"That's the question to be decided. We will keep our secret for the present, at all events. I see no good that can result from making our loss known. If this adventure does not hasten the fall of Mark Donhead, I am no great reader of destiny," added the eldest of two.

"We shall have good reason to remember the Donhead Wood."

"To the day of our death."

"The villains were bold, uncle."

"Had we met the rogues armed in proof, and with lances in rest, we could have scattered them like chaff. By St. John! I long to have a dash at the banditti of Donhead Wood!"

"They may be but common people, and unworthy of your arms, uncle."

"Gentle or simple, I care not, nephew; I would not hesitate to chastise them could I be placed face to face with them, armed as becometh a knight. I do not mind so much the loss of a few florins, as I am angered at the audacity of the villains who took them. It grieves me that half-a-dozen cross bowmen should rob two knights of known ability."

"Yes, I see where the shoe pinches, uncle, and feel the same soreness myself. It will be best, I think, to send a trusty messenger to—" here the young knight lowered his voice so much that Casside could not hear what place was mentioned: but he instantly resumed as before, "with an order for money, and a score of men-at-arms."

"There might be rare recreation in a hunt through Donhead Wood, nephew, I grant. The suggestion is worthy of consideration; but we must strictly observe our incognito."

"True, uncle, that important secret must be well preserved, for in these days it is difficult to know our friends from our foes. My head is young and giddy, but it *thinks*, sir; it is not wholly ignorant of its responsibilities; it begins to feel already the cares of —" here again Casside lost a few words.

"No doubt, nephew, and when your wild oats are scattered with a liberal hand all over England, you will become a pattern of gravity and wisdom. But I have noticed that our worthy host is inquisitive, and we must be

guarded in our speech while stopping at the Silver Bell."

"Observed you the two individuals who were sipping their wine when we entered?"

"I saw them."

"I liked not their looks," added the young man, "especially the more youthful looking of the pair."

"And but little does he care whether you like his looks or not," remarked Albert to himself.

Overcome at length by drowsiness he sank into a deep sleep, from which he did not awake until the bright sunlight was streaming cheerfully into his room, in the morning.

CHAPTER III.

ISANDRA. WEIRD ELSIE.

ON the day following the events already narrated, a young girl of about sixteen years, accompanied by a lad of twelve, might have been seen in one of the rural districts near Mt. Palladore. The latter carried a shepherd's crook in his hand, and both were attired after the fashion of the peasantry, according to the prevailing custom of the times.

The soft airs of morning fanned the brows of the young girl, and the pleasant rays of a cloudless sun danced along the grassy way at her feet. The expanding flowers smiled in the gladdening light, and joyous birds, flitting from bower to bower, warbled their sweetest notes.

Upon the verdant side of a hill of gentle ascent contented flocks of sheep were feeding, and sportive lambs cheered the eyes of the beholders with their innocent gambols. A little to the left of the hill the waters of the Stour could be seen wandering on towards their final destination—the sea.

"Come, Isandra; let us sit upon this green bank of earth, and rest," said the lad.

With a gentle smile, Isandra seated herself beside the youth.

"I have been thinking of late that I should like to be rich," added the latter.

"Why should you like to be rich, Louis?"

"For several reasons," replied the lad. "If I were rich I would give you money, and make a fine lady of you. To be plain with you, sister, you seem too fair and delicate to work with your hands as the neighboring girls do."

"Labor is not degrading, brother Louis."

"Perhaps not, in the sight of God, but it is in the sight of our wealthy neighbors. The noble lords and ladies that we often see gallantly mounted, sweeping past us, regard us as the dust beneath their feet. And yet, Isandra, in beauty of face and figure, you are not a whit behind the fairest damsel I have ever seen."

"Do you know, good brother Louis, that your love for me has made me appear to possess all those qualities which you name. Any object that we love seems fair to our partial judgments."

"It may be so in many cases; but in this particular instance, I have excellent reasons for believing as I do; for all the young fellows within half-a-dozen miles are in love with you."

"I am not so vain as to credit that tale," said Isandra, blushing.

"That strange young gallant, who can talk so bravely, and used to come here so often, once declared in my hearing, that your beauty astonished him and made him forget everything else."

Isandra made no reply, but played with the pet lamb that had nestled down beside her.

"I think that young man acted strangely; and I have sometimes imagined that he was really some nobleman's son in disguise," continued Louis.

"What an absurd idea!" rejoined Isandra.

"Father told me the same when I said I should like to be a page to some brave knight."

"And finally become a knight yourself!" added the young girl, smiling at the earnestness of the lad.

"You have guessed it," returned Louis.

"You would be much happier tending your flock," resumed Isandra. "But who comes hither?"

"Some wandering sibyl, I trow."

"Ah, that's lucky! we'll have our fortunes told; these old wives have strange gifts," said Louis, eagerly.

"They are mere pretenders; they know nothing of the future; the future is a sealed book which mortals cannot read."

"That will do very well to say to keep up appearances, and sustain a reputation for wisdom; but come to the case in hand, all like to dabble in these matters—gentle as well as simple."

While the girl and the youth were speaking, the personage referred to was fast approaching.

She was of masculine height, dark-skinned, wrinkled and bony. She wore a long garment, something like the domino of a monk. Her head was destitute of any covering save that which nature had bestowed—a thick growth of short, coarse, black hair. In her right hand she carried a stick of goodly length, but whether as a weapon of defence, or to assist her in walking, was a matter of some doubt.

The old woman drew near and without ap-

parently deigning to notice Isandra and Louis, seated herself exactly opposite them under the shadow of some spreading trees.

"Are you weary, good mother?" inquired Louis.

"I have been weary many years, my son," returned the woman, quickly.

"You look strong and well. I dare say you have walked over a great part of England since you were young?"

"Walked! how could I help walking? What else could I do but walk? Walking is the only relief for the miserable who wish to die, but cannot."

"Then you have been miserable?"

"Look at me and see! Do I look like a happy person? ha, ha!"

"You don't look just right," returned Louis.

"Doubtless you have uttered your prophecies in a great many places, and to many fair auditors?" said Isandra, smiling.

"Prophecies? yes, miss, and many a true prophecy have I uttered; it is a gift I've had for many a long year."

"I never thought the future could be opened to the gaze of mortals. There is too much mystery about your trade for it to be true."

"Nature is full of mystery!" exclaimed the sibyl, bending towards Isandra and elevating the left hand. "There is mystery in the wind, and in the rain; there is mystery in the thunder, and in the sheeted lightning; there is mystery in the wild hurricane, and in the deep throes of the heaving earthquake; there is mystery in the tides of the sea, and in the fountains of waters; there is mystery in the silent swingings of the earth around the sun; and there is mystery enthroned among the countless planets. There is mystery above, and there is mystery below—on the earth, and in the heavens; and the sleepless God, the greatest mystery of all."

The sibyl spoke with impassioned earnestness, and shook her hand wildly as she went on.

Isandra instinctively drew closer to her brother.

er, and grasped his arm, awed by the strange eloquence of the wandering woman.

[SEE ENGRAVING.]

Louis gazed at the speaker with rapt attention, wondering that her thoughts should flow with such volubility and force.

"I have turned over the leaves of the future for many young and fair ones like you, miss," resumed the *sibylla*. "I hate mutterings and incantations; I never look at the hand or consult the stars. I only need to see the person, and it all comes to me."

"Whence comes it?" asked Louis.

"Ask the wind whence it comes, and see if it will pause and tell you," rejoined the woman, sharply.

"Will you try your skill at my fortune, good mother?" asked Isandra.

"It is easy to tell—easy enough, young woman; it is coming to me now faster than a cunning penman can write it. You have loved; and, as the world would say, unwisely. Blush not—the object is worthy, but he is above you in condition. Ah, it will make sorrow! sorrow for you and for others."

The woman paused; but soon resumed with a start of surprise.

"But what strange tale is this that is breathed into my ear; it is like unto fairy fiction, and yet it is true. It is as an improbable dream, and yet it is real. Girl, there is a wonderful future for you; mark what I say, and remember it when the time comes."

"Speak, and tell us what it is!" cried Louis.

"Hold! the voice says no; wait a little; it is not wise to tell too much at once; but you will one day be a fine lady and ride in your carriage, and keep company with noble knights, and lords and ladies of high degree."

"I like that," whispered Louis to Isandra.

"They all prophesy good," she replied, in a low voice.

"Not all—not all!" exclaimed the *sibylla*, impatiently. "Listen! you shall pass through great sorrow before you reach the position you were born to fill. The time will come when you

will wish you were at rest beneath the turf of these pleasant glades."

"Go on, good sibyl," said Isandra.

"No more now; there will be time enough anon; your griefs will come as fast as you can bear them, and it would do no good to suffer them in anticipation; for anticipated sorrow is as bad as the reality," returned the woman.

"I have a few small coins in my pocket which shall be yours when you have told me what shall be my own future," added Louis.

"Keep your coins, child. I shall be fed and clothed, without taking money from such as you. Should you ever see me hungry and thirsty, offer me a piece of bread and a cup of pure water, and I will accept them thankfully. You will yet wear spurs upon your heels, my lad, and do many a brave feat of arms."

"Do you hear that, Isandra? I shall become a knight before I die."

"Simple Louis! the shepherd's crook will suit your hand better than the lance or the sword. Your armor will be of lamb's wool; like this jerkin and doublet that you have on; and your helmet will continue to be these curly locks!" retorted Isandra, playfully.

"Something within me tells me that you are wrong," returned the youth, gravely.

"Yes, this is your lance, Louis," resumed Isandra, laying her hand upon his crook, "and this is your tented field; and you will run many a gallant course with yonder peaceful flocks. Your lady bright shall be one of the neighboring peasant girls, whose favor will be a branch of sweet brier, which you will carry in your hand. You will be called the knight of the shepherd's crook."

"Let the pretty young woman joke on," said the *sibylla*; "her playful words will not change the decrees of the future. The events of human life are governed by fixed laws, which all the arts of mortals cannot disannul. The stars, and the earths, and the suns, and the moons, of all systems are bound in their orbits by eternal principles; and think you that man, the glory and crown of all creations, is left to the guidance of chance?"

"She talks wisely," said Louis.

"Am I not old enough to be wise? Have I walked up and down for these many years, and thought over these matters for nought? Should not experience give wisdom, and sleepless nights reveal the deep and occult things interwoven with human destiny? I have suffered, and great grief sharpens the intellect."

The *sibylla* paused again, and falling into a reverie, took no farther notice of her youthful auditors for some time.

"She mutters to herself," whispered Louis. The woman at length arose to go.

"They are calling me away," she resumed.

"Who are calling you away?" asked the youth.

"Ask the wind, as I told you before."

"What is your name?" inquired Isandra.

"I've had many names since I was a girl; which do you mean?"

"Your present name."

"They call me Weird Elsie where I am known; but I seldom appear the second time in the same place, and never without a particular object. Farewell, children; I must go, for they are urging me away."

"Shall we see you again, think you?" asked Isandra, timidly.

"It wouldn't be strange—not at all strange—the ways of Providence are so mysterious, and the voices speak to me so often; besides, the prophets of evil never disappear when there are evil tidings to tell."

"Poor old creature!" sighed Isandra. "Her intellect is sadly shattered."

"Hush! h-u-s-h! don't speak so loud. I'm coming—I'm coming, I say!"

"Away over mountain, away over moor,
To many a glen I've ne'er travelled before;
No rest for Weird Elsie, no home for the poor."

The *sibylla* walked rapidly away, chanting words like the above as she went.

"Well, she's gone," said Louis, "and left us to think of our fortunes. What makes you tremble so? You see I'm not afraid."

"That's because you are to be a booted and

spurred knight; but I am indeed foolish to let the words of yonder mad woman affect me."

"I am inclined to believe in her art," returned Louis.

"The reason is very obvious; people are apt to believe what they desire to be true. But look; your flock is wandering, sir knight, of the crook!"

"And you are no doubt willing that I should run after them; for yonder I see your strange lover—whom nobody knows," answered Louis.

"His name is Albert Casside—if you mean the person who is approaching," returned Isandra.

"That cannot be his real name—it must be an assumed one. It seems to me that his visits will bring us no good, and I hope I shall never see his face again," added the youth, with considerable warmth, as he ran to look after his truant flock; while the young man whose acquaintance the reader has already made (at the Silver Bell) approached the rustic maiden, whose embarrassment increased as he drew near.

"Isandra, this is fortunate!" he joyfully exclaimed. "I had hoped to meet you in just such a spot as this—where nature wears her most cheerful smile—where flowers are blooming—birds singing—soft breezes blowing, and delightful verdure springing up at every step. Such a morning as this, and such a balmy atmosphere, are enough to tempt one to forget his sorrows."

Isandra had arisen when Albert began to address her; but taking her hand he begged her to be seated again upon the grassy bank, and then sat down beside her.

"When we last met and parted, Albert, I prayed that we might never meet again," said the girl, earnestly.

"And why did you frame such a cruel petition?" asked Casside, with a melancholy smile.

"Because I had a thought that it might avert some great evil that is impending," said Isandra.

"You are unhappy; what troubles you? Speak, and let me know all."

"Alas, what can I say! I fear these wild hopes of ours will never be realized. I am but a simple girl, the daughter of a poor peasant, while you—you seem to be above me in condition."

"Am I not clad in the garb of the common people? Is not my speech plain, and my manners simple?"

"You strive to make your speech plain, and your manners simple; but occasionally you rise far above plainness and simplicity, and then I tremble lest you are deceiving me."

"By this pleasant sunshine which streams into the heart, as if to admonish us to truth; by these fragrant flowers, whose odors seem to invite the soul to purity; by these dallying winds, whose brief, fitful respirations tell us of the brevity of human life; by these green grasses at our feet, which will one day grow over us; by all the beautiful and sacred things in nature, I solemnly swear to esteem and love you, while my being is animated with a single pulse of life. I care nothing for relative conditions; reciprocities of sentiment are sublimely independent of what the world calls inequality in circumstances," said Albert, with much enthusiasm.

The fair and ingenuous Isandra looked into her lover's face and smiled; his evident sin-

cerity had chased away a portion of her sadness.

"You say that I sometimes appear other than what my externals indicate," added Casside. "I could, with truth, make the same declaration in regard to you; for instance, your language is much better than that of the peasantry of these rural districts; your sentiments surprise me, and your beauty makes me adore you."

"How and when shall this wild dream terminate!" exclaimed Isandra, covering her face with her hands. "I see a dizzy gulf before me; a terrible phantom stares me in the face; an irresistible fate is dragging me whither I would not. My father is poor; he loves gold; he is sordid; he is already urging me to a marriage which will make me hopelessly wretched. It is this that fills me with dread, and embitters my life."

"Fate mocks at our efforts to be happy!" cried the young man, deeply moved.

Isandra wept in silence.

"But I will protect you from this misery; I will thwart this villany!" added Albert, energetically.

"No more—we are observed!" said Isandra, in a low voice.

Casside looked up and perceived two persons approaching.

CHAPTER IV.

THE KNIGHT. THE RENCONTRE.

THE individuals referred to were on horseback, and turning somewhat from their way they drew near to Albert and Isandra. The person who rode in advance appeared to be a knight of some consequence; and a little in the rear followed his squire, bearing his armor and his lance.

"He sits well in his saddle, but methinks he carrieth himself proudly," observed Casside, to his fair companion.

Louis, who had returned from looking after his flock, regarded the approach of the knight with enthusiastic interest.

"You are thinking of the spurs that Weird Elsie promised you?" said Isandra, playfully; but the mind of the youth was so much preoccupied with his own thoughts, that he made no rejoinder to the gentle sarcasm of his sister.

"Has he the promise of knighthood?" asked Albert, smiling pensively as he looked at the thoughtful countenance of the lad.

"He hath indeed," she replied.

"As much as you have the promise of being a fine lady!" retorted Louis.

The rustic maiden blushed deeply at this re-

joinder, and said quickly in reply to the inquiring looks of Albert:

"The idle tales of a strolling propheteess—Weird Elsie."

By this time the knight had reached the spot where the parties stood. He was, apparently, near the age of Casside, and about the same size, with the exception, perhaps, that he was somewhat more slightly formed, lacking the full development of muscle that characterized our hero. He was richly attired, and judging by his haughty air, seemed to attach no diminutive idea to his own importance.

"Good youth," he said, addressing Albert; "can you direct me the way to Motecombe Manor?"

"Return to the road you have left, and you cannot fail to find what you seek," answered Casside.

"Ah, what have we here?" exclaimed the cavalier, as his eyes rested upon the face of Isandra.

"Nothing that need attract the attention of a courteous knight," added Albert.

"Be quiet, simple youth!" said the knight,

with a frown. "Upon my knightly honor, here is rare beauty," he resumed. "Here is a pretty flower shedding its fragrance upon ill-mannered clowns. Come, fair shepherdess, what may I call you?"

Isandra turned towards Louis and made no reply.

"Both fair and modest," added the cavalier, with a laugh.

"Sir knight, resume your journey and leave us, simple people, to our own enjoyments," said Casside.

"Silence, bold varlet!" cried the cavalier. "It pleaseth me to talk with the maiden, and the matter concerneth you not. Think yourself lucky, if you escape without personal chastisement. Now, sweet shepherdess, let me hear thy voice; I would know if it be as sweet as thy looks."

"Let us leave this spot," said Albert, addressing Isandra.

"I must chastise this insolent hind!" exclaimed the knight, unsheathing his sword and urging his horse to the side of Albert. "I cannot disgrace this good weapon by shedding thy base born blood, but according to knightly usage, I may strike such as thee with anything but its edge."

The knight lifted his sword to put his threat into execution, but quick as thought, Casside snatched the shepherd's crook from the hand of Louis (for he had left his own weapon at the Silver Bell), and disarmed him in a moment. The cavalier grew red with shame and vexation, and called to his squire to bring him his lance that he might beat the audacious peasant with its stout ashen handle; but in this he was no more successful than in the first attempt; our hero quickly knocked the weapon from his grasp, and gave him a staggering blow upon the head.

The knight was now ready to choke with indignation; for a blow from a simple peasant he considered a foul affront.

"Lend me your sword, my friend, and I will make an example of this fellow," he said to his squire, in a voice hoarse with passion.

"Remember, my lord, that it will tarnish

the memory of your gallant deeds, if you shed the blood of this peasant."

"I care not—I care not!" he cried, leaping from his horse. The squire gave him his sword as desired, and Albert availed himself of the one which was lying upon the ground.

Isandra stood pale and mute with fear, while Casside awaited calmly the attack of the enraged cavalier, who was anticipating an easy and speedy victory. But he was doomed to a bitter disappointment. Our hero met his furious onset with skill and coolness, baffling all his mad efforts to give him a mortal thrust. The squire watched the progress of the contest with undisguised wonder.

"The fellow has used that weapon before!" he muttered. "He handles it well—admirably, too well for my lord's good."

The countenance of Casside during the contest wore a calm and contemptuous smile. At first he acted only on the defensive, and seemed greatly to enjoy the disappointment and impotent chafings of his antagonist; but at length, he began to act on the offensive, and before ten seconds had elapsed, again disarmed his assailant.

"You are at my mercy," said Casside, placing the point of his sword to his breast; "but I give you your life without the asking; go, and in future be more courteous to strangers."

"Mount, and let us be off, in the virgin's name! you can perhaps settle this matter at some future time, for I doubt not you will again hear of this person!" exclaimed the squire.

The knight got on horseback without a word of reply. Albert gave the sword to Louis, who handed it to the squire, with the lance. The cavaliers then moved away, and as the squire passed Casside, he said in a low voice:

"Young man, you have done a fool-hardy thing. You have mortally offended young Lord Spencer—the son of Sir Hugh Spencer."

This piece of information did not seem to produce that degree of astonishment which the squire evidently expected to see manifested; but without pausing to say anything more, he rode after his master.

"That was gallantly done!" said Louis, whose respect for Albert had greatly increased during the last few moments.

"Unlucky hour! unfortunate event! you have, in protecting me, brought certain destruction upon yourself!" exclaimed Isandra. "Sir Hugh Spencer, I have heard my father say, is very powerful with the king."

"Fear not," replied Albert; "in protecting you from insult, I would cross swords with the king himself."

"My father comes this way; we will hear what his opinion is; whether it be indeed so dangerous a thing to disarm an insolent knight," said Louis.

A tall, middle-aged man, of not very prepossessing exterior, approached the parties. If the face is an index to the character, a very high estimate could not be attached to that of Peter Vidal, Isandra's father. Casside had seen him but a few times; and had never been favorably impressed with his moral worth; for sordid avarice was indelibly written upon every feature. He bowed coldly to our hero and listened sullenly to the story of what had just transpired.

"So you have offended the son of Sir Hugh Spencer, young man?" he said, with a sarcastic smile. "My fiery youth, your head isn't worth a florin. Sir Hugh Spencer is in reality king of England, though Edward the second sits upon the throne."

"But he saved me from insult, father," said Isandra, timidly.

"That was all very well, and I am much obliged to him. I hope he will get happily out of the unpleasant business. I advise him to leave England as soon as possible. Come, daughter, let us return to the cottage," replied Vidal.

"Courtesy requires that you should ask the young man to go with us; he has rendered an important service," whispered Isandra.

As if half-ashamed of his ill-nature, Vidal paused and asked Albert to accompany them; but perceiving that his consent to this proposition was by no means wanted, he prudently with-

held it, and bidding adieu to Isandra, walked away towards Donhead Wood.

Having entered the forest, the first object he beheld was Denis Wetzel. He was dressed in the same manner as on the previous night, and a heavy sword hung at his side. He manifested some surprise at seeing Casside, and laughingly inquired if he intended to take up his residence in that dangerous region.

Albert replied that he had laid no plans for the future; that for the present all places were the same to him.

"How like you our host of the Silver Bell?" asked Wetzel.

"If I wanted a scoundrel, I should know where to find one," was the reply.

"Ah! have you discovered his tricks so soon? Strolling Willie told me there was some cause of offence between you this morning."

"He stole my purse; that was all."

"And you—"

"Came very near strangling him."

"A resolute youth!"

"Bah! that is a slight thing."

"You suit me better and better."

"Well, the good will of even Denis Wetzel may be preferable to his hatred."

"Possibly!" said Wetzel, coloring and biting his lips.

"I wish you good day," added Casside, moving away.

"Not so fast, young man; let us talk over matters that concern us both."

"You can talk of nothing that concerns me, certainly," returned our hero, somewhat loftily.

"Don't be too confident; we shall see. I shall have to be plain with you. And in the first place I must ask if you will keep, forever and a day, what shall pass between us here in this forest, a secret?"

"I have not the least objection to that," answered the young man, carelessly.

"Very well; I will take your word. Be not offended at what I am about to say; you have seen better days!"

"Well."

"You are poor."

Casside colored.

"You are, at present, a needy adventurer."

Casside set his teeth hard together, and his eyes darted fiery glances at Denis Wetzel; who went calmly on, without heeding the stormy appearance of his auditor.

"You are suffering some deep disappointment, and know not what to do. But I can tell you. I know of a profession in which you can not only acquire fortune and renown, but also punish your enemies."

"Is it an honorable profession?"

"It is the profession of arms."

"Under what leader?"

"You have heard his name often," said Wetzel.

"Proceed," returned Albert.

"Don't start, young man—his name is Mark Donhead," added Wetzel, slowly.

But Casside *did* start, notwithstanding the premonition of his new friend to the contrary; he quickly recovered his usual calmness of demeanor.

"Methinks, Denis Wetzel, that you speak of a hard and dangerous trade."

"The profession of arms is always more or less dangerous; especially where men are made to fight like dogs at the bidding of kings, who go to war to gratify some passing whim. Donhead Wood is wide, and the followers of Mark dwell in comparative ease and safety. They are for the most part, desperate fellows, I will admit; but there is much gentle blood among them. Yes, there are those enrolled among them who have won golden spurs, and received knighthood from noble hands."

"And who will end by winning a rope from the hands of the hangman," said Albert.

"Never! not one of them will be taken alive. They will perish with their good swords in their hands."

"Can you tell me if the band is large?"

"Ay! that it is; and merry withal."

"I should think the fear of being brought to justice would mar their enjoyment."

"They have lurking places where nobody can find them; and good King Edward has fighting enough on his hands to keep him busy without troubling himself to look after them."

"This state of things may not continue. When young Edward is crowned, he may, perchance, amuse himself by exterminating all the robber bands in England."

"If you have any fear in your composition, Mark Donhead wants not your services; he seeks hearts of oak to serve him."

"Let me ask what possible interest you can feel in this matter? What is Mark Donhead and his free companions to you?"

"That is not the question under discussion; and I do not choose to tell the reasons for all my acts. Will you reflect upon this subject, or do you reject it without thought—on the spot?"

"I reject your proffers!" exclaimed Casside, bitterly, feeling for the hilt of his sword; but he remembered that he was unarmed, and truly, as Wetzel had said, a "needy adventurer."

"The voice of reason is speaking to you; I perceive; listen but a few moments to its whispers, and you will say, 'long live Donhead and his merry men,'" added Wetzel, who saw that there was a struggle in the young man's breast. "Weigh the subject well in your own mind—do not fret and chafe—but look calmly at the matter."

"Begone, tempter!" cried Albert.

"Yes, I am going—but I will see you and hear your final answer before another sunrise."

With these words, Denis Wetzel walked composedly away; while Casside gazed after him with emotions which cannot readily be described, wondering whether he was not some dark minister of Satan sent to lure him to perdition.

CHAPTER V.

THE MONK.

THE warm rays of the meridian sun were streaming through the branches of the trees upon Albert Casside's head. He looked up and sighed, and queried whether the bright luminary shone upon another person so wretched as himself. He moved with slow steps towards the Silver Bell. His melancholy meditations were interrupted in an unexpected manner. Three men clad like hunters, suddenly presented themselves to view. Crossbows were slung at their backs, and they wore heavy broadswords at their sides. One of them advanced, and in a voice as amicable as the case would allow, said:

"Sir, I will trouble you for your purse."

Our hero hesitated, for all the money which he possessed was in the pocket of his doublet, where he had placed it at the suggestion of blind Willie.

"The young man will be good enough not to keep us waiting," added the robber.

Casside cast his eyes rapidly about him for some weapon of defence, resolved to keep possession of his paltry fortune to the last. He perceived lying at his feet a stout limb which had

been broken from an oak by the fall of a tree. He instantly seized the missile, and being active and strong gave the robber such a blow upon the side of the head, that he fell senseless. The second one drew his sword and pressing precipitately upon him shared the same fate; but the third knave, instead of advancing, put his hand to his mouth and produced a sort of whistling sound, which speedily brought half-a-dozen sturdy accomplices to his assistance.

Albert grasped more determinedly the oaken stick and stood his ground manfully. The newcomers, perceiving that the affair was likely to result in flattened noses and broken heads, prudently came on warily. Casside flourished his weapon in every direction, laying on many effectual blows before he was vanquished; but his stick was finally knocked from his hand, and he could make no farther resistance. The robbers leaned upon their swords and stared at him, admiring evidently, his courage, and his well-developed person.

"As I can defend these paltry pieces no longer, you are welcome to them, gentlemen, as well as to the broken heads I have already given you."

While making this remark, Casside turned the pocket of his doublet wrong side out, and saw his last florin disappear.

"Now I suppose you will allow me to go my way unmolested?"

The robbers looked at each other, as if to learn what opinions prevailed upon the subject. Those who had received the severest contusions and bruises, appeared by no means disposed to let the author of them depart in peace; and mildly suggested that it would be well to hang him upon the nearest tree. But this proposition was at length overruled by the more humane, and after being thoroughly searched to ascertain if there was not more money concealed upon his person, he was suffered to resume his way towards the Silver Bell.

He was shortly after met by Strolling Willie, to whom he related the story of his recent loss.

"It no doubt appears a great misfortune to you," said the mendicant; "but I have always noticed that what seem great evils often turn out to be inestimable blessings."

"That's sorry comfort to one in my condition!"

"I know of a monk who can well advise you what to do; he can, at least, give you shelter, until Providence sends you better luck," added the stroller.

"I shall not ask alms quite yet," replied Casside, rather haughtily.

"I did not mean that; but simply that you should visit the wise man who can make himself happy with a crust of bread and a cup of pure water."

"A rare personage!"

"Ay, you may well say so; there is not another like him in England. Now give particular attention, and I will direct you how to find him."

To humor the kindly disposed beggar, our hero listened to his directions, which were somewhat complicated; and to please him still farther, promised to seek the habitation of the recluse sometime during the afternoon.

Albert then proceeded to seek the Silver Bell to get the sword which he had left there when

he set out on his visit to Isandra Vidal. Joachim Capet regarded his guest with anything but friendly looks, and hinted pretty plainly that if he did not see what color his money was soon, it would be highly expedient for him to quit the inn and seek other accommodations. He went on to add that his was the first instance in which any individual had been so bold as to complain of losing a purse at the Silver Bell.

Casside's blood began to boil with vexation, and seizing mine host by the nape of the neck, he belabored him soundly; which event produced a great disturbance in the hitherto quiet precincts of the country inn; but the employment afforded our hero the liveliest satisfaction he had experienced for a long time. In the midst of the excitement he pitched Capet with no gentle hand among a quantity of empty bottles, and bid a hasty adieu to the Silver Bell.

He wandered about for some time without any fixed object, being, in fact, in a complete state of indecision. At length happening to see some of the landmarks which the stroller had mentioned as guides to the residence of the monk, he mechanically directed his steps to the spot; not indeed expecting any benefit, but merely because he knew not what else to do. After he had walked what appeared to him a long distance, he was ready to reproach himself that he had suffered the words of the mendicant to make a sufficient impression upon his mind to think of them the second time. So he resolved not to see the monk, although he was aware that he could not be far distant from his habitation.

But the time employed in forming this resolution was lost; a man who proved to be the monk David, was already near him, clad with all the simplicity of his calling.

"Whom seek you, young man?" he asked, looking attentively at Albert.

"The monk David lives somewhere about here, I believe?" he answered, evasively.

"He is before you," was the immediate reply. "Follow me."

Casside, as we have seen, having nothing

better to do, and almost wholly indifferent in regard to the turn affairs might take, believing that he had got quite down to the foot of the ladder of adversity, obeyed the injunction of father David, and followed him along a narrow foot-path that wound about in an eccentric manner. They reached finally the most lonely part of the forest that Albert had seen. The monk paused before a rude hut, in front of which was a small rivulet.

"Here is where I dwell," he said.

"A most secluded spot, truly."

"It suits my purpose. The real wants of life are few, and if we are wise, we can find them anywhere. Nature supplies me with water at small cost, you see, and my hut is more capacious than it seems. Let us enter."

There was nothing very striking or worthy of much description in the hut of father David. It was indeed much more capacious than its exterior indicated; a liberal excavation having been made in the rear, forming a room of considerable size; so that the dwelling was composed of two apartments, besides a small oratory, or what subserved that purpose.

"Now, young man, what is your object in seeking me?" asked David.

Casside replied that he had no particular object in view, other than to gratify the whim of a mendicant, who was desirous to do him some kindness out of gratitude for some trifling service he had rendered him; a service, by the way, not worth mentioning.

"I have seen the stroller since he gave you that advice. He has told me all he knew of your misfortunes."

"He is a singular old creature; for I could not find my way here with both eyes open, while he is deprived of the blessing of sight entirely," remarked Albert.

Father David proceeded to clear his throat by several preliminary ahems; but what profound wisdom he was about to utter, is not now known, for a gentle knocking upon the door of his hut put an end to the contemplated speech.

The monk arose quickly in some confusion,

and hastily opening the little door that led to the apartment in the rear, he bade Albert enter and remain silent until the new-comer should be disposed of. Our hero passed into the room (which was quite dark, having more the appearance of a cellar than of a habitable place); and the door was closed and fastened upon him.

He seated himself upon a block of wood to await the result, with the same feeling of indifference that had characterized all his movements for the last four-and-twenty hours. He heard the outer door of the hut opened, and after a few words were exchanged, some person was admitted. Presently, Casside heard the low tones of a female voice, or such it appeared to him; and his curiosity began to get the better of his indifference. A female in the hut of the monk! What possible motive could bring her to such a solitary place? Here was food for curiosity, and Albert resolved to gratify his, if practicable. He placed his ear close to the rough wall and heard a voice that made him start with unfeigned surprise. Could it be possible that Isandra Vidal was there? He would listen again. He did so and the conviction that forced itself upon his mind was the same. He next proceeded to search for a crevice by which he might gratify the eye as well as the ear. He found a small one without difficulty, and the subject was no longer one of doubt. Isandra Vidal was indeed in earnest conversation with the monk—a circumstance which filled Albert's mind with the most singular and uncomfortable thoughts.

Although he could not obtain a full view of her face, it was evident enough that she was considerably excited, and laboring under some strong feelings of apprehension. In the first moments of his amazement, Albert was greatly tempted to dash down the door that separated the apartments, confront the parties, and demand to know the reason of this singular interview.

But a moment's reflection made him abandon a purpose so foolish. What right had he to question her motives, or what influenced her actions? What authority had he over the young maiden? Moreover, why should he dis-

trust the purity of her intentions, or the integrity of her soul? Did he not know her to be prudent, discreet, and considerate, in all her acts? Was not the gentle spirit that animated her, as fair as the temple in which it was enshrined? Away then, with unkindly misgivings! away with uncertainty, away with doubt! the breath of Isandra was purity itself, and her youthful bosom the home of sweet affections.

He observed that the monk listened with intense interest, and the tale Isandra was telling affected him; but in what manner it was not easy to decide, his face being so imperfectly seen.

Father David's agitation subsided, and he grew profoundly thoughtful. After walking across the room a few times, he motioned to Isandra to enter the little oratory, where the monk doubtless performed his devotions and practised his self-abasements. The young girl entered and the monk closed the door. He then paced the room as before, rubbed his forehead as if endeavoring to stimulate the reflective faculties, and then freed our hero from his temporary imprisonment, who came forth as much mystified as ever a mortal was.

Fixing his eyes steadily upon the monk, he said in a voice intended to be calm, but was not:

"So you have had a female visitor; it was Isandra Vidal."

"You are right; I am her friend and adviser; she is in great danger," answered father David.

"I am also her friend," added Casside, impatiently.

"Save her, then, from a fate which she considers worse than death," continued the monk.

"Explain."

"A detestable union, sir."

"With whom?"

"One who is powerful."

"I will prevent it."

"You may tremble at the mention of his name."

"I fear no man."

"Her father is interested in this marriage."

"Yes, he is selling her for gold; I remember—she told me so this very day. But I know not that the danger was so near and so pressing."

"Have you seen Denis Wetzel, to-day?" asked the monk.

Casside turned and looked fully at David.

"I have," he rejoined, emphatically.

"What said he?" resumed the monk, hurriedly.

"Much that was villainous."

"I can guess; he wished you to join the free companions of Mark Donhead?"

"That is true."

"And you must comply," added David, quickly.

"What do you say!" cried Casside, angrily.

"That you must accede to his wishes," said the monk, in the same tone.

"Your sacred profession alone hinders me from doing you personal violence!" retorted Albert, sternly.

"Restrain yourself, impetuous youth; do not take my words in their broadest sense. Listen, it is Mark Donhead who will bear off your fair shepherdess; his gold is all powerful with her father."

"Mark Donhead!" exclaimed Casside, with eyes dilated with amazement.

"Even so, my son."

"Then her situation is indeed terrible! this man's power is felt and feared all over the country."

"Without doubt," returned David, and by joining the band you would have the most efficient means, it seems to me, of watching his movements, and of baffling his design."

"The idea appears plausible; it is worth a trial, at least."

"A trial you will find it in more senses than one. The compact that binds them together is most fearful. Those who enroll themselves among the followers of Mark Donhead are his till death. Every one of them are bound by the most solemn oath to seek out and punish all traitors, and such as violate, in any manner, the terrible compact. Woe to him who is faint-

hearted, or meditates an escape, or a betrayal of the band; he dies without mercy."

"That does not intimidate me. Recent misfortunes have fitted me for desperate undertakings. And to save yonder fair girl, I would face greater dangers than those you speak of. Yes, I will sign the dark compact of this prince of robbers."

"I admire your free and generous self-devotion. Isandra Vidal, though the child of a peasant, is worthy of your efforts. Donhead is anxious to consummate this monstrous union, and Vidal is equally interested. The terms of the sacrifice, for I can call it nothing else, are already agreed upon, and will be carried out, unless speedily thwarted. She can only oppose her feeble will to the might of the famous bandit, and the inflexible determination of her

father. A bird in the fowler's snare were not more helpless, or less strong to resist its fate. Mark proposes to convey her, ere long, to his subterranean haunt—a large cave in the heart of the forest. Should you join his ruffians, you will greatly increase the chances of being of service to the poor girl."

"My resolution is taken; and now let me have a few words with her before I address myself to this new adventure which may possibly prove my last."

"The interview must be short, time flies on; you must talk with those less fair, and listen to voices less musical. You must see Denis Wetzel before the sun again reddens the far off west. Open that door, and you will see Isandra."

The first of these is the fact that the
 second of these is the fact that the
 third of these is the fact that the
 fourth of these is the fact that the
 fifth of these is the fact that the
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CHAPTER VI.

THE CAVE OF THE BANDITTI.

THE sober gray of evening twilight came stealing over Donhead Wood. Albert Casside stood leaning against a huge fragment of rock that had, in other ages, been burst asunder by some strange convulsion of nature. Not far from him, the figure of Denis Wetzel stood pictured in the deepening gloom.

"Some hours have passed since we met; tell me if you are less scrupulous than then?" said the latter.

"I am," answered Albert, coldly.

"That is well; I knew that reflection would cool your chivalric attachment to what people call honor," added Denis.

"Circumstances have had more to do with it than reflection. I have been robbed of all the money I could call my own in the wide world."

"Robbed, say you?"

"Of the last florin; but some of the knaves of Mark Donhead, I trow, have got such bruises as will make them remember me for a long time to come."

"Did you resist?" asked Wetzel, earnestly.

"Resist! I knocked them over as I would

so many wooden saints. And I wish to impress this fact upon your mind, that you may remember it as long as you happen to know me, that I always resist every species of injustice. Nature has given me two strong arms, and it is my established principle, to use them just as often as I am the object of a wrong of any kind."

"Bravo! you will do for Mark. But I warn you to give him no offence, which your aptness at the game of hard knocks might perhaps quickly lead you to do. He is rather hasty in his temper, and absolute among his men. If at any time he should give you a blow—"

"A blow, you knave! I'd strike him dead on the spot!" cried Casside, drawing his sword and springing towards Wetzel.

The latter did not change his position, but stood before Albert with as much tranquillity as hitherto.

"I did but joke, young man; put up your sword. If you conclude to have your name written in the compact of the free companions, you will have practice enough, without being obliged to pick quarrels with your friends. Is your

mind fully made up on the subject? for a resolution half-formed is not to be depended on."

"I have determined to offer my services to Mark Donhead. Now I speak plainly, and you will need to question me no farther on the subject. Proceed at once to inform me what I am to do to be initiated into this celebrated company of banditti?"

“Your straight-forwardness is commendable. The initiation is such as becomes brave spirits ; but cowards shrink from it. It will be well for you to know before you go farther, that those who once join this brotherhood, are never at liberty to dissolve the connection and depart in peace ; once enrolled, enrolled forever and a day.”

Wetzel paused, and then added slowly and emphatically, looking steadily at Casside. "*We punish traitors with death!*"

"You, then, belong to the band?" said Albert.

"I do," returned Denis, promptly.

"I trust, then, that you will do me the honor to conduct me to the presence of Mark Donhead."

"If you once enter the secret abode of the banditti, you cannot leave it until you go forth as one of them; you go in a good citizen; you come out an *outlaw*, or you never come out. Do you comprehend?"

"Most perfectly; lead on, I follow you to the haunt of the redoubtable brigand."

"It is settled—this way—and be patient," returned the bandit.

Casside abandoned himself to the guidance of Wetzell. He knew that he was taking a step that might affect his whole future life, and yet he followed Denis calmly. He was aware that danger and death fluttered like dark angels about him, but his tread was firm and his purpose unflinching. That the banditti of the period were bound together by fearful compacts, and visited treachery with speedy and pitiless punishment, he also knew. At other seasons in his existence, when the sun of prosperity was shining benignantly upon him, he would, without doubt, have shuddered at what he was now

daring with scarcely a quickening of the pulse. Even with his present feelings, he would have shrunk from the committal of crime, and writhed under disgrace.

But the object which he now had in view overcame all other considerations, and made him risk the only inheritance which he could call his—his honor. Impelled by his love for Isandra, and a high chivalric feeling which ever prompted him to befriend the weak and helpless, he devoted himself fully and completely to this new enterprise.

Dennis Wetzel moved steadily on, making numberless eccentric windings and turnings, until Albert believed that it would have been quite impossible for him to have found his way, unguided, to the Silver Bell, or to the hut of the monk. He employed his mind during the long and silent walk in maturing the plans of father David. The latter he believed could be fully trusted, for he could conceive of no possible motive that he could have for betraying him, or exposing him to danger and death. He felt sure that Strolling Willie was, or meant to be, his friend. And here he could not help asking himself if he had indeed reached that condition, when he was to find his friends in the lowest walks of life. For a moment the thought annoyed him, but his better nature soon banished such unworthy ideas.

Wetzel, who had hitherto walked on without uttering a word, now stopped and remarked that there *was* yet time for him to go back, if he felt any regrets or misgivings. Our hero motioned him to proceed, and Denis continued to lead the way through the dark and silent wood.

"The way to the cave is rather intricate, and I think it would perplex you not a little to find it with the score of men-at-arms at your back, which you spoke of last night," he observed, casting a sly glance at Albert.

"I begin to feel greatly inclined to that opinion," answered the latter. "Are we not most there?"

"We are quite there," answered Weibel, pausing.

11 I see nothing but a thick forest and some

large rocks piled one upon another by the hand of nature," said the young man, looking about him.

"And yet within call of us are two hundred as merry fellows as ever lifted sword, or bent a bow."

"You surprise me," added Albert.

"I will increase your wonder," resumed Wetzel. "Come this way a little. Mark the effect of this."

Denis Wetzel knocked a few times upon the large rock near which he was standing. Immediately it moved noiselessly from its place, and disclosed the mouth of a cavern.

"No human being, not in the secret, could have mistrusted that this was anything more than an ordinary stone," observed Albert.

"The fact is often a fortunate thing for us," rejoined Wetzel. "Your last chance of repenting your choice is gone; when next you cross this threshold, you will be an outlaw—at least in name. Be careful, there are steps here."

"Is this the only entrance?" asked our hero, as he stooped and entered the aperture.

"That is a subject upon which I shall not be over-communicative; be content with what you already know," was the reply of the bandit.

Casside groped his way down the steps in almost total darkness, but when he reached the bottom he beheld a faint light reflected from a small lamp. Near the steps stood a man with a drawn sword in his hand, to whom Wetzel made a significant sign to remain silent. A bunch of keys was hanging against the wall; Denis took them and going on a little farther, unlocked a door. When both had passed through, he carefully relocked it. The place in which Albert now found himself was a low and narrow passage, as rough and jagged as nature had originally formed it.

At the end of this passage was another door, to which his guide fitted a key and unlocked it as in the first instance. Each of these natural compartments was faintly lighted by a single lamp, suspended from the roof. The second passage was rather more lofty and capacious than the first. The next new movement which

Wetzel made, was to the left, through a door in every respect like the others; but the apartment was materially different from the ones which had preceded it; it was a long and winding way, in which their footsteps awoke loud echoes.

Wetzel took the lamp, which hung from the roof, in his hand, and moved on like a spectre through the dismal place. While they were threading the labyrinths of this cheerless abode, there came occasionally to their ears the sound of voices and merry laughter.

After going a considerable distance in this damp and serpentine corridor, Casside was at length shown the apartment he was to occupy for the present; it was fitted up with much neatness, and had within it many articles of comfort; so that our hero did not feel disposed to complain of his accommodations.

"Here you will remain until it shall be the pleasure of Mark Donhead to summon you before him."

"Will it be long, think you, before I shall have that honor?" asked Albert, sarcastically.

"I don't know; possibly to-night—perhaps to-morrow. I will go and see how our fellows feel, and whether they will be disposed to forgive the blows you gave some of them. It shall be my care that you have generous cheer. The motto of the free companions is, 'a short life and a merry one.'"

With these words, Denis Wetzel lighted a small lamp and left our hero to his meditations, carefully locking the door upon him; a precaution which, in this instance, was rather unnecessary, as the neophyte had no intention of escaping.

He examined the apartment with some interest, and wondered how many others had been locked therein in the same manner. His mind then wandered from this subject to Isandra, and his recent interview with her at the monk's hut; but this train of thought was interrupted by the creaking of the door upon its hinges. A person entered to say that the new candidate for the band would not be allowed any food until after the ceremony of initiation.

There was such a saucy leer upon the fellow's face, when he communicated this piece of intelligence, that Casside could not well resist the temptation of doing him personal violence; thereupon, incontinently doubling his fist, he placed a blow upon the frontispiece of the bandit, just above the bridge of the nose, that caused him to change the vertical for the horizontal position, and to see all kinds of electric lights, and stars that danced about eccentrically, and couldn't keep still.

"Tell your master that it is thus I always punish impertinence, and resist wrong," said Albert, when the fellow began to show signs of recovering the position most natural to human bipeds.

When he had succeeded in regaining his feet, he looked menacingly at the chastiser of his insolence, and obviously felt a strong desire to retaliate upon him; but observing that he wore a sword, and fearful, doubtless, of giving offence to his master, Mark Donhead, his anger found vent in threats and scowls, which were productive of no great inconvenience or annoyance.

He left the premises, muttering that his name

was Dick Strow, and that he never overlooked a blow, but invariably managed to pay up the score, with compound interest.

A few moments after the withdrawal of Dick Strow, another of the band made his appearance to inform him that although food was not allowed him, wine in any quantity and of the best flavor would be brought in, if he desired it. Casside signified that it should be produced without delay; and great was his chagrin when a third knave opened the door and remarked that Mark Donhead did not think it best to excite his mind by stimulants, while he was on the eve of such an important change in his manner of life; but the purest water should be brought in its stead.

Seizing the block upon which he was sitting, Albert hurled it at the head of the unfortunate messenger, and taking effect upon his head, stretched him bleeding and insensible upon the earth.

The neophyte stepped over the unconscious individual, and proceeded along the great natural corridor, which led he knew not whither.

As Casside went forward, he was surprised at the spaciousness of the cavern; for the narrow passage rapidly widened, and the low, arching roof assumed a loftier height. The feeble glimmerings of the light fell with a curiously picturesque effect upon the numerous stalactites that had frozen into form during the lapse of years. They flashed back the reflections in innumerable prismatic colors, which dazzled and astonished the eyes of the young man. Without pausing to examine the various ramifications of the grotto, he kept on in what appeared to him the main shaft of the same.

The sound of merriment grew more distinct as he proceeded, and he resolved to present himself boldly to the revellers, whatever might be the consequences of such an act. Casside reached, ere long, a large door which was closed; it was the only obstacle which separated him from the carousers. He exerted a gentle force against it, to learn if it was fastened; it was not, and pushing it suddenly open, a singular scene met his vision. He found himself in a spacious saloon, brilliantly lighted. If the curious effect of the dim lamp shining upon the

CHAPTER VII.

THE GRAND SALOON. THE CAPTIVE.

stalactites had previously surprised him, his amazement was now incalculably increased; for numberless formations similar to those he had seen, depended like enormous icicles from the lofty roof, that gave back the dazzling glare of the lights with extraordinary effect and brilliancy. Extending through the centre of the saloon, was an ample table, or what answered all the objects of one, and which was groaning, to use a figure, beneath the weight of the viands placed upon it. Around this spacious board was seated a motley mass of human beings, whose boisterous mirth gave proof that they intended to make the most of the present, without trusting anything to the future. There were among them faces of manly beauty, and visages rendered harsh and disgusting, by drunkenness and evil passions. Their drinking cups were just replenished, and they were on the point of conveying them to their lips, when Casside made his unexpected debut. Every hand seemed paralyzed with surprise, and all eyes were turned towards him with a wondering stare.

Without heeding these indubitable signs of astonishment, our hero walked boldly up to the table, and reaching over one of the ruffian's shoulder, took one of the flowing cups, just poured out, and drank it off at a draught. He then replaced the vessel and took another, intending that it should follow in the track of the other.

"Blood and fury!" cried the bandit, whose wine had been appropriated so unceremoniously. "Who is this audacious varlet?"

"I am one of the free companions," replied Casside, carrying the brimming cup to his mouth.

"It's a lie—a foul lie!" retorted the robber, foaming with ire.

Without deigning any reply to this imputation, Casside, quick as thought, dashed the wine in the bearded ruffian's face.

Instantly a terrific scene ensued. The bandit sprang from the table, grinding his teeth with fury, and drawing his sword, made a hurried thrust at Albert, who, foreseeing the consequences of what he had done, had already unsheathed his weapon. The steel blades met, fire flashed from their edges, and the angry clash resounded a thousand times through the arches of the cavern.

The free companions simultaneously arose to their feet, to watch the progress of the desperate encounter.

"Hold! sheathe your swords!" thundered Denis Wetzel.

"Noel Yorick, do you hear?" With a discontented growl the bandit sullenly dropped the point of his weapon, and Casside did the same.

"Yorick, don't be a fool, man! I will settle this matter myself. Put up your blades, I say."

Albert returned his sword to his scabbard, and Yorick reluctantly followed his example; but an expression of deadly hostility lingered upon his face which no human command could chase away.

"Now, sir, what means this?" asked Wetzel, turning sternly to Albert.

"I mean that you have not kept your word

with me, and I have come to right myself," answered the latter, quietly.

"How have I violated my word, rash boy?" added Wetzel.

"You promised me the common hospitality of life, and have refused them. I must eat and drink, were I a thousand times a bandit."

"I grant that I did make such a promise; but it was the pleasure of the leader of this band that you should be kept without the comforts named, until you had passed your initiation. Mark Donhead is absolute here," rejoined Denis Wetzel.

"He's not absolute over my appetite," added Albert, seating himself at the table and appropriating to his own use a large piece of roast venison.

"Who is this fellow?" exclaimed several voices.

"Silence!" cried Wetzel.

While the first mouthful of flesh was undergoing the process of mastication, the unlucky individual who had borne the last message of Donhead to our hero, staggered into the saloon, pale and ghastly, while a small current of blood was flowing from a deep cut upon the head.

"What next!" muttered Yorick, as his eyes rested on the unevoked apparition. The fellow pointed at Casside, and dropped heavily upon one of the benches.

At that instant, Dick Strow was observed to rub his head with a very unpleasant expression of countenance. Some of the banditti laughed, others expressed different emotions by scowling faces and suppressed oaths.

"Men," said Wetzel, "this young gallant has come hither, under my protection, to join us. To-morrow night he will be taken before our captain and initiated into the brotherhood. You see, by what has happened, that he is a youth of spirit and resolution, and we need such among us. It has always been the aim of Mark Donhead to enroll the names of none but the bravest, upon the scroll of our compact. I have pleasure in introducing to you, gentlemen, Albert Casside, whose courage needs no comment from me, for I see several heads among

you, which he has well nigh broken past cure. Brave companions, let us forget all past differences; and welcome among us an able-bodied and daring recruit. Yorick, relax your brows, and be reconciled. Dick Strow, your honor will suffer no taint, and your head will soon heal. Those gallants, who, for a little innocent pastime, rifled this young man's pockets, I trust will be willing to balance accounts and anoint their bruises with the oil of forgetfulness. Come, my merry lads, of Donhead Wood, let us drink a flowing bumper to the neophyte."

This short speech produced considerable effect; the tide of feeling turned in favor of Casside. Instantly there was a lively rattle of drinking vessels, and the health was drunken with gusto; although a few unforgiving faces were still visible.

All now addressed themselves to the business of eating and drinking, our hero not excepted; who resolved to make himself as much at home as the most swaggering ruffian among them.

Enormous quantities of food vanished as if by magic, while servants, male and female, appeared to answer the vociferous demands of the revellers. Hearts, merry enough before, grew merrier; cheeks already reddened with wine, grew redder; tongues already voluble in the utterance of profanity and bravado, grew more and more voluble. The free companions boasted of their achievements, and discoursed, in a very excited manner, of deeds which they yet intended to accomplish. They talked like men who expected to gain undying renown by their daring acts. They spoke of notoriety and fame as being one and identical; that to be notoriously bad, was as desirable as to be equally celebrated for deeds of goodness and benevolence.

While these perverted beings were thus engaged, and growing every moment more boisterous; a part of the band, which had been deputed upon a particular service, returned successful; bringing with them a young lady, who was left by the orders of Wetzel (who appeared to command in the absence of Mark Donhead), in an

adjoining apartment. Room was instantly made for the new-comers at the convivial board. They entered with much zest into the details of their recent adventure; and went on to state the particulars of the manner in which they had taken their fair prisoner.

Casside listened to the recital with absorbing interest. The lady, it would seem, who had been the unfortunate victim of this ruffianism, was of gentle birth and high station. She had been one of a hunting party of lords and ladies; but imprudently allowing her spirited horse to carry her considerably in advance of her companions, she had unluckily fallen into the hands of the banditti; who, having had previous intimation of the hunt, had been stationed, at intervals, in certain localities favorable to their purpose.

The robbers, being in uncommon good humor, proceeded to give a very facetious account of the panic which their unexpected appearance had excited in the mind of the noble maiden. They referred to her tears and entreaties as legitimate objects of laughter; and to her beauty, as a thing upon which every knave had a right to gaze.

"It has been rumored," said Wetzel, "that this damsel, who is now our guest, has been blest with rare personal charms. Does she sustain, think you, the reputation which the good old dame Rumor has conferred upon her?"

"I think I may safely say," replied one who had been the leader of the recent expedition, "that I never looked upon a fairer face or a prettier figure; although the terror with which our presence inspired her, has paled her cheeks, and detracted, somewhat, from her beauty."

"By St. Michael, my patron saint! I must see this paragon!" exclaimed Wetzel, emphatically.

"Ay, we must all have a glance at her!" cried a score of voices. "Bring her in; bring her in, that we may be drunken with beauty, as well as with wine!"

"I care not," resumed Wetzel, "if in this matter you are gratified. Let the gentle maiden be brought in. Ho, there! Yorick, and Dick

Strow, be you the escort of this queen of beauty."

"With right good will!" responded the personages addressed, who thereupon arose from their seats and staggered forth to perform the bidding of Wetzel; a task which appeared completely consonant with their feelings.

During their short absence a breathless silence prevailed in the banqueting hall of the banditti. Presently footsteps were heard, and all eyes were fastened upon the door where the unfortunate lady was expected to make her appearance. The ruffians were not long kept in suspense; the door was pushed open, and Yorick and Dick Strow re-appeared, supporting between them a helpless female.

Albert Casside, whose ears had been open to every word that had been uttered, and whose indignation could scarcely be repressed during the time the subject of this brutality had been under discussion, did not, at first, raise his head to look at the sufferer, fearing to trust himself to do so; but when he heard the loud shouts of admiration which burst from the lips of two hundred inebriated men, he slowly and sorrowfully looked in the direction in which all faces were turned.

The spectacle which he beheld caused him to leap to his feet with the quickness of lightning, while his respiration seemed nearly suspended with the intensity of his surprise and consternation. He gasped for breath like one in the agonies of drowning; he pressed his hand convulsively upon his chest; he clutched at the air for support; his face became of the ashen hue of death, and then flushed with the crimson of a burning fever. He stood a moment powerless with emotions which none could analyze, and then his strong manhood came back to him again, and smoothed down, with magic power, the agony that convulsed his breast, and raised the veins upon his forehead like knotted cords. He folded his arms, that had been thrown aloft so wildly a moment before, calmly upon his bosom; he drew himself up proudly and firmly; his respiration became deep, full, and regular, and not a muscle of his

countenance rebelled against his own inflexible will.

He gazed around him with a pride and dignity of expression that elevated him to be, in reality, the master and leader of them all.

"Denis Wetzel!" he exclaimed, in tones so calm and yet so deep that they could not fail to fix the attention of every one, except the unhappy lady who had found temporary relief in unconsciousness. "Denis Wetzel, let this unmanly exhibition cease. I have strong, yea, all-powerful reasons for making this request. If you refuse me, I swear, by my honor, which I never tarnished by a base act, that I will call you to a terrible account for the same. You perceive this weapon by my side; I have worn it from childhood; it was buckled there first by my mother, at an age when its point trailed upon the ground as I walked. She told me that it never was to be drawn except in the cause of the right—in the defence of the wronged and the oppressed, and for the sake of lady-fair. I have never forgotten the injunction, and so help me the powers that preside over worth and innocence, I will always obey it to the very letter! I can use this weapon with the skill and strength of a man; and if you do not choose to order this unhappy maiden from this presence, I shall make it the subject of a personal arbitrament by the sword."

Denis Wetzel, at the commencement of Casside's address, sprang from his seat at the head of the table, and drew his sword from its scabbard; but before its conclusion, slowly sheathed it and resumed his place.

The female, who had produced this extraordinary sensation, was still supported by Yorick and Dick Strow; but fortunately for her, was yet insensible to what was transpiring. The loveliness of her features, the purity of her complexion, the symmetry of her proportions, were indeed marvellous. As her beautiful person lay unconscious upon the arms of the robbers, her face and neck were not unlike the whiteness of the sculptured marble.

The bold speech of Albert produced a striking re-action among the banditti. They gazed with

a sort of awe at our hero. His temerity appeared to strike them dumb, and they evidently regarded him as one who had lost his reason, or whose audacity knew no stopping place. From the daring youth they glanced at Wetzel, to note the effect of his words upon him.

No one ventured to speak; there was an impressive silence, in which all seemed at the climax of expectation. Denis Wetzel at length arose to his feet, and waving his hand authoritatively, said, calmly:

"Let the maiden be conducted hence, and committed to the care of one of her own sex. Let no insult be offered her; let no one presume to address her in other than a respectful manner, or he shall answer for it with his head!"

This command was instantly obeyed, and

the lovely maiden was consigned to other hands. The instant that her slight figure disappeared, Wetzel resumed:

"Let this rash youth be conveyed to the chamber of justice, to await the reward of his unparalleled presumption. Place upon his limbs the heaviest manacles, and leave him to meditate upon whatever subjects he chooses, and to form whatever conclusions he may see fit, in regard to the future. Insubordination is a crime which never passes without summary punishment, among the followers of Mark Donhead."

Wetzel sat down again as though nothing had happened, while Casside was seized and hurried away to what had been styled "the chamber of justice," there to remain in terrible suspense until his fate should be known.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MIDNIGHT INTERVIEWS.

It was considerably past the midnight hour. The angel of silence had waved her wing over the labyrinths of the banditti's cave; they no longer resounded with the sound of boisterous laughter or reverberated to drunken and excited voices. The lights no longer flashed brilliantly in the grand saloon, and the revellers were locked in the embrace of heavy slumber.

Albert Casside was the occupant of a damp and cheerless apartment. He was lying upon some straw, securely ironed. Sleep had not visited his eyelids; his brain was the theatre of many distracting thoughts. Believing that he heard cautious footsteps traversing the subterranean corridor which led to the gloomy place of his imprisonment, he raised himself upon his elbow and listened attentively. Some one paused at the door; a key turned in the lock; the rusty hinges grated dissonantly upon his ear, and a man, holding an iron lamp in his hand, stood before him. It was Denis Wetzel, and his expression was thoughtful and troubled.

"I have come, to say a few words to you."

"Let them be brief," replied Casside.

"It would appear," resumed Wetzel, "that the demon of rashness and audacity has possessed you for the last few hours. I perceive that you are resolved to place your neck in a halter as speedily as possible."

"And yours," retorted Albert, sneeringly, "should have been thus placed years ago, before you had stained your hands with crimes at which humanity revolts."

"Hold!" exclaimed the other, sternly. "Do not tax my patience more severely than you have already done."

"Strike these fetters from my limbs," rejoined Casside, "and then address to me such language, if you dare. Fulfil the promises you have given me. I demand to be taken before Mark Donhead."

"Your wish shall be gratified in due time. You will feel his power, perchance, sooner than you imagine. Your conduct, this night, has been outrageous. Speak: what is this fair damsel to you? What sympathetic cord makes you feel her sufferings?" added Wetzel.

"That is a secret that I shall keep; it shall die with me, if I die, and live only with me, if I live. It is a secret most dear to me; I will share it with no brigand under heaven," returned Albert, firmly.

"You are in the wrong, young man!" said the bandit. "I should be your confidant."

"You!" exclaimed Casside, sarcastically.

"Even I," rejoined Wetzel, kneeling beside our hero, and with a small hammer beginning to remove the irons upon his limbs.

"This is an unexpected favor," resumed Albert. "I thought it possible that you had come for another purpose."

"To assassinate you, perhaps?" replied the bandit.

"That was my conviction," said the young man.

"That proves," continued Wetzel, "that Satan does not always get his due; that he is often basely slandered; that he is maligned in various ways; that on account of former misdeeds, he is seen with distorted vision by all eyes. But come; your limbs are free again. Arise, and let us discuss matters in a more amicable way. I will tell you the circumstances respecting this gentle damsel, whose appearance operated upon you so wonderfully. Not many days since, Godfrey Ridenger, the second in command, chanced to see her, in the vicinity of Motcombe Manor. He was smitten with her beauty, and conceived the bold idea of bringing her hither."

"And did he not fear the anger of her father?" asked Casside, hastily.

"I trow not," answered the bandit. "We are not wont to fear great names. We are more powerful than the lord of Motcombe Manor; we can defy him to his teeth. Mark Donhead has a larger retinue of men-at-arms, than the haughty father of our fair guest."

"But where was this Godfrey Ridenger during the scenes of the past night?" inquired Albert.

"He was away on another service, and the capture of the maiden was entrusted to other hands. Had he been present in person, he would doubtless have objected to exhibiting her to our fellows in the manner which was seen by you. And I am free to confess that had I not been inflamed with wine, I should not have permitted it."

"It was unmanly—it was brutal!" said Casside.

"It was not gallant, at least," added Wetzel, "and I regret that the event was suffered to transpire."

"Now you begin to talk like a person who

has yet some sense of honor remaining. Your last words remove some of the unpleasant impressions which your late conduct produced. Wetzel, this gentle girl must be saved from the fate that Godfrey Ridenger is preparing for her. His accursed projects must be thwarted forever. I will move heaven and earth to save her."

Wetzel laid his hand heavily upon Casside's shoulder, and said, impressively:

"I ask once more, if you will tell me what relation you sustain to the daughter of the lord of Motcombe Manor? Is it possible that you have presumed to love one so far above you in station?"

"On that subject I shall still remain silent; you have had my answer. You must already know me well enough, to be aware that my purposes are fixed and strong; that I do not change them without reason."

"So be it," returned Wetzel, decidedly.

"Know, then, that Godfrey Ridenger is powerful, and that the maiden could not be wrested from him, were she born of the noblest in the land. No matter if she were the daughter of the Earl of Kent, or even a princess of the blood. In this case, my fiery youth, you are more than matched. There is a power opposed to you, with which you cannot successfully struggle."

"But Mark Donhead—"

"Mark Donhead himself cannot easily control the actions of Ridenger," interrupted Wetzel, impatiently.

"I had supposed that Mark was absolute," resumed Albert, thoughtfully. "But it appears that he is not; that he is ruled by a subordinate officer; that he is not the iron heart I fancied him to be."

"He is absolute!" thundered Wetzel, striking his foot against the ground violently. "He utters a foul lie who affirms that he governs with a feeble hand."

The bandit paused, and walked hurriedly across the apartment a few times, and then added:

"But enough of this; drop the subject, and never let it be resumed again. Donhead will not interfere in this matter; it is not for his in-

terest. He is not a fool. He will not meddle with what does not concern him, without cogent reasons. Give your thoughts to other matters. To-morrow night you will be enrolled among us. Forget the past; gather up your manliness, and prepare yourself for the imposing ceremonies of the initiation. "Come, follow me to a more comfortable apartment."

Taking Casside's arm, the bandit conducted him through several windings of the cavern to the place which he had first occupied. He found there a comfortable couch prepared for his reception, and a sideboard loaded with various kinds of eatables and choice wines.

"Here," added Wetzel, "you may make yourself comfortable, and even happy, if you will be reasonable. Take the world as you find it, and not try to remedy evils which cannot be remedied; submit patiently to ills which cannot be cured by the most skilful leech."

Albert threw himself listlessly upon the couch and made no reply; but had internally marked out the course he intended to pursue, and the rules by which he resolved to be governed, in relation to matters which lay nearest his heart. Denis Wetzel poured out a glass of wine, drank it off, and once more left the neophyte, to eat, to drink, to sleep, to reflect, to repent, to kill himself with his own sword, or to do anything else which he could, under the circumstances.

Casside, chose, however, to remain precisely as the bandit had left him. The idea of repose did not occur to him; his mind was too deeply engrossed with other matters—affairs, to him, of the first importance. But he was not destined to remain long undisturbed; he heard steps without in precisely the same manner as he had in the case of Wetzel's recent visit. He heard a key placed in the lock, and the door opened, as on that occasion. That event appeared to him to be quite natural; but the advent of his present visitor seemed wholly the reverse; for it was no other than Strolling Willie, the blind beggar.

Motioning our hero to observe the utmost silence, he closed, relocked the door, and ap-

proached the couch upon which Casside was lying.

"I am probably the last person whom you expected to see!" said the stroller.

"Nothing could be truer than that remark," replied Albert, looking at the mendicant as if disposed to distrust the evidence of his senses. "How, in the name of all the saints, did you get here?" he added.

"Naturally enough; by instinct—nothing but instinct," returned the new-comer.

"Nonsense!" retorted Albert. "There is a deeper mystery about this transaction than instinct. Men's instincts usually lead them in different directions; and persons of your calling to any place but this. Bah! instinct!"

"Very wonderful is instinct," resumed Willie, musingly. "It directs the footsteps of the poor blind man to haunts, which the acute eyesight in the world might never discover."

"Well, keep your own secrets; let it be instinct, if you will," rejoined Albert. "And now be good enough to tell me the object of this visit?"

"It is to do all that one of my condition may to assist you; to give you, perhaps, a word or two of advice which may prove useful," replied Willie.

"Mysterious man! say what you please. I am ready to listen!" exclaimed Casside.

"In playing at this dangerous game," resumed the mendicant, "you need much cunning and prudence. In regard to the maiden, at present a captive, you must operate more by stratagem than by violent measures. Physical force may prevail when one meets his enemy hand to hand; but not when he is opposed to a power that he cannot comprehend, and which appears to spread itself out in all directions. You cannot well battle with the arm of might which holds the damsel in its grasp; it reaches a long way; it has power to crush its enemies at a great distance. Be calm, and act cautiously, and there are those who will co-operate secretly with you. Cease to irritate Denis Wetzel any more at present in regard to the subject. Pass your initiation with the same

tranquil and lofty courage which has distinguished you on other occasions. Be not awed by what you shall see and hear; the pale cheek, the dilated eye, the hurried respiration, the trembling limbs, will condemn you as one unworthy the confidence of the fraternity. It is those only who give these evidences of fear, that are never trusted; that are always watched; that are never for a moment free from the prying scrutiny of some one or more of the band. Your own reckless and daring spirit will sustain you through the ordeal, and best recommend you to the confidence of the brotherhood. You shall be informed, when any immediate danger threatens the Lady Eveline, of Motcombe Manor. At present, the person who is known as Godfrey Ridenger, is absent, and is not expected here for several days. I will not reveal to you his real character; I will not whisper his name to the damp atmospheres of this subterranean hell, lest they might divulge the secret, and bring ruin upon us."

"You hold strange discourse; you talk in parables; your words are as ambiguous as the oracles of Delphi," said Casside. "Come, thou miracle of instinct; be less obscure in thy speech. I cannot understand him who speaks in an unknown tongue. Tell me the nature of this wonderful embodiment of power, which stretches its hand over the defenceless head of Lady Eveline."

"Upon that theme I will not spend another breath; I did not seek you to reveal secrets which would cost me my life, and nothing less; and although the boon of existence to a blind beggar may be thought of little value, yet the most wretched fear to die. No, no! Strolling Willie is not ready to meet the last and most mysterious of all earthly changes. He prefers to wander up and down a little longer; he would inhale the balmy airs of morning upon the verdant mountain sides; he would feel the kiss of the gentle zephyr upon his brows, and the sunshine streaming upon his sightless eyes; he would repose among the shady arbors of the forest; he would listen to the song of birds, and all the sweet sounds and inspirations of

Nature. Yes, yes," added Willie, impressively, clasping his hands, and pressing them to the tattered rags that covered his bosom, "life is sweet, even to the poor, the blind, the wandering beggar."

"I doubt it not," returned Albert, seriously; "and although bereft of all that could make existence endurable, I am free to acknowledge that at this moment I shrink from death; that cold and chilling thing that freezes up the vital fluids, and leaves the human organism to feel the force of those laws which will, inevitably, resolve it to its primal elements. Yes, it is true, too true, that even I am base enough to wish to live."

"Base! no, my good youth, it is not base to desire to prolong life; it is nature—a voice, a continually breathing voice, which you can no more cease to hear, than you can cease to feel the wants of hunger and thirst, and innate longings for happiness. The love of existence is strong in young hearts and strong in old—in the latter but too, too strong. But I wander from my purpose; I am babbling of that which I should endeavor not to think of; for sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. I know many things which you would ask; I perceive many thoughts which struggle for expression; I read upon your face that you are anxious to know more of Blind Willie. I shall see you again, and meet you in the dark windings of this cave; you shall see Lady Eveline, and comfort her with such words as your mind may suggest. But you must wait patiently, for the matter must be conducted with the utmost prudence and secrecy; discovery would result in my destruction and yours. The resolves of Mark Donhead are as fixed as the decrees of fate; the sword rises and falls at his bidding; he is an embodiment of strong passions; he is rapid in his decisions, inexorable in his determinations, and terrible in anger."

The stroller ceased speaking, and opening the door, glided quickly and noiselessly from the apartment. Casside arose to bid him stay, but heard the bolt move to its place, and the blind beggar stealing away.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INITIATION.

It was the night of the initiation of Albert Casside into the opening scenes of a bandit's life. An individual, clad in the habit of a monk, had passed two hours with the neophyte, giving him such instructions as were deemed appropriate and necessary. Clad in a simple garment resembling a monk's, with sandals upon his feet, and a staff in his hand, he was led through the long corridor into a large apartment adjoining the grand saloon. A number of persons clad in the same costume preceded and went behind him. The passage was but dimly lighted, and low and mournful strains of music floated through the labyrinth. Arrived at the apartment, Albert perceived, at the farther extremity, an elevated platform, accessible by steps, upon which was seated, on a sort of throne, a man clad in costly and splendid apparel. Extending the whole length of the compartment, upon the right and upon the left, in two rows, were many individuals attired like himself.

Advancing to a person seated in front of the platform, Casside inquired to know the meaning of what he beheld.

"It means," said the individual addressed, "that life is a pilgrimage. You perceive that all those assembled here, are clad precisely in the same manner; it is to represent the equality of man. You observe that each has sandals upon his feet, and a staff in his hand, like one going upon a journey; it is intended to convey the idea that all men are travellers, pursuing the same road, and having the same objects in view. Every one is seeking to be happy; to be like the man splendidly arrayed, occupying the throne before you. They all flatter themselves that they shall, ultimately, reach the goal of their hopes. But enough of this scene; let us see the result of this universal desire for happiness. I will be your guide; follow me."

Casside bowed acquiescence, and the guide led him into a long and dismal-looking passage, which stretched away to a great distance beyond them, and finally lost itself in darkness.

"Now mark what you see," observed the guide.

Albert kept on treading in the footsteps of his conductor for some time in silence; presently he saw persons walking slowly onward

They appeared to be weary and dispirited; soon they fell down and seemed to expire by the way, uttering deep groans and piteous lamentations.

"Those are some of the pilgrims whom you have seen; discouraged, at length, and worn out with the vain effort to attain to happiness, they perish miserably upon their pilgrimage."

The guide continued to move forward, and anon the passage appeared to be strewn with human bones.

"These are the remains of the pilgrims," added the conductor.

"And have they all shared the same fate?" asked Albert.

"No: a few bold and indomitable spirits have discovered a shorter way, and have succeeded in attaining to the summit of their hopes. Follow, and you shall look upon the successful few."

The cicerone turned abruptly into another passage. The doleful music ceased; the lights flashed up more cheerfully, and they passed along with greater alacrity. In a moment they stood at the entrance of the grand saloon. Two persons, in the livery of servants, threw it open, and a magnificent spectacle dazzled the eyes of Casside.

The banditti, arrayed in their most costly and imposing garments, holding drawn swords in their hands, stood motionless as statues upon each side of the long table, upon which was spread every luxury which could tempt the palate of an epicure, or which wealth could procure. At the head of the board, more richly arrayed than all the others, with a crown upon his head, and a sceptre in his jewelled hand, sat the individual whom Casside had known as Denis Wetzel.

"What moral truth is intended to be illustrated by this imposing scene?" asked Albert.

"These are the pilgrims, who, despising the prejudices of weak and superstitious minds, have found a new and certain road to ease and affluence. These are persons who are governed only by their own desires; who believe in the equal distribution of property; who will not

starve while the wealthy are rolling in luxury; who will not suffer wrong and injustice; who appropriate to themselves whatever nature seems to crave; who take food when they are hungry, without asking whence it comes; who drink wine when they are thirsty, without inquiring in whose cellar it acquired its age and flavor; who put gold into their pockets, without troubling themselves about the mint where it was coined, or the coffers from whence it was taken; who make the sword the great umpire of all questions of right and title; who live for the present, and take no thought for the future; whose motto is 'eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we may die.'"

"These principles," returned Casside, following the letter of his instructions, "are in accordance with my philosophy. I have long believed that life was a thing to be enjoyed. Tell me, sir, how I may become a member of this brotherhood?"

"By proving your courage and ability, and by subscribing to the laws which hold them in solemn compact."

"I request you to propose me for membership to this wise fraternity."

"Prefer the request to Mark Donhead, the leader of the free companions. That is he, sitting at the head of the table upon the elevated seat."

Albert Casside could repress his surprise at this disclosure, only by a strong effort of the will. The truth was at length apparent; Denis Wetzel and Mark Donhead were identical.

"Daring commander of these brave men!" said Albert, "I desire to be admitted to the secrets and privileges of your order."

Mark Donhead made no rejoinder, but slowly waved his sceptre. Immediately several persons clad in black marched into the saloon through the open door, and proceeded to remove a large screen upon the left, when several individuals were seen, with their swords crossed, in the act of commencing a combat. The conflict began and was carried on with much spirit and determination, until they sank down, apparently, from wounds and exhaustion.

"You are the witness of this scene," said the conductor, "that the followers of Mark Donhead are never to fly from their enemies; but to fight until victory crowns their efforts, or death lays them low. Each person is solemnly pledged to die with sword in hand, or peaceably in bed, and never to perish by the arm of law. The hemp is not grown that shall strangle one of our order."

Again Mark Donhead waved his sceptre, and a second screen was removed, revealing the appearance of a large building of stone, with grated windows, which was strongly guarded by men-at-arms. Suddenly a party of men, clad like the banditti, rushed upon them and after a short and decisive struggle, defeated them.

"That gloomy edifice," resumed the cicerone, "is a prison, and the men-at-arms are the soldiers of the king; and the whole is intended to convey the idea that if any of our brethren, by any unavoidable necessity, be captured and imprisoned, that the brotherhood is to make every possible effort to set them at liberty, even at the hazard of life and limb."

Mark Donhead for the third time waved the emblem of power, and the third screen upon being withdrawn, displayed to view a block and an executioner, with an axe. Near the block knelt a man whose hands were bound, and whose neck was bare. A priest stood beside the culprit, and Casside recognized in him the monk David. In a solemn voice he read the service for the dead. When he had finished, the kneeling man proceeded to utter a prayer, whose deep earnestness made Albert's heart beat fast with apprehension. He prayed like one standing on the threshold of death; like one whose last and only hope is in invisible power; like one who already feels the agony of dissolution; like one who strives to master an awful shrinking from a fate which he knows he cannot, by any possibility, evade. He ended his fervent appeal to Heaven, but still seemed anxious to prolong the moments of existence.

The monk attempted to comfort him with assurances of a better life, and to make him comprehend that the pains of dying were short, and not so dreadful as they appeared.

The culprit groaned in spirit; he self devoutly upon the breast with his pinioned hands, and with a shudder, laid his head upon the block.

Albert's heart beat with intense excitement; he felt a sickly faintness creeping over him, and his brain grew dizzy with horror. The axe descended like lightning; the man's head was severed from the body—the streams of life rushed forth in crimson jets, and the limbs quivered in the throes of death.

The scene was indeed too real; a human spirit had passed to its account.

"It is thus," added the cicerone, "that Mark Donhead punishes traitors."

Instantly the low, mournful strains of martial music again resounded through the cavern; the lights in the great saloon suddenly grew dim. There was a short interval of profound silence; then the body of the unfortunate who had been beheaded, was brought forward in an open coffin and placed at the foot of the table.

Casside, whose senses had been stunned for a moment by the terrible scene which had just been enacted, now endeavored to shake off the fearful impression which it had made. The cicerone whispered a few words of instruction in his ear.

Albert immediately knelt beside the coffin, and placing his hands upon the dead man's breast, said, in a clear and distinct voice:

"When I betray Mark Donhead or his followers, may I become even as this man. May my punishment be sure and speedy, like his, and may no angel of mercy be near to avert my doom."

When he had pronounced these words, the lights burned brilliantly once more, the solemn music changed to a lively measure, the body of the traitor was removed, and all the emblems of the initiation disappeared. Two men, bearing a large roll upon their crossed swords, entered; the roll was laid upon the table, and a pen was given to Albert.

"Read the contents of this parchment," continued the cicerone, "and then place your name at the bottom."

He glanced his eyes over the scroll, and then affixed his name as he had been bidden, with a red fluid, which but a few seconds before warmed the heart of a human being.

"Those names," observed the cicerone, "which are erased with a pen, are the names of those who proved themselves unworthy of the fraternity. They are gone; they are no more among us; they have suffered, as they deserved, the reward of their treachery and unfitness. For a certain time, as you have doubtless seen by the perusal of the by-laws to which you have affixed your signature, you will not be considered as one entitled to the full benefits of membership, but as one on trial. You will not be at liberty to go and come at your pleasure, until some daring act shall fully have set its seal upon you, making you as indeed an outlaw, and amenable to the laws, so called, of the kingdom. Those who have solemnly entered into this compact, are not permitted to draw the sword upon each other; all quarrels will be decided by Mark Donhead, from whose judgment there is no appeal. There are no drones in this brotherhood; all are required to be active, and to contribute something towards the general fund of the community."

The cicerone then turned to Mark Donhead and addressed the neophyte as follows:

"Young man, you are now enrolled among my merry men, and, to a certain extent, entitled to the privileges, and under the protection of the order. Your courage and sincerity will be further tested when the proper time arrives. Daring deeds and bold achievements will always be appreciated and rewarded among us; while cowardice and treachery are despised, and punished with equal certainty. At present I have no more to say; let music discourse its most gladsome notes; let the wine cup pass; let hilarity prevail; let the voice of mirth and the shout of merriment echo loudly through these subterranean arches; let us remember our immortal motto; 'let us eat, and drink, and be merry;' for to-morrow the angel of death may call for us, and hurry us away to labyrinth darker, deeper, colder, more mysterious than these."

Mark Donhead resumed his seat and deafening plaudits resounded through the cave; swords were sheathed; wine flowed, and mad revelry prevailed among the free companions.

CHAPTER X.

THE SECRET WAY.

It was near the hour of rosy morn. The bacchanalian revelry had ceased. The followers of Mark Donhead had reeled to their couches, and their senses were again locked in lethargic slumbers. Our hero was alone, occupying the same apartment which had been allotted him on his first entrance to the secret haunt of the banditti. He had indulged but sparingly in wine, for he wished to keep every faculty of the mind in a state of tranquillity, in order to be able to seize upon any circumstances that might occur, favorable to his purposes.

The scenes of the initiation had made a deep impression upon him, and he recalled, with a cold thrill of horror, the tragedy that had marked the final scene. In imagination, he saw once more pictured before him the kneeling figure of the traitor, witnessed the throes of agony which shook his frame, and heard the voice of his despairing prayer. Casside covered his eyes, as if to shut out from his mental sight the remainder of the spectacle.

"And this," he said to himself, impressively, "and this may be my fate!"

With a sigh he raised his head and turned

a startled look towards the door; for he heard it moving, in the act of being opened; Strolling Willie was again his visitor.

"You come and go as mysteriously as the spectres of the night. What brings you now?" said Albert.

"My limbs bring me, and my instincts guide me," replied the stroller.

"Your purpose, then?" added Albert.

"To aid you; to prevent the meshes of Mark Donhead's power from enclosing you inextricably; to assist you in dealing with one who is wise as a serpent, and as strong as a lion; to help you play skilfully the game, upon the results of which are staked life and death," replied the beggar.

"It may be thus, I know not," answered the young man, "and, after all, it may be quite the reverse. It is said that the tempter often presents himself to mankind in a garb least expected; but go on—I am attentive—I listen."

"The last act in the initiation," added the mendicant, "gives you some idea, doubtless, of what you may expect, should your designs, by any unfortunate accident, be discovered. The

plot thickens as you proceed. The unexpected appearance of this high born damsel in whom you appear to be so strangely interested, throws around you another strong influence to drag you forward to the consummation of your ruin. Against occurrences not anticipated, the most skilful schemer cannot always guard; but I shall nevertheless make an effort to bring this affair to a successful termination. On this occasion I have sought you to reveal a most valuable secret; a secret which will prove of the most vital importance, if kept, and of the most fatal consequences, if betrayed. The revellers are sleeping soundly; the fumes of the accursed stimulants which they have swallowed, paralyze all their mental and physical powers; but, notwithstanding this, we shall incur some risk in the adventure to which we shall now address ourselves. Follow me, and I will make a curious revelation."

Wandering Willie took the small iron lamp in his hand, and passed from Albert's apartment into the main shaft of the cavern. Albert mechanically moved after him, wondering what new mystery was about to dawn upon his senses. The stroller stole softly onward in a direction opposite to the entrance of the cavern. In a few moments he left the lofty corridor, and followed the fantastic turnings of a smaller and more obscure passage—a damp and rugged way, as cheerless as the tomb itself. In the cold and mephitic airs the lamp burned feebly, and Albert's respiration was considerably affected by the same circumstance.

"This is a way seldom travelled," whispered Willie, "and were we, by any untoward accident discovered here, we should never travel it again. We will look, for one moment, into that passage to the right." The stroller turned in the direction indicated, and after going a little distance, reached a large and dismal compartment.

"It is here," resumed the beggar, "that the banditti bury their dead."

Albert surveyed the spot as well as he could by the dim light, and beheld quite a number of mounds, and one which had just been made.

He recoiled with horror, and a voice seemed to whisper and tell him the secret of that recent grave. He felt an indescribable sensation of relief when the stroller turned and retraced his steps.

The latter now proceeded in silence, and Albert followed him with sad, gloomy, and foreboding thoughts. His guide paused, at length, at what appeared to be the end of the passage.

"What now?" inquired Albert. "I see nothing that can interest me in this damp and chilly place."

"Be patient; do not jump so hastily at conclusions. There are a flight of steps here somewhere; do you see them?"

Our hero glanced about the spot more particularly, and discovered a flight of stone steps, which seemed to be more the work of nature than of art.

"Now," continued the stroller, "you must observe the profoundest silence. Follow me, and step lightly."

"If the blind lead the blind, will not both fall into the ditch together?" answered Albert, in the same tone.

"Not where the faculty of instinct is fully developed," rejoined the beggar, with a smile. He then mounted the steps and soon reached the top of the flight, where all farther progress seemed to be denied by a wall of solid rock. Willie pressed against it with his hand, and lo there appeared an opening of sufficient size to admit the body of a man, through which the stroller passed, motioning Albert to imitate his example.

He did so, and upon looking around, found himself in what resembled, in every particular, a wine cellar; for it was filled with casks and bottles both large and small. Albert did not express the thought which was in his mind, and his singular guide kept on, ascended another flight of steps, which were obviously the work of human hands (being made of wood), and raising a trap door, emerged from the cellar into what appeared to Albert a small room above ground.

Again warning our hero to observe the great-

est caution, he crossed the apartment and mounted a third staircase, leading, as the others had done, to an ingeniously contrived door. The surprise of Albert cannot be easily conceived, after creeping through the third aperture, upon discovering himself in a chamber precisely like that which Joachim Capet had assigned him at the Silver Bell.

"Do you recognize this?" asked the mendicant, in a suppressed voice.

"I think I do," returned the young man; "and if it were not so far from the cave of the banditti, I should say it was the chamber I recently occupied at the Silver Bell."

"You are right," rejoined Willie; "we are indeed at Joachim Capet's inn."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Albert.

"On the contrary, quite possible; for your long walk to the cave, under the guidance of Mark Donhead, was purposely intended to give you a wrong impression of the locality."

"This is indeed an important secret," said Albert. "Is it known to all the banditti?"

"It is known only to those who have proved themselves worthy of the confidence of Mark Donhead. The mysterious connection of the robber's cave with the Silver Bell is not revealed until after the term of trial has expired, and the new-comer has acquitted himself to the general satisfaction of all concerned. Some belong to the band for months, without having any knowledge of the subject, and it is a secret of which you would have known nothing, had it not been discovered to you in this manner. The time may arrive when the knowledge you have this night acquired, may be of incalculable use. Some unexpected event, or some terrible contingency may occur, from the consequences of which you can only escape by means of this singular connection of the cave with the Silver Bell."

"Joachim Capet then, of course, is but the agent of Mark Donhead?" said Casside.

"He is in the secret; it could not well be otherwise, and a more selfish and money-loving knave never walked," was the rejoinder.

While our hero and Willie were carrying on

this whispered conversation, the murmur of voices reached them from an adjoining room. The stroller placed his ear to the wall and listened, and then made a sign for Albert to do likewise. The tones which he heard did not sound altogether unfamiliar.

"I am rejoiced to hear this news," said one; "the affair must now terminate in a manner to suit my wishes. I see no means by which the Lady Eveline can escape the meshes of my power. Yonder subterranean vaults keep well their secrets. She is proud—she is spirited, imperious; she must be subdued, humbled, humiliated. And, perhaps," he added, in a voice of deeper significance, "degraded."

"Act your pleasure, sir knight," replied another voice, "but I tell you frankly that I like not this mode of wooing the fair damsel. I would greatly prefer to woo her on bended knee, and with words most fitting and gentle."

"Woo how, when, and just as often as you please!" retorted the first speaker, "and I will not find fault with you; but I reserve to myself the same liberty. However, I proposed honorably to this haughty maiden, once on a time, but met with no reciprocal response. I never forgave her for being indifferent to my suit, and am now putting in practice a fixed purpose of retaliation. I know that the news of her violent abduction will spread like wild-fire all over the country, and great efforts will be made to discover the perpetrators; but they will be able to find no traces of her; for the cavern, in Donhead Wood, does not disclose its mysteries. But in regard to the rude fellow who gave my honor such a wound a few mornings ago, I must devise means to have him punished. Have you sent for Herbault, Mark's executioner?"

"Yes, I despatched Joachim Capet for the ruffian," replied the knight, somewhat contemptuously.

"You have no great relish for this business, I perceive," retorted the knight, sharply. "But I care little for that, providing you do not play me false; in which event, methinks, it will go hard with you. Since you have been

my squire, I fancy you have not found me a difficult master; I have not been niggardly with my money, nor given you bad words when good ones would do just as well. But we will not now pause to discuss questions of morality; certain objects are before me, and I shall not stop short of their attainment. This Herbault can seek out the insolent peasant, and the stroke of a dagger will settle the account between us, and balance, forever, all our terrestrial dealings. The affair will be but a trifle—the turning of a stream of blood in another direction—the stopping of an almost imperceptible beating at the wrist—preventing a little air from rushing into the lungs—causing scarce an inquiry—exciting but little wonder, save among a few simple people. Bah! the world will move on just the same when an impudent varlet has ceased to exist! I marvel that such small matters should cost us a second thought. We are over-scrupulous; the common people are our slaves, we are their lawful lords and masters; when they displease us, the prerogative is ours to tread them into the dust, whence they sprang."

"But this youth, sir knight, could not have been what he seemed," rejoined the other.

"Absurd!" exclaimed the knight, "and even were he really above his seeming, it would not change my purpose; so, my worthy Claude, say no more. I shall buy the dagger of the knave Herbault into my service."

Willie plucked Albert by the sleeve and whispered.

"We have heard enough—it is time for us to return."

Albert was about to leave the spot, when he heard the knight add:

"Some one knocks at the door; it is Joachim Capet returned from his mission."

"Do not delay an instant longer," whispered the stroller, "for every moment is precious. I perceive that our return may be attended with much danger."

The mendicant led the way, and they quickly and noiselessly glided from the chamber through the secret door, down the steps, into the room below.

CHAPTER XI.

HERBAULT.

WANDERING WILLIE paused and turned toward his companion, fixing his sightless eyeballs upon him in a manner to indicate the deepest earnestness.

"Could I by any means have foreseen that Godfrey Ridenger would have returned so soon, and that Herbault would have been sent for, I should not have conducted you hither," he said; "but the gift of reading the events of the future is denied to mortals. Having undertaken this adventure, we must conduct it boldly to a conclusion. You already know for what purpose the services of the assassin are required, and who is to be the object of this horrible trade. The conversation to which you have just listened has quite accidentally made you master of an important secret, which may or may not be of use; the next few hours will determine. We are now exposed to the danger of meeting Mark Donhead's ruffian on his way to the Silver Bell."

"Can we not secrete ourselves in the wine cellar until after Herbault has passed through?" asked Albert.

"Possibly we might; but discovery would

be almost inevitable. I hope to gain the main shaft of the cavern before he reaches the spot; on that contingency I stake our chance of success. If that fails, means more prompt and decisive shall not," replied the stroller, with emphasis.

"What mean you?" inquired Albert, as he followed the old man through the trap-door into the cellar.

Willie paused near the foot of the stairs, and grasping Albert's arm, replied:

"Should we meet him, but two alternatives remain; *he must die, or we must.*"

"But I hate murder!" returned Albert, with a shudder. "I can give broken heads in the heat of passion, or measure swords with my adversary on equal ground; but to shed blood deliberately is abhorrent to all my feelings. Devise some other plan of escape."

"Nothing else can be done; the fellow cannot be trusted. He would be sure to betray us, even were he to make the most solemn promises to the contrary. He is your enemy; for a trifling sum he will assassinate you upon the first opportunity that offers. Our lives, at this

moment, are worth more than his; there are those whom we may protect, and who require our most strenuous and untiring efforts in their aid. Think of Isandra; think of the Lady Eveline. They are young, they are fair, and hitherto have been hopeful; shall they be abandoned to the miserable fate which seems to stretch forth its arms to enfold them? No, no! they must be befriended and rescued, although a score of Mark Donhead's knaves perish!" exclaimed the beggar.

"I feel the force of your reasonings," replied Albert, "and though I have a strong desire to avert bloodshed, I will no longer oppose you. Act as circumstances may require; for I am convinced that you have a deeper knowledge of these matters than I. That you are other than what you profess to be, I doubt not; and that you have powerful motives for what you do, must be equally true. Caprice, and love of excitement alone, could not prompt you to brave danger and death; but I will not penetrate your secret; I will not tear away the mantle of mystery that envelopes you. That those eyes of yours are sightless, I cannot well believe. But it matters not; move on, I am with you."

Without making any reply, Strolling Willie pressed against the wall where the door was concealed; a cold and damp current of air rushed in from the cavern, nearly extinguishing the lamp.

"Hark!" whispered Albert. "I hear some one approaching."

"It must be Herbault," replied the stroller, stepping back from the secret passage. "Here, take the light and place it upon the earth, beside yonder cask. He will think that Joachim Capet left it there, or that some one has come to the cellar for wine."

Albert placed the lamp as he was bidden, and withdrew to an obscure corner, while the stroller stood motionless beside the entrance, with his right hand in his bosom. Meantime the footsteps drew nearer, and were each moment more distinctly heard. Albert kept his eyes fixed intently upon the beggar and the dark

aperture. He felt icy chills creeping over him, and heard his own heart beating with unwonted vigor. He would have withdrawn his gaze from the statue-like figure of the mendicant, but he could not; some resistless spell seemed to rivet them upon the mysterious man. He would have moved his limbs, and shook off the trance-like power that bound him in its iron chains; he would have looked up towards the dawning skies of morning, but they were shut out from his vision by dark and impenetrable walls; he would have felt upon his forehead a single touch of the balmy zephyr that kisses the earth with the first streaks of daylight; but the cold and chilling damps rushing in from the cavern, fell upon his face like the breath of the angel of death.

The intruder advanced; he evidently perceived that some person had recently been there, and the fact of finding the secret door open obviously surprised him for a moment; for he paused an instant as if not quite decided in regard to the propriety of proceeding; without first scrutinizing the locality. During that brief interval, the stroller remained in the same stern and moveless attitude; his right hand still clutching something beneath the tattered doublet that covered his bosom.

Casside's breath seemed to be suspended, and he made another strong effort to tear his gaze from the fixed form of the old man.

The indecision of the individual in the passage was of short duration; he came forward with a quick and confident step, and instantly his figure darkened the aperture. Willie bent quickly forward; his right hand left his doublet and descended with the celerity of thought. Albert saw a momentary glimmering of steel—heard a dull heavy blow followed by a hollow groan. The icy spell that bound him was broken; it no longer held his limbs in horrible bondage; it no longer paralyzed his brain and fettered his faculties; it no longer grasped his heart with its phantom hand. He closed his eyes and shut out the scene, until he heard the hoarse voice of the beggar say:

"Come!"

He stooped and took the lamp from the earth and obeyed the summons. The stroller had already passed into the cavern, and our hero followed.

"Close the door," added Willie, in a low voice. "Press upon that part of the wall at your right, upon which are finger marks. There that is right; now we are ready to go on again. Step softly, and all will yet be well. The assassin is powerless to do us harm; the pulsations of his heart have ceased."

Casside looked up, and perceived that the beggar was carrying the body of Herbault in his arms; but he made no comment upon what he had witnessed, and the strangely mated pair threaded the labyrinth most silently. Although of a bold and adventurous nature, the young man could not well repress feelings of anxiety in regard to the results; he could not help picturing to himself the catastrophe that would ensue, should they meet any of the followers of Mark Donhead.

Presently they reached the banditti's place of interment, and the mendicant laid his ghastly burden down beside the new-made grave, which marked the resting-place of the traitor.

"A part of the danger is met and overcome," resumed Willie; "but something yet remains to be done; this body must be concealed."

"It must now be near morning," said Albert, "and but little time is left us for deliberation; we must think and act quickly. Ere long some of the banditti will be astir."

"You speak reasonably," returned Willie; "but we must first consign this clod to its kindred clods. There must be somewhere hereabouts, a pick and mattock, which are used in digging graves. We will remove a portion of the earth from the remains of this last sleeper, and place near him this carrion to keep him company. Ah! you remember, perhaps, that I once told you that life was changeable; now reflect, and tell me if I was not right?"

"You spoke like an oracle," replied Albert; "but let that pass. Let us attend to this awful business with as much despatch as possible."

At that moment the sound of a bell echoed

in heavy undulations through the cavern. Willie dropped the mattock and turned a startled look upon his companion.

"It is to summon the band!" he said, in answer to the inquiring glance of his companion. "The burial of this carcass must be delayed until midnight, and then we will give it as deep a grave as it could expect under the circumstances. Alas! Herbault," he added, sentimentally, "you were a villain in life, but I bear you no malice now you are dead."

"Can you not think of some spot where this piece of work may remain undiscovered for a day?"

"That is the very subject upon which I am considering; let me see; ah! now I have it; but a few steps from here is just the place. I must lift this poor rascal again. This way—this way."

The beggar caught up the body and walked hastily across the subterranean cemetery, and stooping until he was nearly double, entered a small passage only large enough to admit one person at a time, and then in the position already named. The stroller worked his way along in the best manner he was able, encumbered with his heavy burden, and finally deposited it upon the earth, and crept back again to the side of our hero.

"Can you see any telltale spots upon me?" he asked, of the latter.

"Your doublet is stained," answered Albert, in a low tone.

"I will be careful that no other eyes ever look upon it," continued Willie. "Now, my lad, put on a bold and cheerful front and let us back to your quarters that you may join the merry men of Captain Mark, at their morning meal, as though nothing extraordinary had happened."

Without farther conversation they glided along the silent arches of the sub-mundane corridor, and reached, without accident, the apartment from whence they had issued some two hours previously; where Wandering Willie shook hands with Albert and parted from him.

Casside sat down upon his couch; but he

dared not allow himself to reflect upon the events which had just transpired, and to which he had been a party. He had not anticipated at the outset anything of that nature; these occurrences had come uninvited and without any consent or desire on his part, previous to the time when the emergency which had demanded promptness of action was actually pressing upon them.

The death of Herbault was not a transaction that had been matured by designing villany; but a thing which a terrible contingency suddenly called for. The assassin no doubt deserved well his fate, and the instrumentality by which he had fallen, might, without much exaggeration, be considered the avenging arm of heaven. Wearied with excitement, Albert soon fell into an oblivious slumber, in which all the incidents of the night were forgotten.

He was awakened from sleep by a touch upon the shoulder; and starting up, beheld Denis Wetzel standing beside him.

"Methinks you sleep soundly," said the captain of the banditti, with a smile.

"It is a part of my philosophy," answered Albert, carelessly, "to pass as great a portion of my existence in slumber, as possible. If I had my own way, I would divide my time as follows: twelve hours should be dedicated to the drowsy god; I would devote an hour to my morning meal; after that, I would fight a little and perhaps flatten a few noses, or break a few heads, to sharpen my appetite for dinner, which is a very important item in my existence, and wine and all, usually costs me two hours time, providing, always, that I have the means of defraying expenses."

"Well, what would you do after dinner?" asked Captain Mark, good humoredly.

"I would pass the next hour after that important meal, in a sort of lethargic state, and form a connecting link between the vegetable and animal kingdoms. I would then walk about a little in quest of adventures; woo fair maiden;

or listen to music; at supper time I would fill myself with wine, quarrel with my best friend, and run him through the lungs; knock down the servants, insult my mistress, get jilted, and stagger to bed, to remain in total unconsciousness until about this hour of the day."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the bandit leader, "I like your humor."

"By the way," resumed Casside, arising and deliberately unsheathing his weapon, "you have played me a piece of deception, for which I ought, doubtless, to bring you to strict account. I had but little idea that I should lose my new friend, Denis Wetzel, in the manner which I have; I now demand that he be restored to me, or satisfactory apologies offered for his sudden disappearance, which is mainly attributed, I believe, to your agency."

"The demand, perhaps, is no more than just," returned Mark Donhead, still smiling; "but if the famous leader of banditti offers himself as a substitute, I hope he will not be rejected: What do you say?"

"Captain Mark might prove a dangerous friend," resumed Albert, "and a far different person from Denis Wetzel. The former I should not have hesitated to honor with a knock upon the occiput, or a thrust under the fifth rib, had he displeased me; and these little matters of etiquette are privileges which always cement together and accompany my friendship."

"Well, well, I will not be particular with you; we shall see how we can get along with each other; but it will be wise for you to remember always that Mark Donhead is more prompt in action, and quicker to resent an affront, than Denis Wetzel. The cat not unfrequently plays with the mouse, but it cannot be inferred from that circumstance that the former is a fitting companion for the latter," rejoined the bandit. "But come; let us to breakfast; our fellows gorged themselves long ago."

CHAPTER XII.

PETER VIDAL.

WHEN they were seated at the table, Mark resumed; "In a few days, you will be permitted (providing your conduct gives satisfaction) the liberty of the cavern; but when that time arrives, I warn you against meddling with matters which do not directly concern you, and especially to remain silent upon the subject of Lady Eveline; otherwise, you will bring down upon you the hatred of Godfrey Ridenger."

"One of two things is clearly evident," rejoined Albert; "you either fear this Godfrey Ridenger, or are, in some manner, placed in his power."

"Fear him!" exclaimed the captain, fiercely, striking his fist violently upon the table. "I tell you, I fear no one! Be less free in your speech. Those words had they been uttered in the presence of others might have cost you dearly."

"Speak without reserve, captain," added Albert, sarcastically, "we are alone."

The bandit chief looked fixedly at the imperturbable features of our hero, and after a little time continued his discourse.

"We are meditating some bold—"

"Robberies," suggested Albert, coolly.

Mark frowned and went on.

"We are meditating some bold movements, which will require much skill and address; and I mean that you shall commence your career as soon as possible, in order that we may not be obliged to practise with you those precautions which are always thought necessary with new members of the band. We have heard a rumor that some knights who were robbed in the forest a few days ago, are about to make an attempt to exterminate each and all of us, with two or three score of men-at-arms. So you see there is some prospect of excellent sport, in which you may freely indulge in your favorite passion for breaking heads, and giving delicate sword cuts. Say, my lad, how does this news affect you?"

"It puts me in excellent spirits. Give me your hand!" cried Albert, feigning to be much elated, and favoring Mark Donhead's hand with a powerful squeeze. A lively conversation was kept up between the parties until the morning meal was despatched, when father David made his appearance.

"Here comes father David," said Donhead; "a most useful personage in our fraternity. He is faithful to his calling, never betrays confidence, or meddles with that which does not concern him. In these respects, he is an example worthy of imitation."

The monk gave our hero a significant look, and the latter replied that he considered himself highly fortunate in making his acquaintance.

"We will now," added Mark, "go out and see what is passing above ground; but first we will take the precaution to change the appearance of our outer man. What say you, my lad, to the garb of a monk?"

"Providing I have my sword under my domino, I shall not make the least objection," returned Albert.

The leader of the banditti instantly summoned a servant, and two dominos were brought, one of which he donned himself, while the other was given to Albert, which he drew on over his other garments. Thus apparelled the trio left the cavern in the same way that our hero had entered.

"Is the Silver Bell far from here?" asked Albert.

"Yes, it is a long way," replied Mark, looking slyly at father David. "Perhaps you would like to see Joachim Capet, and settle your past differences. By the way, he has not recovered from the beating you gave him not long since. The last time I saw him, he was making you the subject of unheard-of threats. And now, father David, lead the way to your hut, for I have some matters to talk over with Peter Vidal."

The monk walked forward with alacrity, and they soon reached his humble residence. They entered, but Vidal had not yet arrived.

"This interview," resumed Mark, "must have no witnesses."

"This apartment," replied David, "is at your disposal. When Vidal comes, I will retire with this youth to the room adjoining, and you may converse as long and as confidentially as you choose. May you be as successful in love as in war."

"Had you expressed a wish that I might be as successful with the daughter as with the father, you would have spoken to the point," said Captain Mark, drily. "But I hear some one approaching; it is Vidal; leave me."

Obedient to this injunction, Albert and the monk immediately retired into the adjoining room, where the former had once been a witness to an interview which interested him as much as the present one promised to do.

"We must endeavor to make ourselves acquainted with the purport of the conversation about to ensue," said Albert, nervously. "It will, doubtless, have much to do with our future plans."

"Be prudent," replied David, "and all will work to our wishes; while one false step will destroy all prospect of success."

Casside imitated the example of the monk, applied his ear to the wall, and was able to hear the general tenor of what was said.

"Why this unnecessary delay? I accede to all your terms!" exclaimed Donhead, impatiently.

"Because the girl cannot be brought to think as I do. No arguments or entreaties soften her resolution; she turns from you with aversion, and I might use a much stronger term," answered Vidal.

"I have not been so simple as to imagine that a young creature like Isandra would fancy a man of my age and profession; but I was not quite prepared to know that she absolutely shrinks from me with such marked feelings of repugnance. I have not expected her love, neither have I expected her hatred," rejoined the other, thoughtfully.

"Fair and gentle words will have no weight in this matter with Isandra," continued Vidal; "she will never consent to be your wife; violent measures only can effect your purpose. Were she once in your power, and an occupant of your subterranean palace, father David might do the rest without much trouble. If you wed her, it must be thus; no alternative remains. I know the girl well enough; nothing can change her determination."

"This is bad,—unfortunate!" said Mark, walking across the floor impatiently; "but I suppose," he added, pausing, "that the affair cannot be mended, and we must make the best of it. As I have already told you, the sum which you demand for your daughter, shall be yours. Now tell me how I shall bear away the prize to my underground home?"

"That can easily be arranged," said the other. "There are an hundred ways by which she can be thrown into your hands. I can send her upon some pretended errand or other, to a distance from the cottage, when you and a few of your trusty fellows can seize her and bear her off. Once in the cavern, the most difficult thing will be accomplished, and a little of father David's mummery will accomplish the business."

"Right, Vidal, right; the affair shall not be delayed; I am impatient to see it conducted to a happy conclusion. Let us fix some time for this to come off."

"To-morrow night will suit me as well as a year hence," answered Vidal. "What say, then, to that time?"

"The arrangement pleases me; let it be so; to-morrow night I will bear off the fairest maiden in Dorsetshire. By St. Michael! the Lady Eveline herself might envy the beauty of your charming daughter. But a thought occurs to me; 'tis possible that she already loves the son of some neighboring peasant. Come, Peter Vidal, tell me the truth for once, if you know; although it would not add to the sweetness of my temper to know that another had won what I would give a countless number of florins to obtain."

"Do you hear that villain?" whispered Albert, grasping the monk's arm.

"Hush!" said father David. "Listen, and keep command of your temper. We are hearing just what we ought to hear, in order that our schemes may be brought to a successful issue. What could be more auspicious? you cannot thwart villainy, until you understand it and have fathomed its depths; you cannot meet an emergency, until you know the nature of it, and when, and where, to meet it; when you

strike, you must know what you strike at; when you fight, it is desirable to know your enemy's plan of battle."

"Let to-morrow night, then, be the time fixed upon," resumed Vidal, evasively. "I will see that everything favors your design."

"I am content; farther words upon the subject will be unnecessary. It shall be so understood," replied Donhead.

"And the five hundred florins—"

"I will bring you, tied up in a bag," added Mark, with a sneering expression. "And I'm sure it's not every father who has sense enough to sell his daughter for that sum."

"Certainly not," answered Vidal; "but I am confident you will be kind to the girl, and make her an excellent husband. What more could I wish? It is true that society has set its ban upon you, and royalty has offered a reward for your head; but these are questions of morality which I do not feel competent to discuss. All men differ in their views; scarcely two persons think alike in the wide world. What seems right to one seems wrong to another; that which proves good and wholesome food to one person proves poison to another. Had you as many followers as King Edward, you would be to all intents and purposes as good a king as he. Could you lead the largest number of men to the field, your deeds would be hailed by the applauding shouts of the wondering multitude. It is power that confers greatness upon celebrated chieftains; the majority is respected, the minority is scorned."

"By St. John! I never heard so many wise sayings in the mouth of Peter Vidal before," rejoined Mark. "Beware! that philosophical head of yours will yet carry you into trouble."

With a sinister smile upon his hard, wiry lips, Vidal opened the door and departed from the monk's hut, his brain teeming with visions of golden florins.

"If I should not have an opportunity of speaking confidentially to-day, you may expect to see me at the cavern between the hours of midnight and morning, when we will devise

means to frustrate the villany of Vidal, and the unmanly projects of the bandit chief," said the monk.

Farther conversation was prevented between the two, by the authoritative voice of Mark summoning them from their hiding-place.

"I have attended to the business which was uppermost in my mind," he said, "and now we will to the Silver Bell, to give ourselves a little relaxation over Joachim Capet's best wine."

But few words were spoken by either parties on their way to the inn. Joachim Capet met his visitors upon the threshold with his usual urbanity of manner, and ran over his usual catalogue of great names with accustomed volubility. That he recognized Mark Donhead and the monk, there could be no doubt; but that he did not recognize Casside was equally certain; for he had drawn the hood of his domino close over his features.

"We would have a room to ourselves," said Mark, "and our holy calling will not prevent us from tasting some of your oldest and choicest vintage." With bows and smiles the master of the Silver Bell ushered the three monks into the chamber which Casside had so recently visited, and where he had passed some of the most unhappy hours of his existence.

Wine was immediately placed before them; but Mark Donhead appeared ill at ease, and after swallowing, hurriedly, a few cups of the sparkling beverage, arose and abruptly left his

companions, saying that he would return in a short time.

Albert was about to speak freely in regard to the subjects in which he felt so deeply interested; but a significant gesture from father David deterred him.

"This is no place to talk concerning important secrets; these walls have ears to hear and tongues to betray us," whispered the monk.

The table had been placed against the wall near the spot where Albert and the stroller had heard the conversation between the knight and his squire, and the mind of the former naturally recurred to the subject which had then been discussed. He felt an intense desire to meet the person who passed under the assumed name of Godfrey Ridenger, and provoke him to an encounter, in order to do him such personal harm as might most effectually prevent him from carrying out his nefarious schemes in relation to Lady Eveline. Knowing, as he now did, the true name and character of this person, he was fully conscious of his power to exert a strong influence in whatever direction he was disposed to turn his attention. His arm could indeed reach all over the kingdom, and crush his enemies with scarcely an effort, with little regard to their rank or condition.

While these thoughts were passing through Albert's brain, a heavy step was heard advancing, and presently the door was thrown open. A man entered, and the subject of his meditations stood before him.

CHAPTER XIII.

GODFREY RIDENGER.

WHEN Albert perceived that some one was about to enter, he drew the hood of his domino more closely about his face, and when he saw the figure of Sir Hugh Spencer, alias Godfrey Ridenger, he congratulated himself that he had taken that precaution. He hesitated an instant, and seemed inclined to offer some apology for his intrusion, and withdraw; but his eye resting upon father David, put an end to his indecision.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, holy father," said Sir Hugh, affecting a very respectful air.

"It is as unexpected on my part as on yours," replied the monk. "To put you out of all uncertainty, this young man belongs to the brotherhood, and you may speak freely before him; I will answer for his fidelity. The captain reposes great confidence in him. How is it that you have returned so much sooner than you expected?"

"My movements have been influenced by various causes," returned Ridenger. "But to tell the truth, I was anxious to learn the ter-

mination of a certain business upon which a few trusty fellows of our fraternity had been sent. I have always been reputed a gallant gentleman, and a devout admirer of dames and damsels."

"Who that knows the daring Godfrey Ridenger, will presume to dispute his claims to gallantry?" said the monk. "But pardon my want of hospitality; here is some of Joachim Capet's best vintage. Let us drink success to the pretty love adventure now fast hastening to a happy consummation. You have doubtless heard ere this that the proud maiden is already caged?"

"Yes, the pleasant news reached me some hours since; and I shall present myself to the fair one in the course of the day. But I fear I shall not be considered a very welcome visitor. The damsel, I trow, is prejudiced against me; rumor hath not given me a fair fame in these parts; my little peccadilloes are magnified into crimes, and my follies into downright wickedness. But, by the holy cross! I mean this lady no positive wrong. I swear by my patron saint, that I would wed her fairly this day, were

she in consenting mood. As for my past gallantries, they should be repented of, and never repeated; and on the whole, I think I would become a sort of sober philosopher—a wise owl to hoot at the failings and moral aberrations of others. My good monk, there is nothing like reform when one is sated with enjoyments, and has a constitution which is shattered by dissipation. Upon my word! I could sit down and read you a good sermon extempore; and if good, what matter where it comes from. We must not look at the origin of things, but at things themselves. There was Solomon; a man reputed exceedingly wise; but yet not wise enough to break off his follies in time to prevent the consequences, save his poor body from aches and pains, and his conscience from periodical convulsions. That celebrated sage did not discover that 'all was vanity beneath the sun,' until his debaucheries had rendered him miserable, and no longer able to enjoy the sweets of existence."

"Heaven obviously intended you for the church," answered David.

"Heaven might have had such intentions, but the whole thing was evidently a failure," added Sir Hugh, with a laugh.

"Perhaps not, perhaps not," replied David. "It is hard to tell what a man will be, before he gets through with life; it is easier to tell what he has been, after he is dead."

"It appears that the exploits of a certain Mark Donhead are at this time producing some excitement in Dorsetshire, and other portions of the country; and it may interest you to know that six hundred florins have been offered for that portion of his person situated immediately above his shoulders—a part, which, I fancy, he would be loth to exchange for even that sum, although I much doubt whether it does not tempt the cupidity of some of his merry knaves."

"Little fear of that," said the monk, quickly. "I query whether there is one among them who would betray him for twice that amount of filthy lucre."

"I will add that I have heard there is some

prospect that the band will be harassed by a strong body of men-at-arms," resumed Sir Hugh. "However, I have other matters to engross my attention at present; I have fair lady to woo, and I must prepare myself to appear in her presence in a manner most likely to disarm her anger. I must exhibit such a degree of contrition as shall excite her pity; I must be the most penitent of men; the most self-condemned of mortals; the most humble of human beings; more abject in my self-abasement than the reptile that crawls upon the earth. Yes, by St. Simon! there is but one way in which I can appear before that peerless beauty; and that is, as a criminal, as an offender against the laws that govern social etiquette; as a violator of the rules of human society; as one who has outraged forbearance and common decency; as one adjudged by the mouth of morality to be vile, viler, vilest."

Sir Hugh Spencer pressed his hand thoughtfully to his forehead and paused a moment. He then added, in much the same tone:

"But the Lady Eveline has, in some measure, brought this upon herself. In rank and fortune I was far above her when I first made suit to her in the courtly words of a gallant knight and a courteous gentleman. To her refusal, she may justly attribute this misfortune, if misfortune it can be called; and I'll be sworn the foolish maiden considers it as such. But I will be honorable, by the virgin, I will be honorable before I am vindictive; I will renew the offers that she scorned in other days. She will not—she dare not—do otherwise than accede to my wishes. I can raise her to a place of power, whose heights will almost make her dizzy; and I can crush her to a depth of degradation, that would madden her to contemplate even in the distance."

Godfrey Ridenger uttered these words energetically, and stamped upon the floor to give them emphasis.

"Come, father David, fill this cup once more, and I will leave you. That will do; long life to you. I hope your companion is discreet; if he is not, he had better be dangling from the

tallest tree in Donhead Wood than be here." And turning upon his heel, the friend, companion, and leader of banditti, strode from the chamber.

"What think you of that, my friend?" exclaimed David, when Sir Hugh had disappeared. "Have not the last few moments given you a deeper insight into the character of the second in command?"

"I acknowledge that they have; but I knew him but too well before," said Albert. "Allow me to leave you for an instant; I will return directly."

"By no means whatever!" cried the monk. "It is against the regulations concerning new members. Such an act would provoke the anger of our worthy captain."

"It shall be mine to shield you from all blame," returned Albert. "I am resolved; do not attempt to hinder me. I would not do violence to one who has shown himself friendly; but I warn you not to lay your hand upon me to detain me. I shall strike—by Heaven, I shall strike! All the powers of the infernal regions, with Captain Mark at their head, could not keep me here a moment longer. Give way—I go!"

Dashing the monk from him, as though he had been a mere child, the young man sprang from the room. He closed the door after him, and perceiving that it could be bolted on the outside, deliberately fastened father David in; then throwing off his domino, he passed on to the chamber adjoining, burst it open with a blow of his foot, and very unceremoniously entered.

Sir Hugh Spencer had just crossed the apartment, and was looking from the window towards the forest, when our hero made his unexpected advent; the noise consequent upon the latter's movements caused him to turn quickly towards the intruder, who was careful to close the door, as though apprehensive that the object of his wrath would attempt to escape.

The knight started with surprise, and his cheek flushed with indignation. Sudden as the gleam of the angry lightning, Albert's sword leaped from his sheath.

"Most villainous of villains! draw and defend yourself!"

Sir Hugh needed no second bidding; he drew his weapon from its scabbard, exclaiming:

"Presumptuous hind! base born peasant! this time you shall not escape me so easily!"

"Boast not—boast not, black-hearted wretch! but look well to yourself," returned Casside.

For a few seconds the two men fought with desperate daring and deadly determination. The frantic fury of the knight was met by the cool and consummate skill of Albert. An unguarded movement on the part of the former left a portion of his person exposed, and instantly the latter's sword passed into his body, inflicting as he believed, a mortal wound.

Sir Hugh staggered a few paces and fell to the floor, which was soon stained with the blood that welled from his side. Albert passed not an instant; sheathing his sword, he ran from the room, resumed his domino, and rejoined the monk, before he had gone from his side five minutes.

"In heaven's name, what mad freak have you been guilty of now!" exclaimed father David, pale with apprehension.

"I have been doing what I shall ever consider it my duty to do, while my arm is endowed with life and strength. I have punished a villain for his crimes; I have smitten one whose evil deeds have long evoked the vengeance of Heaven," replied the young man. "But come," he added, "let us sit calmly down to our wine as though nothing had happened. Good father David, let us drink long life to—to—anybody you will—Strolling Willie, for instance."

"It is a wise thought," added the monk. "And since the deed is done, we must put a good face upon the matter. So here's a very long life to those who deserve to live, and a speedy death to those who deserve to die."

"Very good, my worthy recluse; a more comprehensive health could not be quaffed. It will be well for us to pretend to be a little heated with this vintage, and with argument, when we hear any one approaching. And, by the

way, we may as well rattle the drinking cups somewhat, and strike the table to give a life-like reality to the affair."

"As wild and headstrong as you are, I perceive that you are not entirely without prudence," said the monk. "And then," he added, in a low voice, "I hear the tread of Joachim Capet. There will soon be a tremendous excitement at the Silver Bell. List! he knocks at the door—he repeats it—still no answer—no voice says come in; louder and louder fall the blows of mine host—no response—he is out of patience—he will wait no longer—the door creaks upon its hinges—he opens it, and now for the grand discovery."

It may readily be imagined that our hero waited the denouement with considerable interest, being himself so intimately concerned in the subject. The moment the door was heard to swing open, the voice of Joachim Capet was also heard, uttering an exclamation of the most complete surprise.

Casside and David immediately raised their voices as though in hot dispute, thumped upon the table with their fists, rattled the drinking cups, and gave other appropriate indications of violent controversy upon some polemical matter.

The words, "church, indulgences, eucharist, holy sepulchre, virgin Mary, etc.," were vehemently articulated, and it is feared in not a very connected manner. Capet, meantime, ran to the head of the staircase and cried:

"Murder—thieves—assassins!" in a stentorian voice.

Immediately several persons were heard rushing up the stairs to see what such dire exclamations meant. Claude, the squire, and Mark Donhead were among the foremost.

"What in the name of all the martyrs means this turmoil?" cried the latter, as he passed Capet in the passage.

"It means," answered Joachim, "that murder most foul has been perpetrated at the Silver Bell."

Hearing the excited voices of Casside and David, the captain of the banditti threw open the door and looked in, supposing that the trouble might be there; but perceiving them earnestly engaged in controversy, he turned instantly and ran into the next chamber, preceded by Claude, and followed by mine host. The cause of the latter's consternation was now fully apparent. Stretched at full length upon the floor, lay the body of Sir Hugh Spencer, in a pool of blood. Claude Herminger knelt beside his master and felt his pulse.

"Life is not extinct," he said, and then proceeded to examine the wound in his side.

"It is deep and dangerous," he added; "and the hand that dealt it knew well the use of the sword. Joachim Capet, let strict search be made for the murderer; see that he does not escape."

"This is wondrous strange!" muttered Mark Donhead, assisting Claude to place the knight upon a bed. "I would give a thousand florins to know the perpetrator of this deed."

Without pausing to add more, or to hear any rejoinder, the captain ran quickly to the chamber where our hero and the monk still remained, and whose voices could be distinctly heard rising higher and higher.

"Fools!" thundered Mark. "Do you not hear the uproar—are you deaf to everything but this confounded church nonsense—do you not know what has happened? Godfrey Ridenger has received a mortal wound!"

Albert and the monk turned a pair of amazed faces towards the bandit chief.

"You confound me! how did this happen?" exclaimed David.

"The foul fiend only knows!" rejoined Mark, and instantly a new idea seemed to occur to him. He gave the monk a stern and searching look.

"Tell me, sir," he said, "has this young man left the room since I parted from you an hour ago?"

"Not for a single moment," replied father David, promptly. "I have been impatient for you to return to decide a question upon which we have been disputing for a long time."

"Satan fly away with your questions!" retorted Donhead, impatiently. "You are morally certain, then, that this youngster has not left the room?" he added.

"He has not even left the table, if I can trust any of my senses, and I doubt whether he will be able to leave it, without help," answered the friar.

"You are both pretty deep in your cups, I should say," rejoined Mark.

"It is false—leave the room!" exclaimed Casside, imitating in a most felicitous manner

the tones of a drunken man. He then arose and fumbled for his sword, which his domino prevented him from drawing. He made two or three unsteady steps towards Mark, and then appearing to lose his equilibrium, fell against the table, upsetting it, breaking bottles, and making a great crash.

"The merry lad is too far gone to be of much service in case of a surprise," said the bandit chief, with a smile.

The friar then assisted Albert to rise, and partly by force, partly by persuasion, got him upon a bed, and in a few minutes he was, apparently, wrapped in the profoundest drunken sleep that ever fell upon the eyelids of a lover of the rosy god.

CHAPTER XIV.

WEIRD ELSIE.

MARK DONHEAD left the chamber to see how it fared with Godfrey Riden-ger, feeling quite sure in his own mind that our hero would require no more watching for the next two hours. The friar spoke a few words to Albert in a low tone, and shortly after issued from the Silver Bell. He walked into the forest until he had reached a lonely spot, and having looked cautiously about him to see that he was not observed, he stooped and drew a bundle from beneath the trunk of a fallen tree. Then taking off his monkish habit, he tied it into a similar form and secreted it in the same place.

The bundle being unrolled proved to be some kind of a garment obviously designed for female wear. He proceeded to put it on, when his external appearance was greatly changed, although the piece of apparel which he had donned resembled in some respects the domino which he had cast aside; but it differed in color, and gave to the wearer a more feminine look. The monk next fastened upon his feet some sandals, which had composed a part of the bundle; and completed his singular toilet by plac-

ing upon his shaven crown a kind of cap, ingeniously covered with short, coarse, black hair, closely resembling the natural growth of the human head, and approximating, somewhat, to a modern wig. This curious fixture covered a considerable portion of his forehead, giving quite a different expression to his face; a change which was greatly enhanced by the appliance of a white substance resembling chalk. This application imparted a pale and care-worn appearance to his visage, and a long stick grasped in the right hand, completed the reader's idea of the physique of Weird Elsie.

All these preliminaries being concluded, father David examined himself as reflected in the clear waters of a small spring, to see how effectually the monk was merged in the fortune-teller. Bending his form somewhat, and depressing the corners of his mouth by a muscular effort, he walked away in the direction of Peter Vidal's cottage, mumbling and singing as he went, in order to enable him to sustain, as far as practicable, the character which he had assumed.

Louis Vidal was keeping watch over his flock

as usual, in the accustomed place, and he was not sorry to see approaching the old woman, who had told such fine things concerning him on another occasion; for he believed a good opportunity now offered to learn the particulars in relation to the good fortune in reserve for him.

Elsie drew near.

"Well, my good lad," she said, "I told you that we might, perchance, see each other again. Where is your sister?"

"She is at the cottage; but I expect her here soon," replied the boy.

"Perhaps you remember that I made the remark that I was seldom seen twice in the same place, without I had strong reasons for my re-appearance. I have things to say to you both of vital importance; and what I say, I must say quickly, for there is no time to lose—the voices are calling me another way. Isandra is in great danger; designing men meditate much mischief against her. But their plans must be baffled—their schemes must fail—their counsels come to nought. You are a brave and active youth, and must be the instrument employed to save her from the evil purposes of bad men," added Elsie, with an earnestness of manner that caused Louis to stare at her with astonishment.

"I know, wise mother," answered the lad, "that Isandra is unhappy, and that my father has proposed a husband for her who is detestable to her sight; and if that is the fate from which you are anxious to save her, there is nothing which I will not do to bring about such a desirable event. Look! she is coming!"

"It is to that intended marriage that I refer," resumed the sibyl; "and when Isandra has joined us, I will speak more plainly upon the subject."

In a short time the fair shepherdess stood beside Elsie and Louis.

"This woman," said the latter to the maiden, "says that she has something of importance to communicate that concerns us deeply."

"Speak on, Elsie," said Isandra.

"I will," said the sibylla, solemnly; "for I have come to advise you of the wicked arts of

base and unscrupulous persons. I know this man whom your father has selected to be your companion through the journey of life; I know him to be so opposite to you in character, that another could not be found so widely different; I know him to be a man of many crimes, upon whose head justice has set her reward."

"Do you mean Denis Wetzel?" asked Isandra.

"Yes, yes! Denis Wetzel!" returned Elsie, emphatically.

"Then comfort yourself, good sibyl, for the proposed union will never take place," rejoined the maiden, earnestly; "I will never consent to bestow my hand on Denis Wetzel."

"Never consent! Silly girl! you know little of the power of the man who has given you the promise of so many golden florins. Your consent will not have much to do with the matter. Might can overcome right; priests can mumble ceremonies, even though they fall on unconscious ears. A plot is already laid for your abduction."

"Are you indeed speaking what you know? or are those words but insane mutterings, having little or no meaning?" cried Isandra, becoming very pale.

"I am speaking advisedly, calmly, rationally. I weigh every word—I know what I say, and what I would do. I have not come hither by mere chance, but by design, with a settled purpose. Listen to me no longer as a man or woman, but hear me as a responsible being. To-morrow night is the time fixed upon to carry out these nefarious schemes. Upon some idle pretext, Peter Vidal—I will not call him your father—will send you from the cottage. You will be met by several persons delegated for that purpose, and forcibly carried to the place which Denis Wetzel calls his home, where a monk will profane the marriage ceremony by repeating it in your presence; thus making you the wife of a man whom you detest."

Isandra listened to these strange declarations with increasing trepidation, and was obliged, when the sibyl ceased, to cling to Louis for support.

"I fear this terrible story is true," said the youth, embracing his sister affectionately.

"Too true, too true!" murmured the fair shepherdess.

"But your brother shall thwart this well-devised scheme, if he has courage and address enough," resumed Elsie.

"Tell me how it is to be done," said the youth, firmly, "and I will do it, if it costs me my life."

"Bravely spoken, my fine lad! the plan is briefly this; you must change places with your sister, and be carried off instead of her."

"How can that be?" inquired Louis.

"After she leaves the cottage to-morrow night, as agreed upon, you must exchange dresses. You are nearly of the same size, and clad like a female, you might well be mistaken, in the evening, for the one you would personate. This exchange of garments must take place near the cottage; when completely arrayed in the maiden's dress, you will proceed on the errand upon which she has been ordered by Peter Vidal. When you are seized by the ruffians, you must pretend to be much terrified—weep, struggle, and sometimes appear to faint; always being careful to keep your face closely covered with your sister's veil. You must exercise all your ingenuity, and keep up the deception to the last. When the fraud is discovered, you must not be terrified at the scene which will ensue. Denis Wetzel will, doubtless, be in a great fury; but I do not believe he will be disposed to do you serious harm. Do you understand me perfectly?"

"I do, if he does not," replied Isandra, quickly. "My mind grasps all the threads of the tangled skein; I perceive all the details of the subjects, so far as concerns the disguise of Louis, and the instructions which are to govern his conduct. I will teach him how to act, and what to say; I will see that in the matter of dress he resembles me as much as one person can look like another; and trust me all shall be done with skill and promptness, and the emergency met in precisely the way you desire. My intuitions are quick; I have a clear percep-

tion of what must be done, to make the artifice succeed. But proceed; tell me what course I shall pursue after Louis has left me?"

"Having put on the garments of your brother, return to the cottage and retire to bed with as little ado as possible. When you reach the cottage, if you perceive a man within, do not enter until he is gone; if not, enter boldly, as I have said. Should you see a small bag upon the table, or in your father's possession, know that it contains five hundred florins in gold; and that it comes from Denis Wetzel, in payment for a young and innocent maiden."

"Your manner," rejoined Isandra, "assures me of your sincerity. Your instructions shall be implicitly followed. But I would ask one more question; upon whose head will the anger of my father fall, when he learns the deception that has been practised?"

"Not upon yours, not upon yours; leave that subject to other hands. God will, peradventure, raise up a friend to protect you. He clothes the lilies, and he cares for the sparrows; will he, then, desert those who are of more value than the lilies and the sparrows? No, no! Weird Elsie, in her wanderings has not found it so."

"And yet one more question?" resumed Isandra.

"Speak, daughter," said Elsie.

"What will become of Louis? will his life be in danger?"

"I hope not—that is, I believe not," returned the sibylla, with some embarrassment of manner. "A friend may be raised up to him, also. Who knows? the ways of Providence are mysterious. No, no! Denis Wetzel dare not kill the lad."

"It had better be me than her!" exclaimed Louis, warmly.

"God bless you, my noble youth! You well deserve to be a belted knight; and so you will be, or I am no prophetess. Adieu, children, I must go."

"But will you not come to us again, kind Elsie?" asked the lad.

"I cannot tell; my own future is not always

plain before me. Sometimes the darkness closes down upon my path, and I cannot see clearly; and the voices that speak unto me so often, admonish me that I must not live for myself, nor seek to know coming events concerning myself, but concerning others. My calling is not a selfish one; a single selfish act would deprive me of my power; the threads of destiny would slip from my hands and be lost; I could not gather them up again. No, no; the thread of my own life is not among those that guide my wanderings, and direct my efforts. Be assured that I shall appear before you again, when a feeble hand like mine can assist you; till then be content, nor expect me until you see me."

The monk, or Weird Elsie, as we have called him, in this character, said no more, but directed his footsteps toward Donhead Wood, leaving Isandra and Louis to marvel at what they had heard, and to tremble with apprehension when they thought of the future.

While the scene we have just been describing was taking place, Albert Casside still continued, to all outward appearance, to be enjoying a most refreshing slumber. The bustle in the adjoining room had subsided. The wound of Sir Hugh had been dressed and pronounced of a dangerous nature, and he still continued in a state that precluded the possibility of learning from his own lips for the present, the author of his misfortune. The Silver Bell had been made the subject of a rigorous search, by Joachim Capet and Mark, but without throwing any light upon the mysterious transaction; so they were obliged to content themselves with conjectures and vague speculations in regard to the affair."

Capet averred that if a certain young man had been there (whom he would not disgrace himself by calling by name), he should have very well known to whom to attribute the deed; for said youngster was of a temperament to commit murder, or to perpetrate any enormity that a human being could be guilty of.

Upon being asked by Donhead if he did not refer to Albert Casside, he unhesitatingly re-

plied that he did; and had not spoken without good reason.

"And the strongest of your reasons, doubtless, are those black and blue spots which I see over and under your eyes, and upon various parts of your face," said Donhead, with a malicious smile.

"There is not," returned Joachim, "such a hardened wretch among all your fellows. I never was handled so roughly during my whole life; he showered such a storm of blows upon me that I verily thought my last hour had come; and when he left me, I was such a shocking spectacle, that my own mother would not have acknowledged me for her own son. Among gentle or simple, I never saw such a fiery and impetuous youngster; and though chary of his words, his fists are always at one's service."

"In the case of Godfrey Ridenger," said the chief of the banditti, "I think your rustic youth must be innocent; and it were indeed hard to animadvert upon one, who, for aught you know, is an hundred leagues from here. But to change the subject: Are those two proud-looking cavaliers, who lost their florins in the forest, a few days ago, still your guests?"

"I am momentarily expecting them," returned Capet. "Their servants brought me word that they should pass the night here. The time that has intervened since they were here, they have spent at Motecombe Manor; and indeed they were of the hunting party upon that occasion when Lady Eveline so strangely disappeared."

"Now, Joachim Capet, you begin to interest me," resumed Mark, earnestly. "If I mistake not, those two cavaliers were of high rank; and I have a presentiment that we shall yet hear from them in a manner not agreeable. I wish Satan had flown away with Yoriek and his comrades, before they had unluckily encountered and robbed them in the forest. Have you learned by any travellers from that direction, whether these unknown gentlemen have interested themselves in that affair of Ridenger's—the vexatious abduction of the lord's daughter?"

"Ay! you are now asking a question which

I can answer; I never neglect to levy contributions of general information upon every guest. Travellers don't often escape without talking more than they ought to, when Joachim Capet gets hold of them. I have good authority for saying that the two noble cavaliers, who were robbed of their florins, who stopped at the Silver Bell, who despatched a trusty messenger for men-at-arms in order to punish Mark Don-head, who were of the hunting party referred to when the Lady Eveline was stolen, have interested themselves most deeply and seriously in the matter; and it is rumored, furthermore, that it is by their agency that a reward of six hundred florins has been offered for your head."

"It will cost whoever gets my head more than that!" replied Mark, sternly. "Let them come, I say," and the robber chief played nervously with the hilt of his sword. "But, Ca-

pet," he resumed, hastily, "we must be cautious. This last act of daring, into which the folly of Sir Hugh has inveigled us, I plainly foresee will raise a dangerous storm, which we must be prepared to meet like men. Be circumspect in your treatment of travellers; play well the host. Preserve the important secrets connected with the Silver Bell, as carefully as you do the precious sands of your own life. Let them once be whispered to the winds, and the arm of our power will well nigh be broken. Yes, I warn you to be discreet; I am watching you. Should your folly or your cupidity betray us, remember that there are two hundred daggers ready to draw your blood; and that to escape the vengeance of the order, will be an attainment utterly impossible. So, Joachim Capet, let that fact be an everlasting admonition in your ears."

CHAPTER XV.

SCENES AT THE INN.

IF there was any sound under heaven that could attract the attention of Albert Cas-side, and endow arm and brain with activity, it was the clashing of swords. For him there was music in the ringing of steel blades; a kind of music which invariably affected him with the fighting mania. Therefore, upon hearing the noise of a contest in the yard, in front of the inn, he incontinently leaped from the bed, and ran towards the scene of the conflict as fast as his limbs could carry him; oversetting, in his impetuous course, several officials of mine worthy host, Joachim Capet. But our hero did not perplex his mind about details; he had an eye only to generalities; and without pausing to apologize for the various accidents which his unexpected advent produced, he dashed into the yard like a young colt, which disdainingly collar and saddle, throws his master into the ditch, and follows the dictates of his own fancy.

Arrived there, he was much elated to perceive that there was an excellent opportunity to indulge in cut and thrust; for two persons were engaged with one slender youth, who, unequal to the contest, was rapidly losing his strength, and yielding ground.

To inform the reader that Albert drew his sword from beneath his domino, would be time and words thrown away; for knowing his hot and headlong temper, he would conclude at once, without much reflection, that his first act would be to whisk out his weapon in the least possible space of time; which was really the case.

"Cowardly caitiffs!" he exclaimed, making his blade flash merrily in the sun. "Does it not shame your manhood to attack one slender youth upon whose chin the down has scarcely appeared? Come on, cravens, and I will teach you a lesson of good manners!"

One of the fellows instantly turned and made a furious lunge at Albert; but he parried it, and in return, gave him a thrust that stretched him at his length upon the ground. His companion, seeing how matters were going, took to his heels and soon disappeared, but not before the sound of the affray had alarmed all the inmates of the Silver Bell.

"Holy father," said the youth whom he had befriended, "or whoever you are, I am greatly obliged to you for this timely interference. The

scoundrels were getting the best of the bargain, and I should soon have been entirely at their mercy. Although you wear the garments of holy mother church, you use the sword like a true knight. This service I will not forget; and if it does not at some future time react in your favor, then you may set me down as an uncourteous cavalier and an ungrateful gentleman."

The courtly manner in which the youth uttered these words, declared him to be of some consequence; and there was an air of superiority and authority about him which did not ill become him, but sat easily and naturally, like a garment whose first stiffness and awkwardness has been lost by wear.

"Such a slight service as this, gentle sir, merits not the kindly acknowledgements which you are disposed to accord. I were indeed a churl, to allow two savage ruffians to murder you," replied Casside.

"I know what is due to gallantry," added the youth, "and how to be grateful for a kindness. Here, take this ring and wear it for my sake; I shall take it ill, if you refuse. It may ultimately prove a powerful talisman to save you from your enemies; or to bless your friends."

With a bow, Albert took the ring which the young man proffered him, and which he feared to reject, lest he might wound his feelings, and hastily placed it upon the third finger of the left hand.

"To oblige you, courteous youth, I accept this pledge of your friendship; not as something in any manner merited, but as an indication of your own generous nature."

At that instant, Albert felt a rough grasp upon his arm, and turning angrily towards the intruder, he perceived the scowling face of Mark Donhead.

"What now! has the foul fiend gotten possession of you again?" he said, in a voice of suppressed anger.

Casside's eyes flashed indignantly, and advancing his face close to the ear of the bandit chief, he rejoined, in a hoarse and threatening tone:

"Never presume to lay your hand thus unceremoniously upon me the second time; for should you, I swear by the holy cross, I will pass my sword through your body, although you are surrounded by all your minions!"

Mark Donhead bit his lips, and quailed before the menacing glances of Albert.

"Beware! remember who I am!" retorted the former, in a voice subdued almost to a whisper. "But come," he added, taking Casside's arm; "this is no place for wrangling. We are attracting observation; we will adjust our differences at some other time and place."

Our hero slowly and reluctantly permitted himself to be conducted into the inn. As he passed over the threshold, the youth whom he had assisted thanked him again, while at the same time a cavalier rode into the yard, whose arrival appeared to give him much pleasure.

Upon seeing the two together, Albert immediately remembered them as being the identical persons who had passed the night at the Silver Bell, in an apartment adjoining that which he had occupied, and between whom he had overheard a conversation of some length, relating to a robbery in the Donhead Wood. The younger of the two was obviously the individual whom the elder had addressed as nephew; and the elder was consequently the same who had answered to the application of uncle, on the occasion referred to.

"A fine piece of work have you spoiled for me!" said Captain Mark, as they entered the tap-room. "Those fellows," he added, "were acting by my orders. Those two unknown personages are dangerous, and it is necessary that they should be put out of the way. They are persons evidently occupying places of power. I have learned that it is through their influence, that the reward of six hundred florins has been offered for my head. A hearty curse upon your officious intermeddling! If you go on in this manner, in three weeks there will not be a man among us who has a whole skin!"

"I cannot help it; the fight is in me, and must come out," said Albert, mastering his indignation.

"Your unparalleled impudence confounds me!" roared Donhead. "By St. Stephen! you cannot be what you seem. You are proud, fiery, and daring enough to be of the noblest blood in the land, instead of the humble individual which your garb attempts to declare you to be. Young man, I must have your history, though I wring it from you by the neck!"

"You can have it without that trouble," said Casside, carelessly. "I was born of some simple peasants, near Hengistbury Head, in the year 1306."

"Bah! it is false—it is false!" cried Mark, violently. "No more fooling—no more fooling! Come, speak; who are you?"

"I am a man," answered Albert, calmly.

"By my faith! now you are bearding me to my face!" resumed Donhead. "But no matter; I have you fast enough, and your boasted manhood is subservient to my orders. There is a man in my service by the name of Herbault—you saw him in character the other night—he whisks off human heads in a curious way," he added, significantly.

"In that case, I know of a head the fellow might make money on; he could command six hundred florins for it; which, considering the quality, is exorbitant and extortionary," observed Casside, coolly.

"You think so!" muttered Mark, scowling darkly.

"I do, candidly, captain."

"Hark ye, my precocious youngster! perhaps you aspire to the six hundred florins yourself?"

"If I did," cried Albert, striking his hand upon his sword, "I would have them in my pocket, before yonder sun sinks behind the distant hills."

"You!"

"I."

"When, how?"

"Now," said Albert, firmly, "and by means of this weapon by my side." And the young man fixed his eyes calmly upon the leader of the banditti.

"That is empty bravado! a mere current of

air passing out of your mouth!" rejoined Donhead, in a voice subdued, deep, and full of meaning.

"I will lay a wager of an hundred florins, providing you are agreeable thereto, that, if placed on equal footing, face to face, and nothing but our swords to decide the matter, before ten minutes have been counted upon the dial, I will have your head under my arm!"

Mark Donhead, who had been walking fiercely up and down the room, now paused before Albert, and favored him with a long and penetrating stare, in which ferocity, fear, and indecision, seemed to be blended. His chest worked convulsively; he set his teeth hard together, and breathed like a tiger that wishes to spring upon his prey, but dare not. He then threw himself heavily into a chair and said hoarsely, and with forced composure:

"I will not accept your accursed wager!"

"Act your pleasure, captain!" said Albert, who appeared to exercise a kind of fascination over the sanguinary monster. For a short time, there was a profound silence, in which Donhead sat contracting his brows, and casting savage and curious glances at our hero.

It is impossible to tell how this singular scene might have ended, had it not at that crisis been interrupted by the entrance of a traveller and his servant. He was a person considerably advanced in life, whose exterior denoted both rank and respectability. His manner was abstracted, and he took little or no notice of Albert and his companion, but seating himself dejectedly, waited patiently for the appearance of mine host. The attention of Casside was immediately directed towards the new-comer, and he gave unmistakable signs of being considerably interested in his appearance; and, so far as one could judge, appeared equally anxious not to be observed by the object of his scrutiny. The hood of his domino, which had been partially removed, he hastily adjusted, concealing nearly every feature of his face.

Mark Donhead smoothed the frowns from his forehead, and also began to honor the stranger with prying looks, and obviously desired to

know the name and station of one whose bearing was in every respect so *distingue*. It is possible that he was taking a mental inventory of such articles of jewelry as ornamented his person; such, for instance, as golden finger rings, chains, rich lace, together with the heavily-mounted hilt of his sword, and its chased silver scabbard; or, it may be probable that he was thinking of the possible amount of ready money which his purse might contain.

Joachim Capet not appearing, the servant, who was in livery, rang a small hand bell, which had the effect to summon that worthy functionary.

"Your humble servant, noble cavalier!" exclaimed mine host. "You are welcome to the best house in Dorsetshire. The cellar of the Silver Bell is stored with the choicest vintage; and some of it has been there half a century. And then I have chambers that are fit for a prince; the Earl of Shaftsbury, the Earl of Salisbury, Lord Beaumont, Sir Hugh Spencer, and the very puissant and honorable—"

"Enough, enough, my worthy host! I am seeking comfort rather than splendor. Be so obliging as to show me a decent chamber, without farther circumlocution," rejoined the stranger, rather unceremoniously interrupting the master of the Silver Bell.

"Certainly, my lord! Your honor's honor has only to command, and your worshipful worship's servant will obey. What, ho! Jean, Carl, and half a score of you blockheads! will you keep his highness waiting all day? Groom this noble gentleman's horse, take his worthy servant's portmanteau, lay the table, and bestir yourselves like useful servants, and not like indolent knaves, as you are! My lord, be pleased to come this way, and I will show you to an apartment which commands one of the sweetest views that your honor's eyes ever looked upon."

Smiling at the volubility of Joachim Capet, the traveller left the tap-room, and Casside heard him ascending the stairs.

"Do you happen to know that gentleman?" asked Mark, sullenly.

"I haven't that honor," replied Albert.

"Neither do I; but trust me, Joachim Capet will be likely to find out. The fellow will not be happy until he knows his name and rank," added Mark. "One thing, however, to me is quite obvious; he is a person of consequence; and who knows but a wise providence has thrown him in our way, that you may have a chance to try your hand at your new trade. Now I should call it a fair commencement in the world, for a youngster like you to begin business on such a respectable gentleman. Any bungler may rob a common person of his filthy lucre, but it's not every tyro that has the privilege of clapping his sword to the breast of a real lord, or a belted knight," continued the bandit chief, in a sneering tone.

"I perceive," returned his companion, "that you always have an eye to business; that you are something of a philosopher, as well as a famous chieftain; that you are as ready to count laurels as florins."

While Casside was making this rejoinder, Joachim Capet re-appeared; whereupon Don-head inquired how the cavalier and his servant were mounted; whether their horses were in good condition; whether the housings upon them were rich and costly, and several other things which we do not now remember.

Joachim went on to state that both master and man were mounted upon beasts good enough for the king himself; and that saddles, bridles and housings were resplendent with gold and silver.

"Ah! say you so?" cried Mark. "By my patron saint! we must see what can be made of this traveller. Casside, if you acquit yourself well in this matter, I will forgive your dare-devil impetuosity, and the mischief you have already done. But I warn you to be governed by me, and exhibit more subordination and discretion, and less obstinacy and impudence."

"What did you call this fellow?" asked

Joachim, turning pale and looking fixedly at Albert.

"It is your old friend—Albert Casside," replied Mark, laughing at Capet's consternation.

"Heart of the Madonna! St. Peter and St. Paul, and a great quantity of other saints, of all sexes! I had rather see Satan himself at the Silver Bell, than this mad-cap, hair-brained youth!" exclaimed the host, with much perturbation of manner. "He will cut all our throats, and murder the women and children!"

"Come, Joachim," said Albert, "go and bring us a bottle over which the cobwebs have been accumulating for the last twenty years, and let us drink confusion to our enemies."

"If it's all the same to you, I'd rather not,"

replied Joachim, working himself towards the door, whereupon our hero went through with the interesting pantomime of cracking his skull, which had the effect to subdue instantly all his former objections. He hastened for the wine, and while he was gone, father David once more rejoined them. The drinking scene that followed did not appear to be of the most comforting and happyfying kind to Joachim; who seated himself as far from the table as possible, and kept a most vigilant eye upon the motions of our hero, expecting, unquestionably, to have a bottle or some other missile hurled at his head, or some violent demonstration made upon his person.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ROBBERY.

MARK DONHEAD resumed: "You, Joachim Capet, must be sure to learn when this gentleman intends to leave the inn; and having ascertained that particular item, do not neglect to advise me of the same. Father David, Casside and myself will be enough for this job; we will station ourselves in the forest at a proper time, and in a proper place, and await his coming. While one of us takes care of the servant, our young friend shall perform his first robbery on the king's highway."

Albert did not demur at this arrangement, and the captain and the monk proceeded to give him very minute instructions concerning the part he was to act, especially against awkwardness in his first attempt; they assured him that his language must be courtly and civil when he demanded the nobleman's money, and that he must not degrade himself by low and vulgar expressions; as his reputation depended very much on the skill and address with which he conducted his first enterprise.

While the worthy pair were imparting these useful hints and practical admonitions, Albert could not but observe that Mark was watching

his countenance continually, to discover, without appearing to do so, the effect of his words; and he could not doubt but the bandit was studying more fully his character, and testing his good faith in regard to the object of his enrollment in the band. He was shrewd enough to conclude that the captain's careless manner was wholly assumed, for the purposes above mentioned, and conducted himself accordingly. He was quite sure that he had seriously provoked Donhead, by his recent interference in the quarrel which had taken place, in the yard of the inn, a short time before; and it appeared more reasonable to him to suppose that he was only repressing his anger for the present, than that he had entirely forgiven him his unintentional offence.

Albert knew enough of the human disposition, to understand many of its various phases, and flattered himself that he could not be deceived, even by the cunning arts of the bandit chief. Disguising his own feelings, he conversed with affected cheerfulness upon different subjects, quaffed his wine with apparent enjoyment, and sustained his reputation, generally,

as a care-for-nothing fellow, in a manner that reflected great credit upon his power of self-control. Mark was baffled in all his efforts to throw him off his guard, and it is possible that his confidence in his new ally, was, in some measure, restored. His good nature increased with his increasing cups, and he even went so far as to drink the health of his intended bride; a formality which was anything but agreeable to Albert, who would much rather have preferred to dash his wine into the captain's face than to be reduced, as he was, to the alternative of swallowing it.

While matters were progressing in this manner, father David was suddenly seized with a copious hemorrhage from the nose, and left them, as he said, to make an appliance of cold water; the only sure remedy for that complaint. But the moment he was out of the tap-room, instead of manifesting any concern or annoyance from the circumstance named, he quickly mounted the stairs, and being intimately acquainted with all parts of the Silver Bell, instantly sought that particular apartment where he had reason to believe the last traveller was accommodated.

He listened a few seconds at the door, and then entered without knocking. The noble-looking guest, was pacing the room with an air of the deepest anxiety, while the melancholy expression of his face gave ample evidence that sorrow had not been a stranger to his breast. The abrupt and unannounced appearance of the monk seemed to surprise him, and pausing in the middle of the apartment, he fixed a reproving and inquiring glance upon the intruder. Father David hurriedly closed the door, and laid his finger warningly upon his lips.

"I have come thus abruptly," said the monk, in a suppressed voice, "to make an important communication. I have but a moment to spare; it must not be known that I entered this chamber; and should chance throw me in your way during your brief stay here, do not recognize me, by word or look. Certain parties have laid a plan to rob you in the adjoining forest, after you have left the Silver Bell. No personal violence will be offered you; but whatever

moneys and valuables you and your servant may have in your possession, will certainly be taken, to the last farthing's worth."

"Proceed," said the traveller, as David paused an instant.

"Is it necessary that you should resume your journey before to-morrow?" asked the friar.

"Imperatively," replied the gentleman.

"Be it so—be it so; listen to me: I have concocted a scheme in my own mind, by which you may punish and baffle the designing knaves of Mark Donhead. Feign to have with you a considerable sum of money, and question mine host about the safety of the roads; and the danger of robberies in the forest; while at the same time you admonish your servant to be careful of your portmanteau. This line of conduct will have precisely the effect desired; and to keep up the deception, procure a small bag, and have it filled with copper, lead, brass, and other worthless articles, thus giving it the appearance of great value. This bag you need not be very careful to keep entirely out of sight; and after yourself and servant have mounted, it might very much favor the object in view if you should order him, in a suppressed voice, yet loud enough for by-standers to hear, to hand you the bag of florins, for you fear to trust him with it. You smile, sir; I perceive you enter into the spirit of my proposal."

"I do, holy father; I commend your ingenuity, and will follow your instructions to the letter," rejoined the stranger. "The boldness of Mark Donhead is becoming insufferable. Heavy robberies are of daily occurrence. To disappoint the cupidity of the ruffian in the manner which you propose, would really give me great pleasure. Although you are a stranger to me, the earnestness of your manner, as well as the garb you wear, assure me of your good faith. I thank you for this warning; and will trust your integrity implicitly."

"Remember, my lord, or whatever your title may be, that you are not to recognize me, should we meet again in this part of the country; and I will also add, that in giving you this warning,

I endanger my own life. There are those with-in bow-shot of the Silver Bell, who, had they any suspicion that I had whispered a word of advice in your ear, would hang me higher than Haman."

"Sir," returned the traveller, earnestly, "I will sacredly observe your wishes. Here is my hand; and once more let me express the deepest sense of obligation, although the simple loss of my florins could not affect my fortunes materially; for my most precious treasure is already stolen."

"My lord," added David, in a whisper, "notwithstanding every wall has an ear to hear and a tongue to speak, I will venture to add yet one more word. The treasure you refer to, and the loss of which makes your heart sad, is watched over by vigilant eyes, and shall be restored to you again."

The monk glanced cautiously about the chamber, and turned to go.

"Stay, good father, stay!" cried the traveller, much affected by the singular announcement he had heard.

"No more, my lord, not a word more—do not detain me a second longer—you will ruin all—do not despair—be hopeful—I go—adieu."

The monk opened the door, and left the chamber with quick and noiseless steps, and speedily rejoined his companions in the tap-room.

The day was drawing to a close. The sun was disappearing in the western horizon, and twilight was dispensing her soft mists over earth and sky. There was no sound in Donhead Wood, and silence seemed to have cast her spells over the depths of the wide forest. Three persons stood motionless beneath the shadow of a clump of oaks, whom the gentle reader will recognize as our three friends whom we left, not long since, enjoying the vintage of the Silver Bell.

Albert Casside still wore the monkish habit; but Mark Donhead and father David were clad in the garments usually worn by the banditti.

"This adventure promises to be a very rich affair," observed Mark; "for Joachim Capet assured me that this traveller carries a large amount of money."

"That's lucky," replied David. "I hate jobs that do not pay well; for it appears like incurring much risk for a very small reward. You say that this nobleman, for such he must be, carries his florins in a large bag?"

"Yes, I am certain of it, for Joachim was favored with a glimpse of the same; and he is of the opinion that its contents would be sufficient to make a common man rich."

"Do you hear that, my lad?" said the monk turning to Albert.

"I do," replied our hero, striving to speak with befitting firmness; "and I must endeavor to acquit myself creditably."

"Of course; you must make a grand effort, and though you may feel a little trepidation at first, the thing will come quite naturally, after a time," returned David.

"Perhaps so—I dare say," rejoined Casside, in a voice not free from emotion.

"Be firm!" said Mark. "Evolve the career—nothing spirit that sometimes possesses you. They are feeble hearts only that falter—weak souls—that lack resolution. The time draws near—the moment of action approaches. Banish your indecision, man; lay your hand boldly upon your sword, thus; and when you seize the bridle rein, and place its point to the cavalier's breast, look at him as hard as you did at me this morning, when you threatened to run me through the body. Let the thought of the florins, tied up at the saddle-bow act as a continual incentive, and stimulate you like a dozen glasses of wine. In this case, we will content ourselves with the money; we will not take their horses, or personal ornaments."

"I understand," rejoined Albert, in a low voice.

"Courage—courage!" whispered David in his ear.

"You must bear in mind," added Donhead, sternly, "that I am watching you; and if you attempt to play me any of your scurvy tricks,

I will give you over to the tender mercies of Herbault!"

"Hush!" said David. "I hear them approaching. Let us take our places nearer to the road."

As the parties moved in the direction indicated, the monk contrived to whisper a few words to Albert.

"Keep your face well concealed—do not tremble—be resolute—be prompt—as I have told you, the traveller is warned—he expects this interruption—he is prepared for it—there will be no resistance—it is understood—and he will not be a single farthing poorer by the operation!"

"I cannot perceive how that can be," returned Casside, in the same tone, "when he has a bag of florins at his saddle-bow."

"You will know soon enough," added David.

"I tremble—my heart leaps into my throat to choke me. My God! you know not what you are urging me to do—you cannot tell the terrible struggle this is costing me!"

"No more—no more! remember what is at stake—Isandra—the Lady Eveline!" replied the monk, hurriedly.

"What are you saying there? Be silent!" hissed Donhead, holding up his finger. "Idiots! don't you see they are close at hand? Casside, go forward; act your part; if you fool me, you shall feel what it is to play with the lion's paw!"

The traveller was now nearly abreast of the parties, and his servant a few steps behind him. Albert leaped into the road, drew his sword, and placing its point to the breast of the foremost, said, in a voice as unlike his own as he could assume:

"My lord, I would trouble you for the bag of gold at your saddle-bow!"

"Villain!" exclaimed the nobleman. "How dare you stop a peaceable traveller upon the king's highway?"

"Your money, my lord! Do not force me to do you personal harm—the florins, without

delay!" retorted Casside, firmly, and making a menacing motion with his weapon.

Without farther remonstrance, the nobleman took the bag from his saddle-bow, where it was partially covered by a portion of his dress, and threw it at Albert's feet, saying, contemptuously:

"Young man, I hope you will some day learn a better trade."

As our hero bent to take the bag from the ground, the hood of his domino unluckily slipped from a portion of his face; the traveller caught a glimpse of his features, and uttered an exclamation of painful surprise. The young man hastily replaced his domino, waved his hand to the man whom he had robbed, and rejoined father David, who had been watching the scene with much interest. A moment after, Mark Donhead, who had prevented the servant from going to the assistance of his master, also returned to his accomplices, rejoicing in the complete success of the robbery.

"In this affair," he said, warmly, addressing Albert, "you have conducted yourself with much discretion and courage. I never saw a beginner do the thing up more cavalierly. I have a distinct recollection that the first time I performed that delicate business, my voice trembled a little when I made the reasonable request that the worthy gentleman would give me his purse. However, practice makes perfect; and the little qualms of conscience which a tyro may feel in the first stages of the art, soon disappear. By my life! that is a corpulent-looking bag! Joachim Capet was right, and he shall be suitably rewarded for his fidelity."

"Take it," answered our hero, "and dispose of it as you please; I care not for it."

"That was a spasm of conscience; believe me, it will soon wear off. Bah! I never refuse money; it is what all the world are running mad after!" retorted Donhead, taking the bag. "But come," he added, "let us away to the cavern; we have done enough for one day."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE INTERMENT. THE MIDNIGHT WALK.

UPON the ensuing night, Albert awaited in his cell the expected appearance of the stroller, with considerable anxiety. That singular personage came a little earlier than on previous occasions. He found our hero much dejected, and more than ordinarily excited by some recent occurrence. But Wandering Willie appeared the same; there was no change in his manner, or in his dress; the same impenetrable mantle of mystery hung about his acts and intentions. It was in vain that he addressed words of cheer to Casside; the latter's mental serenity had been too violently disturbed to recover speedily its wonted tranquillity.

"Do not speak to me of the future!" he exclaimed, somewhat sharply. "Its skies are overcast, and dark with storms of disgrace. The more resolutely I struggle to mend my desperate fortunes, the more deeply do I become involved. But let us drop the ungenial theme, and talk of anything but the future. I recollect now, that there is a disagreeable work to be done; come, let us go forth and perform it. As I told you at the first, it is a thing I like not; but as we have commenced it, it must be conducted firmly to the end."

"Very true," said Willie; "what is begun must be finished, and it is now our painful duty to consign earth to earth, and dust to dust, praying that God may take care for the rest."

Casside and the stroller then proceeded to the place of interment; the former held in his hand the dim light, while the latter, with pick and spade, removed a portion of the earth from the recent grave. Standing there, beneath those gloomy arches, with such mournful mementoes of mortality around him, Albert could not but reflect upon the mutability of human affairs, and feel that life was indeed a season of vicissitude and pain. The feeble scintillations of the lamp called up fantastic shadows and shaped grim monsters upon the rugged rocks and overhanging walls.

His own fancies were as wild and fitful as those pictured around him by the faint efforts of the glimmering lamp to overcome the surrounding darkness. Meantime, the stroller labored industriously, and hollowed out a space in which to deposit the mortal remains of Herbault.

"It will matter but little, if it is not very deep and wide," said Willie; "and his slum-

bers will be just as sweet, as though he were encased in a gilded coffin."

The body of Herbault at length was brought from the spot where it had been secreted, laid into the ground above some of his own handiwork, and the kindred earth was thrown upon him.

Albert felt truly thankful when this disagreeable task was completed, and the ghastly figure of the executioner shut forever from sight. The mound was made to assume its former appearance, and the implements that had been used were returned to their accustomed places. Each of the two men experienced sensations of awe, when they turned from the spot where so many human bodies had found room to mingle with their kindred elements.

"Now," said Albert, pausing in the corridor, when they had walked some distance, "I would see Lady Eveline; and if you have any power to conduct me to her presence, I entreat you to do so."

"No no! that must not be thought of!" replied the stroller. "The danger attending such a step is too great."

"Old man, I care little for danger. You cannot change my purpose," rejoined Albert, firmly.

"But you forget, my good youth, that I also incur a portion of the danger? It is true that you may value your life lightly, but it does not follow as a consequence that I set the same low estimate upon mine," returned Willie.

"To all outward appearance you are the most wretched of human beings!" exclaimed Albert, contemptuously; "and yet you cling as tenaciously to life as the young; the fair, and the hopeful."

"Selfish young man!" retorted the beggar. "Is this, then, your return for kindness conferred? are these the thanks you bestow for my services? is this your gratitude to an old man, who has already incurred deadly peril for your sake?"

"Pardon me, good Willie! my impatience and impetuosity make me utter things which are not discreet, and which may cause me to ap-

pear meanly selfish; but at present, as you are aware, I am not acting for self, but risking life and fame for others. If there is any possible way by which you can procure me an interview with Lady Eveline, you will confer upon me the greatest possible favor, and lay me under an obligation which I shall not consider repaid, until the debt of nature itself is cancelled."

"One great difficulty which stands in the way of your desires, is, that the apartment of this damsel is beyond the places where many of the banditti sleep; consequently, in going there, we shall be obliged to pass them; which, on the whole, cannot be considered a very pleasant undertaking."

"I confess, friend Willie, that that is an objection worthy of consideration; but I am prepared to incur the risk consequent upon the undertaking, providing you feel disposed to share it with me; or, if you prefer, give me such instructions that I may go unattended, and suffer in my own person (if need be) all the penalties of discovery."

The stroller mused a moment, as if weighing all the circumstances of the case, and then answered:

"I am always willing to dare danger, where there is a prospect of success; but I am not one of that kind who act without forethought, and endeavor to execute plans before they are well matured. In regard to your going alone, no instruction which I can give, will enable you to do so. And now tell me, my lad, candidly, if much real good would result from an interview with this high-born maiden?"

"She is, no doubt," added Casside, "the subject of the most painful uncertainty and torturing apprehension. A few words from me might remove a portion of her anxiety, and lift the heavy burden of terror from her heart. This gentle damsel, good Willie, is most dear to me; and the sorrows that distract her bosom are shared by me, and render my own life wretched."

"Such things are very strange," resumed the stroller, "but no doubt they are natural and proper, although I may not be fully able to un-

derstand them. I dare say there are some true friendships in the world, which do honor to the human race; but they are not often found, and in all my wanderings I have not had the good fortune to meet with many of them. However, in relation to this Lady Eveline, I will attempt to conduct you to her; and if I fail, you must suffer the consequences, as a reward due to rashness, and not as a result of a want of prudence on my part."

When he had uttered these words, the stroller moved on in a direction wholly unfamiliar to our hero, often pausing to admonish him, by a warning gesture, to the observance of extraordinary caution. The way over which they were now walking, gave evidence of being more frequently trodden, than that they had previously traversed. They passed various diverging shafts and dismal passages, leading he knew not whither. Presently Willie stopped nearly opposite a massive door of wood, which appeared to be fixed in its place with strict regard to strength and security.

"That door," whispered the beggar, "opens to a room where the treasures of the banditti are hoarded. Could you make a stolen visit there, and manage to get above-ground once more, you might load yourself with untold wealth."

Casside shook his head, smiled faintly, and signified, by a movement of the hand, that his guide should proceed.

A little farther on another door, somewhat similar in appearance, attracted the young man's attention. Willie pointed towards it significantly, and whispered:

"It is the place assigned to the exclusive use of Mark Donhead. It is there that he will dream to-night of his young bride alect."

Albert bit his lips, and pushed the stroller onward.

After advancing some twenty yards, Casside was informed by his companion that they were near the large compartments where the banditti slept.

"Being so numerous," he added, "it cannot be expected that they should be accommodated with separate sleeping apartments, not-

withstanding nature, in one of her wild vagaries, amused herself by conducting these vast mining operations beneath the surface, which have more than once excited your wonder by their innumerable ramifications, and varied windings and turnings. Some half-a-dozen capacious chambers, excavated by nature, but improved by art, answer all the purposes of lodging rooms for Mark's merry fellows. Some of these chambers, for the object of ventilation, have been left open; and as I have already warned you, we shall run some risk of discovery in passing them. It is now necessary that the lamp should be extinguished; when once past this villanous neighborhood, it can easily be relighted, as I have the requisite materials in my pocket. Day and night, you know, are all the same to me; I am guided as much by instinct when the sun is highest in the heavens, as I am in the hour of midnight darkness. Take hold of my arm, and you shall see what instinct can do; by my faith! I am inclined to think it was made before eyes!"

Casside made no answer, and Willie extinguished the light, leaving them enveloped in the most impenetrable robe of night that ever baffled human sight. Taking the arm of his conductor, he suffered himself to be led forward, for a considerable distance, each vying with the other in the softness of their tread, and the stealthiness of their movements.

Occasionally they heard voices, and the heavy respirations of many sleepers; and by the currents of air which blew upon Albert's face, he was enabled to tell when they were passing the sleeping apartments, even had not the above-mentioned sounds greeted his ears. Anon, the footsteps of Willie became less light, and his manner more assured, and the young man was conscious that they had left the dangerous locality behind.

"A few yards further, and we will light the glim," murmured the mendicant.

Casside was glad to hear this, for he was tired of groping in the dark.

"There is a passage somewhere in this vicinity that turns to the left," added the last

speaker, "and I must find it before venturing to strike a light. I must feel along these rugged walls; it cannot be possible that I have passed it."

"Perhaps your instincts have failed you for once," replied Albert.

"I trow not—we shall know soon—it is very important that the passage should be found, because it leads to the place where the fair captive is immured."

Willie then placed his hands upon the walls and felt his way carefully along; while Albert followed him, awaiting, in the greatest suspense, the welcome announcement of the expected discovery.

"Here it is," said the stroller, at length, when Albert was beginning to despair of success.

"Instinct forever!" said the latter.

"Wisely spoken, young man. It is one of the most wonderful gifts of the benevolent Creator. What could the horse or the dog do without instinct?"

"Nothing, philosophical, Willie; they would cease to be useful servants to man. You are enhancing my estimation of instinct, to such a degree, that I begin to entertain serious intentions of putting out my own eyes, in order to be made the object of its wonderful powers!" retorted Casside.

"I would not advise you to do so," returned the blind man, "because it is more the friend of the unfortunate than the foolish."

The stroller stopped, and producing flint, steel, and tinder, re-lighted the lamp. The two men now walked briskly forward.

"Here is the door that opens into the Lady Eveline's prison," said the beggar.

"But one difficulty yet remains!" cried Albert. "The door is locked, old man; how can I enter?"

"I am not the person to come so far on a fool's errand, I assure you; I always look ahead, to see if I am prepared to meet all the difficulties which I undertake. I have a duplicate of every key in the cavern. I have not been idle since I gained access to this singular brotherhood," replied the mendicant, with a smile.

Thereupon, he drew from his bosom a key, and held it up before the young man.

"Industry is among the most commendable of all virtues; it is a sin to be inactive; when the means of knowledge and power are in one's way, he should invariably improve them. They are the drones of society who never prosper. Those who have made the most of their opportunities are those best prepared to meet great emergencies. Remember it, young man, for it is a truth which may be of benefit to you during the worldly struggle."

The mendicant then placed the key in the lock, and with emotions of joy and hope, Casside heard the bolt fly back.

He took the lamp and entered the cell, while Wandering Willie awaited his appearance in the passage.

The interview was of considerable length, and when it was concluded, the stroller conducted Albert back to his allotted compartment, with the observance of the same cautiousness that had characterized their previous proceedings.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ABDUCTION.

THE time approached which seemed destined to prove an important epoch in the life of Isandra Vidal. She experienced much anxiety and many trepidations of spirit in regard to the events about to transpire. She feared not only for herself, but for the safety of Louis. The sudden appearance of Weird Elsie, and the singular interest which she manifested in these new phases of her existence, had a tendency to mystify her mind not a little. Why had that inexplicable personage presented herself at such a crisis? What earthly object could she have in frustrating the designs of the man whom she knew as Denis Wetzel? Whence came her knowledge of his character and designs? Was there any secret tie that bound Elsie to Wetzel; and had the former really any power to aid her in an hour of extreme need?

Queries of this nature floated continually through the brain of the gentle shepherdess; but she found herself unable to arrive at any definite conclusion in regard to them. Sometimes she was half inclined to believe that Elsie was a mad woman, and no more than that; and had merely given utterance to the disconnected

and incongruous imagery of her own distorted imagination. But when she reflected more maturely upon the details of the last interview, she could not consistently question her sanity; her manner was rational and impressive, her words well chosen, and her earnestness quite apparent.

Isandra had promised to follow the instructions of Elsie; and she adhered religiously to the same. She had discussed the matter fully with Louis, and the youth had entered with spirit and determination, coupled with prudence and sagacity, into her plans and purposes. It was conceded by both, that their father's manner indicated that something unusual was going to take place. His air was abstracted, his brow clouded and thoughtful, and his replies to questions abrupt and impatient.

As the night approached, his agitation evidently increased; and Louis observed him more than once casting troubled and half-regretful looks at Isandra. The latter felt a natural quickening of the pulse when she perceived that the hour had arrived which was to test the practicability of Elsie's schemes.

"Isandra," said Vidal, suddenly, in a voice not altogether calm, "you may take this package and carry it to our neighbor, Michael Hoffland; and tell him that I attended to the matter as well as I could."

With a trembling hand the maiden received the package, looking inquiringly into her father's face as she did so. Vidal instantly averted his eyes and turned from her, and with an unutterable feeling of sorrow, the young girl prepared herself to execute this pretended commission. When she had done so, she left the cottage and was joined by her brother, who was awaiting her at a short distance. The garments which he was to wear on that occasion had been previously conveyed to the spot, and Louis had already partially arranged his unaccustomed toilet, and only needed the dexterous and more experienced hand of Isandra to render it quite complete. The maiden affirmed that said garments fitted him to a charm, and in fact did not ill become him. With true feminine skill and taste, she attended to those details, which, though they seemed unimportant to Louis, when taken altogether had much to do with the general effect.

The lad's locks were quite long, and by the ready fingers of Isandra, they were arranged in a highly creditable way. She then gave him such instructions in regard to his deportment, manner of wearing a veil, etc., as she thought would be useful.

All these preliminaries were not effected without much effort on the part of our heroine. A full realization of the season of trial which awaited both him and her, had a deeply depressing influence upon her. Although she shrunk from the proposed alliance with Denis Wetzel, her own desire for safety did not cause her to selfishly forget the danger to which Louis was exposing himself to save her. Her affection for the lad made her painfully anxious in regard to the result. The manner in which Elsie had referred to that subject, had convinced her that the risk to be incurred would not be slight.

But Louis was firm in his determination, and embracing him most affectionately, the fair shep-

herdess invoked the blessing of Heaven upon the enterprise, gave him the bundle, and with an agitated breast saw him depart to encounter he knew not what.

The moment the youth disappeared, she sank upon her knees, and prayed fervently, humbly, and tearfully, for the protection of God; that he would so surround him and her with his protecting providences, that evil men might not bring them to shame; that his fatherly hand might be so stretched out over them, that the devices of the wicked might fail; that his great love would raise them up friends to be near them in every emergency; that his wisdom might guide their footsteps always, and be to them as a wall of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day.

Isandra arose from her knees; she felt calmer and stronger; the angel of hope whispered more tangibly in her ears—she spoke more confidently of the joys of the future, and smiled more benignantly upon the face of the humble maiden.

With eyes still wet with the dewdrops of the soul, she proceeded to fulfil the rest of her instructions. It was not altogether a genial task, but supported by a new-born strength, she attired her person in the garments of her brother.

Twilight had passed, the moon was up, and the stars were softly gleaming, when Isandra had completed the change and was ready to return to the cottage. She entered without hesitation just as Elsie had directed, and passing through the room where her father was sitting abstractedly, with his elbows upon the table, and his head resting upon his hands, sought the little apartment where Louis slept. Vidal did not alter his position, or notice her; a circumstance for which she was thankful, for she felt a little awkward in her new dress.

Isandra did not retire, but awaited farther developments with an intensity of suspense which cannot be expressed. Presently she heard some one knock, and the stern voice of her father bade the applicant enter. The maiden looked anxiously through an interstice in the partition, and saw a man enter and place a bag upon the table before Vidal.

"This contains," he said, "the florins promised you by Denis Wetzel."

"Then the girl is—in his power?" cried Vidal, quickly.

"She is," replied the man; "and a terrible piece of work she makes of it!"

"I expected she would take it hard," added Vidal, hastily.

"She goes into the faints, and groans enough to make one's hair stand. A person would think she'd never done anything else all her life time."

"Don't you know enough about women to know that all that comes natural?" rejoined the other, sharply. "There's no deception about those demonstrations, for the girl really fears him, as she does Satan."

"Well, she'll soon learn that tears, and outcries, and swoons, wont avail much. Why, bless you, she's at the cavern before this time! There'll be a nice job for father David, when she gets pacified a little," added the man.

"Hush!" said Vidal, striking his hand heavily upon the table. "It isn't best to say much about it; she is a thousand times too good for him; I sometimes regret what I have done, for it's Satan's own work."

Isandra, who distinctly heard this conversation, felt a deadly chill creeping over her frame, and listened eagerly to every word.

"But come," resumed Vidal, "it's too late in the day to be guilty of the folly of repentance. Let us count these florins, and see if Wetzel has kept well his word. There is a seat; draw up to the table." The man obeyed, and Vidal with alacrity untied the bag.

"Money," he observed, moralizingly, "is a great anodyne for a nervous conscience; and I shouldn't wonder," he added, with a smile, "if the contents of this bag should put mine to sleep for a long time; it looks fat and inviting; I will empty its contents upon the table."

The coarse and sordid features of Peter Vidal lighted up with anticipation; and his hands shook with expectation as he inverted the bag. Isandra heard a heavy metallic sound, and then there was an interval of the deepest silence.

"By the holy cross! what vile trick is this!" vociferated Vidal, choking with wrath.

The man who had brought the bag, stared at the contents of the same in mute wonder.

"Your master has fooled me! I was an idiot to trust him!" added Peter, with increasing vehemence.

"Trash! not worth a single florin!" exclaimed the messenger, putting his hand upon the worthless pile, which consisted of brass, lead, copper, and other quite valueless metals.

Vidal sprang to his feet, beat upon his breast, tore his hair, foamed at the mouth, and leaped about the room like a madman, uttering imprecations upon the head of Denis Wetzel, too profane to repeat.

"This is one of the strangest things I ever knew," observed the messenger, scratching his head.

Instantly the fury of Peter found vent upon the unlucky bandit; he darted upon him, and administered such efficient blows as soon stretched him beneath the table.

"Go back, to your accursed villain of a master!" he thundered. "Tell him I will pay back this trick with interest; that I will have my revenge; that I will hang him—that I will hang you all! I will have my daughter, he shall give her up, if I have to apply to the king himself for justice!"

"Justice!" cried the bandit contemptuously, getting upon his feet; "if you had justice, you would be hanged, quartered, and burned! Take the advantage of a fellow, will you! Take that, you avaricious old thief!" he added, hurling a three-legged stool at Vidal with such force and precision that he was prostrated, in turn, and rendered incapable of making any farther immediate hostile demonstrations; while the missile, whose momentum was not wholly retarded by the concussion, kept on, and passed out of the window, making a tremendous clatter, having the effect to agitate Isandra with additional terror.

The bandit, not thinking it prudent to stay to triumph over his fallen enemy, contented himself by shaking his fist at him as he left the

cottage and admonishing him to lie there until he could learn better manners, if it was forever.

Isandra beheld this scene without daring to leave the room, and with emotions of fear to which such occurrences would naturally give rise. Leaving the cottage and its inmates, we will now follow the fortunes of Louis. He had gone but a short distance after parting from our heroine, before he was seized by two men who proceeded to place him on horseback. The brave youth did not forget his instructions, but screamed and struggled, and exhibited every sign of terror. He found the swooning part the most difficult to perform, inasmuch as in a feigned state of unconsciousness he would be in danger of losing his equilibrium and getting a fall; but he managed the matter so adroitly, that the two bandits had ample warning of what was going to occur, and so supported him while he made a very respectable faint, which lasted in duration some ten minutes.

"She's gone quite off," said Yorick, who with Dick Strow had been delegated to perform this important service.

"Well, hold on to her," said Dick. "Captain Mark would never forgive us if the girl should get a tumble."

Presently Louis began to manifest symptoms of returning life, and thought it would be to his credit to favor them with a few hysterical screams, which would not have done discredit to the lungs of the most terrified damsel under heaven.

"What a stunnin' voice she has!" cried Dick. "A few more screams like that will unroof my head! If it's all the same to you, ma'am, I wish you'd shriek on a lower key."

"And without meaning any offence," added Yorick, "if you would manage to set up a little

straighter, and not lean so heavily on my arm, you'd do me a particular favor; and I dare say you can feel just as bad, and make as much noise in any other position."

"Take me back—take me back!" cried Louis, frantically, in a voice not quite so soft as Isandra's, but as soft as he could make it.

"We should be werry happy to please you, young woman, but our orders are strict, and we must follow 'em, even if you cry yourself into convulsions, and have the tantrums twice as bad."

When the lad perceived that he was being conveyed into the depths of the forest, he began to entertain certain vague suspicions, and to be the subject of uncomfortable misgivings in regard to the place of his destination. Finally, Yorick and Dick stopped at a lonely spot, which proved to be the entrance to the cave of the banditti; and the youth could no longer have any doubt in regard to the hands he had fallen into, but was not yet inclined to regret the step he had taken; for he reflected that he might be the means of saving his sister from a fate worse than death. He felt a cold and sickly foreboding when he entered the subterranean abode, and the stone that concealed the entrance moved back to its place. Who would be his friend in that foul haunt of robbery and crime? Who would interpose to save him from the anger of Denis Wetzel, when the trick became manifest? What could he hope from such men as those with whom he was now dealing?

Agitated by feelings like these, he was conducted onward through some of the various windings of the labyrinth, and finally stood in the presence of the personage whom he recognized as Denis Wetzel.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BRIDAL.

YORICK and Dick Strow withdrew, and assuming as conciliating an air as possible, Mark Donhead advanced and attempted to take Louis by the hand; but remembering his instructions, he positively refused to permit that liberty; still keeping the veil drawn closely about his face, he recoiled from the approaches of the bandit, evincing, so far as he could, every evidence of repugnance and timidity combined.

"I have sent for you," said Mark, "to make you my wife. Here you shall reign like a queen; two hundred men shall be your subjects and servants. You have only to command, and your slightest wish will be obeyed. Here I am absolute; but I will share my power with you. Your father knows me, and he has given his consent and approval to this step. It will be useless for me to attempt to conceal from you longer who I am; I am he whose name you have so often heard. My name and exploits are famous; but Satan himself is never so bad as he is painted. I am Mark Donhead—the captain of banditti! The future before you is not so dubious as it might seem at first thought. Here you may live in affluence and ease. As

a husband, I shall be considerate and indulgent; you will share my wealth, but not my crimes—if crimes they may be called. It will evince the most good sense on your part to leave off sighing and crying, and submit to your lot like a rational maiden. There is much true philosophy in submitting gracefully to what you cannot evade; and this marriage, I assure you, is inevitable. The ceremony will be performed immediately, and you will remain here until all is in readiness. A few of my followers will be admitted as witnesses of the rite, and the monk who will officiate, is now in the cavern."

The bandit chief ceased speaking, and Louis offered no reply, not at that time deeming it prudent to trust his voice, fearing it might betray him. Being left alone, he passed the time in reflections of a nature not very flattering to his future prospects. The name of Mark Donhead was familiar to his ears; he had heard of his innumerable robberies, and his character was associated, in his mind, with all that was cruel and terrible. Common report spoke him vindictive in disposition, and violent in his sudden outbursts of passion; and he naturally dreaded

the finale of the present scene. He had not yet traced out any definite method of making known the fraud which he had practised; but that the whole would soon transpire, was now fully obvious.

After the lapse of about an hour he heard several persons approaching, and knew that the ordeal which was to test all his firmness, was indeed at hand. Mark Donhead entered, followed by father David, Albert Casside, Yorick, Dick Strow, and half-a-dozen others.

"My honorable intentions towards this maiden," said Mark, "are known unto you all, gentlemen. I have formally proposed to her father for her hand, and have received his fullest assent. I now intend to wed her on the spot, and desire all present to be witnesses of the legality of the marriage."

"The damsel, of course, consents to this arrangement?" said father David, inquiringly.

"Unquestionably," replied Donhead; "but her agitation and embarrassment, which are quite natural to the novel position in which she finds herself placed, will prevent her, as you perceive, from giving the fitting responses; but that will make no material difference. You can make the contract just as strong, even if she utters not a word. Come, gentle shepherdess, all is ready, and I am impatient to be made the happiest man in Dorsetshire."

Donhead advanced and took Louis by the hand, while the monk gave Albert a sly glance.

"The gentle damsel is greatly abashed; be not so urgent, captain; allow her a moment or two in which to recover her equanimity."

"When the ceremony is fairly over, she may have as much time as she pleases for that purpose. But upon my honor, I cannot now admit of any delay. Come, my queen, no more whimpering and tears; let me cast aside the folds of this envious veil, that your beauty may astonish and dazzle the eyes of all present, and mine most of all."

Knowing that the denouement must come sooner or later, Louis made but little resistance to the removal of said "envious veil," when all eyes were indeed "astonished," but not "daz-

zled," with the face that was presented to view; for the youth's features by constant exposure to the sun, had become very much embrowned, and somewhat roughened, resembling but little the soft, downy skin of Isandra.

The complacent air of Mark Donhead vanished with the quickness of light, and his features grew darker than the clouds of midnight. At first, the blow seemed to stun him, and he could not fully realize the deception which had been practised upon him. The storm was about to burst in all its fury, when father David threw the book which he held in his hand at Mark's feet, and exclaimed, in as angry a voice as he could assume:

"Captain Mark, this is a miserable trick! and if you think we shall be amused at it, you are much mistaken!"

"It is infamous!" cried Casside, springing forward and shaking his fist in Mark's face.

"We did not come here to be fooled, sir; but in good faith to witness a marriage ceremony, and not to be laughed at and mocked in this contemptible manner."

"Ay, ay!" added the monk, with increasing energy, and gesticulating violently. "You may think it a very fine joke to smuggle a boy in here, dressed up like a woman, in order to make me and others appear ridiculous! It's a disgrace to the priesthood!"

Yorick, Dick Strow, and others, seeing father David and Casside so much excited about the matter, began to think that a sorry trick had been played upon them also, and showed their displeasure by chiming in with the two latter in a very decided way.

Donhead recoiled a few steps, and his countenance grew blacker, as he realized more perfectly, that he was becoming the centre and focus of the foul words and indignant looks of all present.

"Stop your infernal chatter, you confounded idiots!" he exclaimed, stamping upon the ground like a maniac. "This is no work of mine. Peter Vidal has deceived me. Bring Herbault! run for Herbault! and let him strike off this young rascal's head as quick as possible! Ho, here! Yorick, begone?"

"That alters the case, then, somewhat," returned Albert, apparently considerably pacified by the declaration.

"Let us hasten at once to the cottage of Peter Vidal," cried the friar, "and see what all this means."

"Means!" thundered Mark. "It means that I have been bearded, hoaxed, and defrauded beyond calculation! By my soul! this boy shall rue the day that he undertook to execute this commission!"

The bandit raised his hand to strike the youth, but the monk interposed.

"It is n't the lad that is to be blamed," said David, "but the knave, Vidal. On him should fall the weight of your fury, and not on this poor youth."

"I will visit the sin of the father upon the child!" retorted Mark. "Herbault shall deal with him!"

"Come, come, this is unlike you, sir," said Casside, taking the bandit by the arm. "I must have a victim; let us away to Vidal's cottage."

At this juncture, Yorick returned and reported that Herbault could not be found, and had not been seen for the last two days.

"What can have become of the fellow?" muttered Mark, impatiently.

"I don't know," said Dick. "Joachim Capet has been after him several times, and said that Godfrey Ridenger wanted him."

"Night before last," added Yorick, "he told me he was going to the Silver Bell on particular business, and I haven't seen him since."

"It strikes me there is something very singular about this," resumed Mark, thoughtfully. "It's a matter that must be looked into."

Louis, during the whole of this singular scene, had stood silently awaiting the result, with anxious forebodings. He had recognized Albert at a glance, and his presence gave him fortitude and courage, although he wondered not a little at finding him in such company. The numerous speculations which the boy had formed in regard to our hero's rank, station, etc., faded

away, and the truth now seemed to be completely apparent. Instead of being a nobleman in disguise, he was no more nor less than an outlaw.

"Let this youth," said Mark, at length, "be conveyed to the chamber of justice, there to await my pleasure." Louis was led away, and Donhead proceeded to question Yorick and Dick Strow on the manner in which they had performed their part in this rather curious business. They affirmed that they went to the spot to which they had been directed, met the person whom they expected to meet, and acted, as they supposed, precisely in accordance with their instructions; not having the remotest idea that said individual would turn out to be anything different from what the externals seemed to indicate. Both the men earnestly declared that they had acted in perfect good faith.

The captain of banditti was evidently very much excited; and after he had wearied himself in striding up and down the cavern, and uttering all manner of threats, he turned to David and Casside, and asked them to accompany him to Peter Vidal's.

When they reached the cottage of the latter, he was sitting moodily at the table, staring sullenly at the heap of valueless metal before him. Mark entered without ceremony, followed by Casside, while David, on some pretence, stopped outside, saying he would be with them in a moment.

"Miserable cheat!" exclaimed Donhead, as he burst into the room.

"Lying knave!" cried Vidal, springing to his feet, and confronting the bandit captain.

"Dishonest scoundrel!" shouted Donhead.

"Ungrateful villain!" retorted Vidal.

"You sent me a contemptible boy!" continued Mark, furiously.

"You sent me a bag of copper and lead!" resumed Peter, vehemently.

"I sent you five hundred florins!"

"I sent you Isandra!"

"Liar!"

"Robber!"

Maddened by mutual recriminations, and, as they believed, by individual wrongs, they sprang at each other with the fury of wild-cats; and thereupon ensued a pugilistic encounter of unsurpassed ferocity. Father David appeared while blows were being exchanged with great rapidity and violence.

"Come, good monk!" cried Casside, quickly throwing off his outside garment; "let us part these two men. Don't you perceive that our worthy captain is getting the worst of it?"

Now our hero was a strict lover of justice, and he straightway endeavored to act towards the parties with entire impartiality. He gave Vidal a blow under the left ear, and Mark a buffet in the left eye. When they had recovered their feet again, he flattened the nose of the former by a second punisher upon that organ, and knocked out a front tooth for the latter by placing a pain-killer upon that interesting aperture where he put his food.

In this manner he continued his efforts to serve both the combatants alike, and very soon the faces of each were terribly cut up, and covered with sanguinary hues that attested faithfully to the skill and prowess of Albert. While the latter was acquitting himself in this highly rational and praiseworthy way, he called upon David at every blow he struck, "in the name of justice and humanity to come to his assistance, that they might put an end to a scene so bloody and brutal."

It was then that the monk enacted his part in the drama. He held up his cross, and dancing about the combatants as though half-frightened out of his senses, called on them in the name of the holy trinity to cease their ungodly operations. After these strong forms of abjuration had failed, he called to his aid the virgin Mary, and as many other saints as he could remember; but with no better success than at first.

At that juncture both Mark and Vidal directed their efforts against Casside; and he, continuing to cry out that it was a burning shame for two human beings to belabor each other so cruelly, gave each such powerful knocks, right

and left, as ultimately stretched them both upon their backs, *hors du combat*, which happened just at the instant that the friar had reached the one hundred and fiftieth saint, and performed precisely sixteen revolutions about the parties.

Neither of the combatants made any attempt to rise, for they were in a state closely bordering on insensibility.

"This fellow," said Albert, pointing to Vidal, "must not be permitted to do farther personal injury to our noble leader."

"Certainly not," replied the monk; "he must be bound."

"Both must be bound," returned Casside, decidedly, giving David such a meaning look that it was impossible for him to repress a smile. "We will bind them both, and then return to the cavern and send up some of our companions to bring them in, when Herbault shall exercise his skill on Peter Vidal without delay."

"My calling," said father David, "is a most peaceful one, and it is my duty, at all times, to prevent, as much as possible, the effusion of human blood; otherwise, how could I have confidence to look a man in the face and say *pax vobiscum*. I see close at hand some strong cords, in the name of the virgin, let us use them!"

Immediately Albert and his companion seized upon the prostrate forms of Donhead and Vidal and bound them hand and foot. The captain, becoming quite conscious during this operation, gnashed his teeth with rage, and uttered all kind of threats upon his persecutors, heartily wishing our hero at the bottomless pit.

"I was a fool to trust you!" roared Mark. "You have done nothing but mischief since you have been among my men. You are a traitor, sir, and if I had my way, you should suffer a traitor's doom before the world was an hour older!"

"If a man smites thee on one cheek, turn to him the other also," said father David, with a nasal twang.

"Infernal hypocrite!" exclaimed Mark, foaming at the mouth; and there being nothing

else that he could do, vented his fury by knocking the back part of his head against the floor.

"You can now settle the subject of difficulty between yourselves, at your leisure; and I really hope, for the sake of example, in a more Christian method," resumed Albert.

Mark Donhead rolled up the whites of his eyes in a manner too expressive to be misunderstood, and indemnified himself for his utter impotency by beating his head more violently, and growling like a mad dog.

"*Dominus vobiscum!*" said the monk, as the parties were preparing to leave the cottage.

The captain ground his teeth, and kicked at Vidal with both feet.

"We will comfort your fair bride!" added Casside; and when he and the friar closed the door behind them, Mark was bellowing like an ox.

"And now," added Albert, when they were in the open air, "where is Isandra?"

"Fear not, she is safe. I knocked upon the window of her apartment, and she left the house after you entered. By this time she has found a protector. Come, let us hasten to the Silver Bell. The Lady Eveline and Louis must be set at liberty this night."

CHAPTER XX.

FATHER DAVID'S STORY.

ALBERT CASSIDE and father David proceeded at a rapid pace to the inn. Entering boldly, and without consulting Joachim Capet, they mounted the stairs, and gave a few gentle taps upon the door of the chamber, which communicated with the cavern by the concealed doors and secret passage; it was instantly opened by a middle-aged man, whom the reader will recognize as the same who had been robbed by our hero in Donhead Wood. Beside this personage, the room contained the young man who had been attacked by two ruffians at the inn yard, and the elderly-looking cavalier who had joined him on that occasion.

In an obscure corner of the apartment, Casside recognized Isandra. The individual who had opened the door, appeared to be much agitated, and paced the floor nervously, casting troubled glances at our hero.

"It will be well," said the monk, speaking in a low tone to the young man whose life Albert had saved, "to send some of your men-at-arms to the cottage of which I have spoken before, to secure the two persons whom they will

find there; one of them is Mark Donhead himself, and the other Peter Vidal. Donhead Wood will soon cease to be a terror to honest travellers. Since I conversed with your highness a few days ago, I have acted with promptness, and have been able to execute my plans more quickly than I had expected."

"It shall be speedily attended to," replied the person addressed. "I have a company of as trusty fellows as ever drew sword, concealed at no great distance from here."

Father David bowed, and then turning to the individual who had been robbed in the forest by Casside, added, pointing to the latter:

"This young man and myself will now attempt to procure the liberation of Lady Eveline; and should we be successful, such explanations will be made in regard to these complicated matters as shall make all persons present happier. My lord, you must not always judge by appearances, because such judgment is not always righteous. I think I understand the nature of the grief that is weighing upon you so heavily; and think I may say boldly, with-

out fear, that the assertion can be proved false, that your noble name has never been disgraced by those who bear it."

"Such words are useless," returned the nobleman, sorrowfully. "My griefs cannot be so easily assuaged. I know what you probably do not; I have knowledge of that which makes me wish myself in the tomb of my ancestors, mingling quietly with the dust of past generations. But enough of this painful theme; can I not accompany you whither you are now going, and share the danger, should there be any?"

"By no means, my lord! it is not to be thought of. Skill will serve us on this enterprise better than strength. Should we not return at the expiration of an hour, conclude that we have failed, and provide for your own safety and hers," pointing to Isandra.

While the monk was conversing with the two persons referred to, Albert found opportunity to whisper a few words to the fair shepherdess, and to encourage her in the best manner that he could. He then followed father David, who had proceeded to open the secret door which connected with the cavern, having first provided himself with a light. They passed hurriedly through the intervening apartments, and were soon in the subterranean labyrinth. They kept on without accident until they reached the cell which Albert had hitherto occupied.

"Enter here, and stop a few moments," said David, "when Strolling Willie will join you, and conduct you to the place where the Lady Eveline is held in captivity."

Casside did as he was directed, and after the lapse of ten minutes, the stroller made his appearance.

"I have come," he said, "to take the place of the monk. I know what is to be done, and we must be expeditious in our movements."

"As expeditious as you please," replied Albert. "Lead on." Without farther conversation, Wandering Willie threaded once more the intricacies of the way which had cost them so much anxiety and trouble on the previous night. They met no one in the passage, and in a little

while the door of Lady Eveline's prison was thrown open.

Casside ran forward and tenderly embraced the fair occupant, who manifested the utmost joy.

"Repress your emotions," said the stroller, "and prepare to depart instantly from this place."

Albert had observed that the beggar carried under his arm a small bundle, which he now unrolled. It proved to be a long, singular-looking garment, but not wholly unknown to the reader, who will recognize it as the same worn by Weird Elsie.

"Put this on," said the stroller, "as quickly as possible. It has done good service on several occasions, and I pray heaven that it may on this. You observe that it has a hood like a domino—pull it over your face. Now we are ready."

The parties issued from the cell, and after going a few yards, the mendicant stopped and unlocked another door; it was the chamber of justice where Louis Vidal had been conducted to await the pleasure of Mark Donhead. The youth was sitting in a disconsolate manner upon a heap of straw, where our hero had passed some uncomfortable hours himself.

The lad started up in great astonishment, but Willie laid his finger upon his lips, and signified by a gesture that he should follow them; which was a thing so agreeable to his own feelings, that he obeyed with wonderful alacrity. Observing the profoundest silence, and agitated by numberless fears, the parties glided like midnight spectres towards the Silver Bell.

So strong were the emotions of Lady Eveline, that she was several times in danger of becoming unconscious; but Albert supported her and whispered words of cheer. She trembled at the echo of every sound; the damp currents of air, sweeping from different passages, sounded to her like the wings of death, and chilled her blood until it seemed to be congealing within her veins. The horror with which the banditti had inspired her mind had nearly dethroned the powers of reason and self-consciousness; but

the comforting assurance of Albert strengthened her so that she was able to meet this emergency with sufficient fortitude to ensure its success.

They reached the cellar beneath the inn without discovery, and ascended to the apartment, where their appearance was awaited with the greatest anxiety, with feelings of joy natural to the importance of the achievement. Lady Eveline threw back the hood from her face, and the personage whom the monk had styled "my lord," caught her in his arms, exclaiming: "My daughter! my daughter!"

"Have you no kind words for Ethelbert?" asked Eveline, when she was sufficiently calm to speak.

"He has disgraced me!" replied the lord of Motcombe Manor, bitterly.

"Never!" cried the young man whom the reader has known as Albert Casside. "I can place my hand upon my heart, and boldly say before all men, and before him who is above all, that I have never yet disgraced my name or family."

"You once," rejoined the nobleman, "wore a domino, for some good reason, doubtless, but unfortunately the head-piece of the same slipped from your face; I will not be more explicit."

"Yes, he did wear a domino," said Strolling Willie, "and for the best of reasons; and when circumstances are fully explained, his conduct on that occasion will reflect the highest credit upon his courage and native goodness of heart. I pronounce your son an honorable man, and a courteous gentleman."

"And who are you?" asked the nobleman, sternly.

Strolling Willie instantly threw off his tattered garments, and straightening up his bent figure, stood before them all as father David.

"I have been called," he said, deliberately, "by several names since I first crossed the threshold of the Silver Bell; I have been known as Strolling Willie, as Weird Elsie, and as father David."

Isandra and Louis exchanged looks of mutual amazement, which was largely shared by our hero.

"It appears, then," said the latter, "that the same powerful instinct that guided the footsteps of Strolling Willie, has also governed the movements of father David?"

"And of Weird Elsie, also," added Louis, timidly.

"Allow me to inquire," resumed the Lord of Motcombe, "your reasons for joining the banditti, and assuming so many disguises?"

"Not for my own gratification," replied father David, "have I led such an eccentric life for the last few months. It has been my object to watch over innocence, and to unmask and bring designing villany to deserved punishment. The young maiden who has hitherto passed by the name of Isandra Vidal, and the lad who is called Louis, both now present, have been the particular objects of my guardianship."

"May I ask your real name?" inquired Lord Motcombe.

"Charles Cranston," replied the monk.

"You formerly owned an estate near Cranston Abbas," resumed Motcombe, "and was the friend and companion of Sir William Winborne, who had extensive possessions between the Stour and the Avon?"

"The same," returned father David. "The unfortunate Sir William Winborne was killed on the English border, in a sanguinary engagement with the Scots. I was with him at the time, and heard his last words. He charged me to be a friend and father to his only daughter, who was at that time nearly four years of age. I solemnly promised him to do all for the child that one human being could do for another. He pressed my hand, thanked me, and died. When, at length, my duties permitted me to leave the field, I sought the family residence of Sir William. I learned, to my sorrow, that his good lady was no more; that she had perished giving birth to a son. Great changes had taken place; the estates of my friend had passed into the hands of a distant relative; I was received with coldness, and it was soon evident to me that my movements were watched with distrust, and the interest which I took in the children gave anything but pleasure. Finding that I could

be of no service to those committed to my care, I again returned to my military duties, and was often engaged in the French and Scotch wars, winning what men please to term a brilliant reputation as an accomplished knight, and a bold soldier."

"My lord of Cranston, your exploits are well known to me and to others," said Motcombe, earnestly.

"I also have heard them spoken of," added the elder of the two cavaliers.

"Pardon me," added the monk; "I meant not to trumpet my own fame, but merely to give you to understand that in the various duties of my calling and station, I found cares enough to occupy most of my thoughts; but I did not entirely forget the promise which I had made to Lord Winborne. After the lapse of several years, I directed my footsteps once more towards the former home of my friend, anxious to know if I could be of any use to those who bore his name. Alas! the Winborne estates existed no longer, save in name; for the changes that had taken place during my last absence, had been more marked and melancholy than all former ones. The ancestral mansion, with its valuable belongings, had become the property of strangers, by purchase; and no traces of the children, or of the person who had succeeded Sir William, could be found. I could only learn that the estates had been sold, seven years before, by their (supposed) legal owner. It was in vain that I instituted inquiries; the whole was involved in mystery. But I am not a man to be easily discouraged; in my own mind I renewed my promise to look after the fortunes of the children of my early friend. Finally, by the greatest chance, I learned from a peasant that the young girl and the boy had last been seen with a former servant of the Winborne family. But this furnished me with poor data upon which to begin my researches into this mysterious

affair. However, I commenced the business in earnest, and visited various parts of the kingdom, leaving no means untried to ferret out the villain who had been false to his trust, and restore the injured heirs to the enjoyment of their own. Almost despairing of success, I came hither again, to look once more upon the scenes where I had spent my youthful days and received my first impressions.

"As fortune would have it, I stopped at the Silver Bell, in the disguise of a monk (for I had assumed various disguises). During my travels I had often heard of the daring deeds of Mark Donhead, and thought it a very singular thing that he had never been brought to justice. Well, to make my story as brief as possible, I saw enough, in a short time, to excite my suspicions in regard to the connection of this inn with the horde of banditti. I heard whisperings, and saw significant looks, which assured me that Joachim Capet was not an honest man. Being a man of the world, I made myself quite at home at the Silver Bell; drank with mine host, invited his friends to join, and praised his wine unsparingly. I soon made the acquaintance of one Denis Wetzel; a personage whose calling and principles were not clearly evident at first, but not destined to remain long in ambiguous shade. He commenced a series of skilful attacks to sound my honesty, and to ascertain whether I was one who loved ease and revelry better than honor and uprightness. I saw the bait, and knew well what kind of a hook it concealed; but appeared to bite at it like a greedy fish. I hardly need say to this fair company that Denis Wetzel was no other than Mark Donhead, the notorious bandit. To serve my king and my country, I won his entire confidence, and enrolled myself among his followers. I was strongly impelled to this step; and presently had no reason to regret that I obeyed the impulse."

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION.

THE monk continued: "One day, I saw the captain conversing with a man whose appearance struck me as resembling, in many respects, the servant with whom the children of Sir William had last been seen. When I was alone with Donhead, he told me that the person's name was Peter Vidal; and that he had a daughter of uncommon beauty, to whom he (the captain) was about to be wedded. This information excited my curiosity, for I was still hoping that some fortunate chance would divulge the secret of the disappearance of those whom I had promised to protect, should they ever need a protector. Full of these feelings, I visited Vidal's cottage, and when I beheld the sweet face of yonder maiden, I could scarcely doubt that I had found the daughter of Sir William."

The monk, as he spoke, pointed to Isandra, and immediately all eyes were turned in that direction.

"The damsel certainly bears a striking resemblance in features, to Sir William Winborne!" exclaimed the Lord of Motcombe. "This is indeed a strangely interesting narrative."

The relation of the monk had been listened to by Casside (as we prefer to call him) and Isandra and Louis with absorbing interest; and when the last announcement was made concerning the fair shepherdess, our hero could not repress an exclamation of joyful surprise.

"Before proceeding," added the monk, "I will call the attention of this gentle company to yonder lad, who, though not dressed in the garments legitimately belonging to his sex, will still, by his features, give additional weight to the statements I have already made."

Poor Louis blushed like a bashful girl, and shrank from the earnest glances that were instantly fastened upon him. Lord Motcombe looked attentively at Louis, and affirmed that "all those persons familiar with the features of Lord Winborne would not be at a loss to discover a strong resemblance upon the face of the youth;" who doubtless at that moment vividly recalled the prediction of Weird Elsie concerning the boots and spurs.

"Weird Elsie," resumed father David, with a smile, addressing Louis, "promised you the spurs of knighthood; and I will stake an hun-

dred florins that the prophecy will prove no falsehood. But to go on with my story: Upon questioning Isandra in regard to her early life, I found that she had but little knowledge of it; for children of four years soon forget the transactions of so early a period of their existence. She remembered, only, that many years ago she had lived somewhere else; but all the particulars of the manner of living, etc., were almost entirely obliterated; she retained no knowledge of any other mother than the wife of Peter Vidal, whom she had always considered as such, until the time of her death, which event occurred some four years ago; since which time the care of Louis and the domestic affairs had devolved solely upon her. I exerted all my powers to gain the confidence of Vidal, and succeeded beyond my expectations. One night, when deep in his cups, he confessed to me that Isandra and Louis were not his children; and that he received a yearly stipend for their maintenance.

"They are sprung," said he, "from a noble house, whose ancestral glory has departed forever. They are the children of Sir William Winborne."

"He died, possessed, I believe, of considerable wealth," I remarked, carelessly.

"He did," replied Vidal, "and the bulk of it is now in possession of Stephen Landsmere, a distant relative on my lord's side, who would have been the legal heir, providing the latter had died childless."

"These assertions," he added, "are not mere fabrications of my own; I have papers at the cottage to prove all I say."

"And did you manage to procure those important documents?" asked Lord Motcombe, eagerly.

"I did," replied the monk, "and here they are; I confide them to the care of his highness, that he may examine them when it shall be his pleasure to do so."

Father David (Lord Cranston) produced from beneath his domino a bundle of papers, and with a low bow, placed them in the hands of the distinguished-looking youth, who had given

Casside the ring. At the word "highness," Albert started in astonishment, as he had done on the previous occasion when that term had been employed.

"Do not be surprised, my Lord Ethelbert," said the personage referred to, addressing himself to our hero. "I am called Edward, and in a few days, God willing, shall be crowned king of England."

With glowing cheek and beating heart, Albert hastened to throw himself at Prince Edward's feet—that distinguished personage who was to be afterwards known as Edward III., and whose renown as a sovereign was destined to spread far and wide.

"Arise, sir!" said the prince, graciously. "I have not forgotten the important service which you rendered me so recently. It shall be mine to look into this affair which concerns so intimately yonder blushing maiden and the youth beside her, and to restore them to the position which they should justly occupy. I am glad that it will shortly be in my power to advance their fortunes and yours. The individual upon whom your eyes are now fastened, is my uncle—the Earl of Kent."

Albert tendered his respects to the latter in a manner becoming his rank, and according to the custom of the times.

"By the way," added Prince Edward, musingly, "as soon as our coronation has taken place, we must mete out full and complete justice to Sir Hugh Spencer and his reprobate son; the latter having seen fit, in addition to his other crimes, to join himself to this notorious horde of banditti, and to cause to be carried away a daughter of my Lord of Motcombe—one of our most faithful friends and subjects. My worthy Sir Charles," he continued, turning kindly to the monk, "be good enough to proceed with your tale."

"Shortly after making the important discovery already related," resumed Cranston, "while I was devising means to restore Isandra and Louis to their rights, and to bring Donhead and his fellows to speedy justice, in the disguise of Strolling Willie, I first met this

young gentleman, who, at that time, pleased to call himself Albert Casside. Now it so happened that I had heard, that very day, of the unfortunate difficulty that had occurred in the family of Lord Motcombe, and also its cause. Being on intimate terms with both Isandra and Louis, in the character of a monk, I had learned from the latter that a young man of distinguished bearing, though clad in the manner in which you now see Ethelbert, had often had stolen interviews with his sister; and he had every reason to believe that a strong friendship had sprung up between them. This information interested me exceedingly, as may be supposed; inasmuch as it had a direct bearing upon the happiness of one whom I considered my *protege*.

"I requested Louis to describe the young man as minutely as possible, and he did so. The moment I saw Casside (for it must be recollected that I was blind only when I chose to be) at the Silver Bell, I recognized the subject of the lad's description. Schooled as I was in the ways of the world, I needed no second glance to tell me that he was not what his garb denoted. I was confirmed in this opinion when I noticed more particularly the value and workmanship of the sword which hung at his side; for it certainly was not in keeping with his russet coat. His moody and dejected looks showed me, at once, that he was laboring under some heavy disappointment; and this fact, added to the circumstances already mentioned, gave me an instantaneous clue to his real name and character.

"The conviction that next followed was equally natural; for, if the young Lord of Motcombe had loved imprudently, Isandra, of all others, was most likely to be the object of his affections; for, begging the damsel's pardon, she was exceedingly fair to look upon."

"Excuse the interruption," said Lord Motcombe, "but I would ask if you were known to Joachim Capet, or any of the banditti, in that disguise?"

"I was not," answered Cranston. "As Strolling Willie and Weird Elsie, no one shared my secret, and I have the consciousness of feel-

ing that I have accomplished some good in these characters. Mark Donhead, struck with your fine athletic figure," continued the monk, addressing our hero, "was anxious to enroll you among his men; and with that object in view, planned the taking of your purse, with Joachim Capet, in order to compel you to some decisive step. I frustrated the scheme in a manner already known to you; but on the following day you were robbed in the forest, without my knowledge. Having learned more perfectly the designs of Mark in relation to Isandra, upon mature reflection, I changed my views somewhat, and resolved to advise you to accept of his proposals; in order that you might be able to assist in baffling his intentions, so that sufficient time might be gained for the men-at-arms to arrive which his highness had already sent for."

"I am curious to know in what manner you learned the fact that any of the king's men had been sent for?" said the Earl of Kent.

"You shall be gratified; Joachim Capet listened at your chamber door, and heard you speaking to that effect."

"Ah, the scoundrel!" added the earl, with a smile.

"I am anxious to hear about this affair of Sir Hugh Spencer and the Lady Eveline," said the prince.

"Godfrey Ridenger, or more properly, Sir Hugh Spencer, planned and executed that villainous enterprise without my knowledge; and even Mark Donhead had little to say, or do, in the matter. Had I but had any intimation of what was intended, the transaction would never have reached a successful termination, and the Lady Eveline had been spared a most unpleasant experience. And now I believe I have explained about all that needs explanation; as I have already put the prince in possession of some of the principal facts."

"You have not alluded to the robbery of my Lord of Motcombe?" said the Earl of Kent.

"The object of that robbery was to prevent a real robbery by other hands, in which the life of his lordship might have been endangered;

also to enable Casside, as he was called, to win more perfectly the confidence of the bandit captain. The bag of useless metals which was taken from you, has played quite an important part in the transactions of this eventful night. By my means, it was made to take the place of the five hundred florins which Mark had promised Peter Vidal in payment for his perfidy."

"My good Lord of Motcombe," said Prince Edward, turning to that nobleman, who was in the act of embracing our hero, "I hope you will accord it as a favor, to one so soon to be your acknowledged sovereign, the liberty of joining the hands of two persons, whose hearts have long since been united. Lady Isandra, of Winborne—your hand—Ethelbert, give me yours—there—may you be as happy as wealth, rank, love, and contentment, can make you."

While the prince was thus speaking, the reader will understand that he joined the hands of our hero and heroine, while the Lord of Motcombe and his fair daughter Eveline, and in fact all present, looked on with approving smiles.

"And Louis," continued the prince, turning to that astonished youth, "you shall some day receive the accolade from our own hand; so that the prophecy of Weird Elsie shall in no wise fail."

"This is indeed to me a most happy night; this morning I felt myself childless; now I have three children. Blessed be the memory of my patron saint!" exclaimed Motcombe, with much emotion.

"There is one favor which I will venture to ask of your highness?" said Albert, hesitatingly.

"Speak boldly," rejoined the prince. "You have a talisman to secure our favor."

"You have already cancelled a thousand times the slight obligation which you were good enough to believe you were under to me, by bestowing upon me the lovely being at my side; but the boon which I now crave concerns that brave but misguided man, Mark Donhead; I ask that his life may be spared."

Edward frowned, hesitated a moment, and walked impatiently across the room.

"Your highness, I join in Ethelbert's petition," added Lord Cranston.

The prince paused before our hero, and said, slowly:

"I had determined to show the bandit chief no mercy; but, inasmuch as you affirm that he is a brave man, I will exercise clemency on one condition: it is, that he join the royal army and wipe out, by deeds of valor, his past offences; I will do more; I will extend the same condition to as many of his men as will accept of them. And now, gentle lords and fair ladies, there is no good reason why we should tarry longer at the Silver Bell. Let us mount and away to Motcombe Manor, where we shall no doubt find this famous Mark Donhead and Peter Vidal, not very much pleased I dare say, with this unexpected change in their affairs."

The prince ceased speaking, and descended to the door, followed by the whole party. Joachim Capet stood upon the threshold, and stared at them with inexpressible astonishment. The Earl of Kent produced a small silver call and blew upon it; presently a company of knights and squires galloped up to the inn. Mine host was instantly arrested, to his unspeakable dismay, and the Silver Bell was in possession of the king's men, who had already received their instructions in relation to the secret passage and other matters concerning the banditti.

"They are now," said Lord Cranston, alias father David, "earthed like foxes; for a strong guard has already been set at the entrance of the cavern, so that all ingress and egress is completely cut off. My plans are successful—I am content."

"And I," returned Casside, "am more than content—I am happy."

What remains to be said, can be comprised in a few words. Mark Donhead, finding that no alternative remained, and being tired, as he affirmed, of his former courses, accepted without hesitation the conditions offered. His men, finding that their secret haunt was discovered, and that there was no way of escape, concluded to follow the example of their leader, and to seek under his command more honorable dis-

tion. Sir Hugh Spencer and his son were shortly after executed for numerous crimes.

Joachim Capet, after being imprisoned a while, joined a company of cross-bowmen, and, it is said, conducted himself very well on several occasions.

The claims of Isandra and Louis were fully established; and after his coronation, Edward the third caused their estates to be restored, and Stephen Landsmere to be punished as his villany deserved.

In due time our hero and heroine were united; and the occasion was celebrated in a manner becoming their rank; the young king himself honoring the bridal with his presence. Lady Eveline eventually became the wife of a distinguished nobleman.

The Silver Bell passed into honest hands; and the heir of Motcombe Manor and his lovely bride never mention it without peculiar emotions; it having been the scene of so many strange

events bearing directly upon their present and future happiness.

Lord Cranston, at the earnest solicitation of all parties concerned, took up his residence at Motcombe Manor, where he was greatly esteemed, especially by Isandra and Louis, who entertained for him much of the affection which they would have felt for a father. The prediction of Weird Elsie proved sooth in all respects, and some years after Louis received the accolade from the hand of his sovereign.

Peter Vidal was banished the kingdom on pain of death; consequently was never seen in those parts again.

Thus, gentle reader, have all parties been rewarded and punished according to their goodness or badness; and the great moral lesson inculcated, that honesty, in all the transactions of life, is the wisest and best policy; a truth which will no doubt be remembered by all those who may read the tale of THE SILVER BELL.

THE END.