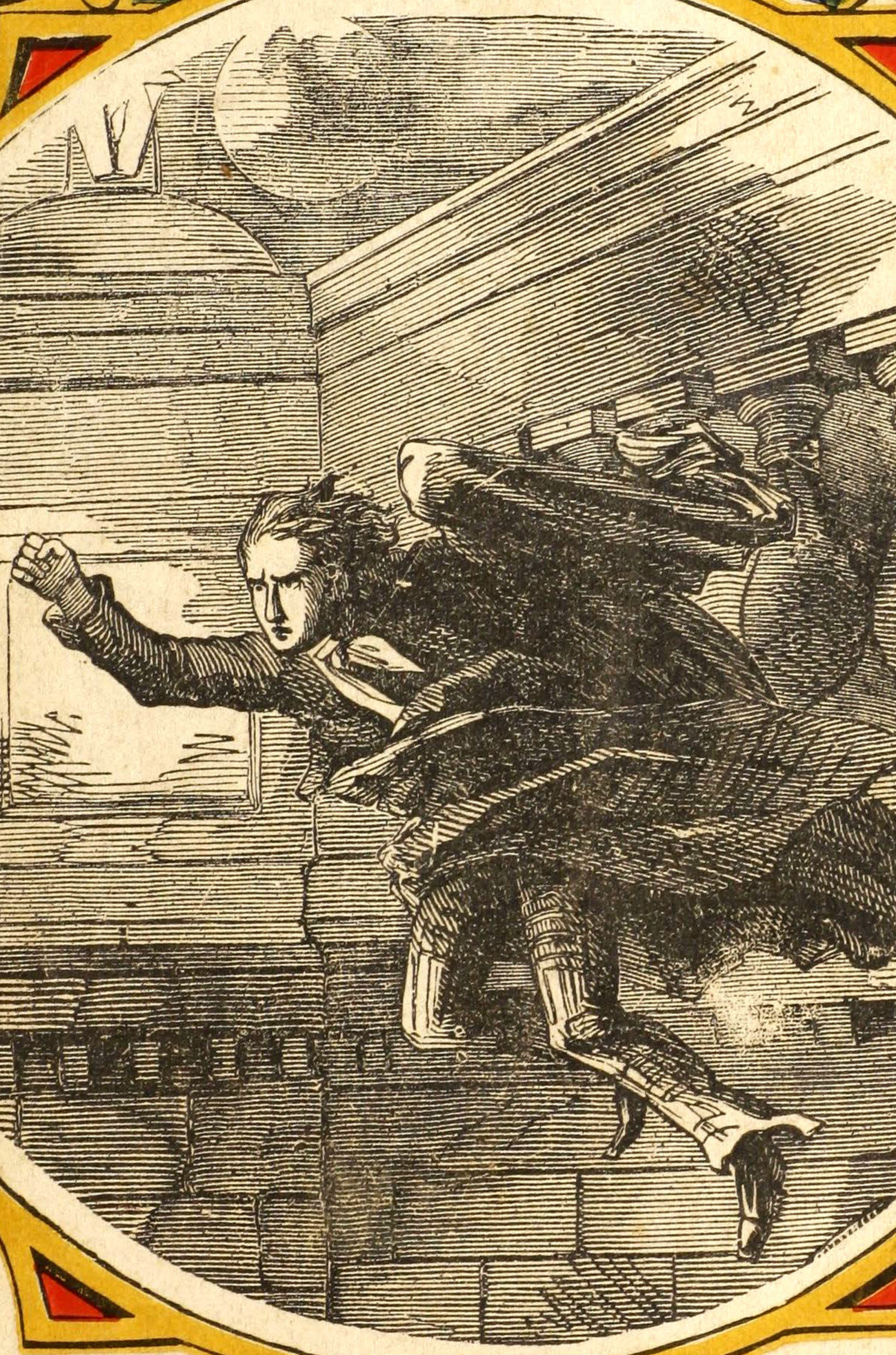
PETERSONS' "ILLUMINATED" STORIES.

CAPTAIN BLOOD AND THE BEAGLES

OR, THE

HIGHWAYMAN'S LEAP FOR LIFE.



BY FRANK HUDSON.

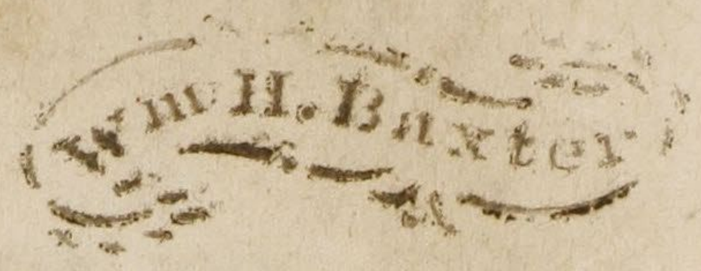
PHILADELPHIA:
T. B. PETERSON & BROTHERS,
306 CHESTNUT STREET.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

BY HENRY HUDSON

CAPTAIN BLOOD AND THE BEAGLES;

OR THE



HIGHWAYMAN'S LEAP FOR LIFE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"CAPTAIN BLOOD, THE HIGHWAYMAN; AND THE HANGMAN'S DAUGHTER,' "THE HIGHWAYMAN'S AVENGER; OR, THE ESCAPE OF SIXTEEN-STRINGED JACK," "SIXTEEN-STRINGED JACK'S FIGHT FOR LIFE; OR, THE HIGHWAYMAN OF HAMPSTEAD HEATH," ETC.

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"STRUNG JACK," "SIXTEEN-STRING JACK'S FLIGHT FOR LIFE;
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CAPTAIN BLOOD

AND THE BEAGLES;

OR,

THE HIGHWAYMAN'S LEAP FOR LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

CLAUDE ALTERS HIS COSTUME.—AN ADVENTURE IN ST. JAMES'S PARK.—THE BILLET.—CLAUDE DUVAL DOES A SERVICE TO THE FAIR LADY ANGELA BELLAIR.—THE CHALLENGE.—THE VISIT TO NORTHUMBERLAND HOUSE.

There were two knights of the English highways who were objects of the officers' pursuits, and of fear to money-laden travelers on the roads around London. One, Claude Duval, was well enough known. The other, called Captain Blood by his associates, had suddenly joined Duval once, and it was believed that the latter knew nothing of his early history.

Claude, in his youth, had eloped from his birth-place in France with a girl named Floridor. The vessel they were in was wrecked on the English coast, and, while Claude was senseless on the shore to which he had taken the fainted girl, a nobleman, a fellow-passenger, removed the girl to safety and contrived to make her believe he was her real deliverer from the sea.

Claude turned highwayman and, never hearing of Floridor, presumed her to be dead. In one of his adventures, he had been captured and condemned to death, but, on his way to the leafless Tree of Tyburn, a band of Alsatians and men from Southwark, formed by Captain Blood, rescued him. The main witness against Duval had been the Earl of Eglintoun, the nobleman before mentioned, and he had forsworn himself to kill off Claude whom he feared to be a dangerous rival in Floridor's love. Duval and Blood stopped the earl's coach, and the former endeavored to remove the girl who recognized him. But the earl threatened to kill her before Claude should have her. Some countrymen had been alarmed by the postillion, and Claude had to ride off, with his comrade, whom the earl had shot. They eluded their pursuers, turning their horses into a field belonging to a friendly innkeeper.

While in the neighborhood of a house where lived Swing, hangman to the City, Duval left Blood in a thicket to go for a surgeon. In his absence, Frances, the old hangman's daughter, was in danger from a viper which the Captain killed. But this act burst the latter's wound afresh, and he swooned. The girl had him removed to her house. Meanwhile, Claude finding his friend gone, went to London and there became a kind of high-class pickpocket just by way of amusement, "working" with a pal named Munch. In the disguise of an elderly clergyman he had taken rooms of a barber.

He had taken a diamond star from a thief and, not getting a fair price for it from fence-keepers, he determined to sell it to its owner, no less a person than the Duke of Cumberland.

"Sir," said Claude, as he put his head in at the door of the barber's shop on his route along the private passage—"Sir, a friend of mine, of the name of Dormer, will call for me. I may be out. Will you kindly let him step up to my rooms and wait for me?"

"Certainly, sir—certainly! Dormer—Mr. Dormer?"

"Captain Dormer."

"Oh, a military man?"

"Just so.'

"It shall be seen to—it shall be seen to, reverend sir. If there is one thing more than another I pride myself upon, it is my attention to my lodgers. To them I am never out of curl, and to their visitors I am soft as a powder puff."

"Thank you."

Claude Duval went quietly and serenely into St. James's Street. At the top of it stood several empty sedan-chairs waiting for hire.

Beckoning to one of them, Claude got in, and said, in mild tones, "Bellamy's, the army tailor's."

"Yes, your honor."

About the middle of St. James's Street was the establishment that Duval had mentioned, and in a couple of minutes the sedan stopped at the door.

Claude alighted—he walked into the shop with a smile upon his face—he beckoned to the first person he saw in rather a mysterious manner, and getting into him into a corner, he said:

"Captain Dormer!—a scrape—forced to leave my uniform, and get out of the stupid alderman's house in these clothes! On duty soon at the Palace.—Do you think you can fit me out completely, eh?"

"I—a—eh? Well—a—"

"For ready money?"

"Certainly, Captain."

"I thought so."

"About thirty-five guineas!"

"There they are."

"Oh, sir! to you of course we would say nothing about the account; but if you prefer, Captain, to pay ready money, as we have not yet had the honor of your name on our books—"

"I do. Be quick! I have a call to make on his Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland."

In twenty minutes, Duval emerged from Bellamy's, the army tailor's, in the full dress of an officer of the Guard.

That full dress was very different from what modern notions prescribe it to be.

Fancy a coat only fastened at the top, and spreading open over the vest—the coat scarlet, with heavy embroidery—the vest a pale, straw-colored kerseymere; white kid smallclothes, and pale pink silk stockings; an elaborate frill to the front of the vest—ruffles at the wrist; a gorget—a gold or silver-gilt moon-shaped ornament that was worn by officers of the Guard round the neck and resting on the breast; a sword with a gold tassel—shoes with sparkling paste buckles;—such was the costume of the officer of the period.

A cocked hat completed it—a hat something of the shape of those with which much later, the dandies used to parade the Opera-pit, called "Fop's Alley."

The chairmen stared at Claude, looking so distinguished and so handsome as he did, with his natural hair hanging in dancing curls upon his shoulders.

He was about to step into the sedan, but they both ducked and pulled the front of their hats, and one of them said:

"Your honor, we are engaged."

"Oh, I have settled that with the gentleman who hired you—a reverend old gentleman?"

"Yes, your honor."

"All's right! To the Duke of Cumberland's house, by the Green Park."

"Yes, your honor."

"Quick, you rascals!"

The chairmen set off at a trot.

It was past midday.

The chairmen took the route through the Park.

Duval leant back in the chair, with his accurately gloved left hand on the hilt of his sword.

The other tapped gently the window-ledge of the sedan to the measure of a popular tune.

The air was fresh and balmy, the old elms in the Park rustled with a pleasant sound; a broad bright gleam of golden sunshine was upon the mall; and from the shady walks beneath the trees, and from the sunny mall itself, there came the sounds of light laughter, of sparkling young, fresh voices; and there was the glitter of rich costumes, and the odor of perfumes, for it was the bright tide of fashion in the Park, which was then the regular promenade, of youth, beauty, foppery, and fashion.

There the faded dowager or woman of ton came to dream away an hour in the hope that she was still attractive.

There the young hoyden, the miss in her teens, with many an anxious flutter of the heart, came to see, and to be seen.

There, too, the "pretty fellows," the men upon town, came to ogle, to sigh, to fawn, and to flatter.

The aged beau tottered like some dilapidated fly in September in the bright sunshine, and all was gay, smiling and false.

Nothing was more unlikely than the recognition of Claude by any one dangerous to his safety; but he drew down the little faded silk blind of the sedan-chair, so that he could only peep beneath it at that fluttering gaudy scene through which he was passing.

Was Duval thinking of the road, and night-stoppings; fighting with officers? Was he thinking of wounded Captain Blood? of Floridor?

Perhaps not.

Duval was not given to reflection—action was his existence; and, soon, too, he became absorbed in the pleasant observation of a little comedy which he saw enacting in one of the side-walks of the mall, which, although he might expect to find taking place about that period, yet was something of chance to light upon.

Walking very slowly, with the train of her dress looped up, and making but little effort to assume a steadiness of gait which had long since forsaken her, he saw an old Dowager, the Countess of Thrales.

A young gentleman was apparently paying assiduous attention to the old Dowager, but his arm was extended behind her back, and between his finger and thumb he held a small billet, upon which the eyes of another person were fixed.

That other personage was a young beauty, the Lady Angela Bellair, aged sixteen, and just coming out.

Keeping just a few paces behind her grandmother, and accompanied by her governess, whose eyes were everywhere but upon her charge, this young girl, with her hands clasped, and her eyes eagerly fixed upon the extended arm of the gentleman with the billet, seemed momentarily to be upon the point of springing through the air to catch it.

It was a pretty enough comedy.

Claude saw it all at a glance.

Perhaps he hardly knew what he meant to do, but it was at the impulse of the moment that he called to the bearers of his chair to stop.

At that moment a most superlatively-dressed personage, with a swagger of first-class impudence, observed what was going on in respect to the gentleman and his young *inamorata*, and stepping forward, took the billet from the hand of the gentleman, without his being at all conscious that it had passed into the possession of any one but the fair young idol of his heart.

The superlatively-dressed, pretentious-looking personage who executed this feat evidently intended it to be the event of the morning—the talk of the coffee-houses, and the little present scandal of the hour.

He held the billet high above his head, and with an affected lisp he called out:

"Damon writes to Phillis, and the soft impeachment falls into the hands of——"

"The proper person!" said Duval, who at that moment had alighted from his chair, and twitching the note from

the hands of its impertinent interceptor, he, with a courtly bow, dropped it upon the bosom of Lady Angela.

The young beauty uttered a shriek.

The superlatively-dressed personage blundered out an oath.

The gentleman turned round with his hand upon his sword.

"Angela! Angela!"

"Oh, Charles!"

"Gracious heavens! what has happened, Colonel Maynard?" cried the old Countess of Thrales.

The whole party looked transfixed for a moment; and then it was from sheer inexperience, and intense anxiety, and inability to hold her tongue, that the Lady Angela spoke, with her eyes fixed upon those of Colonel Maynard."

"Some one took the—the——"

"Ah!"

It occurred to Maynard on the moment that the billet had been taken from his fingers in rather a masculine fashion, and he cast a frowning glance upon Claude Duval.

The superlatively-dressed person who had hoped to be the interpreter of so excellent a jest, probably thought affairs were getting serious; for if ever the words "no joke" showed out of the countenance of human being, they did from that of Colonel Maynard at that moment; and therefore he as rapidly disappeared amid the throng of gay promenaders, as was at all consistent with a movement that could not be exactly called running away.

When Claude rose from the low bow he made to Angela, the eyes of Colonel Maynard were fixed fiercely upon him.

"What is it? What is it, my child?" said the Countess of Thrales.

"Nothing, grandmamma. Only that gentleman—that is, I mean this gentleman——That's all, grandmamma!"

Colonel Maynard surveyed Duval from head to foot; and then, fully possessed with the idea that he must have had the impertinence to twitch the note from his fingers, he strode up to him, and said, through his set teeth."

"I don't know you, sir!"

"Glad to hear it!" said Duval.

"But you wear a uniform——"

"My dear sir, you wouldn't have me come before so many ladies without one?"

"You are impertinent, sir!"

"I always was."

"We shall meet again, sir, and the sooner the better. My name is Maynard, sir—Maynard. Do you hear, sir?—Maynard!"

"It's a foxy sort of name; I'd change it!"

"What do you mean, sir? Foxy?"

"Exactly. You said Reynard, didn't you?—Reynard, the fox, eh? You know all that sort of thing?"

"Zounds, sir! you shall hear from me! Your card, sir—your card!"

"Let my name suffice: Captain Dormer. Inquire for me at Hatchard's Coffee House."

"Enough—enough! I've the honor, sir, to bid you good day."

Duval stepped into his chair again; but Colonel Maynard was red and furious, for he just intercepted a glance which passed from the eyes of Claude to those of Angela, and was darted back by those fairest orbs in the world with an expression that set the heart of the Colonel on the rack.

Claude smiled.

"A pretty creature," he said to himself; "but she's in love with the Colonel, and not with me; and all she meant to tell me by that look was that she would explain everything to him, and that he should not be allowed to carry out a quarrel with one who had done her a service instead of being guilty of an impertinence. However, business is business. I wonder what's in this?"

Claude had adroitly picked the pocket of the pretentious, superlatively-dressed personage at the same moment that he had twitched the Colonel's note from between his fingers.

"Ah! nothing worth having. Some tavern bills, a couple of guineas, two dice, and a lock of hair. Is there a name here? Ah!—Major Noblet! A major of his own creation, I should fancy!"

Claude put the couple of guineas and the dice in his waistcoat pocket.

The pocket-book, with the remainder of its contents, he flung out of the window of the sedan-chair.

"Here we are, your honor," cried one of the chair-men.

"At the Duke of Cumberland's?"

"Yes, your honor."

"Wait."

Claude alighted, and entered the duke's house.

It was a fashion, at that period, at the great, grand houses of the royal family and of the nobility to have always open doors.

The owners were none the more accessible on that account, for the halls were crowded with domestics, and any unauthorized intruder would be challenged in a moment.

The uniform and the distinguished appearance of Duval procured him immediate entrance and an obsequious attention.

A gentleman of the chambers, in plain clothes, bowed twice before he ventured, in silvery accents, to ask his pleasure.

"Is his Royal Highness up?"

"Yes, sir; but he has not left his dressing-room."

"Will you kindly say that a gentleman has called, who has the means of restoring to him a diamond star, of which the notorious highwayman, Colonel Jack, is said to have robbed his Highness on the Bath Road."

"Sir, you will be most welcome! His Royal Highness is furious—that is to say, as furious as—as a Royal Highness can be. He has dismissed his valet, who is now going into one fit of hysterics after another in the housekeeper's room. Indeed, sir, we shall be all infinitely obliged if his Royal Highness's feelings can be in any way mollified in regard to the loss of that diamond star."

"I have it in my pocket."

"Good gracious! Might I humbly ask——"

"Oh, yes—where I got it, you mean? The last person who had it was a young lady to whom this Colonel Jack was tenderly attached. She handed it to me; and I bring it to the duke."

"Ah, sir, I see—I see! You gentlemen of the sword make such havoc with the women! A red coat, sir—nothing like a red coat! But I will venture to intrude upon the privacy of his Royal Highness on such an errand as this—for otherwise, sir, believe me, I would as soon go into the den of a lion."

"I wait the result of your mission."

"Nay, sir, if you please, follow me, for I've not the slightest doubt that his Royal Highness will rave until he sees you. You—you—there is no mistake, sir—you really—it is the—a——"

"The real diamond star of the duke's? Oh, yes! here it is."

"It is indeed! it is indeed! His Highness has already offered two hundred guineas reward, which I suppose, sir, a gentleman like you will not take?"

"I shall not ask his Royal Highness for a farthing. I would not have undertaken an action like this unless I had thought it would bring with it its own reward."

"Better and better, sir. His Highness will be delighted to see you."

"Hem!" thought Claude.

Claude followed the gentleman of the chambers up a grand staircase, and through a bewildering suite of rooms, until they reached a large apartment, in which was set a magnificent breakfast service.

"His Highness is still in his dressing-room, but I will venture to——"

Tap! tap! tap!

Something between a growl and a shout, but no articulate sound, came from the adjoining apartment upon the tap of the gentleman of the chambers.

His Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland was not the most amiable of created beings.

"Your Royal Highness," cried the groom of the chambers, placing his lips to the keyhole of the door, "your Royal Highness, an officer has brought the di-a-mond star! The di-a-mond—"

The door was dashed open, the groom of the chambers fell on his back; and, looking hot, red, and

angry, the Duke of Cumberland appeared at the threshold, with a hair-brush in one hand and a pomade-box in the other.

"Give him the reward, and let him —Oh, I thought you said an officer—a Bow Street officer; but it's—it's a gentleman!"

Claude bowed gracefully.

"It was my duty to wait upon your Royal Highness so soon as I could have the satisfaction of presenting to you the diamond star of which you were lately robbed."

"And being in the hands of a gentleman," put in the groom of the chambers, "the two hundred guineas reward are not required."

The duke's countenance assumed a mild and munificent air.

"Really, sir, really," he said, "you place me under a—a great obligation!"

"I hope to have the honor of explaining to your Royal Highness in what manner that obligation can be repaid."

The duke's countenance fell.

There was something suspicious about the word "repaid."

But after taking another glance at Duval, and running his eyes over the faultless uniform he wore, he said:

"Step in here, sir, into my dressing-room, and we can speak about it."

"Strictly in private?" said Claude.

"Oh, of course! Begone!—begone!"

The gentleman of the chambers backed himself out of the breakfast room, and the Duke of Cumberland preceded the highwayman into an exceedingly luxurious and well-appointed dressing-room, in which burnt a bright sea-coal fire, against which the duke set his back, and then puffing out his cheeks in a manner incidental to him, he growled out:

"Well, sir? You see, sir, I was robbed of that star under my very eyes, sir, by the most atrocious de—de—de—de——Well, I won't swear, sir! but by the most impudent rascal I ever saw, sir! And then those idiots, the officers, sent word here they had caught him, sir; and my valet went down to the—what do you call the place?—St. James's Round-house—and came back again like a fool, to say that the fellow had given them the slip, and I might whistle—if I could whistle, but I can't—for my diamond star, sir! But I discharged him at once; and that's how, sir, you see me waiting on myself, sir, this morning, sir!"

The duke having finished this communication, rubbed the pomade box furiously on his head, and then flung it and the brush to the other end of the room.

"I don't wonder," said Duval, "that your Royal Highness feels aggrieved!"

"Aggrieved, sir—aggrieved! Of course, I am aggrieved. The robbery was effected with every addition of aggravation that could possibly be associated with it. The rascal professed to be delighted to see me—and asked after the royal family."

"A most impudent thing!"

"Villanous, sir!"

"Atrocious!"

"Scandalous! But you have the star, sir?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Ah! It is, indeed! Ha, ha! I could almost laugh now! The fellow was ingenious. He robbed several other folks; and particularly that old sinner, Queensberry. It's enough to —ha, ha!—make one laugh! The fellow's impudence was sublime. Oh, yes, it's my star; and, really, sir, I feel under the greatest obligation; and if, at any time, I can be of any service, and—and it won't be too much trouble, or—or, if my treacherous memory does not forget you, it will give me the sincerest pleasure to a—to a—— Good morning, sir—good morning!"

"One moment, your Royal Highness."

"Eh?"

"It would be but a natural curiosity, if your Royal Highness were to wish to know how I became possessed of this beautiful jewel."

"Oh, ah! Well, I suppose you took it from the vagabond?"

"I shouldn't like—excuse me, I will close the door, and we shall have no listeners—I should not like to call

your Royal Highness a vagabond!"

"What?"

"Because you see——"

"What?"

"I am Claude Duval!"

The duke, first of all, made a deliberate attempt to sit on the fire, in the fancy that a chair must surely be behind him; then, turning twice round, as though he were at the commencement of a game of blind man's buff, he sank upon a couch and glared at his visitor.

Duval drew a chair and sat down opposite to him.

"Yes, your Royal Highness, I am Claude Duval!"

The duke opened his mouth twice, but no sound came from it.

Duval crossed one leg over the other, and, lightly smoothing his moustache with his finger and thumb, he added:

"Oh, yes—yes! there's no mistake about that! I'm Claude Duval!"

"And—and," gasped the duke, "you have actually ventured——"

"Oh, yes; I've actually ventured——"

"To come here——"

"Yes; to come here!"

"To me!"

"To your Royal Highness; but," added Duval rising and speaking in a clear, though highly modulated, voice —"but, in doing so, I relied upon the honor and the generosity of a prince of the blood royal of England not to take upon himself the office of a parish constable, or a Bow Street runner; but to let one who came to him as a gentleman, on the errand of a gentleman, leave him again in peace and in safety. Am I wrong, your Royal Highness?"

"You're the most impudent——"

"Nay, your Royal Highness; that is beneath you!"

"The most a—a—astonishing——"

"Hush, your Highness—hush! We will neither abuse nor compliment each other! Business — business! Here is the star! It's a beauty! I don't know what the dealers in these kind of things, who carry them to the Continent, pick out the jewels, and bring them back as some other glittering fantasy, would have given me for it: but of one thing I felt quite sure; and that is, that your Royal Highness would be by far the best customer I could have; and, therefore, I leave it to your royal generosity to *buy* this diamond star back of me, at such a price as may become a prince to pay, and Claude Duval to receive."

The Duke changed his tone and manner.

"Sir," said he, "this becomes a mere matter of business. I gave, I believe, for I have forgotten the exact sum—quite a hundred pounds for that star."

He rose and went to a drawer.

"I am sorry to say, sir, that here are only sixty pounds in notes and gold."

"Sir, your munificence is quite royal," said Duval, bowing, and pocketing the money without looking at it.

"Good morning, sir," and the Duke bowed in a way to intimate that the audience was at an end, "I trust you will meet with no inconvenience from your visit here."

"In return, let me inform your highness," said Duval, stepping towards the door, "that he will never again be stopped on the highways of the West of England. Allow me to wish you a good day."

The door closed upon him.

Duval reached his lodging in safety.

CHAPTER II.

DUVAL BECOMES A "DISBANDED OFFICER," AND PLAYS HIS OWN "FRIEND."

Claude Duval, the next morning, was curious to ascertain if Colonel Maynard had sent any fire-eating friend to Hatchard's Coffee-house after him; and taking his way down St. James's Street, even at the hazard of meeting the colonel himself in that locality, he entered the well-known tavern.

"My name is Dormer. Has a gentleman asked for Captain Dormer?"

"Yes, sir, and left this card."

"Thank you—thank you."

The highwayman strolled quietly

out of the tavern, and glanced at the card.

"Major O'Millighin, Orderly Room, Horse Guards."

"Confound Major O'Millighin!" said Claude. "I suppose I shall know no peace now till I have measured swords with Colonel Maynard. Let me think —let me think!"

He went into the Park, through the Palace.

He sat down on one of the wooden benches, beneath an overspreading elm.

"If I do fight this colonel," mused he, "I may be wounded, like my friend the Captain—by the bye, I wonder where the deuce he is—or, I may possibly end my career on the green turf of Hyde Park. No, no, I must live for my friend and my love, for Floridor, for Captain Blood. I'll fight this colonel. If I slightly touch him, and he thinks I have done the magnanimous and spared him, he will be my friend for life; and such a friend as Colonel Maynard may, some day or another, stand me in good stead! Yet it is all a mistake his challenging me at all; for he thinks it was I who snatched the little billet from his hand in the Park here, when it was that rascal who ran off, only leaving me the spoils of the field in the shape of a beggarly couple of guineas, some dice, and a worthless pocket-book."

"True as steel!" said a voice.

Duval sprang to his feet; and there emerged from behind the bench and the tree a grotesque-looking figure, in a suit of terribly-faded finery, and who made a bow to Duval.

"True as steel! You said you would be here; and here you are! One can always trust to a real, great gentleman, like you!"

"Munch!" exclaimed Duval.

He at once recognised, in the individual who thus addressed him, Munch, the pickpocket, who had so materially assisted him to escape from St. James's Round-house.

And in the faded and decidedly the worse for wear, and some adventures that Munch had been in, he likewise recognized his own suit of clothes which he had exchanged with him in the cell.

"Why, Munch, it is really you!"

"It is, Captain! Ah! it was a proud moment for me when I was put in a cell with such a gentleman as Claude Duval!"

"Well, Munch, I owe you some money."

"Don't mind it, Captain!"

"Oh, but I do! Look here, Munch. Take this snuff-box, and see what yon can do with it."

"A sparkler!"

"They are diamonds. I will wait here for you. Be as quick as you can. I daresay you know where to get our sort of value in ready money for this as well, if not better than I do!"

"Not better! But I will be back in half an hour. It's only as far as St. Martin's lane."

"Good! Be off!"

Munch started off directly.

Duval as he looked after him, suddenly exclaimed.

"Ah! I have an idea—an inspiration! I will fight with Captain Maynard; and Munch shall go to the duel as my second! Why not? Ha, ha! I shall have some sport, and save my honor."

Munch came back within the half-hour he had mentioned; and he executed a series of low bows to Duval as he approached him along the Mall, which made some chance passengers and some nursery-maids with children think that he (Duval) must be some great personage indeed.

"Fifty!" said Munch, when he was close to the highwayman.

"That's all?"

"Every spangle of them! Old Stevernbooke would not give a stiver more."

"Ah! you went to the Dutchman, at the corner of the court?"

"I did, Captain, and there's the money."

"Take half."

Munch rapidly counted the gold, and handed to Duval, tied up in a piece of old linen, one-half the amount, which Duval put into his pocket

without condescending to take a look at it.

"Now, Munch, I want you."

"Yes, yes! I'm quite delighted to hear it."

"I was sure you would be! Just stand behind the bench, and you will not be so much observed. You can listen to me better likewise, and reply more at leisure, while I shall be able to see up and down the mall if any uncomfortable person approaches."

"Yes, sir, here I am, quite at your service; and I'm sure it's an honor for a poor prig like me to be talking in St. James's Park with great Claude Duval. You're a great man, Duval, and are, and will be, all the rage!"

Claude smiled.

"You are partial, Munch. But, however, that's not the question. It has become necessary that I should fight a duel with a colonel in the army."

"Munch whistled.

"You think that a little out of the way."

"Well, I do, sir; but if you think it is all right, why, then, of course it is!"

"That's right, Munch. If you are to be of use to me, that is the spirit in which you are to look at all I do and listen to all I say."

"That's the ticket," said Munch.—"It's a real honor to a poor fellow like me. Just say what you want done, and it's as good as over."

"In the first place, Munch, call me Captain Dormer; that name of Duval has too much of the smack of barkers and heavy purses on the road in dark nights not to be unpleasant here."

"All right, Captain."

"Then, Munch, I must fight a duel, and I intend you to be my second."

"Go it! What a honor for poor Munch! I suppose the seconds don't come off second best—do they, Captain?"

"You will have nothing to do but stand by and take a pinch of snuff, while you see Colonel Maynard of the Guards and myself, in the politest possible manner, try to pick a hole in each other's coats."

"No, really?"

"But perhaps I'm wrong there, Munch, for we shall probably take off our coats."

"I'll take care of them, then, Captain, for there may be something in his pockets."

Claude laughed.

"I see, Munch, you have an eye to business. It's a fortunate thing for you and me that we are much of a height and much of a thickness, for you will have a part to play, in which you will look as like me as possible. I have arranged and combined everything in my own mind, within the last five minutes. The duel will come off this evening, either one half-hour before sunset, or to-morrow morning early. I prefer the evening; it's a cold-blooded affair, getting up before your usual time, and going out to fight. So now understand me, Munch, once for all. You are to be leaning against the post at the corner of Albemarle Street, in Piccadilly, at five o'clock to-day."

"I'm as good as there, Captain.—If I am alive, I will be there; and if I am dead, you'll see my ghost there to a certainty."

Claude rose from the bench, and, waving his hand carelessly, he made his way in a quiet, unobtrusive manner, from the Park by the Spring Gardens entrance.

Duval felt rather uneasy in his costume of Captain in the Guards.

It exposed him to observation—it exposed him to suspicion, and to the possibility of being accosted by some officer, who, by virtue of the uniform, might consider himself companionable and whom it might be difficult to shake off.

Claude, therefore, quickened his steps, and made his way to the classical neighborhood of Covent Garden, which then, as now, abounded in those shops which are ready, at five minutes' notice to supply costumes from that of an ancient Roman to a modern dandy.

Duval's experience had been quite sufficient to enable him to know what to ask for, and how to ask for it; and

in half an hour he had a well-selected assortment of what in theatrical slang are called "properties," at his disposal.

Claude called the "dresser" to him.

"I want to go out," said he, "dressed like a middle-aged officer of that Hanoverian Legion which has lately been disbanded in Germany, and of which there are a good many specimens, in no very flourishing condition, about London at present."

"Ah! this old wig is just the thing! You've nothlng else to alter but the coat and waistcoat, to well powder my moustache with this grey ash, establish a line or two in my face, and stoop a little, and behold I represent, as accurately as possible, Captain Sanderson Millar—a Scotch adventurer of the Hanoverian Legion."

The dresser could not help giving a shout of laughter at the broad Scotch accent in which Claude uttered these last words.

The fact was, he fully intended to go as his own friend to the orderly room of the Horse Guards, with Major O'Millighin's card in his hand, to arrange the preliminaries of the duel.

But those once settled he fully intended that Munch should appear on the ground in the same costume that he (Duval) then wore to personate the old Hanoverian Captain.

It was but a change of parts.

Munch was not at all likely to play the old Scotch veteran so well as Duval; but Major O'Millighin would scarcely be able to doubt his identity when similarly attired—being, as he was, about the same height and size.

Claude was an accomplished actor.

His walk down St. James's Street was a sight to see.

The slightly tremulous movement of his legs—the apparent gratification and perking up of the whole body when he found he had secured a firm step—the stoop of the shoulders—the careworn rigid look of the face, with the lips turned inwards, thin and pulpless—all conspired to make up the most vivid picture of a man who had fought a hard fight with the world for at least fifty years, and who, if he were to speak candidly, could scarcely have said if he had come off best in the conflict or not.

A rather severe trial awaited the highwayman before he got to the bottom of St. James's Street.

He saw Colonel Maynard advancing arm-in-arm with another officer.

There was a look of fiery indignation upon the Colonel's face.

But the highwayman was determined to test his disguise; and feigniug not to be sufficiently agile to be able to get out of the Colonel's way sufficiently quickly, he allowed Maynard to strike against him, and apparently to twist him round on the pavement.

The colonel paused instantly.

"A thousand pardons, sir! Pray excuse me—it was my carelessness. I was talking to my friend here upon a subject which touched my honor, and scarcely saw whither I was going."

Duval drew himself up tremulously and lifted his hat an inch as he replied.

"Sir, the fault was mine! I'm no' that active as in time past; and never getting out of the way of a bullet, I sometimes stand in that of a friend."

Maynard bowed and passed on.

"Good!" said Duval; "he don't know me from Adam! And now for Major O'Millighin! I believe there's nothing in the world aggravates an Irishman so much as being called upon and advised with upon an affair of honor by a Scotchman."

Claude quickened his pace a little, but by no means sufficient to destroy the identity of his character; and entering the Park of Marlborough House he proceeded in a direct line across it to the Horse Guards.

On the route he had further proofs of the accuracy of his personation, for the disbanded officers of the Hanoverian Legion were at that time in bad odor.

They were, in fact, pensioners on the English War Office; and a great outcry was made that the King was quartering his German Legionaries upon the public purse of England.

Duval had the gratification, there-

fore, as he crossed the Park, of hearing himself called "Blood-sucker," "Hanoverian rat," and various other uncomplimentary expressions which the pensioned officers of the disbanded Legion were apt to be treated with by the exceedingly candid English mob.

But he pursued his way, entirely unsuspected of being what he really was; and reaching the Horse Guards, he inquired for Major O'Millighin, at the same time tendering the card which had been left at the Thatched House to a sergeant off duty, who, Duval thought, looked at it rather ruefully.

"If you please, sir," said the sergeant, "I'd rather not have anything to do with it."

"What for, my friend?"

"The Major's a mad maniac, if you please, sir."

"I presume, sergeant, that if he be mad he is likewise a maniac. But pray enlighten me further. I came here to see Major O'Millighin on business of some moment."

"If you please, sir, the Major has been in his own room since twelve o'clock yesterday, and it's now a a quarter to twelve to-day. I fancy, sir, it's some affair of honor among the officers, for I've heard when such is going on, whoever's to be one of the seconds is forced to wait four-and-twenty hours for a reply."

The highwayman smiled slightly, and by thinking back a little he comprehended exactly the state of mind into which he had put Major O'Millighin.

"I thank you, sergeant—I thank you. But I must see the Major, for all that."

"This way then, sir. I will venture to take in your card, for it happens to be a matter of duty, since I am this month orderly room clerk; but if the Major gets more than my arm and the tip of my nose in at the door, I'm a Dutchman."

"I've no card, my friend," said Claude, "but I will write on the Major's own bit of pasteboard here my name."

"Here is a pencil, sir, if that will answer the purpose."

"Brawley — brawley, my man. Captain Sanderson Millar, of the Hanoverian Legion, has no need to be ashamed of his name, whether written in pencil, in ink, or in blood, amid the lurid light of battle!"

Duval in a tremulous hand, wrote upon the Major's card.

"Captain Sanderson Millar, Hanoverian Legion, with compliments to——"

Here followed the Major's own name in print, after which Claude wrote—

"On behalf of his friend, Captain Dormer."

"That will do, sergeant," he said; "it is what the Major is waiting for."

"I guessed as much, sir. Please to follow me."

The sergeant led the way down a narrow passage, at the end of which was a door, beyond which again it might well be surmised some wild animal was confined, for a yell came from it that was scarcely human.

A something was flung against the inner panel with nearly sufficient force to break through it.

"A wooden one! a wooden one!" roared a voice in unmistakable Hibernian accents. "Bedad, then, the poker's gone through this again!"

"There he goes, sir!" said the sergeant. "You'd hardly make out until I told you, sir, what he meant; but the major's been drinking burnt brandy, sir, for the last few hours; and the way he makes it is to stir the spirit itself with a red-hot poker. He's had all the wooden tankards we could bring him; and I suppose, now, sir, he's pushed the red-hot poker through one of the canteen mugs."

"Ah!" said the disguised highwayman, as he took out an old, well-worn snuff-box, made of horn, value about twopence, from which he regaled himself with a pinch of genuine Scotch snuff. "Ah! the Major's a violent man; but we'll soon tame him, sergeant—we'll soon tame him!"

"If you do, sir, it's more than anybody else can; and I hope your honor

will consider me if I get a broken pate for knocking at the door!"

"Certainly, sergeant, certainly. I shall make ye a present—a present of a—a——"

"Yes, your honor."

"A pinch of snuff!"

The sergeant made a wry face.

Duval's young ears caught his muttered words as he said something about "that being like a Scotch officer all over!"

But the sergeant was a humane man, and wished not only to keep out of mischief himself, but to do a good turn to others; so before he knocked at the Major's door, he said:

"Stoop! sir, stoop! He has his pistols with him, and is as likely to send a shot through the panel as not."

Major O'Millighin did not send a bullet through the panel of his room door.

Perhaps, after all, the Major, as is the wont of some of these fire-eating, noisy people, had a sort of discretion at the bottom of it all, which kept him out of any very great danger.

But the voice of the Major was like a gong.

The oaths rumbled along the narrow passage like echoes of some distant storm.

"Ye will oblige me, sergeant," said Claude, "by knocking again."

"Very well, sir."

The sergeant knocked this time with more confidence, and the Major roared out:

"What now? What now? Tired of life, eh? Is this world a dirty little planet? By the soul of the O'Millighins, I'll make mincemeat of somebody!"

Duval began to have a suspicion that the Major was a bully.

If a bully, cowardice was sure to be at the bottom of it.

"Sergeant," he said, "I will not trouble you any more. I'll just walk in."

The sergeant went right about face in a moment, and Duval flung the Major's room door wide open and stepped across the threshold.

"Fiends and fury!" yelled the Major. "Has it come to this? Taken by storm! The entrenchments forced? Blood and thunder!"

"Silence, sir!" cried Claude in a voice an octave higher than the Major's. "How dare you receive an officer and a gentleman in this fashion?"

"How—dare—I?"

"Yes, sir; how dare you? Dare is the word, sir!"

The Major was astounded.

"And—a—who—who are you, sir? —who, body of me! who are you?"

"There, sir!"

Claude laid the card which he had taken from the sergeant again before the Major, who, after glancing at it, put on an air of good-humored *bonhommie* as he said:

"True, sir—true for me! I rejoice that, in a moment of vexation, I did not sacrifice you. Bedad, sir, by this and by that, the O'Millighins oftener kill their man than wait to find out it's all a mistake."

"Stuff, sir!"

"Eh?"

"Rubbish, sir! The O'Millighins can do as they please, but the Sanderson Millars are never taken at unawares by bluster and fury!"

"Zounds, sir!"

"Ay, ay! there was hard swearing in Flanders, but it's rather out of place here, Major. You see what I came about: but as ye have taken offence at the way I have come, why you and I, Major, can settle our little difference at the same time and place that the arrangement comes off between the Colonel and Captain Dormer."

"Sir?"

"With all pleasure in life. Permit me, Major. It will save some trouble."

The Major did not look at all delighted as Duval drew his sword, and advancing, took that of the Major from its sheath, and placed the blades close together.

"Ay, ay! I see, Major, that your sword has the advantage of a good twa inches; but I can afford to give more than that—I can vera weel afford to give more than three. I gave double that to the Lieutenant-Colonel of the Black Cuirassiers, poor man. They buried him on the march, for the

Russians, ten thousand strong, were harrassing our rear."

The Major turned pale, all but the point of his nose, which had acquired a rubicund tint that no emotions of the mind could dispel.

"And—and you mean to say, sir, that the—a—Lieutenant-Colonel of the Black Cuirassiers was—a—killed!"

"Ay, ay! It was necessary; and you ken, Major, the poet says, 'A necessary act incurs no blame;' so nobody can say anything to me to-morrow morn when I leave you on the daisies in Hyde Park."

"My dear Captain! My dear sir! It's all a botheration and a blunder. Don't mention it—I don't want satisfaction; for by this and by that, how can I want it, when I am more than satisfied already? The blood of the O'Millighins easily boils, but it easily cools. Captain, I am your most obedient; and, from this moment, swear to you eternal friendship."

The Major, or The O'Millighin, as he delighted in being called, would fain have embraced the highwayman, but the latter got abruptly out of the way.

"Weel, weel, Major! if that's the song ye sing now, we need say no more about it."

"My dear Captain, I am delighted to see you."

"Weel, then, about this little affair. Ye are the friend of Colonel Maynard?"

"Fire and fury! Brimstone and bombshells! Yes—yes!"

"I'll just trouble ye, Major, to answer in a rational manner."

"What, sir?"

"Or I shall tak' offence mysel'; and when I do, I am never quite satisfied till I see my man's eyes through the glint of his sword-blade!"

The Major replied with the meekness of a sucking lamb.

"By this and by that, sir! I'll say or do anything in the wide world to please you; for if there is an officer whom I respect upon earth, it is Captain—"

The Major glanced at the card and added—

"Captain Sanderson Millar, of the Hanoverian Legion."

"Weel, Major, then that's all as it should be; and I name Hyde Park this evening at seven o'clock."

"This evening, Captain?"

"Yes, Major."

"But would not the morning be more usual? It is so very seldom that these affairs come off in the evening."

"Captain Dormer has an engagement at half-past eight this evening, sir, and he will be kept late, so that he may find it an indulgence to be in bed in the morning."

"Very well, Captain, I defer to you."

"It is well, Major. I have now the honor of saying good day to you.—We shall meet in the Ring in the Park at seven o'clock to the minute.—Allow me!"

Duval again placed the two sword-blades together..

"Yes, I was right—it is just two inches!"

"But, my dear Captain, I—a—thought we had satisfactorily arranged any little difference!"

"Weel—weel, that's all as it may be! But you might change your mind, you know; and if you do, just tell me when we get to the ground, and there will be no more harm done. There's a time for all things; and nobody can say that Captain Sanderson Millar, of the Hanoverian Legion, was above accommodating a gentleman with ten inches of cold steel, at the shortest possible notice!"

The Major made a wry face.

"I have the honor, Major, to wish you a braw good-day!"

The Major was painfully assiduous in his attentions to Duval, as the latter left the Horse Guards; and he watched him for some distance over the Park with any thing but amiable eyes.

"The old ruffian! By this and by that, an' he'd make me fight whether I would or not! I'll find out the Colonel, and it shall never be said that Thaddy O'Millighin got into a fight, with ten inches of cowld steel before

his eyes, when he could keep out of it."

"That's a fine specimen," said Duval to himself, "of the genus Bully—class Irish Major."

Taking his way slanting across the parade of the Horse Guards, kept up the gait and character of the old disbanded officer to the life; and, finally, reaching the Mall, he paused to look about him.

It was half past twelve o'clock.

The Mall was full of life and animation, for that hour, at the period of which we write, was almost equivalent to our half-past four, when the high tide of fashion begins to overflow.

St. James's Park, however, is no longer the favourite lounge: the bleak, open waste of Hyde Park, with its sparse vegetation, has usurped the dominion of the old Mall, with its stately elm trees.

That Mall along which the second Charles delighted to make his way with his witty, profligate Court at his heels, and his pretty spaniels gambolling on before.

But on this occasion, when Duval paused, and leant against one of the old trees, the Mall was in full riot and confusion.

A throng of sedan-chairs filled up the side walks, and the benches were crowded with ladies, while the beaux, over the wooden backs of the seats, whispered soft welcome nonsense to tingling ears.

Duval was about to pass on towards the entrance by Marlborough House, when his eyes fell upon a couple who were apparently very much absorbed with each other, although they did not look equally well pleased.

They were no other than Colonel Maynard and the fair Lady Angela Bellair.

The Colonel was talking vehemently.

Angela was picking a feather fan to pieces, and as the wind, such as it was, set in that direction, the pieces of flossy feather stuck to the Colonel's coat, and began to make him look a little grotesque.

He was too much absorbed, however, in what he was saying to notice this effect.

"Now would I give something," said the highwayman to himself, "to hear what is passing between those two."

To wish a thing, with Claude, was but a prelude to an attempt to bring it about; and therefore, in full reliance of his disguise, he made his way through a throng of persons after Colonel Maynard and Angela.

They abruptly turned from the Mall into one of the side alleys.

Claude did so likewise, for he fancied they were about to turn.

There were a couple of elm trees growing so close together that the space between them would scarcely have permitted any but a very slender person to pass through, and against one of those trees was placed one of the Park benches, which, for a wonder had no occupants.

The highwayman hid behind the other tree to that against which the bench was placed and by cleverly shifting his position as the Colonel and Angela advanced, he managed to keep out of the line of their vision.

Good fortune befriended him.

They both came directly towards the two trees.

Angela's voice in pettish accents, came full upon the sharp ears of Claude.

"Well, sir, since I am not a soldier nor a running footman, perhaps you will permit me to rest."

"A thousand pardons," said the Colonel. "Here is a vacant seat: and oh, Angela! while you give yourself some rest, let me hope you will bestow some on me!"

"La!"

"Angela—Angela, do not answer me in that fashion, I pray you. Shall I leave you?"

"Why?"

"I will tell you why. Since—that puppy—that——"

"Heyday! What puppy?"

"That man, who calls himself Captain Dormer, has had the effrontery to intrude himself upon your notice, you

have not been the same Angela to me! I have suspicions that he is an impostor—perhaps some mere adventurer—perhaps something worse; for no one seems to know of an officer, past or present, of that name. I am well aware that the army system is so corrupt, that commissions are given to men who would not know the corps they are said to belong to if they saw it; and therefore it is just possible that this Captain Dormer may be what he represents himself to be. But, oh! Angela, Angela! what is he to you?"

"To me?"

"Yes; that is the question. Tell me that you do not look upon him with eyes of favor, or my jealous heart will break!"

"And so you really love me, Charles, as much as all that?"

"I do—I do! Until another—Until I seem to see the shadow of another creeping in between us, I never knew, in good truth, how much I loved you!"

"Very well."

"You say, very well!"

"Of course I do! Do you want me to say 'very ill?' Don't be foolish, now; but come to the masquerade to-night, at the Opera House; for I have persuaded grandma to sit in her own box, and let me mingle with the gay and pleasant scene!"

"I thought these masquerades were going out of fashion, Angela, among our class?"

"Perhaps they are; but until they do, I will consider them dear, delightful things! So mind you come. I shall wear a domino of amber satin, with a scarlet bow on the right shoulder."

"Dear, dear Angela!"

"Now, don't!"

Colonel Maynard gave his arm to Angela, and was on the point of leaving the shade of the trees and conducting her to the centre Mall, when Major O'Millighin darted out of the crowd, exclaiming, "Oh thin! by this and by that, Colonel, and it's yoursilf I've found, at last!"

"Hush!"

"He has sent a friend."

"Hush, Major; are you mad?"

"Madam, a thousand pardons! Mars bows to Venus! Ten thousand pardons, madam; I—I——"

"I will be with you in half an hour, sir!" said Colonel Maynard, with an asperity of manner which made Claude Duval suspect that he knew the real character of the fire-eating Major.

O'Millighin stepped aside; and the Colonel and Angela passed on to the Mall, where, under the trees, in her chair, was the Countess of Thrales, who probably never before had been so little observant of what became of her lively and beautiful young granddaughter and ward.

Duval emerged from his place of concealment.

He took in his hand that old horn snuff box, from which he had promised a pinch to the sergeant at the Horse Guards; and stooping a little lower, and walking a little more shakingly, he made his way, with scarcely a passing glance from any one among the gay throng of promenaders in the Mall.

"If I don't go to that masquerade to-night, and have something to say to the fair domino in the amber satin, with the scarlet bow on the right shoulder my name is not Duval!"

CHAPTER III.

CHANGE OF CHARACTER.—THE DUEL.—THE IRISH MAJOR'S SURPRISE.—— DUVAL'S PREPARATION TO GO TO THE MASQUERADE.

The afternoon was speeding away; and Claude Duval who now and then consulted one of the several watches he had at that time in his possession, saw that it was nearly time for him to meet Munch at the "post," where he had told him to be in waiting for him.

The highwayman still retained the costume of the old Hanoverian officer, because he particularly wished Munch to see him in it, in order that he

might be aware of how to comport himself when he had it on.

It was quite a gratification to Claude to find that his disguise was so good as even to impose upon Munch himself.

The pickpocket was leaning against the post that Duval had indicated to him in a very pensive attitude.

But he gave quite a leap into the air as Duval whispered in his ear,

"Young man; I would thank you to give me back that handkerchief you took from me this day week!"

Another moment, and Munch would have run off, but the highwayman caught him by the arm.

"Don't you know me, Munch?"

"Oh, lor'! it's the Captain!"

"To be sure it is! You are a pretty fellow to be of use to me, and not to know me in any possible disguise!"

"Oh, Captain!"

"Come!"

"If ever there was in all the world a right down real great man, it's you, Captain! Oh, that's fine!"

"What is?"

"That toddle!"

"That what?"

"The way you does the old fogey sort of way o' getting along, Captain!"

"You allude to my walk, Munch. Of course I studied it."

"Walk, Captain Duval! You don't call that a walk! It's for all the world like a lame duck in a farmyard!"

"Let it be what it may, Munch, I will trouble you not to call me Duval again. Are you mad to use such a name in the open streets?"

"I won't again, Captain—I won't again. But you did give me a bit of a fright, and no mistake, when you pretended to ask for that handkerchief, and said it was a week ago! Bless you, Captain, I've had a dozen or two since then; but I thought I was in for it, and no mistake, and that you were some blessed old codger that wasn't half such a fool as he looked!"

"I was willing to try if you would recognise me. But now, Munch, come on! No more words. Yet stay a moment! Keep a few paces behind me, and look at me well, and remember that, for the present, my name is Captain Sanderson Millar!"

"Good!" said Munch. "I'll be after you, Captain, in half a minute!"

"What's the matter?"

"There's an old gentleman on the other side of the way, with a silk fogle in one pocket and a snuff-box in the other. It will be flying in the face of Providence, Captain, not to take them."

"Be quick!"

"Quick's the word, Captain!"

Munch crossed over the way, and passed the old gentleman.

He seemed to do so without the slightest slackening of his pace, but as he so passed him he secured the handkerchief, which seemed to rush from the old gentleman's pocket into his hand as if it were a living thing.

Then Munch turned and faced the victim, as he said:

"Please, sir, is this Pall Mall?"

"No—no! Get along—get along! Don't know! Never speak to anybody in the street! Get along!—get along!"

The old gentleman walked on, but Munch had the snuff-box.

Picking pockets was a science; perhaps it is one still.

Munch had seen by the shape of one pocket that it contained a silk handkerchief; and a peculiar action of the other skirt had convinced him that there was to be found a snuff-box.

Duval amused himself by looking in at a shop window, while Munch was thus professionally engaged.

"All right, Captain; got 'em both!"

"Then study me well, for you'll have to put on this suit of clothes this afternoon, and look as like me as possible."

"I'll do it. I don't say I can come the old fogey business quite so well as you, Captain; but a fellow can but do his best, and that I'll do."

Duval certainly could not expect Munch to have the tact which experience had given him, but he felt pretty

well satisfied that the personation would be sufficient to answer all purposes.

Munch was still in that suit of clothes which he had exchanged with Duval in the cell of St. James's Round house; although, as we have before hinted, they had suffered considerably while in his possession, for Mr. Munch was in the habit of sleeping off his day's fatigues in the Red Ken of Southwark, where everything was certainly not in the neatest and nicest possible condition.

"Come along."

Duval led Munch into his own dressing-room.

"Sit down," said Claude. "Put on this suit as I take it off, and let me make your face."

"Make my face, Captain?"

"Yes: sit down. Keep still."

Munch sat like a martyr while Claude made those few artistic alterations to his countenance, which his experience had taught him how to set about; and then, when Munch was fairly attired in the costume of the old Hanoverian Captain, and stood up for Duval to look at him, Claude was well enough pleased to see that the transformation was tolerably complete.

"That will do!" he said. "All that you will have to be careful of will be not to show any activity—never to stand quite upright—but rather at times to overdo than underact the manners and gait of an old man.

"I'll do it, Captain! I suppose it's some lay that'll bring us a pretty good heap of swag?"

"Not at all."

"What, Captain?"

"It's nothing of the sort. I'm going to fight a duel with Captain Charles Maynard, of his Majesty's Guards; and you, Captain Sanderson Millar, late of the Hanoverian Legion—an old Scotch veteran officer—are to be my second; the Colonel's friend being Major O'Millighin—a fire-eater, a bully, and a coward."

"Stop a bit, Captain," said Munch; "let a fellow take that all in. I'm to fight a duel with Major O'Maynard and you're agoin' to bully Captain Sanderson——No, hang it, that's not it! I'm Colonel O'Miller, and you're Captain O——No, hang it, that's not it either!"

"Munch, you are a fool!"

"Am I, Captain? Just you set me in a crowd at the box entrance at Drury Lane, and see if I'm a fool or not!"

"Pho! pho! that's not the question."

"I takes all I can grab, and axes no questions."

"Listen now. You are to be Captain Sanderson Millar, late of the Hanoverian Legion—do you understand that?"

"All right, Captain!"

"I am Captain Dormer."

"Good again!"

"And I am going to fight a duel with Colonel Maynard."

"That's it!"

"Whose second will be Major O'Millighin. Now, do you comprehend it?"

"Of course I do. But it's a rum go, and if there's no swag to be had, I don't see much what's the use of fighting duels."

"Nor I either, Munch. But this happens to be a necessity that I cannot avoid, and it must be carried out. You see I treat you like a friend, because the first service I ask of you is one that will return you no profit. And now, come along; you see I am equipped, and it is nearly half-past six o'clock. This little affair is to come off at seven, in the Ring at Hide Park."

There came a knock at the door.

It was the barber's house-maid with some chocolate, the highwayman had ordered.

"The chocolate, I see," said the highwayman, "is ready; we will take a cup, and then be off, for I have a night's work before me—as I intend going to the masquerade at the Opera House after this little affair is over."

He and Munch left the house, and it could not be said that there was anything on the mind of Claude of a grave or serious character in connexion with the duel

Such encounters were very common then, when every gentleman wore a sword, under the pretence of being in some costume or another, military or official—for the weapon had gone completely out of use, certainly in ordinary civil costumes, properly so called.

The full-dress of the period, however, comprised the long glittering, skewer-shaped small sword, in the use of which no one who pretended at all to the conduct of a gentleman could be otherwise than, to a certain extent, an adept.

These duels were seldom absolutely bloodless, but they were as seldom dangerous.

The quarrel was generally about nothing.

A word, a look, a shrug of the shoulders—an accidental push in the crush-room of the Opera—the suspicion of "making eyes" at somebody else's intended.

Anything was sufficient to enable two gentlemen to turn out and measure swords.

The first light wound finished the affair; it was the talk of the taverns and coffee-houses for the next four-and-twenty hours, and then forgotten.

Of course, there were occasionally fierce and dangerous encounters upon matters which stirred men's evil passions, and which nothing but death would seem qualified to allay.

But these occasions were rare, and made a noise.

It was not at all probable that the little affair of honor between Claude Duval and Colonel Maynard would assume such proportions.

The Colonel fought from rivalry and vexation, and in mistake; for he still thought that it was Duval who had twitched the billet out of the fingers in the Park, which he had intended for the Lady Angela Bellair.

And as far as the highwayman was concerned, he only fought because he felt that if he did not he would scarcely be able again to show himself in the society in which he hoped to figure; and, therefore, that all his schemes, both of love and of plunder, in that direction would necessarily fall to the ground.

"Munch," said Duval as he and his associate entered the enclosure of Hide Park—"Munch, can you fight?"

"Not with an iron skewer," said Munch, indicating his sword. "Don't you think the end of it is apt to get into folks' eyes?"

"Not if folks look sharp to keep it out. But there is only one thing I've got to tell you as regards this Major O'Millighin, with whom you will have to settle matters—and that is that if he begins to speak loud, do you pitch your tones a little louder, and he will become as calm as a dove."

"I'll do it. But what do you mean by settle with him? I'll settle him off quick enough if he's got anything in his pockets."

"That, you may depend, he will not have, except it may be a tavern bill. But what you will have to settle with him are the terms of the duel."

"My eye! What's that?"

"You needn't know or care It would take too long to explain to you. Just let him have everything his own way with the exception of making me face the sunset which, for the next half-hour I fancy, will be rather bright and strong."

"Never you fear, Captain; I'll be down upon him."

"Hush! there they are! Say as little as possible—do as little as possible—and keep yourself quiet."

That sunset on which Claude Duval was to fight his duel was very beautiful. The trees in the Park looked as if they had been plated with some rich, glowing bronze, and the grass as if it had been powdered with gold-dust.

Long shadows swept over that portion of the Park which went by the name of the "Ring," and where so many duels were fought.

Claude and the sham Captain of the Hanoverian Legion, as they approached Colonel Maynard and his second, cast shadows behind them of at least fifty feet in length.

"Now, Munch, be careful," whispered Duval; "and don't make any allusion to the profession."

"I won't."

Colonel Maynard at sight of the highwayman started forward a pace or two, as though he had something to say; but then he seemed suddenly to recollect that it was contrary to all rule for him to do so, and he stepped back again and bowed.

Claude returned the bow with a finish and a courtly grace that made the Colonel bite his lips, as he muttered to himself:

"Confound the fellow! he must be a gentleman, or he never could be able to bow like that."

Major O'Millighin stepped forward, and as Duval gave Munch an admonitory kind of push that he was to go on and meet the Major, Munch did so.

The Major looked curiously at him.

There was a sufficient difference between the Captain Sanderson Millar of the morning and the Captain Sanderson Millar of the evening to attract the Major's attention and excite his surprise.

And yet, substantially, it seemed to be the same individual.

The two principals stood far apart, and Major O'Millighin, after a bow, spoke.

"It's a mighty convanient place this same, sir, for a little gintlemanly amusement."

"True for you," replied Munch, in a rich brogue, "true for you, and the divil a bit ov a lie."

Major O'Millighin nearly fell down.

In the morning, the Hanoverian officer spoke broad Scotch, and now he was Irish to the backbone.

The mistake was on the part of Munch.

Fully impressed with the idea that Claude had told him he was to be Scotch or Irish, he forgot which, and when the Major addressed him in Milesian accents, it seemed to him that that must be what was required; and Munch, who had heard plenty of Irish, but very little, if any, Scotch, imitated the accents and the brogue to the life.

"Thunder and blazes, sir!" said the Major, raising his voice, "what do you mane, sir?"

Now, Munch, when he heard the Major begin to speak loud, was mindful of the instruction of Duval that he was to speak louder, so he roared out:

"An' what is it you are after maning, if it comes to that, the likes o' me would fain know?"

"Tipperary, an' no mistake!" said the Major in a lower key.

"What, sir?"

"No offence, sir!"

"Very good, sir!"

"But this morning it was Scotch you spoke, sir."

"What's that to you, sir, if I choose to spake Frinch, sir, or High Dutch, sir, or German text, I'd like to know sir?"

"Oh, bedad, nothing!"

"Thin don't mention it."

The Major made an impatient gesture; and after turning completely round, in order that he might relieve his mind of a brace of oaths, he added:

"To business, thin, sir. It's to be first blood, I suppose, and then an end?"

"I said so," cried Munch.

"You did?"

"Of coorse I did."

"Thin I didn't hear you."

"More shame to the likes ov you——It's only cotton!"

"What?"

Munch had picked the Major's pocket of his handkerchief during the moment that he had turned his back to him, and had made the "cotton" remark in regard to the valueness character of the article.

"What yourself!" cried Munch. "Don't be after saying what to me—it's insulting, sir!"

The Major got desperate.

The old Hanoverian officer, he began to think, was a fiend sent into the world on purpose to annoy him.

"Place your man, sir," he said, "and I'll place mine. I've nothing more to say."

"Well," said Munch, to himself, as he went back to his friend, "I rather fancy I have done that well."

"Get it over quick, Colonel!" whispered O'Millighin. "And if you settle matters comfortably with the prin-

cipal, have a pink at the second, for he says you are a blackguard, every inch of you."

"Impossible!"

"I know it is, my dear Colonel; but he says you are."

"The scoundrel shall not leave the field alive. My dear O'Millighin, these little affairs, I know, are rather a treat to you than otherwise: go and kick Captain Dormer's second, and then he will be obliged to fight with you, and we can all set-to together."

"Kick him?"

"Yes; it is the best way."

"Aisy—aisy, Colonel. I've got a pain in my arm, that I'm afraid would spoil my fencing."

"Ah! Indeed!"

"It's true as gospel. But, after you have done with the other, I will back you with him."

A smile of contempt came over the lips of Colonel Maynard.

Perhaps he was not at all surprised to find his second showing the white feather in the affair; but, whatever he thought of the matter, that was certainly not the place to make any remark about it.

He began calmly to take off his coat.

Munch, meanwhile, had nearly driven Duval frantic, by saying to him, "I did it well, Captain. There is not one Irishman on this side of the Channel could beat me at a rale Tipperary brogue."

"A what?"

"A Tipperary——"

"Stop! You don't mean to say that you have been talking to O'Milligan as an Irishman?"

"You told me."

"I did not. It was a Scotch officer you were to be."

"Oh, the deuce!"

"How vexatious of you, Munch! But it can't be helped now. Help me off with my coat, for I see the Colonel is all but ready."

The highwayman and Colonel Maynard stood cross-ways of the setting sun. It was a little awkward for both of them, for the slant beams were in Duval's left eye and in the Colonel's right.

The slender swords clashed together. The Colonel made a sudden feint and a lounge at Duval which he hoped would settle the contest at once.

But the arm of Claude was long, his sight good, and we have seen in his fight with the Earl of Eglintown that he had a right to pride himself on his sword-play.

So the sword of the Colonel was turned aside, and the point of Duval's weapon ran up his arm beneath his shirt-sleeve, scratching the skin as it went.

"A hit!—a hit!" cried Duval.

"No!" cried the Colonel.

"No blood!" said the Major. "Be-dad, an' there's no blood!"

There was a flush on Colonel Maynard's face, for from the nature of the scratch on his arm, and the smarting that began in it, he could very well imagine that, slight as the hurt was, there would soon be some show of blood.

He was feverishly anxious to accomplish some victory over his antagonist before the red stain could show itself on his shirt sleeve; and so he lost caution, and pressed forward.

His foot caught in a tuft of rank grass. He stumbled; he half fell.

Duval closed with him, and catching the hilt of his sword in his left hand, he held the point of his own at the Colonel's throat, as he said:

"And so Colonel Maynard bids the world good night."

The sun set at that moment, and the brightness departed from the trees, and the grass, and the sky.

Colonel Maynard shut his eyes.

Duval the next moment flung his own sword to the grass, and raised the Colonel to his feet, as he said:

"My dear sir, are you satisfied, and will you accept of my apologies?"

"Apologies, sir?"

"Yes, Colonel! I beg to offer them The fact is, we are both in the wrong."

"Sir! sir!"

"Yes; both, Colonel. You have

been hasty, and sent me a challenge, without well considering what for."

"Sir, your conduct in the Mall at St. James's——"

"Nay, you don't know what my conduct was. I was in the Mall, in my sedan chair; I saw you walking with the Countess of Thrales; I saw you stretch your hand behind you with a billet, which you intended for the Lady Angela Bellair, who was a few paces behind you, with her accommodating governess; I saw a rude, burly fellow impudently snatch the note out of your fingers."

"Ah!"

"Hear me out!"

"I will! I will!"

"I sprung from my chair—I wrested the note from the big, burly fellow, and I handed it to the lady for whom it was intended; you turned round at that moment, and thought I was the delinquent."

"Sir! sir!"

"Colonel?"

"Why did you not tell me this before?"

"Honor — honor! Punctilio — the etiquette of the sword, Colonel! It has been told in time enough."

"Good Heavens! and I might have sacrificed to a mistake one who had done me a service."

"I don't think there was much fear of that, Colonel!"

A flush of color came to the Colonel's face.

Mortification was depicted on every feature.

Claude Duval made another courtly bow, and was walking away towards where his coat lay upon the grass, when Maynard sprung after him.

"Tell me, for the love of heaven, who and what you really are? I feel convinced that there is some mystery about you."

"Colonel, you are a man of penetration."

"Then there is a mystery?"

"There is."

"Give me your confidence."

"Not now. But if at any time it should be necessary or convenient to do so, I hope that the recollections of this half-hour in Hyde Park will be sufficient to procure me the friendship of Colonel Maynard."

"It will—it shall!"

"Then I am abundantly satisfied, and have the honor of bidding you good evening."

Claude put on his coat, and taking the arm of the rather bewildered Munch, he walked away; while the Major in vain expostulated with Colonel Maynard for not having a set-to with the Hanoverian officer, who spoke Scotch in the morning and Irish in the evening.

But Colonel Maynard was in no mood for further fighting; and he abruptly broke from O'Millighin, and turned to his own house.

"So that's all over, Captain!" said Munch.

"To be sure it is."

"Well, these affairs don't pay! But just look at this, Captain, and say what you think of it!"

"What is it?"

"It opens, somehow. Shall I smash it?"

Munch produced a completely round, convex piece of gold, about a quarter of an inch in thickness, to which a gold chain was attached.

"Where did you get that, Munch?"

"The fellow who fought you had it in his pocket."

"Why, you don't mean to say you rifled the Colonel's coat-pockets, while the duel was going on?"

"Yes, but I do, though!"

"Munch, you are incorrigible! Let me try to open it. You are delicate-fingered enough, Munch; but I think I beat you in that quality. There, you see, it opens. It is a locket!"

"Lor!" said Munch.

"And contains as charming a lock of hair as ever mortal eyes beheld! What have we here? Some verses, too! Ha, ha! Colonel, you are far gone, in-deed!

"'With angel's grace, and angel's form,
Diamond eyes, and voice to charm,
Lodges in this faithful heart,
Brightest fay, ne'er to depart—
My Angela!"

Ah! So — so! I see! This is a lock of the fair charmer's hair, either given to the Colonel or stolen by him. I fancy the latter, by its condition. The fair Angela would have tied a piece of her blue ribbon about it, in a lovers' knot."

Duval put the locket in his pocket.

"All's right, Captain," said Munch; "you can have that for your share. The purse satisfies me."

"What! you took his purse, likewise?"

"To be sure I did! Doesn't the copy-book say that idleness is the root of all evil? So you see, Captain, I wasn't going to stand by, kicking my heels while the fight was going on."

The highwayman could not help laughing.

It was scarcely for him to blame Munch for acting "professionally," whenever he saw a chance; so he dropped the subject. They were now very near to the lodgings, Duval turned to Munch and said to him.

"Go, and get some dinner; you have no doubt plenty of money. I shall want you again at about nine o'clock, for I intend to go to the masquerade at the Opera House, and you shall go with me."

"Bravo, Captain! If we work well together, we shall make a good thing of it!"

"No doubt of that! But before you come to me, go to the Red Ken and leave these ten guineas there in the hands of the Copper Captain, or Joe Fierce; and say that Claude Duval sends them, that any poor fellow who happens to be out of luck may drink his health in a flowing can, and forget his cares."

"That's the sort, Captain!"

"And ask if any one is in trouble, that a few guineas can help through."

"I will! Ah, Captain, no wonder the 'family' looks up to you! Why, there isn't a downey cove in all London that would stop at anything for you! And I do believe that if the nabs ever do lay hold of you, and the bigwigs want you to take a ride in a cart up the Oxford Road, they will never get you there!"

"Don't anticipate uncomfortable things, Munch, but be off, and take care that I see you not later than nine o'clock at my lodgings. And by the bye, see if there's any news of Captain Blood."

"It's as good as done, Captain."

"Yes," said Duval to himself, as he crossed the treshold of his lodgings,— "yes, I will go to the masquerade; I will look out for the domino in the amber satin. It's all in the way of business. I don't see why I should not make a good night's work of it. People go to masquerades quite expensively got up. Business—business!"

Duval was not the man to let his calculations and plottings interfere with his bodily cravings.

As he finished a hearty supper, at nine o'clock precisely, Munch made his appearance.

Duval took him into the same dressing room he had been in before, and restored him the suit of clothes he had worn before he assumed the disguise of the old Hanoverian officer.

"Now, Munch," he said, "let us have no blundering, but recollect what you have to do."

"Goodness gracious, Captain!" said Munch, "you have only to let me know this time which I'm to be, a Scotchman or an Irishman."

"Neither."

"That makes it all the easier, Captain. But what am I to do? Only make me understand it, and you'll see I'll do it as smart as possible."

"Munch, you're about one of the best pickpockets in London, but you're not fit for much else."

"Don't say that, Captain! Didn't I clear out the pockets of that Colonel's red coat almost with my foot, while you was fighting him?"

"That's just what I say. I'd trust you to clear anybody's pockets before anybody I know; but, however, you can't go wrong in what you have to do to-night."

"That's pleasant!"

"Put on this domino."

"This what, Captain? It looks like an old blue rag."

"Stuff! stuff!"

"Well, it is stuff, ain't it?"

"I don't mean that. You see it is a long, loose garment, which at masquerades is called a domino. It either covers a plain dress or a costume, whichever the case may be. Put it on."

"All's right, Captain. Here you are! I feel like a hog in armor."

"Take this other one now, and put it on over it."

"I shan't be able to move; my legs is in a *vice!*"

"Yes, you will; now take this hat and feather, and this mask with the crape hanging to it. Put both on, and you are equipped."

"I'm done for!"

"What do you mean by 'done for?'"

"I means, Captain, that if a gentleman was to hold open his pocket and say, 'Munch, here you are, my fine fellow,' I don't think I could get anything out of it with all these 'tanglements of dominoes about me. I've played at dominoes, but I never was made into a domino before."

"You will soon get used to them, and it is necessary that you should wear two, because, if we should get into a scrape, by throwing off one of them, we completely alter our appearance: and now all you have to do is to come with me, and keep as close to me as possible, so that in case I want you for any purpose I may have you at hand."

"That's easy, Captain. But you don't object to business?"

"Not at all; but be careful."

Duval not only attired himself in a quiet evening dress, which was in itself perfectly unostentatious, but he put on no less than three dominoes over it, of different colors, and this he was able to do without presenting any very remarkable appearance, owing to his figure not being very stout.

He wore a mask of the same description as that he had handed to Munch—etc., of black silk tightly stretched upon pasteboard, to the lower part of which depended a fringe of crape, that left nothing but a small portion of the chin visible.

In the pocket of his evening dress he provided himself with another mask which was perfectly white, and a piece of white lace, instead of black, depending from it.

He wore a Spanish hat, in which was one small ostrich feather, and he satisfied himself that he could take that feather out at a moment's notice.

By the aid of a couple of pins, which he stuck in the beaver of the hat, he knew likewise that he could alter its shape whenever he pleased.

And thus provided, the highwayman went to the Opera masquerade, where he fully expected to meet the incomparable Angela, and where, if he did not likewise make considerable plunder, and encounter some amusing adventures, it would not be his fault.

Duval and Munch were in the street in a few moments more, where they hired a hackney coach to convey them to the Opera House; for, short as the distance was, Claude had no wish to parade the streets in his domino and Spanish hat, followed by an admiring crowd of small boys.

CHAPTER IV.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND MUNCH MAKE THEIR APPEARANCE IN NEW CHARACTERS.

"Hurrah! hurrah! here's another! Clear the way, there! Get out, you ruffian! Constables, constables! Clear off, clear! Thieves, thieves! I've lost my watch—my stop watch! Ha, ha, ha! it wouldn't stop with you, though! Move on, move on! My Lord Wigginson's carriage stops the way! Pull him off the box—he's drunk! Hurrah—hurrah! Thieves—thieves! Officers—officers! A link here, you boy! Drag him off! Help—oh, I shall faint!"

Such may present a faint specimen of the cries, shouts and general observations that took place at the door of the Opera House when the coach containing the knight of the road and Munch fell into the rank of closely packed vehicles bringing visitors to the most popular and successful masquerade of the season.

Thieves, constables, demireps, and every variety of the idle and dissolute population of London, were mingled together in inextricable confusion.

Both our highwayman and Munch had fairly to elbow their way, which they did with small ceremony, indeed, into the vestibule of the Opera.

"I shall have some spoil," thought Duval. "These are the scenes for me. Life—life in its wildest, gayest aspects. By my faith, it would have been a thousand pities to have missed all this! It almost equals the gallop over the heath on gallant Sue, with gallant Captain Blood by my side. Would that he were here!"

A seedy looking personage sold tickets of admission from a little pigeon hole to the right of the entrance.

But Duval's eyes were sharp, and immediately behind this individual—to whom everybody had to go with their half-guinea to get a ticket—Duval saw two eyes which he certainly thought he had looked upon before.

"Stapleton, by Jove!" he said. "Stapleton, the Bow-street runner. My being in the city seems pretty widely known now. He fully expects me here, and it only shows what a clever, far-seeing fellow he is, for here I am."

A feeling of recklessness came over Claude and glancing at the little pigeon-hole, he saw that there was a sliding panel by which it could be easily shut up.

He paid a guinea for himself and Munch, and took the two tickets.

Then leaning forward, to the surprise of the officer, he said:

"Mr. Stapleton, you're looking for somebody here, I presume?"

"I am, sir; but it is nothing to you if I am."

"Oh! I only thought I would ask you; because my name is Claude Duval!"

Stapleton seized the money-taker by the hair of his head, and made a desperate attempt to scramble out of the pigeon-hole.

Duval with a rapid action, slammed shut the panel, and then, turning to Munch, he whispered:

"Follow, quick—this way!"

They passed the ticket collector. They plunged into a stream of Turks, warriors, monks, shepherdesses, devils, clowns, grandees, and dominos.

Before the bewildered Stapleton was at liberty to look about him, the highwayman and the pickpocket stood on the immense boarded-over pit of the Opera House, beneath the five hundred lights of its gorgeous chandelier.

The scene was brilliant.

The tier upon tier of boxes were filled with fashionable company.

Mad, whirling dances were going on in the smallest possible spaces, and under the most difficult conceivable conditions.

Munch touched Duval on the elbow.

"Captain—Captain!"

"What is it?"

"Stapleton mightn't have knowed you, if you hadn't have spoken to him."

"That's half the fun!" said Claude. "Keep pretty close to me!"

"Yes, Captain, half the fun, indeed! We shall be nabbed, grabbed, and muzzled to a certainty!"

The highwayman's eyes were on a lady in a rich Spanish costume.

On one of her fingers was a diamond ring of great value, and she wore a pearl necklace, which, if real—and he thought they were—was certainly tempting.

"Ah, donna!" said Duval, as, with an air of familiarity, he took her hand in his; "it was almost tempting Fate to wish for the happiness of seeing you so soon!"

"Indeed, sir?"

"Ay; and in truth! What weary hours have I counted since our last delightful meeting! Heigho! love masters all."

"Stop, sir! That voice——"

"Eh?"

"Those tricky tones—musical and pleasant, I grant you—have surely rung upon my ears before!"

"The devil!" said Claude.

"Sir?"

"Fair and beautiful donna, I was alluding, at the moment, to yonder

grotesque personation of his majesty from below, with the exaggerated tail."

The Spanish lady laughed.

"But where, may I ask," added Duval, "where have I had the pleasure of looking into those eyes before, for I seem to see them, even through that envious mask that hides their brightness?"

"I thought you accosted me familiarly, sir, as an old acquaintance."

Claude saw his mistake.

"Hang it all!" he muttered to himself; "I'm blundering at a nice rate."

"But," added the Spanish lady, "to put you quite at your ease, I will inform you that I think it was on the Great Western Road that we met."

"Hem! the Western Road! The deuce we did! Madam—fair donna—I'm afraid there is some mistake; and, as I perceive his Grace the Duke, my half-brother, waiting for me and beckoning me, I—a——"

"Nay, not so fast, Mr. Domino!"

The Spanish lady took a good grip of Duval's three dominoes, and held him securely.

"I'm quite certain," she added, "we have met before; and I should esteem it as a particular favor if Mr. Claude Duval, the 'ladies' highwayman,' would restore to me a certain circlet of diamonds he took from the Duchess of Northumberland's brother last April on the Great Western Road."

"I'm in for it now!" thought Claude. "By Jove, this is the Duchess!"

"Now, sir!"

"Oh, yes! the—a—a—a night last April."

"Exactly!"

"The Western Road?"

"Just so, sir! The yellow coach and four."

"Well, madam, *I am* Claude Duval; and I throw myself upon the womanly kindness and mercy of her Grace the Duchess of Northumberland!"

"You are an impudent fellow!"

"The most impudent fellow under the sun, madam."

"And my diamond circlet?"

"Shall be restored to your Grace to-morrow morning at one o'clock—precisely if the Jews haven't sent the thing long ago to the pot;" added Duval to himself. "Anything to get rid of the woman."

Some great uproar and excitement seemed now to actuate the whole of the maskers in that brilliant pit.

There was a swaying to and fro of the multitude—cries, shouts, and expostulations.

Presently, as waves rushed one upon another, communicating motion to a great distance, the Duchess of Northumberland and the highwayman were so pressed upon by the people, that but for his protecting arm her Grace might have been thrown down and sustained serious injury.

The screams of affrighted females—the oaths of obstinate, angered men—and the general tumult that ensued—however were all insufficient to prevent two men from fighting their way to the very centre of the pit, dragging, pushing, and hauling with them a small round table and a chair, both of which, from the tawdry gilding upon them and white lacker, were evidently theatrical properties.

These two men were Stapleton and Godfrey, Bow Street runners.

Claude was sufficiently master of himself, amid the confusion, to untie the strings of his outer domino at the neck.

A shake was sufficient then to make it fall from his shoulders, and it rustled down to his feet.

That outer domino had been of a steel blue color.

The one beneath it was a delicate fawn.

He put up his hand, and twitched the ostrich feather from his hat.

Duval had just adroitly completed this change when the two officers, with the chair and the table, reached to within half a dozen paces to where he stood.

The chair was placed upon the table, Godfrey held both as securely as he could against the pressure of the crowd, and Stapleton scrambled up until he stood on the very seat of the chair.

"Bravo! bravo!" shouted some

hundreds of voices. "Bravo! they're in character. Bow Street officers! It's some good trick! One of them's my Lord Barrymore, I'll swear! Hurrah! hurrah! Go it, my lord! Don't he look the thing? Wouldn't you swear he was a 'runner?' Look at his red waistcoat, and splashed top-boots—it's the best character of the masquerade! Capital! capital! Bravo! bravo! The one that's holding the table is the Marquis of Pudened. Capital! capital!"

"Ladies and gentleman," roared Stapleton—"my noble friends, I'm a constable!"

"So you are, my lord—so you are!"

"I ain't a lord! Cuss me, I'm a constable!"

A roar of laughter followed a sort of angry dance which Stapleton executed on the seat of the chair.

"I tell you all I'm a Bow Street runner!"

"You couldn't be rummer, my lord, if you was to try it," said a voice.

"I didn't say rummer, *hass!*"

The maskers laughed till tears came into their eyes again.

"I'm a Bow—Street—officer!"

A mask dressed like a large Newfoundland dog sprung upon the back of Godfrey, and began biting Stapleton's legs, crying out as he did so.

"Bow! wow! wow!"

"Get off!" cried Godfrey. "Get off, will you? It isn't a joke!"

"No!" roared Stapleton, as he caught up one leg after the other; "it isn't a joke—it isn't meant as a joke! Cuss you! what are you at? Ladies and gentlemen, I've come to warn you all."

"Hurrah! that will do!"

"No, it won't do! The deuce take this dog!"

"I've got him!" said a Mephistophiles, seizing the dog round the throat, but at the same time dealing Stapleton some ugly pokes with a pitchfork; "I've got him! Lie down, sir! lie down!"

The mask, who was dressed like the Newfoundland dog, howled dismally.

The roars of laughter were deafening, for Stapleton was forced to get off the chair, and use it as a weapon of defence against the pitchfork of the Mephistophiles.

"Come away — come away, Mr. Stapleton!" said Godfrey; "they've all gone mad, and we shall only get the worst of it. Come away, Mr. Stapleton—come away!"

"No, donkey, I won't! He's here—I know he's here!"

"Good gracious! we're in for it now; here's a donkey a-coming!"

Stapleton, to his horror, saw a masker with a complete ass's head upon his shoulders making his way towards the chair and table, and braying in a most awful manner.

He made a desperate effort, and wrenched the pitchfork from the Mephistophiles, dealing him at the same moment such a crack on the head with it, that, as everybody said, "the devil for once had his due."

Then Stapleton got on the chair again, and his face glowing with anger and excitement, he roared out:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, you may laugh as much as you like, and call it a joke; but I'm here to do my duty, and I'll do it. So I can tell you all that Claude Duval, the highwayman, is here—here in the masquerade—in a steel-blue domino and an ostrich feather in his hat."

A yell of laughter followed this announcement, for at the moment it was considered as nothing more than the prelude to some practical joke on the part of some young blood upon town, who would appear to play the part of the celebrated highwayman, and be taken into custody by the sham officers.

CHAPTER V.

CLAUDE DUVAL MEETS ANGELA, AND MYSTIFIES HER IN REGARD TO THE GOLD LOCKET.—COLONEL MAYNARD WAITS IN VAIN FOR HIS RIVAL.—THE APPOINTMENT IN THE MALL.—AN ARRIVAL OF CONSEQUENCE. — COUNT ORLOFF. — THE DIAMOND SNUFF-BOX.

There was no question whatever on the minds of the guests at the masqu-

querade but that the announcement of presence of Claude Duval was one of the pre-arranged jests of the evening.

The seriousness of the constables was looked upon as so much capital acting.

And yet many eyes wandered over the mazy throng of dominoes and maskers to look for that one in the steel-blue domino, and the hat with the two ostrich feathers.

It was well for Duval that he had effected the first alteration in his costume which he had it in his power rapidly to make on that evening.

After Stapleton, the officer, then, had succeeded in making the announcement regarding the presence of the highwayman at the masquerade, he paused to glare about him with a face fiery red with passion.

The Duchess of Northumberland was still sufficiently close to Claude to speak to him.

"It seems you are in danger," she said.

"I hope not, madam."

"But it is known that you are here."

"Generally, but not particularly; and relying upon your Grace's promise, I feel myself safe."

"I have hardly promised, but yet I will not betray you; although I feel that I am doing very wrong by so far aiding one who has so little title to my forbearance."

The Duchess availed herself of an opening in the crowd at this period to make an attempt to join her own party, which consisted of the Duke and several of the constant guests of Northumberland House, which was then the head-quarters of fashion, as Devonshire House became afterwards.

The maskers now, not seeing anything come of the announcement of Stapleton, made some demonstrations of impatience.

A party of young bloods upon the town—who had come to the masquerade on purpose to imitate, as far as they might be permitted, the exploits of the only recently suppressed fraternity that went by the name of "Mohocks"—made a rush upon the officers with loud shouts and cries.

Chairs and tables were in a moment overturned; and Stapleton, with his satellite, Godfrey, found themselves lost in such a mass of confusion that had Claude been at their side they would hardly have been able to move a finger to arrest him.

"Munch," whispered Claude, "follow me!"

"Yes, Captain!"

In the domino which he had worn under the steel-blue one that he had so adroitly got rid of, Claude made his way with an easy suppleness through the crowd.

Munch followed him closely.

"Captain!—Captain!" he whispered; "what luck have you had?"

"None!"

"Why, Captain, this won't do. I don't know what's in the four pocket-books I have—nor what sort of watches they are that I have in my boots—but I am doing the best I can, you may depend!"

"Be careful, Munch! Your face is less known than mine, which might be recognised even despite of my mask. Just put your foot on one of these ornaments of the lower boxes, and look about you carefully."

"What for, Captain?"

"For a lady in an amber satin domino." "I see her."

"Ah! where?"

"No, I don't!"

"What do you mean, idiot?"

"I meant that I did see her all of a moment, and then all of another moment she was gone again!"

"In which direction?"

"Over there!"

The highwayman saw where his comrade pointed, and he began to make his way as best he could through the throng in that direetion.

A pretty general clapping of hands now announced that notwithstanding the crowded character of the vast area, some space had been, or was about to be, cleared for dancing.

This threw Duval out of the course he was taking; but as he passed close to one of the boxes he was arrested by hearing the sounds of a voice he knew well.

"Dear grandma," said the voice, "indeed and indeed I will come back to you soon; but I shall quite die if I don't have one cotillion!"

"Foolish child!" replied the Countess of Thrales, who was in one of the boxes as a spectatrix of the scene, and who, as the reader surmises, spoke to Lady Angela Bellair. "Foolish child! you had much better remain here."

"Oh, but, grandma, Sir Jobus Strange is with me!"

"Go, then—go!"

"Ah!" said Claude to himself; "who is this Sir Jobus Strange, I wonder. Has the fair Angela picked up yet another beau?"

Pretty confident in his disguise, Duval kept the position which fortune had placed him in; and he saw the fair Angela with her arm linked in that of a tall mask in a sombre purple domino.

The moment, however, that this mask moved, Duval's keen eyes detected that he was one of those elderly bucks who still affect the habits and the follies of their youth, but who, if common sense instead of vanity were in the ascendant, would be much better at home.

What rather surprised the highwayman, however, in regard to Angela Bellair, was that she did not wear an amber satin domino.

Perhaps the young lady had her reasons—but the domino she did wear, although of satin, was a very beautiful cerulean blue.

"Munch," whispered Duval, "do you think you could conveniently upset that person in the purple domino?"

"He's a big 'un, Captain!"

"Yes—but watch him. What do you think, now, Munch?"

"It's as good as done, Captain! He's unsteady on his old pins, he is, and will go over easy! I want a bit of fun, Captain, and now I'll have it!"

Claude kept his eyes upon the fair Angela, at the same time that he cast now and then an oblique glance to the proceedings of Munch.

That individual, after a cursory observation of the maskers around him, saw one in the costume of Neptune with rather a formidable trident.

"A storm!—a storm!" cried Munch, as he made a spring and leaped upon Neptune's back; "a squall!—a squall! No end of water in the hold. Down we go to what's-his-name's locker!"

Poor Neptune was taken so much by surprise at this sudden assault, that he fell to his knees with the weight of Munch on his back; and then, with his trident, he attempted in vain to get rid of the iutruder.

Flourishing that rather formidable implement about him, Neptune dealt a bear, on its hind legs, such a crack on the side of the head, that bruin was staggered for a moment, and then, full of indignation, rushed upon the half-prostrate Neptune.

A battle royal ensued, in the midst of which Munch snatched the trident from the sea-god, and, as if seized with a mad desire for mischief, he dashed at Sir Jobus Strange with it; and fixing him in the back with its prongs, he so startled the elderly beau, that, abandoning the arm of Lady Angela Bellair, he rushed before the trident of Neptune with a shout of dismay.

Any practical joke was welcomed at a masquerade, and the crowd made way for poor Sir Jobus, who surely thought the fiend himself was behind him.

An immense wave of people separated Angela from her protector, if he could be called such, and she was in some trepidation.

It was quite the fashion for ladies to make one in the gay throng at a masquerade; but certainly not alone.

Accident only could leave "an unprotected female" in the midst of such an assemblage.

And yet it was an accident that very frequently occurred to young ladies.

Claude Duval was by her side in a moment.

"Where—oh, where," he said in a feigned voice, "are the other two?"

"The who, sir?"

"The other two graces, since I find one here all alone!"

"I don't know you, sir; don't speak to me, don't!" cried Angela.

"But I, dear, charming girl, formed to fascinate a world, and hold all human hearts in bondage—I know you well!"

"Know me, sir?"

"Yes; what domino, do you suppose, could hide the grace of that young, fair form?"

"But my mask?" said the well-pleased Angela.

"Your bright eyes shine through it. Can they be, for one fleeting instant, mistaken for the dull orbs that contrast with them in this assemblage?"

"Oh, sir, you are very gallant; but—but—if you will be so good as to take me to—to that box over there—"

"Nay, dear one, hear me. I have come here with the express purpose of seeking you."

"Seeking me, sir?"

"Yes, it is so; because — because——"

"Because what?"

"Because I love you; and although, perchance, you may not love me, yet it would be agony to this fond heart to see you in the arms of another who is so—so very unworthy of you."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Do you know this locket?"

Ah!"

"You do know it!"

"Gracious heavens, sir, how came you by it? It—it contains a lock of my hair. But I didn't want to give it. Oh, sir, who are you?"

"Your adorer!"

"Yes; but your name?"

"First let me tell you how I came possessed of this locket."

"Oh, do—do! I am all impatience to know!"

"Then, I was passing down the Mall of the Park when I saw a gentleman walking before me."

"An officer?"

"Just so. An officer of the Guard. He suddenly pitched the locket with a contemptuous——But no—What am I saying?"

"What—what? It can't be—it is not true!"

"If you would know all, swear to me that you will keep the knowledge to yourself."

"I will."

"Solemnly!"

"Oh, yes, solemnly. Now, tell me all about it."

"Contemptuously he flung this locket from him; and as he did so, he said, 'She is but a little coquette, after all; and—and——'"

"And—well? and what else did he say?"

"I don't like to tell you."

"You must—you shall!"

"'Far from pretty!'"

Angela uttered a little shriek, and lifted her mask, for a moment, so that, Duval could see her face.

It was as if that fair young creature wished, on the instant, to vindicate herself from the charge of being "far from pretty."

"Ah!" said Duval, "you are, indeed, most beautiful!"

Angela wept, and stamped one of her little feet on the floor.

"I don't love him!—I won't love him!—I never did care for him much! He is old and—and ill-natured and cross, and not young, and—and disagreeable, and middle-aged! No, I don't and won't love him ever again! I cast him off now, and forever—forever—forever!"

"You are quite right," said the dashing highwayman, "but I see one cotillion has been danced, and they are making up another. Nothing in the world will make him so angry as to see you dancing. Do you think he will know you in this domino?"

"Oh, yes! I was to have come in one of amber satin; but the Colonel persuaded me, only two hours before grandma and I set out for the masquerade, to change it for this one. But I am talking to you, and do not know you."

"I am a gentleman."

"Yes; but——"

"Ah, enchantress, will you permit me to keep, for a short time longer, an *incognito*, which permits me to speak to you freely? But if by mere accident you should be to-morrow morning, about the hour of three o'clock,

on the Mall, in the Park, I shall be the happiest of men."

"If I were to be there," said Angela, in a low tone, "it would almost be an appointment."

"Oh, dear, no! merely an accidental meeting. But the cotillion waits."

There was a peculiar crash of music at this instant, and then a cry arose of "Way for the Prince—way for his Excellency! Make way there!"

The crash of music was followed by a strange, wild sort of plaintive air, which swelled and reverberated through the theatre.

The dance was abruptly broken up, and it was evident that some very important personage must have arrived by the pressure of the crowd in one direction, and the commotion about one of the entrances to the gay scene.

"What strange music!" said Angela,

"That, madam," said a mask, in the habit of a friar, who was close at hand and heard the expression, "that, madam, permit me to say, is the Russian National Hymn."

"And pray, holy sir," said Claude, "why is it played so suddenly on this occasion?"

"Because, sir, Prince Orloff, the Russian Ambassador, has just arrived."

"Holy father, I thank you."

"My son, you are welcome."

The friar moved away, and at the moment the highwayman felt some one give a twitch to the skirts of his coat.

The some one was Munch.

"Captain! Captain!"

"Be quiet!"

"Perhaps," said Angela, "you will now be good enough to take me to my aunt, for I have a pain in my eyes."

"And I one in my heart, dear girl."

"Sir!"

"Angela!"

A gentleman attired as a Spanish grandee had stepped up to Angela and Claude.

From the height and the figure, as well as from the voice, which was not in the least attempted to be concealed, Duval, despite the mask that was on his face, recognized Colonel Maynard.

And so did Angela.

She turned upon him in an instant

"I hate you!"

"Angela!"

"I hate you!"

Clasping then the arm of Claude Duval, she added in a whisper:

"Take me to Lady Thrales, my grandmamma, in that box yonder. I—I won't be in the Mall to-morrow at three o'clock. I can't; but, if I can, don't you presume to speak to me, because—because I shall only have my governess with me, and she wouldn't mind!"

Claude *felt* that the Colonel was close behind him.

But he took the fair Angela to the box of the old Countess of Thrales.

There was a temporary staircase from the stage, which led to the boxes, and when he had left Angela there, and was descending the stairs again, the Colonel laid a hand upon his domino, and with the other, lifting off his own mask, he said, in tones of suppressed passion:

"Sir, I am Colonel Maynard, of his Majesty's Guard. Will it please you to say who and what you are?"

"Certainly."

"Well, sir?"

"In two minutes, Colonel. Allow me to say one word to a lady. If you will wait for me here."

"I will, sir."

Claude turned, and left the Colonel fuming and chafing on the stairs, while he went calmly down into the pit.

As he went, he was busy untying the strings that held this second domino that he wore round his neck.

"I fancy," he said to himself, "that I have worn this domino long enough, since Colonel Maynard has had a good look at it."

Duval leant carelessly against a portion of the proscenium, and let the domino fall to his feet.

He then took off his hat, and made an alteration in its shape.

"Bravo, Captain?"

"Ah! are you there?"

"Yes, Captain; and I want to tell you there's a Russian fellow in the house—a kind of a Emperor of Russia, or some such nabob."

"I know; Count Orloff, the Russian Ambassador."

"That's the cove, Captain; but I'm all of a shake at the sight of it, for I never did see, and never expects to see again, in all my born days, such a sparkling sneezer as he has got!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Captain; it quite takes the eyesight away from a fellow; it makes you catch your breath to look at it! It is a out-and-outer, it is; and I heard the buzz of tales about it, and they do say it's worth ten thousand spangles."

"You don't say so, Munch! A snuff-box in the hands of Count Orloff, the Russian Ambassador, said to be worth ten thousand pounds?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Munch!"

"Yes, Captain."

"*I'll have it!*"

CHAPTER VI.

CLAUDE CHANGES HIS COSTUME TWICE MORE.—STAPLETON WARNS COUNT ORLOFF OF DANGER TO HIS DIAMOND BOX.—THE FLIGHT THROUGH THE GREEN-ROOM DOOR.—THE YELLOW DOMINO.—MUNCH IS TRIUMPHANT.—DUVAL A PICKPOCKET.

Count Alexis Orloff, the Russian Ambassador, attended by his suite, and carrying a half silk mask in his hand, as a sort of credential for his presence at that brilliant masquerade, took his way like a star of the first magnitude through the throng of maskers in the Opera House.

There was a grim smile upon the haughty Russian's face.

His costume was magnificent.

In his right hand, as we have said, he held the half mask, which he never attempted to put on.

In his left, along with a white silk handkerchief, he carried the snuff-box.

The snuff-box!

The ten thousand guinea snuff-box, for which Count Orloff was as well known throughout Europe as he was for his rank and diplomatic ability.

The snuff-box sent rays about it as though it were a miniature sun.

Whichever way it was turned, however slightly, the flash of the diamonds caught the light in some fantastic fashion, and sent forth again bursts of radiance truly dazzling to look upon.

The cultivated Russian noble spoke English capitally; and as he looked around him from the centre of the boarded-over pit, he spoke, quite benignly and condescendingly.

"A charming entertainment," he said; "a most charming entertainment."

Then one of his suite executed a bow, as he said:

"May it please your Excellency, there is a man who desires to say a few words. He belongs to the English police, and most humbly requests that he may present his duty to your Excellency."

"What about? What for? Really, Peterhoff, if we speak to the herd, what will come of us?"

"It is some extra-official communication; and he intimates that it concerns the snuff-box."

"Our snuff-box?"

"Just so, your Excellency."

"Let the fellow speak. If it be anything impertinent, I suppose he can be knouted, or put to death in some English fashion. Let him speak."

Quite a little court—a little bowing circle—was established round Count Orloff; for the English were, at that period, almost more inclined to bow down before the golden calf than they are now.

And that is needless.

Stapleton, the Bow Street officer, then, with his man Godfrey close behind him, stepped forward.

"May it please your Lordship's Excellency, from the first moment I saw that diamond snuff-box, I felt certain there was some one here who would have a try for it."

"A what? What does the man mean?"

"I warn your Lordship's Excellency that if you don't take good care of that snuff-box there is one here who will, and his name is Claude Duval."

"Claude Duval?"

"Yes, yes, your Lordship's Excellency. He is a famous highwayman, and just as good a pickpocket, and he is here, though I have lost sight of him; so I felt it to be my duty to warn your Lordship's Excellency to look after your property."

A sarcastic, sneering expression came into the cold, slaty eyes of the Muscovite, as he held up the magnificent snuff-box, with all its brilliants, and seemed to feast his gaze upon its glitter.

"So!" he said; "it is thought necessary in England to warn me not to part with a trinket like this to the first thief who chooses to be attracted by its value!"

"Your Lordship's Excellency——"

"Peace!" interrupted Count Orloff, savagely; and then turning to the person who had, in a manner of speaking, introduced Stapleton, he added: "Can I do nothing with this man, Peterhoff?"

"I'm afraid not, your Excellency."

Count Orloff looked more vindictive than ever; and still holding his magnificent snuff-box in his hand, he continued his career through the motley throng of the masquerade, muttering to himself anathemas against what was called English liberty, which would not let a nobleman do what he liked with common people.

"Well," said Stapleton to Godfrey, "that's all one gets from these foreigners."

"I hate foreigners, Mr. Stapleton!" said Godfrey.

"So do I—so do I! And between you and me, Godfrey, I'd give something out of my own pocket, now, if Duval would only get his snuff-box away from him. But what can have become of the fellow? He was in a steel-blue domino."

"Bless you, Mrs. Stapleton, they change about with those sort of things every half-hour in the evening, when they want to do so."

"I suppose they do; but we may nab him still, if we look sharp."

"Ah, Mr. Stapleton, you might have nabbed him, if you'd only have listened to me. You might have nabbed him twice or thrice, but you are so afraid of making some mistake. Bless you, Mr. Stapleton, I know him always the moment I see him, and if you'll only listen to me next time—— There he is!—there he is! I'd swear to him among ten thousand! That's him!—that's him! and he's got on the very steel-blue domino again!"

Godfrey pushed his principal very unceremoniously on one side, and made a dash forward at a tall, slender personage, in a steel-blue domino.

But it was not our friend of the road but a masker, who for the sake of changing his own appearance, had picked up the domino cast aside by Duval, and, for a frolic, put it on over his own.

"Well, fellow, what do you want?" said the tall masker.

"You, Mr. Duval, if you please."

"Mr. who?"

The tall masker lifted the vizor from his face a moment.

Godfrey started back on to the toes of Stapleton, as he recognised an official personage of high rank connected with the Administration.

"There now," said Stapleton; "you're a pretty fellow! You know him the moment you see him, do you? And here you're going to apprehend Sir John Chetwynd for picking pockets!"

"I give in—I give in, Mr. Stapleton! He's one too many for me!"

"You give in, indeed, you donkey! Bah! bo! I hope now you won't talk in such a style, but leave things to me—your natural superior. When I say, 'That's him!' it's time enough for you to act. Do you hear, goose on a common?"

"Yes, Mr. Stapleton, but I thought ——"

"You thought, indeed! Hilloa! there he is! That's our man! There he goes in yellow! I saw his face!

I know Claude Duval's face! There he goes—through that door! Ha! ha! I have him now—I have him now!"

Stapleton rushed forward; and although he could not prevent the person whom he declared to be Duval from passing through a door which led to the Green Room of the theatre, he slammed that door shut so violently, that he caught a good half-yard of the yellow domino in it.

"Now I have him!—now I have him!" added Stapleton. "He can't get out of that!"

Clutching the portion of yellow skirt which protruded through the doorway, Stapleton held it firmly in one hand, while with the other he wrenched open the door.

His next movement was to fall upon his back with the empty domino in his grasp. Godfrey, with an air of sad commiseration, as he helped him up, said calmly:

"Ah, Mr. Stapleton, I knowed how it would be. He's one too many for me, and one too many for you; only I didn't fall flat on my back when I thought I had him—that makes a difference!"

It was indeed no other than Claude that Stapleton had seen in the yellow domino.

The fact was, that from the moment that Duval had cast eyes on the snuff-box of Count Orloff, he had determined to stake life and liberty upon its possession.

It was perhaps somewhat strange that it was not from the owner of the snuff-box that Duval looked for the greatest difficulty in achieving his purpose.

He saw and heard the warning that had been given by Stapleton, and so ungraciously received by the Russian Ambassador; and it was the sharp, practised eyes of the officers, who he suspected would keep hovering about Count Orloff, that he dreaded much more than the Count himself.

To remove them even temporarily from the scene of operations was therefore the highwayman's great object, and he set about it with his usual skill and judgment.

It will be recollected that Munch was likewise in domino, and that likewise he was provided with one dress under another; but Munch had had no occasion as yet to effect any change in his costume, while Duval was in his third or last domino, with nothing beneath it but the genteel, full evening dress, which he would have to abide by.

Claude, however, made his plans. Beckoning Munch aside, he whispered to him:

"Let me have your under domino. Be quick about it, Munch!"

"Yes, Captain; all right! It's a yellow one."

"I know—I know! The more conspicuous the better."

Very little attention was ever paid at a masquerade to these changes, although they were generally effected in some quiet, secluded corner, under the shadow of the boxes, or of some portion of the proscenium or stage wings.

It was quite common for a large party to arrive attired in different dominoes, and to completely change about at different periods of the evening, so as thoroughly to confuse and bewilder friends and acquaintances whom they had addressed, or who had addressed them, for purposes of recognition.

Nothing, therefore, beyond a mere passing glance was cast upon these proceedings of Munch and the highwayman, so that he was equipped in the yellow domino without the slightest difficulty.

Duval's next effort, then, was to discover if any door was open that would lead into other portions of the theatre, and he was not long in finding this one which led directly to the green room; the short passage he had to traverse further accommodating him by having a lateral way which led into the proscenium box.

This was all as he desired.

He lingered near the door we have mentioned until he saw that Stapleton's eyes were in that direction. Then, with an audacity that only he

could be capable of, he removed his mask, and actually smiled in the officer's face.

What became of that recognition and smile we have already recorded, for it resulted in Mr. Stapleton lying on his back, with the yellow domino in his grasp.

"Thieves! thieves! Help! I have him still! No, I haven't!"

Poor Stapleton was doomed to be misinterpreted on that evening.

A masker, attired as a buffoon or Punchinello, who had been vainly endeavoring to get up a laugh, thinking that Stapleton was succeeding when he was failing, made a rush at him with that abominable and ridiculous squeak which is considered to be essential to such a character, and proceeded to buffet him with a mock bludgeon composed of a slender whalebone covered with wool, and to roll over him, pretending to bite him in a most ridiculous fashion.

The crowd laughed.

But Stapleton was in no mood for jokes.

The Punchinello was shaken roughly off, and sent sprawling some few yards distant.

Stapleton, shouting out to Godfrey to keep the door, dashed into the narrow passage leading to the green room, feeling certain now that he was on the right scent of the knight of the road.

This was just what our hero wanted.

He only waited till he heard this rush on the part of the officer, who would not perhaps have made it at all had his temper not suffered a great deal that evening, and deprived him of a portion of his discretion.

Claude made his way down the lateral passage into the proscenium-box, from which he stepped on to the stage again in a moment.

While Stapleton was blundering about in the gloomy passages of the Opera House, and calling aloud for help to capture the notorious Claude Duval, the said notorious personage was calmly and coolly working his way towards the centre of the pit, where Count Orloff had again made a pause to look about him.

"Munch!" said Duval.

He did not see his follower, but he made sure he was close at hand.

"Here you are, Captain!"

"A snuff-box—any one?"

"Here's two; but they're neither of them worth much."

"All the better. This one will do. Now, Munch, my good fellow, I'm going to make our fortunes."

"Oh, Captain, don't be rash!"

"Pshaw! I live by being rash. It's in rashness I find my safety. If once I become careful, timid, and cunning, I'm a dead man!"

Munch evidently trembled.

"It seems to me," said Claude, as he took a pinch from the box that Munch had handed him, "it seems to me, Munch, that you are afraid!"

"I don't see how it's to be done, Captain. He either holds it in his hands, or he puts it into his coat-pocket—and there he must feel it."

"Good!"

"Lor', Captain, you don't mean to say that, with all this light and all these eyes upon you, and him warned, too, of it, that you can get that snuff-box away from the foreigner?"

"I must, Munch; I should ever bid adieu to my self-esteem if I were now to fail to do it! Keep as close to me as you can. I do not say that you can cover me—that is impossible, and would look suspicious, to begin with. I must take the Russian Ambassador and his snuff-box by assault. If I fail, Munch, you can tell the family that I tried to do it; if I succeed, you may truly cry out: 'Who, but Claude Duval?' Now, mind this!"

Claude slipped off the last domino that he wore, and handed it to Munch.

He stood revealed, in that full evening costume, quiet and gentlemanly, which could not be looked upon as a disguise.

He put even his mask in his pocket.

Munch trembled in every limb.

"You see that box?" said the highwayman, pointing to the proscenium-box from which he had just emerged, "you see that box, Munch?"

"Yes, Captain," said Munch, faintly.

"If there is a disturbance, and they chase me, I shall make for there; and do you do so likewise."

"Y-e-s, Captain."

"Pshaw, man! never look so white about it! Did I not tell you, half an hour ago, that I intended to have Count Orloff's snuff-box? And am I not Claude Duval? Go. You had better get into the proscenium-box at once. You may do me some good there, and you cannot do me any by following me."

Munch was in that state of trepidation at the audacity of the attempt that Duval was about to make, that he obeyed without a word; and making his way into the proscenium-box, he almost hid himself in it, only balancing his chin upon the velvet ledge, in the hope that, through the mazy throng of maskers, he might catch a glimpse of what Claude was about.

It was a nervous moment.

But Duval's mind was fully made up. He made his way with that insinuating grace, and those soft, brief, gentle words of courtesy, which would melt a passage through the most obdurate mob, unless some very evil passions have brought the assembly together.

And so our highwayman reached the circle that surrounded the great Russian noble; and he looked again into the cold grey eyes, which seemed to have brought some of the Northern ice with them, to freeze by a glance whoever they looked upon.

There was the white silk handkerchief still in the left hand of the Ambassador; and half hidden by its fleecy folds was the celebrated box, shining, glistening, radiating, and dazzling.

The Ambassador said something in the cold, sneering tone which characterized him.

Then there was a slight movement in the circle around him, which let Claude plainly know the purport of what he said, although he had not caught the words.

His Excellency Count Orloff was about to go.

He had seen enough of the masquerade, of which, perhaps, he would send so sneering an account to St. Petersburg.

Claude saw him hold up the diamond snuff-box for an instant, and regard it with a smile; while from the motion of his lips it would appear that he made some remark concerning it—probably with reference to the warning he had had from Stapleton, the officer.

Then Count Orloff deliberately placed the box in his coat-pocket, and slightly patting his light blonde moustache with the white silk handkerchief, he made a half-turn to leave the Opera House.

The circle opened, and some little confusion ensued, to make a passage for him through the dense throng of persons.

Duval's time had come.

For nearly five minutes he stood, exposed in the ordinary dress of a gentleman, and without a mask, to the observation of any one who might choose to look upon his face.

That, of itself, was an act of great temerity in so public a place.

But it was nothing to what followed.

Claude Duval gently displaced the two persons who stood between him and the Ambassador.

He crossed the little open space, which etiquette left free around the great man, with a rush; and clasping Count Orloff in his arms, he cried out, aloud:

"My preserver! My benefactor!—savior of my life!"

The Count uttered three terrible Russian oaths; and, flushed, flurried, and enraged, he disentangled himself from the embrace of Duval.

"Gracious heaven!" cried Claude, "Can I have made a mistake? And is this not the Count Alexis, who saved me from death in the waters of the Neva when I was posting through Russia as *attache* to the embassy? Is this not the Count Alexis?"

"Perdition seize you!" cried Orloff

stamping his foot with rage. "I don't know you, and don't want! I never saved any one from drowning in the Neva, and wouldn't wet the sole of my foot to do so!"

A voice rung loud and clear at this moment over all other sounds.

"Take care of your Lordship's Excellency's snuff-box!"

"Ah!" cried Orloff; and he grasped his pocket on the outside with his hand. "Ah! that's safe at all events; and my grasp shall not leave it! I don't know you, sir!"

"At least," said Claude, with a low bow, "if I am mistaken, and it was some other Count Alexis, the effulgence of gratitude is not a crime; and —and——" (this the highwayman turned pickpocket, added to himself)— "and—and I have the diamond snuff box!"

CHAPTER VII.

MR. STAPLETON IS BEWILDERED.—THE WARNING VOICE.—COUNT ORLOFF TAKES A PINCH OF SNUFF.—TERRIBLE DISCOVERY.—THE BOW STREET OFFICERS CONCOCT MEASURES FOR THE APPREHENSION OF DUVAL.—MUNCH FEARS AS WELL AS ADMIRES.—A POLITE INVITATION, AND ITS RESULTS.

"Hoy! hoy! Where am I? Hilloa, somebody! What the deuce of a place is this? Hoy! hoy!"

Mr. Stapleton, the Bow Street runner, kept calling out, in the hope that some of the persons employed about the Opera House would hear him and come to his assistance in the maze and labyrinth of dull passages and gloomy little corridors in which he found himself when he pursued Claude in the yellow domino.

"Hoy! hoy, I say! Hilloa, somebody! Hoy!"

But nobody came.

The transverse passage which led to the private proscenium-box had a door in it, and that door Duval had closed.

It only wanted a touch to open it, but the passage was so dark, narrow, and suspicious, that Stapleton, after going a few paces down it, abandoned it.

It was just at its entrance that he came to a stand-still, and kept calling out:

"Hoy!"

The hum and buzz of the maskers in the immense area of the Opera stage and pit came faintly to his ears, and then, for the first time, he began to think he was tricked.

"Hilloa! I have it!" he cried. "Oh, of course, that rascal, Duval, would never show his face to me for nothing. Of course, he meant something by it. I'm done—done brown! He knows his way better about all these old places than I do; and who knows but he is at some trick or another in the theatre, while I am shut up here like a rat in a hole?"

Mr. Stapleton no sooner fairly mastered this idea than he was as anxious to get back to the scene of the masquerade as he had been to quit it.

But then his inducement to quit it had been a strange one.

The smiling, provoking, tormenting face of Duval had been his reason, and he had followed it.

"Godfrey, Godfrey! Hoy! Open the door! I can't see which way to turn! Where are you? Open the door! It's so plaguy dark here!"

Stapleton had turned round so often that he was bewildered, and did not know the way back to the lights, the music, the crowd, and the maskers again.

But Godfrey heard him.

The little door was opened.

A glare of light, and the sounds of the music and of thousands of voices came upon his senses.

But during the eight minutes that Stapleton had been absent from the motley throng, Claude had time, as we know, to mature his plan for the possession of Count Orloff's snuff-box, with its costly diamond ornamentation.

Stapleton looked like a man who

just awakens from sleep, and finds, to his surprise, that broad daylight is about him.

That was the sudden change from the darkness of the gloomy passages in which he had been burrowing to the brilliant illuminations of the masquerade.

"I don't know, Mr. Stapletou," said Godfrey, with a dogged sort of look—"I don't know what is happening, but Claude Duval, to my thinking, is over there close to the ambassador."

"Claude Duval?"

"Oh, yes! I know it's him; but its much better for us to say nothing."

"Wretch! Fool! Idiot!"

"Go it, Mr. Stapleton—go it! I am such a fool, of cøurse; and have made myself such a donkey and a half by pointing out Claude Daval to you, that when I see him again, it's only proper that I should mention it, that's all!"

Stapleton made a plunge forward. He caught hold of a chair, and stood upon it for a moment.

Somebody then gave the chair a kick, and down it came.

But he had seen the highwayman!

Duval masked, and in evening dress merely.

Stapleton was desperate.

He made a rush forward, but there were, at the least, five hundred maskers between him and the little circle about Count Orloff.

"Get out of the way! Confound you all! Get out of the way! I see my man, and I mean to have him! Get out of the way and be hanged to you all!"

But the maskers were not inclined to give way, although thus admonished.

They still thought they saw a mock Bow Street officer; and when he drove, and fought, and pushed, and strove, and declared "he saw his man, and would have him," they thought only that he was playing his part a little too roughly.

That, at a masquerade, was very sure to beget a spirit of retaliation that would be fatal to the onward progress of Stapleton.

A bear flung his paws about his neck.

A masker, made up to imitate a millstone, would squat down before him

A harlequin sprung on to his shoulders.

Stapleton roared with rage.

Godfrey looked on quite calmly.

"Knock 'em over! Take 'em up! Knock 'em down!" cried the infuriated Stapleton.

"Ah!" said Godfrey, "I don't see what a donkey or an idiot can do, Mr. Stapleton."

Godfrey was in that sulky inert state that some people get when they are offended. He would know nothing—he would do nothing—he would see nothing—not he.

Then it was that Stapleton, finding it impossible to reach the circle around the Count Orloff, yelled out in loud tones that warning that had been heard as well by every one as by Claude Duval.

Then Stapleton gave himself up to the tormentors.

He let the bear hug him.

He would not fall over the milestone.

He let the harlequin take to leaps over his head.

And during that time Duval had possessed himself of the Russian Ambassador's diamond snuff-box.

With the wonderful dexterity and sleight of hand which characterized him, Claude during that short and resisted embrace that he had inflicted on Count Orloff had dived two fingers into his coat-pocket, and had exchanged the snuff-box, so rich and so beautiful, and of such value, for the one he had borrowed of Munch.

Held by one of his long, slender fingers up the sleeve of his coat, Duval had the costly prize.

He then made his way towards the stage or proscenium box, where Munch, in a state of agony and apprehension, was awaiting him.

Stapleton and Godfrey were not twenty paces from him when Claude vaulted into the box.

Munch uttered a cry of congratulation.

"What's the matter?" said the highwayman.

"Oh, Captain, you don't mean to say—only do say it—that is, I mean—have you been, and gone, and done it?"

"Done what?"

"Got the sparkling sneezer?"

"Oh, the Count Orloff's snuff-box? To be sure I have! I thought I told you, Munch, I was going to get it."

Munch was lost in admiration.

"Pho! pho!" said Claude. "You don't seem to be in your right wits, my good fellow, to night. I wonder if the Count's snuff is of the best quality, or has any special flavor?"

Claude coolly opened the diamond snuff-box and took a pinch.

"Oh, gracious goodness;" said Munch! "don't—don't!"

"Don't what?"

"Don't show it, Captain—put it away—keep it dark—hide it—oh, do!"

"The snuff-box. you mean? Ah, well! this is the right article. Take a pinch, Munch! I dare say, now, you never had a pinch of snuff out of an ambassador's box worth ten thousand pounds."

"Never! and I don't want, Captain. For goodness gracious, keep it dark!"

"Take a pinch, I say!"

Munch took the pinch, and then Duval shut the box with a snap, and put it into his pocket.

A yell at this moment, more like the faint cry of a wild animal caught by the leg in some trap, made the whole area of the Opera House echo again, and arrested every one's attention.

Count Orloff had re-entered the pit, and had condescended to give forth that sound from his own illustrious and ambassadorial throat.

It was such a sound as the Calmuck, the Tartar, the Muscovite of early times might have uttered. It showed what his Excellency really was beneath the thin plating of the Court of St. Petersburg.

The persons in the suite of the Ambassador were paralyzed with fear and surprise.

His Excellency had been upon the point of entering his carriage.

His illustrious foot was on the step.

There was a grim smile on his Excellency's face, and a cold, fishy look about his Excellency's eyes.

And then, upon taking his hand away from the outside of his ambassadorial pocket, where he felt certain he clutched the diamond snuff-box, and putting the same hand inside the pocket to take it out, his Excellency had made a sudden leap round, and dashing into the Opera House again, he had uttered that Calmuck yell.

Then the Count held up to the gaze of all observers, not his snuff-box radiant with pearls.

Not the brilliant and beautiful object of taste and lavish extravagance which so dazzled all observers.

Not that box which, in common interest for the money it cost, involved an expense, or rather a loss, of five hundred pounds a-year to keep.

Not that marvel of prismatic rays, each one of which seemed to come direct from the sun's bright glow as it sets in the fiery west.

Not that snuff-box of snuff-boxes, but rather an ancient Scotch affair, with a tartan pattern on it, and a thin plate of pinchbeck, as mock gold was then called, inserted in the lid.

No wonder Count Orloff yelled.

"Thieves!—thieves! Help! Murder! Thieves!—thieves!"

Then he uttered another Calmuck yell, and then another.

At the third, he glared around him like some enraged tiger, and he squinted awfully.

Munch, when he heard those sounds, sunk quite down in the proscenium box, and was lost to sight.

"It strikes me, do you know, Munch," said Claude, "that the Russian Ambassador has found out the loss of his diamond snuff-box, and takes the little misfortune very impatiently."

"We are done for, Captain!"

"Why so?"

"We shall be took and hanged, to a dead certainty."

"I don't see that. It's strong too."

"What's strong?"

"A—a—a—chew! A—a—chew! The Count's snuff I mean. It has made me sneeze twice."

"Why, you don't mean to go for to say as you have took it out of your pocket, and been and took another pinch!"

"Just so! Ah! Things grow interesting. Hush, Munch! Not a word!—not a word!"

Duval himself now dived down to the bottom of the box, so that, unless any one from the stage were to partly look into it, they could not see that that box was at all inhabited.

The yellow tabaret curtain helped to hide Duval and Munch, so that Mr. Stapleton, although he now stood within five paces of the man he sought, and the ten thousand pounds snuff-box of the Russian Ambassador, saw neither object.

"Godfrey," said Stapleton, "you run round to all the different doors of the theatre, and tell them not to let a single living soul pass out—man, woman, or child. Then make the best speed you can to the 'Cock and Pie,' in Russel Street, where you will be sure to find some of the 'runners,' and bring them back with you. Place one, then, at each door. Say it is my orders, and be quick about it. Claude Duval is in the house, and I will nab him yet."

Godfrey departed on his errand.

Stapleton now made his way towards the Count Orloff, whose countenance had turned of a dingy yellow color, and whose blonde moustache seemed to be curling round and inspired with a strange life.

The commotion among the maskers was very great; and as, in a few minutes, the bruit got about among them that the doors were closed, and that no one would be permitted to leave the house until it was ascertained who and what they were, there ensued a good deal of alarm and consternation.

The very essence and spirit of a masquerade was about to be set aside by the violation of the incognito of the masks.

Ladies screamed, and showed a disposition to faint. Gentlemen swore, and some who were there on similar errands to Munch and Duval began to drop at their feet various little articles of plunder, which had rewarded their exertions during the night.

"Munch," said Claude, "it seems to me that our adventures here are not quite over."

"In course, not, Captain."

"The doors will be in possession of all the officers that can be got together to hold them, and not a soul will be allowed to pass unnoticed."

"Then, Captain, we are done for!"

"Eh?"

"I say, Captain, we are done for!"

"Oh, stuff, stuff! I told the servant to have something extra for my supper."

"Supper! Oh, dear!"

"What do you mean by 'supper, oh, dear?'"

"I mean, Captain, that we shall sup in Newgate, if we sup at all."

"No, Munch, no! At all events, you are free to go where you like. It is I only who am sought, and who may possibly be in some danger."

"No, Captain; your danger shall be my danger. I will stick to you, come what may of it. I never thought you could get clear off with such a bit of swag as that; but if they nab you, they may nab me as well. At least, Captain, I can wait on you in the Stone Jug, and save you some trouble."

Duval was silent, but it was because he was touched a little by the devotion of his follower.

It is strange, but it is no less strange than true, that human nature presents in one and the same mind the utmost recklessness and absence of principle along with, at times, very tender emotions.

It was so with Claude Duval.

"No, Munch," he said, after a pause, "no; I have not brought you here to consign you to a prison. Trust to me, and it is the rewards, not the

calamities, of my service that shall be yours."

Munch groaned.

"Let me think!" said the highwayman. "Upon my word, that Russian snuff is about the strongest I ever had. It keeps up a perpetual inclination to—a-chew!—sneeze."

"Oh, don't, Captain, don't!"

"I can't help it. But I have an idea."

"What is it, Captain?"

"The only way to get clear out of the Opera House is to get the officers taken away from the doors; and the only way to do that is to let them capture me."

"Eh?"

"The only way! Come after me, Munch. On your hands and knees you can come; for I see that abominable Stapleton has got a chair from one of the boxes, and is standing upon it, glaring about him like a rattlesnake. The Count Orloff is close to him, and there is a crowd about them. I see many of the gentlemen are unmasked, and hold their vizors in their hands. Creep along, Munch, this way; and I promise you we shall be out of sight in a moment. Bring that domino with you—the one I wore last, I mean. This way!"

The promise of being out of sight of the acute eyes of Stapleton, the officer, if he crept after his great Captain was quite sufficient inducement to Munch to do so on the moment.

Claude led him from the box into the narrow passage, which Stapleton had not had the temerity to trust himself in, and they were soon in the dark route to the green room.

"Now, my dear Munch," said Duval, "if you only attend to my instructions there will be no difficulty about getting out of the Opera House."

"I will, Captain."

"If I don't mistake you very much, you have some cord or twine about you?"

"Yes, Captain; it's useful in so many ways to a gentleman in our profession, and I always carry a few yards of it with me."

"Good! Take my cravat—can you feel it in the dark here, Munch?"

"Yes; but it's easy to have a light if you want one, Captain."

"A match lasts so short a time that it will scarcely be of any service."

"Oh, but I have some bits of wax taper."

"That will do. Light one up, Munch, and you will soon see some place in the wall to stick it in. That will do. Capital, capital! Now, Munch, you stay here, while I invite Mr. Stapleton."

"What Captain?"

"While I invite Mr. Stapleton, I say, to pay us a visit here in this narrow passage."

"He's been and gone mad!" said Munch. "Perhaps that Russian's snuff has got into his head."

"Not at all, my dear Munch—not at all! But when Stapleton does come here, which I think he will, you must fall upon him at once, gag his mouth with my cravat, tie his hands behind him with the cord you have, and get off his coat, waistcoat, and top-boots."

"Oh, my eye!" cried Munch. "Nobody will believe it when I tell it 'em at the Red Ken."

"Never you mind about that. Comprehend now exactly what I want you to do. After Stapleton is secured in the way I say——"

"After?" said Munch, with a grimace.

"Pho! pho! I have no doubt about it, since I shall assist you throughout. After, I say, he is secured, you must put on him the domino I am putting on now, which I will then exchange for yours."

"Yes, Captain."

"And then leave the rest to me."

"I will—I will! It comes to the same in the end."

"What do you mean by the same?"

"Nabbed, grabbed, and scragged, that's all!"

"Pshaw! you have no confidence in me. You are always forgetting—"

"What, Captain?"

"That I am Claude Duval!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CLAUDE INVITES MR. STAPLETON TO HIS CAPTURE.—THE RUSH INTO THE NARROW PASSAGE.—MUNCH CAPTURES THE OFFICER.—DUVAL IN A NEW CHARACTER.—FELICITATIONS AND SUSPICIONS OF COUNT ORLOFF.—DUVAL'S DANGER AND ESCAPE.—A COACH! A COACH!

Claude had the domino round his neck in such a manner that it could be stripped off in a moment; while Munch with several different handkerchiefs that he took from his shoes, his boot-tops, and his pockets, wiped the perspiration of fear from his brow, our reckless hero walked quietly to the door opening on to the stage.

He had on a half-mask, and the domino was rather a capacious one.

No doubt but for the fact that by this time the doors of the Opera House were all in the hands of the officers, the highwayman could have passed out of the theatre easily in the costume that he now wore, but the scrutiny at the door was a thing not to be hazarded.

Duval, therefore, set about one of the most audacious tricks he had ever played.

No one took any particular notice of him when he opened the door that led to the green-room. In fact the attention of every one was so completely engrossed by the Count Orloff, who still stood with the old Scotch snuff-box in his hand, that the space immediately on the stage-side of the door was nearly vacant of maskers.

Stapleton still stood upon the chair, and looked about him.

He was waiting for the return of Godfrey to commence more active operations, and it would seem now that his character as a real officer of police was understood and acknowledged.

He held in his hand the symbol of his authority, in one of those short brass constables staffs with a gilt crown at the head of it.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Stapleton, "his Lordship's Excellency, the Count Orloff, has been robbed, as I fully expected he would be, of his diamond snuff-box. If his Lordship's Excellency had condescended to pay a little more attention to the warning I gave him it might not have happened."

The Count uttered a malediction.

"But, however," added Stapleton, "it's no use speaking about what is past. The job's done—the trick has succeeded—and there is but one man in all London who of course could do it, that is, since Sixteen-stringed Jack is dead!"

Count Orloff swore again.

"And that man is Claude Duval, and what's more I saw him do it!"

Every one present, looked in his neighbor's face, as though he would say:

"Are you Duval?"

"But this night will be the end and last of his little games," added Stapleton; "for the measures I have taken must nab him!"

"Are you quite sure of that, Mr. Stapleton?" cried Claude Duval, as he, too, sprang upon a chair; and lifting the mask from his face, looked over the heads of the crowd at the officer.

Stapleton was so utterly astonished at this unheard-of impudence that he nearly fell off the chair on which he was standing.

The highwayman had time quietly to open the door leading to the green-room before the officer could find breath to utter an exclamation.

When Stapleton did speak, it was with a half-shriek that he called out, "That's him! That's our man! That's Duval!"

The Ambassador uttered another of his Calmuck war-cries.

"That will do!" said Claude, as he retreated just within the door. "Now, Munch, look out!"

"Good gracious, Captain, is he coming?"

"To be sure he is, Munch! Did you doubt it?"

There was an odd, half-scared expression upon the face of Munch; but Duval knew perfectly well that notwithstanding all the remarks he had

made about the extreme hardihood and hazardous character of the enterprise, that he could depend upon his follower, when it came to action, to carry out his instructions.

The commotion in the pit of the Opera House was immense.

A kind of notion seemed to spread about among the people that Claude was some desperate personage, whom it would be a matter of great danger to encounter; and those persons who had lost nothing themselves did not see the desirableness or propriety in, perhaps, getting dangerously wounded for the recovery of Count Orloff's snuff-box.

This produced a state of things that exactly suited the highwayman; for it left the enterprise of his capture entirely in the professional and official hands of Mr. Stapleton.

In every way the officer had mismanaged and miscalculated his resources;—for now at the moment when Godfrey would have been of the greatest possible assistance to him, he was not forthcoming.

But Stapleton was a man of courage —that characteristic could not be denied to the Bow Street officers of that period; and, indeed, a man of far less energy of character than Stapleton would perhaps have acted impulsively as he did—the more especially as Count Orloff had said something about a thousand pounds reward for his ten thousand pounds' snuff-box.

The moment, therefore, Stapleton got over the first shock of the surprise which the appearance of the highwayman had given him, he sprung from the chair and made a rush towards the door at which Duval had disappeared.

The officer spoke not a word more.

The crowd parted, to allow him to pass.

He was cheered on from all parts of the house.

But nobody seemed inclined to help him.

The maskers seemed inclined to look upon the whole affair as a private matter now—a kind of duel compounded of audacity, dexterity, and courage, between a Bow Street officer and the notorious highwayman.

Like a battering-ram, Stapleton came against the door leading to the green-room; and by the force with which he flung himself against it, he must have had the impression that it was fastened.

If he had time to think at all during that headlong career, he must have considered that his weight, and the speed at which he went, afforded the only chances of bursting that door open.

But the officer was disappointed, and not agreeably so.

The door yielded instantly, and the impetus of Stapleton's movement was such that he fell headlong into the narrow passage—sliding and rushing along the floor like some one who has fallen upon ice, and cannot for a few seconds bring himself to a standstill.

Had Duval pre-arranged everything for his own advantage, and pointed out exactly what he wished Stapleton to do, he could not have managed better than the officer himself did in his haste and passion.

The bit of taper, that Munch had lighted, and which he had cleverly stuck to a nail in the wall, shed about it a faint but sufficient light for their purpose.

"There he comes, Munch! Down upon him!"

Munch made a kind of leap upon the prostrate form of Stapleton before the officer could rise; and twining the fingers of both hands about his throat, he held him at his mercy.

"Help, Captain! — and we have him!" cried Munch. Duval was not behindhand in what he had to do.

Stapleton was gagged in a moment with the cravat.

But the officer kicked and plunged furiously; and his rather heavy top-boots would have inflicted a kick almost as bad as that from a horse, but Munch, when he saw that Duval had gagged Stapleton, adroitly shifted his attack to his heels; and seizing him by his ankles, he gave them a wrench

which brought his head upon the floor-boards with a bump that was rather confusing.

"His hands—his hands, Munch!" said Claude—"tie his hands! Yet, no! —by Jove, I forget!—off with his coat! I want it particularly, and that red waistcoat, too!"

Stapleton had no chance now in the hands of his adversaries.

He was rather confused by the knock on the head he had received; and, moreover, both Munch and Claude pushed, hauled, and thumped him about so unmercifully, that he had not the shadow of a chance of making any effectual resistance.

His coat, cravat, and boots were dragged from him rather than taken off in the ordinary fashion; and half-stunned and bewildered, Stapleton could be scarcely said to know exactly where he was.

"Quick, Munch! Put the domino upon him!" cried Duval; "and this mask, too! Take my hat—I have his. His boots are a mile too large for me. What a foot the fellow has! Now for it, Munch—prop him up."

Stapleton was like a man in the hands of Fate. He seemed incapable of resistance, and to give himself up to the situation like one who had fought in vain against circumstances which were overpowering as Destiny itself.

And in far less time than it has taken us to relate it, a transformation was effected, which was the surprise and admiration of Munch.

Stapleton was attired in the domino which everybody in the masquerade had seen enveloping the audacious highwayman when he stood upon the chair and spoke to the officer.

The half black mask was on his face, and the only change which took place in the programme which Claude had laid down was effected at the suggestion of Munch.

That personage had, as a matter of course, dived his hands into Stapleton's pockets, and in one of them he found a pair of handcuffs, no doubt intended by the officer to grace the wrists of Claude.

"Captain," said Munch, "let's put on these; it'll look more natural."

"It will. Do it quickly."

The cord was cut which confined Stapleton's hands behind his back, and, with as much dexterity as though he had been a Bow Street runner himself, Munch put what he called the "darbies" on him.

But if the transformation of the bewildered and stupefied Stapleton was great, that of Duval was greater still.

The Bow Street officer was but a quiescent actor.

The change in him was of costume merely.

But the transformation of Duval was great, for he threw all his abilities into playing the part of Stapleton, the Bow Street runner.

And he played it to perfection.

The coat worn by the officer was one of those immense, wide-skirted garments which covered up a good three parts of the wearer; and, when attired in that, and with the top-boots, and with the edge of the red waistcoat just peeping out from the lappels of the aforesaid huge coat, and the three-cornered hat low down upon his brows, Claude looked the character to perfection.

He seemed to settle himself down so as to be six inches at least below his ordinary height, and to assume broadness and squatness in proportion.

He inserted his hand within the cravat of the unhappy Stapleton, and holding aloft the little constable's staff of brass in the other hand, he spoke rapidly to Munch.

"Open the door! open the door! I'll take him out; and as for you, Munch, you can get away as you can at any time. Nobody will question you, or any one else, when once they think I am taken. We shall meet at home. Now, you rascal!"

Munch threw open the door that led on to the stage.

There was a roar of applause and a tremendous clapping of hands as Duval appeared with his prisoner.

"By Jove! he's got him! There he

is! Bring him along! He has him at last! Hurrah! Bravo! bravo!"

The applause shook the house again.

A wide lane was made for Duval to bring along his prisoner, and all he did was to wave the little staff in his right hand, as, amid the shouts, bravos, and congratulations of all the maskers, he conducted the wretched Stapleton towards one of the outlets of the pit.

Count Orloff, then, with a savage howl, sprang forward.

"My box! my box!" he cried; "my diamond snuff-box, Mr. Officer! Where is it?"

"Quite safe, your Lordship's Excellency," said the mock officer.

"Where? where? Thousand devils! where?"

"In my pocket!"

"Give it me at once—give it me at once! Ha, ha! I shall see my brilliants once again!"

"I darn't now, your Lordship's Excellency. The magistrate must see it. I must produce it, or he won't commit the thief. But, to-morrow morning—Nay, your Excellency, I appeal to this honorable company if that isn't the law?"

"Yes, yes! The officer's right!" the officer's right!" cried many voices.

"I am robbed!" cried Count Orloff—"I am still robbed! How do I know he has the box? Let the officer show it, then, and be answerable for it."

"Oh, your Excellency, that's easily done," said Claude, and he held up before the eyes of the Count Orloff the diamond snuff-box.

Another round of applause shook the house, and for once in a way, the Muscovite noble was compelled to shrink before public opinion.

"If the police-officer is answerable for the box," he said, "I am content."

"I have risked my life for it," said Duval, "and am risking it still, for this is a most contumacious fellow. So your Lordship's Excellency may be well assured that it is as safe in my possession as in yours—and a little safer, too."

Count Orloff uttered his three usual Russian oaths as he saw the highwayman coolly put the snuff-box back into his pocket.

But the public voice was thoroughly with the supposed officer; and, still amid shouts and plaudits, Duval dragged Stapleton onward, dealing him a hearty kick on the shins with his own top-boots whenever he showed any symptoms of being restive.

The shouts and cries that Claude was taken soon reached the ears of the officers who had been fetched by Godfrey to keep guard at the different doors of the theatre.

Now, perhaps our friend was in the greatest danger, and had arrived at what might be called the crises of that evening's adventure.

He might deceive the Count Orloff. He might deceive the crowd of maskers who thronged about him, and he might seem the character he had assumed to the officials and ordinary door-keepers of the Opera House.

But would Godfrey, and the other Bow Street runners, who were the ordinary associates, comrades, and acquaintances of Mr. Stapleton, be so easily taken in?

That was the question.

And now it may be surmised that Stapleton had recovered somewhat, and although terribly beleaguered, handcuffed, gagged, and half-choked by the pressure of Duval's knuckles on his throat, he yet might make an effort to save himself and discomfit his foe.

There was but one effort in his power, and that, to do Stapleton but justice, he made with avidity and smartness enough.

Flinging his legs suddenly from under him, he reached the floor, dragged Duval along with him.

The maskers raised various cries, and two or three rushed forward to render assistance.

The knight of the road felt in a moment that there upon that spot he and Stapleton must part; and he had no objection in the least to do so, provided their association so far had answered his purpose.

"He's an obstinate rascal," said Du-

val; "but, if you, gentlemen, will look to him, I'll get a coach, and some of my comrades to lend a helping hand."

These words had hardly passed Duval's lips when Godfrey, with four or five officers at his heels, dashed into the pit in a state of great excitement, crying out:

"Hurrah! hurrah! Bravo, Mr. Stapleton! So you've nabbed him at last, sir! I told you he was here, sir! All's right! Where is he, Mr. Stapleton? Ha, ha! Claude Duval nabbed and grabbed at last! I've been called more donkeys and idiots on his account than all my life before! Eh! What? Sir! Mr. Stap——No! Yes, it is! No, it isn't! Who is it?"

Claude left Stapleton with as many hands of the maskers upon his collar as could be crowded on to that small space, and holding the gilt staff straight out before him, he rushed past Godfrey and the throng of officers, calling out:

"A coach! a coach! A coach, comrades! A coach for the notorious Claude Duval! A coach! a coach! Call a coach, and let the man that calls the coach be the caller of the coach—and let him call nothing but coach! coach! coach! Oh! for a coach, ye gods!"

The officers looked at each other bewildered.

But the highwayman was gone.

Claude ran along, or rather forced through the press, and reached a spot where the coaches and other vehicles were not so much packed together and entangled.

While scanning the faces of those drivers who had not left their seats, who should his eyes light upon but that coachman who had shown himself so expert at *cloak-hooking*, and of whom Duval had had suspicions that he had betrayed him to Stapleton.

But these suspicions had faded away by this time.

Duval had had some words with Munch concerning this man, and the pickpocket had let him know that he could trust him.

In a moment, the highwayman was in the vehicle, and the driver to whom his fare had whispered through the round hole in the front, was already starting.

Luckily, half a dozen other carriages dashed off from the opera-house at the same time.

At last the officers appeared.

They were misled by some one saying he had seen a man run down Golden-Hill Square.

Off started the officers in that direction.

Duval had had enough experience in eluding the police of a city, not to try to escape them by running, where other means were available.

He knew that he would be eventually tired out, while his pursuers would be increased at every step.

Claude had by this time come into Picadilly, and there he thought he might as well get out.

But before so doing, he lifted the side window-curtains and looked out.

There was nothing alarming to be seen.

Then he peeped through a bull's-eye of glass at the back of the coach.

"The deuce!" cried Duval starting. "That's the red and yellow coach that was next to this at the opera."

Indeed, a coach was following the highwayman's.

The latter was not one to go upon doubts.

By bidding his driver slacken or increase his pace, he soon found that he was indeed followed.

The truth was, in that second vehicle was a police officer, no other than one Mr. Burney, a Bow-Street beagle, who had once been nearly drowned while attempting to arrest Captain Blood and Claude Duval on the River Thames.

He was one of those men who have a little ambition—ambition unaccompanied by coolness aud shrewdness.

He had been on duty outside the opera-house, and had seen our friend enter the coach.

He did not know who it was, then, but speedily guessed it when his brother officer described Duval's last dress.

He did not inform any one of his design, but got into the first coach, and, as we have seen, kept close after the highwayman.

He did not want to tackle the latter single-handed—no, Burney was too clever a man for that.

He only intended to dog the other until he had housed him.

Duval's tactics were completely changed.

He was now intent upon tiring out his pursuer.

He well enough knew how, from selfish motives, the officers did not like to have any sharers in their doings.

It was then a trial of skill between two practised players.

Burney was determined to run Claude to earth.

The latter was determined to give him the double.

Gentle reader, did you ever try to dodge a bailiff?

Did you ever try to mystify some one equally polite and persevering in their attendance upon you?

As I feel certain that I only number among my readers ladies and gentlemen of the strictest honor, such a question is an idle and almost impertinent one.

But supposing anybody did wish to perform such a trick, they might perhaps take a lesson from my hero.

This is the extremely clever trick he played upon his pursuer.

As he rode along, Duval asked himself what he was going to do.

How was he to escape?

It was not so very easy.

He thought first of one plan, and then of another.

He had an idea of going into His Majesty's Theatre, where there was a morning concert in course of progress. The price of admission would be rather too much for his follower, he thought; but then, when Claude came to reflect, he saw that this place was anything but a good one, because the officer would, in all probability, wait outside the door till he came out, so that he would fatigue himself with sitting out what he did not care about hearing, and, after all, be in no better position than he was at that moment.

Or, in all likelihood, would be in a worse position, for it was not improbable that Burney would have a *posse* waiting at the door. It was now nearly ten in the morning.

The carriage continued its course down Piccadily; and Claude pursued his meditations with the same unsatisfactory result.

He looked despairingly out at the window, in hopes that the objects passing by on the other side would suggest some plain; but they suggested nothing.

Duval leaned back, and bit his lips with vexation.

Suddenly, however, he uttered an exclamation of delight.

"I have it—I have it!" he cried.

He looked through the glass at the back of the carriage, and saw that the coach containing Burney was still following him, and that the officer's head was thrust through the window.

They had by this time reached Hungerford Market.

Claude alighted and descended the steps on the right-hand side of the market, and took his way rapidly towards the river.

Here he hailed a boat, and bade the waterman row him towards Westminster. He had not yet quite tired out his follower; indeed, he did not expect to get rid of him so easily.

Presently he saw him sitting quite easily in another boat, which was following in his wake.

But his plan was now to be put in to execution.

"Which is the landing-place near here that is the least used?" Duval asked the man.

He considered a minute, and then replied:

"Whitehall Stairs."

"Are there any boats there?" he asked.

"You very seldom ever sees one," he replied.

"Row me there, then," he said.

When he had done so, Claude landed, telling him first, however, to wait for his return, and should another boat

stop there presently, to be sure and send it away out into the middle of the stream.

When the highwayman got upon shore, he walked quickly along for some little distance, and then pausing, watched the officer with considerable anxiety land and pay his waterman, evidently dismissing him.

Claude watched a little longer, and saw the man row back into the middle of the stream.

Then he allowed the man to run up the steps and pass him, he meanwhile managing to escape his notice by drawing back under the shadow of the wall.

"Now for it!" he cried aloud, when Burney had passed by.

And he rushed rapidly down the steps again and jumped lightly into his own boat.

Next moment the boat had run out into the middle of the river, and next moment, again, was the officer gesticulating wildly and frantically from the shore.

But it was useless.

No boat was within hail, and Claude Duval was carried away in triumph.

Burney was left cursing and swearing.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HIGHWAYMAN AND THE HANGMAN.—THE STRUGGLE.—THE UNSEEN WITNESS.—LEAP FOR LIFE.

We have too long left Captain Blood on his sick couch, while accompanying Claude Duval during his exploits in a line far from as dignified as life on the road. He stooped to pocket-picking as a sort of relaxation.

But we have spared our readers any uninteresting account of the wounded highwayman's gradual return to health.

His nurses had been old Betty and Frances, the highwayman's daughter.

The latter had purchased necessary delicacies from her own pocket-money, and Swing troubled himself so little with the state of the household provisions that he never noticed any unusual consumption; besides a sick man does not eat much.

At the moment when we turn again to the highwayman, it is night.

In the lumber-room of Swing's house, the highwayman had been wearily passing the hours, doubly long to one accustomed to ride fast, mingle in revels and exciting clamor.

He was in better condition now than he supposed.

He had been so used to keep in quiet during his wounds, besides, perhaps, a disinclination to part with his young and lovely nurse, that—like one who, though his chains are flung off him, cannot move his limbs freely of a sudden—he did not feel able to shake off his languor.

We do not care to give his thoughts; thinking was all he had to do—his recollections of dashing deeds, of gallant leaps on obedient steed, of facing a half dozen foes, of—well, we cannot say all, but we promise the reader what Captain Blood does in the future will cast into the shade his former actions.

The Captain had sank into slumber immediately after his supper.

At about eight o'clock, the hangman entered his house.

He was not exactly sober, having been having quite a drinking-bout with some of the under turnkeys of Newgate, who did not think themselves above associating with the executioner.

But the fumes of liquor had pretty well lost their effect by the time he reached his house, and his daughter noticed nothing about him unusual.

Swing hurriedly finished his supper and then went directly upstairs to his room.

This adjoined the one in which was the wounded highwayman.

"I don't know what's going to become of the profession," muttered Swing as he sat down in a reflective attitude. "Lor,' the fellow before me used to have to turn off any num-

ber of celebrated chaps. Let me see."

He tallied off on his fingers, as he named them, the following names.

"He had the finishing of Jemyns—that was the great bank robber. And Colonel Easterly, the one that shot Mr. Timms of Hammersly. He come pretty near to tucking up that sheriff who got pardoned—and young Rimber, but I finished him—that's one piece of luck I had. Why, I got a matter of seven guineas for Rimber's coat, which I sold to half a dozen gents in the cur'us line. I did have Sixteen-stringed Jack go through my hands, to be sure, but what's that? it makes me feel more and more disgraced when I have to hang such as they make game for the gallows now-a-days. Where's that paper, I wonder."

He looked about him, but he had to get up and procure what he wanted from his overcoat, thrown on a nail against the wall.

It was a paper, one of the rare sheets published in those days.

"This is it," muttered he, unfolding it, and reading a paragraph:

"'Stephen Dorlett, aged fifteen, will be hanged on Monday next. Our readers will remember that he was convicted of forgery.'"

Swing vented an oath.

"The fellow is a boy," said he, "with a neck no bigger than my thumb. And that's the way the profession is bemeaned. Mark my word," said Swing with a wave of the hand as though he were addressing an assemblage of Lord Mayors and sheriffs, "and score 'em under; hanging is getting so common that folks will be trying some day to do away with it altogether."

It was under the excitement of this oratorical flourish that the speaker rose and paced the room again.

"Those 'keys at the stone-pig kept me so late that I found all the shops shut where I could have got a decent bit of rope. Rope? it ought to be *thread* for such a child! Well, well, if so be it has to be done, the easier I get through with it, the better. I ought to have a coil of small rope about here."

He began a search for the article he stood in need of, but, overhaul the contents of a couple of old chests, drawers and so forth as carefully as he might, he could not come across it.

"Where did I stow away what was left of that I hanged that girl with, I'd like to know? The little lass who passed a bad shilling, I think it was. There must have been some five or six-and-twenty feet of it unused. It wasn't over in my room at Newgate, for I was searching there this morning. It isn't here, that's plain. And so it must be in the next room."

This logic pleased Swing apparently.

"Ay," said he, "by the same token, it is in that sheep skin-covered trunk; I remember it well now."

So saying, he took up his candle and left his room.

He paused on the landing, but all was dark and silent.

The inmates of the house were doubtlessly asleep.

Swing entered the adjoining room with noiseless tread.

This was the lumber room, the same that served as refuge and resting-place for Captain Blood.

But the latter was concealed from sight by the pile of rubbish, and nothing told Swing that he was not alone.

The hangman managed to find the trunk he had spoken of, and, setting down his light on a barrel head, he began to turn over its contents.

His back was to the hiding-place of the highwayman.

Now, this chanced to be about the hour when Frances, the highwayman's daughter, took advantage of the darkness and quiet to spend a few agitated moments by the pillow of him she had learnt to love while nursing him.

With the mechanical change which comes over one long sick, Captain Blood, woke up despite himself at this juncture.

The slight sound and the muttering of Swing, who had not yet found what he sought, aided his error.

"Are you here, Frances," he murmured faintly, as he held out his hand.

Luckily, the words fell so softly on the hangman's ears that he set down the cause as something occasioned by the wind.

At the time this incident occurred, Frances was coming up the stairs with Captain Blood's supper, but, startled by the light shining through the keyhole, of that place she expected to find in utter darkness, she stopped and looked in.

She saw her father still engaged in his search.

"Here it is," cried Swing, with a long breath of delight, "here's the collar fit for a queen! Coiled up in the coat worn by Sixteen-stringed Jack when he traveled the long road, in the good old times."

He had so far forgot his caution that he uttered the above in quite a loud tone.

The highwayman heard it, and, not imagining any one but the girl could be there, rose half up and looked out from his concealment.

Swing turned, with the rope in his hand, just then, and saw him.

It was almost a scream that he gave, as he turned white, and shook like a leaf.

"The d——"

He got no farther in his oath, but his quivering lips gasped out:

"Sixteen-stringed Jack! it's his ghost!"

But Swing was not the sort of fellow to be long frightened when there was a loophole open to the matter-of-fact. There rushed upon his brain a crowd of stories, scarcely believed before, that Jack Singleton, the highwayman and house-breaker, had been resuscitated after his execution.

The face of the Captain helped to dissipate any idea of its being supernatural, for on it was—not the solemn expression we may suppose unearthly visitors' would wear—but a surprised, puzzled one.

For a second the two men stared at one another. Then Swing made a dash forward, but, coming across the remains of a broken chair, he stumbled.

Captain Blood leaped up, already dressed, and tackled the hangman.

The girl outside heard the scuffle, but not very audibly.

The highwayman was in better condition than he had believed himself, but still he was not the man of other days.

The hangman, stouter built and in perfect health, contrived after a short struggle to pinion Blood with the strong, thin rope.

"There you are!" said he, chuckling, while his daughter by straining her ear overheard every word almost. "What a bit of luck this is! Jack Singleton, once hanged, brought to life, and now caught by me! Why, I'll make my fortune. How will it look in print? 'The famous highwayman taken single-handed!' I should not wonder if some painter came to ask for a portrait-job of me. Ha! ha! Jack Sheppard had his taken—why not I, if it comes to that? But, old fellow, don't get drunk before you have finished the pot. Here I have my man where I can find him when wanted," said Swing, as he stooped down to look at an end of rope, which, not coming up to his mark in security, he fastened up in a way more satisfactory to him.

The highwayman was senseless, or pretended to be so. He had probably overtaxed himself in the struggle.

Frances, fearful that her father would surprise her, had meanwhile hurried down to her room, at the door of which she listened.

"I'll go," said the hangman, "to Marsden and get half a dozen stout, trusty fellows, and we will have Jack Singleton, *alias* Captain Blood, under bar and bolt before we are half a day older. But, but," added he, reflecting, "Fanny will learn now what I am. She'll read about the hangman and the place of the highwayman's capture. Bah! I'll carry him out of the the house into the fields to a place where I will have my helpers ready, and no one will know exactly where I

nailed' him. Good, good; I'll make the story *hang* well together—ha! ha!"

And then he went softly out of the house, so softly that the listener did not hear him, and fancied him still to be in his room upstairs.

True it is that Swing could not help puzzling himself as to the chance that brought the highwayman to his house, but he did not guess anywhere near the truth.

He had enough to do at this moment; and, as he said to himself, he could ask questions of his family when he returned.

Swing could be quick, like most men, upon an emergency, and by daybreak he had collected eight or ten trusty countrymen, who waited at a place he appointed about an eighth of a mile down the road from his dwelling.

Frances had waited for nearly an hour before becoming persuaded that her father must have left the place.

Then she stole upstairs, and, after a long period of waiting in indecision at the door of the lumber-room, determined on a bold move.

This was to open the door and look in.

She did so.

None of her suppositions did come true.

Her father was not there watching the wounded man, nor were both stunned and laying in a grapple; the simple sight of Captain Blood bound hand and foot presented itself to her eyes.

She lifted up her candle, and peered into every corner.

She and the highwayman were alone, indeed.

With her delicate fingers, she began trying to unbind her lover.

She did not succeed very well in that undertaking, but her touch seemed to bring the knight of the road to life.

The Captain stared about him, but instantly he recollected where he was.

"Thank you," murmured he to the girl. "Ah, you will never succeed in untwisting those knots. Go for a knife. But stay; there may be life at stake on each moment—my life. The candle, burn my hands loose."

In five minutes, the Captain stood on his feet free as ever.

"I find that I am able to travel," said he, giving himself a shake. "I must away, for the rough way I have been lately treated by——Your father, wasn't it?"

Frances nodded assent.

Captain Blood was still confused in mind.

He remembered having seen Swing somewhere, as indeed he had, to his cost, but could not call to mind exactly where.

"You have told me all your story, Frances," said he speaking quickly, "but you have not heard mine. You have thought me everything but what I am, I know. I have led you to suppose perhaps that my home is in the city. Not so."

Blood flung open the window, and the morning light streamed in, in a grey beam.

"So late," he muttered. "Upon the open country," said he, "the heath and the road is my home. I am——"

A startling interruption met the highwayman's speech.

In rushed Swing, who had heard the voices.

"The devil! my daughter! Fanny here? And you loose! Here's at you!"

But the Captain stepped aside, and the hangman missed his attempted clutch at him.

"Frances," cried Blood, "will you come with me?"

"No, but you shall with me," shouted Swing, grappling with him.

They wrestled for a moment.

Then the highwayman caught both of his assailant's hands in his.

"Frances, will you come away from here with me?"

Swing struggled frantically.

"He's a highwayman, girl! for heaven's sake, don't listen to him. He has had as many loves as there are days in the year. Sixteen-stringed Jack's name has always been coupled with robbery, murder——"

"Liar!" cried Blood; "if you know me, I know you. You are——"

Swing shuddered.

"Not to her! don't say it!" said he.

Blood thundered in his fury:

"This man is the detested hangman of London!"

With a faint moan that wavered on her lips until it had spelt out the words "highwayman" and "hangman," the girl swooned.

"D—— you!" yelled the hangman, breaking loose and rushing to the heap of lumber for some weapon.

The Captain was well aware now that an encounter with a man so strong as Swing while he was weakened and stiff in his muscles, so to say, had too many risks.

He was not one who stood too firmly on petty points.

He turned and left the room hastily, with a glance at the fainted girl. He slammed the door after him.

At the same moment, the hangman, who had taken up the leg of a table for a club, and was coming forward, seeing Blood's escape, hurled the heavy oaken stick at him.

It rebounded from the just closed door.

Then Swing, with an oath, pulled the door open and tumbled down the stairs rather than ran.

A scream, followed by half a dozen, rang through the house.

This was the old serving-woman alarmed.

The highwayman, knowing nothing of the house, turned the wrong way in the darkness, and found himself at the end of a passage, at the other end of which appeared Swing.

"Ha, ha!" chuckled the latter, "I've caged the bird now!"

There was a door before the highwayman.

He opened it and sprang in.

It was a room of the second floor with two windows looking out on the garden, back.

The Captain dashed up one of the sashes.

A pavement was just under him, and a fall of the twenty feet demanded would have broken every bone in his body.

But there was a little woodshed about ten feet high standing some six feet from the base of the house.

The next moment, the Captain was standing on the window ledge, gathering himself up for a jump.

The next moment again, one might have seen him spring right out into the air, just touching the woodshed, and thus breaking the force of his descent.

When Swing, after forcing the door which had been jammed fast by Captain Blood's violent push, rushed into the room and to the open window, he saw the highwayman running around one end of the house.

"Hoorah!" cried he, "the fool is running down the road just where my men are waiting. But 'twas a splendid Leap for Life!"

With that he darted through the entries to the front of the house, to the great alarm of his serving-woman.

He had to lose some time at the front door, which was fastened, but presently he was on the road about thirty yards behind Captain Blood who was not running at his full speed.

His pursuer was much pleased inwardly by the fact that the highwayman was running into the jaws of danger.

The half dozen men whom he had collected were lounging in a paddock.

When Swing thought he was within earshot of them—and while, consequently, the fugitive was almost abreast of them,—he began shouting:

"That's him! stop him! stop thief!"

His men sprang up at his cries, and climbing over the fence, completely surrounded the highwayman.

In a twinkling, the latter was secured.

After a short consultation it was determined to take the captive on to the tavern called the "Marlborough Head," where a cart could be procured to transport the prisoner to London.

The captors were hankering after

their breakfasts, and Swing had offered to "stand" for a mug of ale and a bit of cheese to all. It will be remembered that he was known under the assumed name of Martin to those in this neighborhood.

CHAPTER X.

THE INN.—ATTEMPT AT ESCAPE.—THE CAPTAIN AND CLAUDE MEET AGAIN.—AWAY!

The "Marlborough Head" at the little village of Marsdown was kept by a man named Spigott, who had often been of service to gentlemen of the road who had got into difficulties and needed a hiding-place.

There was some mystery about the facilities of concealment that the inn must have possessed, for several times officers had lost those they pursued in it or its neighborhood.

Happily, Swing and none of the villagers knew of these facts.

The outwitted officers had generally been Londoners, who looked upon the countrymen as louts unworthy of their confidence.

The landlord, of course, kept secret any share he had had in such evasions.

It was about one o'clock in the morning that a man walked up to the door of the inn, and pulled at a little knob like a nailhead on one side of the doorway.

In a couple of minutes, a wicket, of just the size for one inside to examine a person standing in the porch, opened and, if it had not been so dark, a face would have been seen there.

"It is late!" said a voice at the wicket.

"Early enough," replied the man, with a peculiar tone, "for one of the spur, whip and purse."

"Who is it?"

"Number Seven for these roads!" replied the man.

A light flared up suddenly inside the inn hall, and there was the sound of fastenings being let down.

"Claude Duval again!" said a hearty old man appearing in the open doorway. "You are Number One, rather. Lord love ye, come in, come in."

Duval—for it was he, fresh from London—stepped across the threshold.

"Nobody else? no horse?" inquired the landlord, as he prepared to shut the door.

"No," replied Claude; "I had a trot on a friend's nag down to Barnet, and I came over on Shank's mare."

"Any news of the Captain? No? I'm sorry for it. Never heard of such a thing before. He ain't dead."

"It is not unlikely, Spigott," remarked the highwayman sadly.

"Bah! such a man——Here's the tap-room, though. Claret—*the* claret? yes. As I was saying, such a man, an out-and-outer, has got to do more than the Captain before he cuts the world's acquaintance. He hasn't left the country, has he?"

"It may be. Blood had some secret about him, which he never would tell. He was often sad and thoughtful. I could never fathom the cause."

"Something in early life, no doubt," said Spigott, uncorking a bottle of wine scientifically.

"But to business," began Duval. "I have come down here to make a thorough search for my friend. I believe him to be alive. I want a little laying-over from the roads, and from London, too——"

"Dick the Dasher was down this way yesterday afternoon, and he told me something of 'em. Whew!" whistled Spigott, "mustn't the redbreasts be jolly mad! Oh, that Rooshan—ha, ha!"

"Not bad."

"Splendid! You're the prince of high-jinksmen!"

"Have you my horse here?" asked Claude.

"In tiptop condition. So's the Captain's."

"I will take an hour's nap or so till dawn, and take up the search the first thing in the morning," said Claude, rising.

He had finished his very late sup-

per, or very early breakfast, which ever it was.

"What's that?" said he, suddenly pausing on his way to the door after the landlord.

Somebody apparently had run up to the inn door.

Spigott took the lamp.

"I'll wait a while before I go," said he, "it would look suspicious if I went too quickly."

Rap! rap!

"No one was after you, Duval?"

"No."

Rap! rap!

The landlord bustled down the passage to the front door, and soon the highwayman heard the following dialogue.

"House! house!" shouted a strange voice.

"Well?" answered Spigott.

"Have you got a stable-boy, or any stout travelers stopping here who would lend a hand in securing a high—a suspicious character up at my house."

"Who are you?"

"Mr. Martin?"

"Up on the road?"

"The same."

"No, I haven't a soul in the house except myself, and my wife wouldn't let me stir two feet out o' doors such a night. Thank ye all the same for the offer!"

"Confou — good night!" and the steps of a man hurrying away were audible.

"Who was that, Spigott?" inquired Duval.

"A man who wanted——"

"I heard that, but what's his name?"

"Martin."

"That's puzzling — the voice puts me in mind of some one or other—I cannot call to mind who."

"He is a shortish, thickset man, with a wart under one ear."

"Ah!"

"A queer old fellow. Nobody sees him hardly. His maid says he is never home certain regular nights. I have thought him a counterfeiter. He looks like one who ought to hang."

"By George!" exclaimed the highwayman. "Are not the certain nights Mondays?"

"Yes."

"It is the hangman of the City—Swing!"

"No!"

"I think I ought to know. He gave me a twist when he pinioned me for Tyburn that I haven't got out of my wrists yet. I remember, as he will find out to his cost. Spigott, let your boy go out and find out about what this rascal's up to. I will wait here till he returns."

The landlord despatched his stable-helper to pick up news in the village.

As we have said, Swing was beating up recruits for his plan as regards Captain Blood.

So soon as Duval learnt all that the boy had gathered, he—almost convinced it concerned his old companion—determined to follow the party.

But he had not come to this conclusion until after the party had started.

Then—saying to himself that, even if he gained nothing by such a proceeding, he would risk nothing more than a recognition: something so usual to him that it had lost novelty—Claude mounted his gallant mare Sue, which capered with delight at their meeting, and rode off, followed by the boy, who bestrode the horse of Captain Blood.

During this time, we left the latter surrounded with his enemies.

We have stated that he had been husbanding his powers and had not run very fast in his contest of speed with Mr. Swing.

When the shouts of the latter arose, the fugitive felt instinctively that peril was confronting him, and he so much suspected danger, that the appearance of the half dozen men in his path did not really surprise him.

The Captain was a man ready for everything; he made up his mind as to his best plan.

From one side of the road had sprung the assailants; the other side was hedged and ditched; still a man could have leaped it.

However it was, the highwayman

hesitated and let himself be grasped.

This brought the whole party into one group—a fact which our friend may have intended.

Swing came up running.

"Hoorah!" shouted he; but his exultant cheer was extinguished in a gasping sob, for the struggling highwayman had given him a savage kick.

Then came to pass one of those scenes that had made the Sixteen-stringed Jack of other days and the Captain Blood of these the terror of the road and the toast of thieves'-kens.

There was a swaying to and fro of the ring around the highwayman; the dust arose in a cloud, and through the cloud appeared a man alone dashing out.

It was the Captain.

Two of his assailants were senseless on the ground; a third had grasped the hedge and kept himself from falling into the ditch, while still a fourth and fifth were standing in the middle of the road, almost ready to drop from a blow on the head a-piece which they had received from the highwayman's powerful fist.

And there he ran down the road.

But presently all that were able were at his heels once more.

He went three feet to their two.

Seeing this, one of the men—who, furious at a blow he had been given which had cut his lip, had picked up a bough of a gnarled apple-tree lying on the roadside—stopped, and, whirling it round his head, flung it at the fugitive.

It struck Blood, in consequence of his speed, lower than the man had intended, and, alighting on his heel, lamed him seriously.

Ten yards more, and the highwayman would be at the top of a little rise of the highway.

"I'll limp up on to there," muttered he between his teeth, and he added, "then I'll turn and kill that coward!"

With a shout, on the four or five men came.

Just as Blood was giving up escape as hopeless, though determined now to perish before yielding, two dark forms appeared on the brow of the hill.

Two horses.

A double exclamation arose.

Blood cried out: "Claude!"

The first rider replied: "The Captain!" and after rising in his stirrups to take in a comprehensive view of the scene, he settled himself well in the saddle and rode down the hill.

"Mount your beast!" said he as he flew past his friend.

The next instant, Duval was among the pursuers.

With the butt of a horseman's pistol, he struck but two blows, as he leaned to the right and left, and then wheeling—for his dash had carried him past them—he caught a third by the collar and, fairly lifting him from the ground, carried him to the edge of the ditch, into the green pool sleeping in which he let him drop.

The remaining two divided and ran.

By this time, the boy had slipped off the other horse, and the Captain had taken his place.

The fellow who had thrown the club at him had leaped the ditch to the left of the road and was trying to climb over a bramble hedge.

"Quick, your barker, Claude," said the Captain, holding out his hand.

The other drew one out of his unused holster, for he had not re-primed the one he had used to scatter his friend's pursuers.

Captain Blood took a careful aim at the man.

He fired.

The man never gave a sound, but fell back head down among the bushes.

"What had he done?" Duval asked his comrade, whom he had rarely seen display such blood-thirstiness.

"I will tell you; but not now."

"As you please. Here, boy," said Claude, tossing the stable-helper a couple of coins, "tell Spigott what you have seen, and hurry. You might come to harm if caught here."

The boy, with a wink of intense meaning, darted away and soon his

little figure was to be seen working a way through a field of standing wheat.

The two horsemen started off at the same time.

When Swing came up to the spot, it it was to see his assistants rubbing their heads ruefully, and to help the half drowned man out of the ditch. The other was stiff dead.

CHAPTER XI.

CLAUDE AND BLOOD HAVE A BRACE OF ADVENTURES. — THE "WHITE HORSE," —BLAND THE EARL'S VALET.

About ten hours after the last moment recorded in the foregoing chapter, and at a spot some thirty miles from Marsdown, the two highwaymen drew rein.

Pursuit was unlikely to have been kept up.

Before them, on a lonely tract of country, it must be said, rose an inn, the "White Horse."

It being dark, the two friends having each a long story to acquaint the other with, and there existing no reason for them not to put up there, they did so.

They found the landlord a fine fellow enough, and his supper fair for such an out of the way place.

After that meal, and after they had seen their horses well cared for, the two went up to their room, for they would, despite some attempts on the innkeeper's part, to persuade them otherwise, share their apartment together.

Claude had finished his story of his adventures in the city, when a remark of his friend that talking was dry work, led a bottle of wine to be ordered.

"There, gentlemen," said the landlord, producing the bottle and uncorking it, "there's tipple everybody don't get even in my house."

"It's very good," said Captain Blood tasting a little. "How come you to have such excellent stuff hereabouts, where I should not fancy there would be much demand for it."

"No, sir. It was given me by a young gentleman in these parts whom I saved from a poaching scrape he had got into."

"Very well; you may go."

The landlord left the room, with a peculiar smile on his lips.

The Captain began relating the story of his disappearance, and hid no detail of his love of Frances from his friend.

"You don't drink, Captain," interrupted Duval, pushing the bottle to him.

"No, I need it not," returned the other, resuming his narrative.

"Well," said Duval, when his comrade had concluded, "I've a plan to propose to you. We are similarly situated. Is there anything—save the one—that keeps you here in England."

"Truth to tell, no. Every man's hand is against me, except the few devoted friends, and the high rewards may at any moment tempt them and lessen their number."

"Let us leave for abroad," said Claude. "I have money banked in Amsterdam——"

"And I some in another Dutch city."

"Settled, is it not?" said Claude, holding out his hand.

The other shook it heartily.

"Done!" said he; "we leave England—but when?"

"I have to find Floridor."

"And I induce Frances."

"We'll do it, Captain."

And then the two entered upon the formation of a plan.

They would find Floridor, and tear her from the Earl of Eglintoun, who, as we have seen, was not the man to yield her up willingly.

We have said that Captain Blood, in his emotion awakened by going over again his late adventures, had not partaken of the wine except in the most sparing degree, a mere sip at first being all.

While speaking, it occurred to him that it had been a rather long time

since he had heard his friend utter a word.

He looked up and saw Claude sunk in his chair in the deepest slumber—like death.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed to himself; "here I've sent my poor friend to sleep with my dull story. Come, Claude, it's finished."

He shook Duval, but the latter gave no signs of life.

Blood was alarmed. He hurriedly ran his hand into his friend's bosom, when, to his great joy, he felt the heart beating, though perhaps not as strongly as was natural.

The highwayman's suspicions were aroused, and he held up the half-emptied bottle to the light.

A sediment lay an eighth of an inch thick on the bottom.

"If they've harmed the horses!" muttered Blood, frowning.

He guessed the whole plot, and determined to make it recoil on its author's head.

He wheeled noiselessly the chair which Duval occupied to one side.

"If he is dead," reasoned he, "I can only avenge him. If it is merely a sleeping-potion, it will perhaps have worked off him when it will be time for us to leave."

He cleared the room, and then, blowing out the light, sat down beside the doorway, with his pistols in his breast, Claude's on a chair beside him, and a stout knife lying on his knee.

All was silent and dark, and continued so for full twenty minutes.

"They will come," the Captain kept muttering to himself; "bloody wretches as I believe them to be, they cannot but wish to take advantage of the night."

Instantly, his attentive ears caught the rustling creak of some one ascending the stairs.

The steps of a man, but muffled in some way, went slowly past the door.

"False alarm!" muttered the Captain.

But almost immediately a breath came through the side of the door upon his very face.

"Sound asleep," whispered somebody outside; "and the door unfastened. They're highwaymen, but very careless, I'll save 'em from hanging, anyhow."

With that the door opened.

Blood had grasped his dagger-knife, and was preparing to strike.

"Careful's the word," said the man, trying to pierce the darkness. He turned to the door, and seemed as if about to speak.

But he beheld the form of the highwayman rise before him, dimly outlined in the shade.

He caught the glitter of the knife-blade, and, recovering from his superstitious agitation, lifted an axe which he had carried in his right hand.

Before he could poise it, the highwayman had taken one quick step and had stretched out his arm.

But his aim was not successful; the knife entered deeply the man's right shoulder instead of his heart.

He staggered back a pace or two, with his mouth agape, and, in falling, clutched at the window-blind, which he tore away from the roller as he fell.

The light of a moon just arisen, thus admitted, fell upon the man's face blanched with pain, but with a brow black and heavy with scowling hate.

As he fell, the dagger was knocked out of Blood's hand, in spite of the caution which he had taken to guard against such an accident.

The man, although severely wounded, was not deprived of his strength; and though the axe had fallen from his right hand, rendered helpless by the wound he had received in the arm, he strove to gain possession with his left.

Blood, seeing his object, sprang upon him as quick as lightning.

The Captain leaped upon him with more of the savage ferocity of a wild cat, than the enmity of a human being.

With both his hands, and with all the power of his wrists—so powerful, as we well know—he grasped the man's throat.

Then he grasped the axe which the other was striving to get hold of, and tore it from his fingers.

In the struggle, he bore his foe down to the ground, clinging to him all the while; then, with the weapon which he had wrested from him, he dealt him a shower of savage blows, in furious haste.

Yet another and another blow did the highwayman deal him.

The axe had entered his brain.

The very handle was bloody; but he seemed, as it were, unconscious that his work of vengeance was complete.

The axe slipped at last from his fingers, and, in feeling for it again upon the ground, his hands came in contact with the knife which he had let fall.

Blood caught it up, and though his victim lay there still enough, and dead enough, with his hideously gashed face and shattered skull, he drove the reeking blade again, and again into the victim's breast, until want of breath alone compelled him to desist from the ferocious slaughter.

The passion at such a dastardly assault, at the attempt to drug them and cut their throats, like sheep, had made the highwayman like a fiend.

He rose to his feet and made towards the door.

But at that moment a light was seen approaching, and the door being flung wide open, the landlord rushed into the room, holding a crow-bar in one hand.

The noise he had heard had apprized him that his companion was getting decidedly the worst of it; but when he came to see the dreadful sight which awaited him, he started back in horror.

Only for a moment, though, and then he rushed forward upon the highwayman.

But the latter had time to save himself from the blow which he would have dealt him, and, drawing a pistol from his breast, he fired upon him as he approached.

He could not take a very good aim, for he was trembling violently from the effects of the deadly struggle in which he had been engaged; but the shot nevertheless took effect in the lower part of the ruffian's jaw, and, with a howl, he fell backwards into the passage.

The light which had illuminated this dreadful scene was held by a girl who had suddenly made her appearance. She was apparently the barmaid.

She stood there in dumb terror, clutching a candlestick in her hand, unable to speak or act.

Blood, without heeding in the slightest the mutilated body of the robber he had killed, and the recumbent form of the landlord, writhing and groaning upon the spot where he had fallen when the bullet had laid him low, rushed eagerly up to the terrified girl, and bade her tell him whether there were any more people below, and to employ her assistance in helping them, Claude and himself, to escape.

But the girl, somewhat to the Captain's amazement, made no reply; shook off his grasp with a kind of horrified shiver, and approaching the landlord's prostrate body, knelt over him and wrung her hands, apparently in bitter grief.

"Oh, you have killed him!" she said; "You have killed him! What shall I do?"

"You need not grieve about him," said the highwayman, "he is not worthy of it. He would have taken our lives if he could have done so. As it is, I think he has killed my friend."

But the girl, still stooping over the man's body, and striving to staunch the flow of blood from his wound, made no reply.

"Come, come!" said Blood, again appealing to her; "what makes you stop there by his side? What was he to you?"

"What was he to me?" the girl replied, almost fiercely. "He was my husband, and I loved him!"

"He is not dead now," said Blood. "Assist us to escape, and we will see what can be done for him."

But the girl still remaining in a half state of stupor, without paying

any attention to this appeal, the Captain left her, taking the light in his hand, to go to the bedside and look at the insensible highwayman.

Claude was very white and motionless.

Save that he was not disfigured by the mark of gore, he looked as dead as the ruffian who had fallen beneath his friend's murderous axe.

The Captain laid his hand upon his heart and felt for its throbbings, but his heart was quite motionless.

How fixed and leaden in its hue was his cold handsome face.

His cheeks seemed sunken; and his lips had a bluish tinge upon them, something like the bloom upon a plum.

Blood raised his head upon his arm, and looked down anxiously into his still, white face.

The Captain knelt by the chair, and his features, which only a short time since had been convulsed by passion, relaxed into a soft look, full of deep friendship.

"Claude! Claude! old friend, gallant comrade, can you be dead."

Duval's heart had ceased its beating apparently.

The Captain's now so delicate touch showed him no motion.

"Oh, heavens! to have you poisoned in this way! to die cooped up in a room! you, the pride of the road! I might forgive the man who worsted you in fair fight! I might grieve less if you had fallen in a gallant leap or a dauntless charge, or even if you left the world with a spring in the air from the leafless tree! but so, so to die! I feel right in having slain those cut-throats. But you're not dead, not gone! You will yet live to cry 'stand!' or live with your love in a foreign land. Claude, Claude, arouse!"

But the Captain soon saw how silly were such lamentations.

He turned his attention to something more sensible; to wit, endeavoring to resuscitate his insensible friend.

He laid him on the bed, and tried all his arts.

Long was he busied in this friendly duty, so deeply buried in that one thought that he forgot all else.

When he did look around, awakening, so to say (still hoping, for he fancied, and had made himself believe that faint pulsations in the wrists and temples of his friend had answered twice or thrice to his cares), day was breaking, with a dull leaden hue, upon the bed and its silent occupant—and upon a hideous mass of blood and bruises, which had been a man some time or other.

It was the corpse of the ruffian whom the Captain had slain, where he looked upon it last.

Blood regarded the horrible object with a shudder.

Then he turned his eyes towards the door-way, where the other man had fallen.

He started in alarm when he saw that he was gone.

The girl had gone also.

There was a great stain of blood upon the floor.

Had the man died? and had the girl removed the body?

Or had he recovered, and had she helped him away?

It was curious, the highwayman thought, that he had not heard them leave the room.

The man must have been dead, she thought, or he would have heard the noise.

It was while he was over Duval's body that the landlord's wife had drawn away the corpse.

It was strange that of his absence of mind advantage had not been taken.

But while Captain Blood was thinking of the matter, in a dreary kind of way, he thought all at once that he heard the sound of voices in the room beneath.

They were gruff voices, talking angrily in low, savage tones, above which some voice arose now and then, and he could catch a few of the words which were uttered.

"He killed them, did he?"

"One of them upstairs!"

"Do you think the other is dead, then?"

"We will settle both soon!"

There seemed to be a general movement towards the door.

But suddenly the door was banged to, and a loud voice bade them stop.

The Captain rose to his feet.

What should he do?

While he was hesitating, though, an event occurred which caused him to alter all the plans he was before maturing.

The sound of the door slamming to heavily below, aroused Duval from his torpor. The drug had lost its power.

He sprang into a sitting posture on the bed, and opened his eyes.

But then a violent pain in his head overcame him again, and he sank back wearily.

Blood took his hand into his.

"Are you better, dear friend?" he asked anxiously. "Can you move?"

"I—I am afraid not!"

"Try—try."

"My head aches horribly!"

"Shall I assist you?"

"Mayn't I lie here awhile to rest?"

"No, no, friend—there is no time! There is danger in every moment lost! Come, come! a little courage, and a little effort!"

Duval struggled into a sitting posture, and rose painfully from the bed.

"What am I to do? Where are we going?"

"We must fly! We must fly at once, or we shall be murdered!"

Claude seemed yet more than half-stupefied, but he put his hand into the one which Blood held out to him.

His comrade then took up his hat and cloak, bidding his companion walk as noiselessly as possible, led the way from the room.

The voices were distinctly audible below, engaged in an angry dispute, in which the voice of the woman appeared to be urging some course of action which was not popular with the rest.

The daylight streamed into the passage where the highwayman stood.

Blood saw that there was a staircase at either end.

The one leading in the opposite direction to that in which they had come up when they came to bed, they now descended.

At the bottom of the stairs they came to a door strongly bolted.

With a slight effort, however, the Captain withdrew the bolts.

The door opened.

They passed through, and found themselves in the open air.

In a back yard they were standing.

The gate was open.

Beyond was a meadow, and in the distance, about a hundred yards off, a small wood, or thicket.

"We won't have time," said Captain Blood to himself, "to let out our horses. Oh, Claude, if you could shake off your torpor, we would fight our way to it, but, as it is, we must leave the animals,and reach that little wood.

"If we can get, there!" whispered Claude.

"Yes," said his companion; "let us try. Can you make an effort?"

"Yes."

"Have you strength enough to run?"

"Plenty!"

"Thank God for that, then! We may escape yet."

"Which way?" Claude said.

"To the wood."

"Shall we be safe there, you don't think?"

"Yes—yes; if we can only manage to reach it without being seen."

"Come along, then!"

They started, hand-in-hand, without further parley, and set off at their utmost speed.

A few words here.

The inn into which the ill-luck of the two knights of the road had guided their steps was the rendevous of a gang of desperate ruffians, half poachers and half footpads, who carried on their nefarious practices in the neighborhood, and lived a rollicking life, in defiance of the local police, who occasionally, in a sleepy fashion, endeavored to rout them out of their stronghold, but who were invariably worsted and sent to the right-about after some well-meant but extremely feeble attempts to put them down

after some well-meant but extremely feeble attempts to put them down.

Whether or not they had often resorted to the amicable practice of knifing the guests at the "White Horse" is questionable.

In the evidence which was subsequently brought forward in the trial of one of the miscreants (for this is a matter of history), it is very certain that a case was clearly proved against them, but how many such cases there had been which had not been discovered it is impossible even to conjecture.

Upon this occasion the band had arrived from an exploring expedition in the neighborhood about daylight, and had found the landlord's wife mourning over the body of her ruffian husband, which she had carried down, as best she could, into the sitting-room, and upon which she lay stretched in a perfect paroxysm of grief, heedless of all external objects, and deaf to every attempted consolation or eager question.

Only at last was it, when a suggestion of vengeance was made to her, that she recovered at all from the state of abject apathy into which she had fallen under the weight of her woe.

Then throwing off the shrinking timidity which had seemed a part of herself, she had sworn that no harm should befall her husband's murderers.

"No," she cried, "blood enough has been spilt; no more shall come of it. Let them escape. He has been a bad, wicked man, and has used me harshly, although I could love him still were he alive. Nay, I would willingly lay down my life now could I restore his, but that is impossible. He brought this fate upon himself. God has guided the hand of man; and so surely as any among you attempt to shed more blood, shall you perish in like manner! Let them escape."

But this reasoning was not popular with the gang; they wanted to have vengeance upon the slayers of their comrade.

"Where were they? Let them be delivered up."

Now it was that the woman flung herself between them and the door, and refused to allow any of the ruffians to pass by; and while they were arguing the point it was that the two adventurers were beating a retreat.

You may be sure that one poor, weak woman was not very long able to hold at bay half a dozen strong men.

Very soon they had forced her from the position she occupied, and were pouring up the stairs in a body to the bedroom which the fugitives had just deserted.

Pell-mell they rushed into the room where they expected to find their victims, and exclamations of astonishment and baffled rage soon apprized the woman below that they had met with some rebuff.

What it was, though, she did not at first understand. However, after a few moments' pause, a loud shout arose, and the body of ruffians came trampling out into the passage, and bawling to her:

"Where are they? Which room?"

"The room where the body is," she answered.

That was the room which they had entered.

There was the body, sure enough; but what had become of the fugitives?

"They must be there!" the woman cried up from the bottom of the stairs.

"They are not, you fool! Come up yourself, and see."

"Thank heaven, they are gone!" the woman muttered to herself, and mentally offered up a prayer of thanksgiving for their deliverance.

Meanwhile, the robbers were ransacking the house from top to bottom, muttering fierce threats of vengeance as they went.

The fugitives made the best of their way to the wood, in the dark intricacies of which they had plunged eagerly, hoping to escape observation.

It was not a very large wood, this, although its foliage was very thick, and upon the other side the country was bleak and open.

Therefore did they deem it prudent to lie for a while in ambush, because if the robbers came to look out through

the windows, they would infallibly have been seen out in the open.

It would be best, at any rate for a little while, to remain perfectly quiet where they were before they made any attempt of escaping to a further distance.

The Captain had resolved to gain back their horses, whatever that might cost.

This might be done when the robbers had looked, and had come to the conclusion, as they possibly might do, and as the fugitives sincerely hoped that they would, that they (the runaways) had managed to clear off, and were beyond all hopes of pursuit.

Thus it was that they kept perfectly quiet; and Claude resting on a mossy bank, the other spied through the trees, and took observations of the enemy.

As he had good eyes, he could see, now and then, the faces of one or the other of the robbers at the window.

Presently, the whole party came out upon the roof of the house—a flat roof—and appeared to be taking observations of the surrounding country.

They looked to the right and left, and appeared to enter into argument, and discuss in turn each proposition made by any of the party.

At last, as by one consent, the general attention was centred upon the wood

When, at first, he saw their eyes all fixed that way, Blood came shrinking back from the point of observation, fearing that they had seen him, but then he came to the conclusion that this was not the case.

They came down from the roof in a body, descending, as they had ascended, by a trap-door in the housetop, and in a few minutes afterwards, a door leading into the yard being opened, they came pouring out.

The Captain and his companion watched their movements in deep silence and with intense anxiety.

"Back, back!" whispered Claude, laying his hand upon the arm of his companion and drawing him under the shadow of the tree "If they are coming after us, this will be a pretty place to be caught in! We can be murdered here very quietly, and our bodies buried where there would never be any chance of their being found again."

"We can fight for it," said Blood.

"Of course, we will," said Duval. "Where's my pistols?"

"D—— it!" exclaimed the Captain, "I've left them in that room. Here's one of mine."

Duval betook himself to the occupation of loading; while the other clutching the handle of the dagger-knife, crept forward again to his hiding-place, and watched.

They were coming their way.

They would soon be there. Not all the gang had set out in their pursuit. Some had remained at the inn. Six men there were on foot two riding horses, and one upon a shaggy colt.

Our friends had chosen a spot where the briars and thickly-set bushes completely concealed them from view; and although the party in pursuit came within half a dozen yards of the spot where they were hidden, they did not perceive the fugitives.

As they passed by, the fugitives could hear what they said.

"We will turn them out of their hiding-place, I'll warrant me!" said one.

"It's very sure," said another, "that they cannot be at any very great distance."

"No, they must be hereabouts—somewhere close at hand."

"If they have got beyond the wood, we would have seen them upon the other side, out in the open country; unless they happen to be under the shade of the trees, having just got through the wood."

"That is not likely, though. You may take your oath they are hiding here a few yards off!"

"If we alight on them, they mustn't get off scot-free, that's very sure. They've got secrets that'll string up the whole lot of us!"

The speakers passed away, and entered the wood a very short distance from the spot where the highwayman were hiding.

It would be difficult to describe their feelings as they gazed upon the savage countenances of those lawless ruffians bent upon their destruction.

It was a breathless moment.

The robbers were still muttering among themselves, but their words were no longer audible; the only clue that the fugitives possessed to their intentions being in the angry gestures, and occasionally an extra loud curse which escaped them in the fury of their disappointment.

"We are certain to be found," whispered Claude. "Do you see what has become of them?"

"They have divided, I think. The men on horseback left outside."

"I don't see the others, though."

"It is good," muttered Blood, "that we should be hunted with our own horses. See those rascals riding them."

"Here are two coming towards us!"

The fugitives crept closer, and nothing more was said.

Two of the robbers were advancing in their direction; and they passed by, scrutinizing the bushes upon either side, within a few feet of the spot where they were hiding.

Both fugitives kept their eyes riveted upon them. But a new cause of alarm arose.

They heard some one passing behind them.

The rustling of leaves, and the snapping of twigs, gave fearful evidence of the proximity of a third man.

Just when they got to the exact spot where the fugitives intervened between the one man and the two men on the other side, as fate would have it, they stopped to talk. The conversation which ensued, therefore, passed directly over the heads of those lying concealed.

Nothing, indeed, sheltered them but the branches and leaves of shrubs, so frail and pliant that every current of air passing through them caused them slightly to yield and flutter, and a stronger gust of wind than usual was liable to blow them upon one side and expose the fugitives to view.

Fortunately, however, the two men were standing on a piece of high ground, and the line of their sight carried their eyes right over the bushes that concealed our friends to the spot where the third man stood; and as they were staring at one another's faces, instead of on the thick mass of foliage intervening, they, for a moment, escaped notice.

The conversation which took place was conducted earnestly, but in a low tone of voice, as though they were anxious, if possible, to prevent any listeners from hearing, should any be concealed in the immediate neighborhood.

"They are gone to the other end of the wood," one said.

"There's no chance of finding them about here, even if they were here, the branches are so precious thick."

"All this while they are getting out at the other end."

"Shall we go back, then?"

"Yes."

The two men began to move away, and the other very shortly followed in their wake. When, however, he had gone a few paces, he stopped suddenly and stood quite still.

The highwaymen listened.

The party had ceased talking, and they could hear their retreating footsteps and their slow and guarded movements, as they pushed the bushes aside in their wary progress.

It was evident that they had passed by the cover, but the third man still remained, scanning the bushes around with savage, glaring eyes.

"Had he seen them?" they asked themselves.

He might have fancied that he had, but it was only fancy; for, after a pause of one or two minutes, he began also to slowly walk away, step by step, as a person might do who was searching for some object fallen upon the ground.

When he had got to a distance of six yards or more, Blood could not refrain from exchanging a smile of triumph with his companion.

The Captain pulled Claude by the arm, and whispered hoarsely:

"Now is the time, if we are to go."

They could hear the voices of the other men quite at the other end of the wood, shouting. Only the men upon the horses remained, but they did not know whereabouts they had taken up their station.

They did not bend their steps towards that side of the wood which faced the inn from which they had escaped; nor did they, of course, go towards the one where the two men were looking for them. But they made for the open country upon one side.

Pushing through the briars and brambles with as little noise as possible, but still losing no more time than they could help, they very soon broke through to an opening.

Here, as they left the shade of the trees, they came suddenly out upon a man who was sitting with his back turned towards them.

The three horses were tied up there, and he was guarding them.

"Good heavens! what a piece of luck!" exclaimed Captain Blood.

He did not turn round at their approach.

He was busy lighting his pipe, and, as he heard the branches crackling, he supposed that the noise was caused by one of his companions.

"Stand still for a moment," whispered Blood, "I think I can settle him!"

He stole up behind the robber.

Then with a turn of the hand, he grasped the watcher's throat and flung him on the grass, where he lay struggling and groaning, being badly hurt by the fall.

"Now for it!" said Blood; "we have our horses!"

Duval's strength seemed by this time to have revived, and his courage and spirits returned.

He sprang to horse.

The man bellowed "Murder!" with all the strength of his lungs; but without heeding him, the two struck heels into the horses' sides, and scattered the dust as they broke into a gallop.

But just as they quitted the wood, all the other men aroused by their comrade's cries, came running up.

But they only had the satisfaction of seeing the two highwayman gallop off at a speed that took them around a turn of the road in ten minutes.

Before this was done, however, Captain Blood had taken off his hat and waved an ironical farewell.

They had not ridden far before the sound of something coming along the road towards them, attracted the highwaymen's attention, or rather the Captain's, for Claude could not entirely resist the effect of the drug upon him.

It was the carrier's wagon which ran irregularly on the road.

They let it pass unchallenged.

About a quarter of a mile farther on, the sound of a single horse's feet struck Blood's ear.

"Here's a neat spot for a stop," said he, "Claude, just turn into that lane; I am going to relieve a traveler."

Duval mechanically turned as directed.

Then Captain Blood rode on a bit and, backing his horse into a leafy covert and drawing a pistol, stood ready to dispute the road.

The new comer soon appeared.

He was not a man calculated to excite much fear of resistance, being no other than our old acquaintance, Bland the Earl of Eglintoun's valet. His horse was a wretched bit of flesh.

"Stand, sir," cried the Captain, spurring out across the road; "your money and whatever valuables you have about you. That ring, to begin with."

Bland stared at the speaker, but, well knowing he had but one course before him, he pulled off the ornament, and then, still without a word, produced a pocket-book.

"Six guineas," sneered Captain Blood, "a man of your respectability with only six guineas. It won't do sir."

"I had to leave a deposit of twenty, sir, on this horse," said Bland apologetically. "May I ride on, sir?" he asked softly, finding the horseman would not draw back out of the road.

"What is in that valise at your horse's crupper?"

"A change of clothes," replied Bland stammering and reddening.

"You may go!" said Captain Blood.

Bland did not notice the smile on the other's face, as he drummed his heels on his miserable animal and started off.

Blood let him get about twenty yards and then he pressed on and overtook him.

"On second thoughts," said he, when at the valet's side, "I will take that little bundle."

"But, dear sir," said Bland, "your honor, it is merely an old suit of clothing, worse than this I have on."

"If that is so, it must be worthless, indeed," remarked the highwayman; "I do you a favor in relieving you of it."

So saying, he stretched out his hand and laid it on that little bundle.

This was tied behind Bland's saddle, and looked to be what he said it was.

But the highwayman had studied men deeply, and he suspected it to be more than what it seemed.

Bland hurriedly half turned in his saddle, and spread his hand over it.

"Let me go on," he fairly groaned. "Come to the next town, and I'll give you ten guineas."

But Blood only set to work unstrapping the bundle.

The other appeared to grow desperate; and, the highwayman leaning very much over in his action, Bland suddenly and forcibly clapped his hand on the croup of Blood's horse.

The animal started abruptly forward, and fairly rode from under its rider, who, feeling that he could not help being unseated, shook his feet out of the stirrups and leaped, so to say, on the valet.

The two rolled on the ground together.

Fear, and probably some other motive, lent the highwayman's opponent energy.

He twisted himself out of the other's hold, leaving his coat-sleeve in his hand, and jumped up.

His horse had turned its attention to the roadside; to it he ran, and, the bundle of contention having been half loosened by Blood, a pull sufficed to leave it in the valet's hand.

The highwayman had risen by this time and was already on Bland's track.

But the latter—his wits sharpened by the imminence of his peril—had come to a very sensible conclusion: to wit, that, if he could scramble upon the highwayman's superior animal, he would soon be in safety.

It is true, Claude was lying hid some little ways down the road, but poor Duval was in a sleepy sort of a way just then trying to keep his eyelids from closing; this prevented him from being of much service in the way of checking the valet's escape.

The latter had reached the horse of Captain Blood and made a desperate trial to climb upon it. Indeed, he had half mounted it before the Captain had caught up to him.

The horse bounded away.

Blood went a few steps after it, but, cursing his own stupidity, he stopped and, putting his fingers in a peculiar way to his mouth, he whistled.

At the sound, his horse wheeled with a suddenness that prevented its new rider from keeping in his seat.

"Toss him, lass!" shouted Blood; "off with him! Whit!"

The result of his appeal was more than even he expected.

The animal, trained to such work in in case of seizure by police, gave a bite here, a kick there, a shake, a rear, a plunge, and then a fearful spring, which ended in a kick with both hind feet at once.

The form of the unfortunate valet was thrown off the horse; his hands came away from its mane with a handful of hair in each, and he fell just at the heels of the furious animal, which sent him, a lifeless mass, some half dozen paces off, at the feet of Duval—who, aroused by the struggle between man and horse, had moved out upon the highway.

The valet gasped once or twice, then died.

Blood patted his steed, which had come up to him, a little breathed, but

quite calm in contrast to its late fury.

"You were too much in earnest, lass!" said he, "however, that's not much of a fault. Here, Claude, hold my horse a minute. Now," continued the Captain stooping over the body, "let us see what this was that the foolish man risked his life to keep."

The bundle that had led to Bland's death, lay a short distance from his corpse.

"A guinea—five, ten, fifty," cried the highwayman, "and notes—bank-notes. The deuce! Ah here's a paper—it explains it! By George! Claude, man, here's luck. See here."

He unfolded to his friend's eyes a slip of paper, that had been within an envelope which the highwayman had broken.

"'For the keeping of —— in your Marly Moor establishment, I send you 100*l*.

"'Coronet.—Earl of Egl.'"

This Claude read.

"Well?" said he.

"The postscript!" cried Blood.

"Oh, ah!"

"'Do not harm the girl, for I will want her as soon as he you know is out of the way. E.'"

"You're dull, Claude. That drug has hurt you immensely. The girl is your girl, I'll bet my horse to a brass button! That's where she has been put all this time, depend upon it. See her address. 'Doctor Brown, Marly Moor.' I think I have seen the place, and it is a private mad-house."

It was no use. Duval was still under the influence of the sleeping potion, and even Floridor's name had no effect upon him.

"I will leave Claude at the next town——eh?"

"I say, ride on to Dampmead," murmured Claude Duval, unable to hold up his head, that felt as though a weighty leaden band was around it. "Munch is to meet me there."

"Who the deuce is Munch—oh, yes, the Londoner you were speaking of. Very well."

They reached Dampmead, at about three in the afternoon, and put up at the only inn there.

On seeing Duval, a man, in rather seedy clothes, displayed a great desire to speak with him.

It was Munch.

He had came down into the country—to wait till the late work at the city had blown over—and to keep an appointment with Duval, for the latter had some idea of using Munch in his attempt to discover his missing friend's whereabouts.

Soon, the pickpocket made Captain Blood's acquaintance, and Duval got him to promise to obey him, for it was determined that the Captain should undertake, with Munch, the escape of the captive in the Marly Moor establishment, supposed to be Floridor.

Meanwhile, every means that the village could offer, was put into practice against the effects of the drug on Duval.

CHAPTER XII.

MARLY MOOR.—THE MADHOUSE.—THE CAPTAIN AND MUNCH.

The Black Bull tavern was situated in the village of Cross Roads Gate; and among its guests at the time we visit it, were two men, no other than Captain Blood and our old London acquaintance, Munch.

Blood was wonderfully disguised.

He was even a better actor than Claude Duval, and we know how expert was the latter.

He was just now looking to be an old man over seventy.

The table was spread—a great dish of bacon and eggs, a huge home-made loaf, surmounted by the ale and whiskey—and the Captain seated himself, motioning to Munch to take the opposite chair.

"Now, listen to me," said Blood,

"we've got some pretty hard work before us; it may be to night, it may be to-morrow; so we'll empty that dish, and drink the best part of that ale. The whiskey you'll put in the pocket of your great-coat, for we may happen to want a drop by-and-bye. No half-starved soldier ever won a great battle."

Munch quietly obeyed the directions, and while he did so, the other, who had only eaten some bread, washed down by a little ale, summoned the landlady.

He asked the woman if she could lend him a couple of empty boxes—small ones—no matter how old or shabby, a piece of canvas, and two leather straps.

The landlady of the Black Bull was a very long time procuring these things; but after running all over the village, from cottage to cottage, she returned at last with the desired articles.

An empty tool-box, borrowed from a man who did a little in the carpentering way, an old desk that had belonged to her late husband, the canvas, and the two straps.

Having further procured from the good-natured soul a large needle and some strong thread, Blood divided the canvas, and carefully sewed each of the boxes into a species of case; having done which he fastened the straps tightly round them.

During these operations the pickpocket had sat staring at him, utterly bewildered—too bewildered even to ask a single question.

"He must be mad," thought Munch, "and when he gets me on yon lonesome moor, he'll maybe murder me. Lord have mercy on us!"

It was nine in the evening by the time the two boxes were packed and strapped—a starless and moonless night, with the moorland and sky one black expanse of darkness.

The Captain put on his cloak, the pockets of which seemed heavily laden.

"Now, look here, Master Munch," he said; "when we stopped at the market town where we put up the pony, you asked me what I was running about the streets for all the time. I was looking out for these."

He produced the different articles from his pocket as he spoke.

"Number one, a flask of powder, dried by myself in the inn kitchen; number two, a couple of stout files; number three, fifty feet of good rope; In the back of the dog-cart you'll find a carpet-bag; the rope will go in that, the pistols you'll carry under your waistcoat, the powder-flask and ball in your pocket, the files in mine; and now you may bring the pony round, and we'll be off to try the hospitality of Stone House."

Munch obeyed, but moved about with a bewildered air, stopping every now and then to stare at the other.

"Well, Munch," said Captain Blood, "you don't seem quite to understand all this."

"Well, I can't say I do see my way *very* clear," answered the pickpocket. "As to these here barkers under my waistcoat, and this here powder and ball in my coat pocket, there's some sense in them; but as to how sewing up empty boxes in canvas covers will ever get anybody out of a mad house, I leave it for the patients as is inside the asylum to find out."

"The boxes ain't empty, though," said Blood, rubbing his hands with delight at the other's bewilderment; "they're both of them chock full of pebbles."

"Are they, now? Well, I dare say them pebbles will be a deal of help some way or other, but I can't say *I* can see how."

"Of course you can't—of course you can't; I know what I'm about for all that."

The highwayman paid the bill.

The two men mounted the light vehicle, and after having ascertained the nearest road to Stone House, which the old woman said was a rare lonesome place, and full she'd heard of a pack of "lunattics," Munch gave the pony his head, and away the animal trotted over the rough and narrow road.

There were lamps to the dog-cart,

but they were not to light them, dark as the night was.

"We don't want to give 'em notice of our coming," said Captain Blood; "we want to drop in upon 'em in a friendly way, quite promiscuous."

The night was chilly upon the bleak moorland road.

Blood could scarcely repress a shiver as they left the village of Cross Roads Gate behind them, and felt that they were alone upon Marly Moor.

"Now," said the highwayman to his companion. "It's safe enough to speak here, for there's none to overhear us but a stray sheep or a bat. I know you're a brave man; if you weren't I'd never have brought you here. We're going to rescue a young lady. If we keep our wits about us we shall succeed; if we don't we fail, and if we will fail we go to certain death, for we shall either leave that house bringing her we want with us, or we shall never leave it alive. Remember that, Mister Munch, and drive like the very devil, for I'm in a hurry to be in the thick of it."

The stone-built mansion upon Marly Moor was at any time a dismal object, with its square *facade* and seven rows of narrow grated windows; but under the dark sky which looked down upon it, as the two men drew up at the high iron gates, it was indeed hideous to look upon.

Faint lights gleamed here and there through the grating of a window, but as the two men watched these lights they perceived that they were never stationary; now glimmering from one grating, now faintly glancing from another.

"Those lights are the keepers' lanterns," Captain Blood, who had gained all the information he could; "it is the hour at which they go their rounds. The unhappy creatures within those cells are left in darkness throughout the night."

There was no lodge at the gates, which opened into a square courtyard; but there was a great bell, which Blood alighted from the vehicle in order to pull.

Munch had expected all this time that his accomplice had provided himself with the rope for the purpose of scaling the wall.

What, then, was his surprise at beholding Blood deliberately ring the bell!

"It's so precious likely they'll let us in just for our asking civilly!" muttered Munch; "and I suppose they'll let us carry off a body for asking, too. The fellow must be crazy!"

No trim servant-girl, no liveried page or bedizened porter came in answer to Blood's summons; but a hideous-looking ruffian, with loose canvas trousers, a Guernsey shirt, and a worsted nightcap slouched over his villanous countenance.

He carried a gun in one hand and a lantern in the other, which he held up as he looked through the bars of the gate at the two travelers.

The heart of a coward would have failed him at such a moment as this, and he would have left the gates of Stone House without attempting to enter its gloomy precincts; but it was not so with the highwayman or his ally.

"What do you want?" growled the ruffian, staring at them through the bars.

"What should we want but shelter?" answered the Captain. "We have lost our way on the moor, and would gladly give a sovereign for a night's lodging."

"I dare say you would," muttered the man, with a savage laugh; "but as we don't happen to let lodgings, you had better take your sovereign somewhere else."

"Oh, but think twice of it before you say no—do, now? Put us in any hole or corner you please," whined the highwayman, pitifully, shivering as he spoke. "I'm a poor old man; it's nearly eleven o'clock, and I don't like the prospect of having to drive about the moor all night, with a chance of meeting some ruffian who'll rob me and my man John of everything we've got."

It seemed as if there was little fear of any benighted traveler meeting with a worse ruffian than the man now

talking to them. This was Blood's private opinion, but of course he took good care to keep it to himself.

The pickpocket was considerably impressed by one circumstance; namely, the change in his comrade's voice.

It was no longer the hearty tone of a man of between twenty-five and thirty, but the pitiful and peevish whine of an old creature trembling upon the brink of the grave.

"Was there ever such an old play-actor?" muttered Munch.

"Don't I tell you this ain't a inn?" roared the man, in answer to Blood's supplications.

"I know that, I know that," replied the highwayman. "I know where I am; this is Stone House, Marly Moor, a private lunatic asylum, kept by the worthy Dr. Brown. Bless your heart, I would sooner stay all night on the moor than ask you for shelter if I didn't know the house was respectable. You surely wouldn't have a poor old fellow robbed and murdered, would you?"

The man was silent for a minute, as if pondering over these last words.

"*Robbed!*" he said; "I don't suppose you've got much to be robbed of, have you, old scaramouch?"

"No, no; not much, of course," mumbled Blood; "but you see there's the trap and pony—and—there's—there's something else."

"Something else, is there?"

"Yes; a couple of packages I've got under the seat."

"Some grocery, I suppose, as you're takin' home to your wife and darters?" said the ruffian.

"Why, no, not exactly that——"

"Your Sunday coat and veskit, then, perhaps?"

"No, nor yet that," mumbled the Captain. "The truth is, I am a jeweller; I live at Bowlock, thirty-five miles from here, and I've been over to Hull to buy a bankrupt's stock, that was sold cheap on account of very distressing circumstances."

"And you've got 'em under that seat, have you?" said the man, pointing to the dog-cart.

"Yes; they're chiefly in the way of watches and diamond rings, and they pack into a small compass."

"And what may they be worth, now, that you're so precious frightened of bein' robbed of 'em?"

"Well," answered Blood lowering his feeble voice as if he almost feared being overheard even in that lonely spot, "I gave two hundred and sixty-seven pounds, sixteen and fourpence for the lot; but I got 'em a good hundred per cent. below their value."

"Then they're worth nigh upon six hundred pound, are they?" asked the man.

"Why, yes," answered Blood deliberately; "if the contents of the two cases I've got under that seat are worth five shillings, they're worth six hundred pound."

"But as they ain't worth twopence halfpenny," thought Munch, "that rather alters the case."

The man behind the gate was silent for some moments.

"Well, I'll tell you what," he said at length; "my master Dr. Brown, is rather an eccentric old gent, but he's a good old chap for all that, and better than a mother to the lunatics, so I don't suppose he'd like the idea of a poor feeble old fellow of your years bein' murdered for want of a night's shelter. I'll go and speak to him; but wait a bit," he added, just as he was going to turn away. "How about that there man of yours? He looks a stout, broad-chested fellow. Surely he'd be protection enough for you against half a dozen robbers."

"Ah," whined Blood, "so he ought to be, and you'd think he was, now, wouldn't you, to look at him? But bless your heart, of all the poor cowards that ever was, he's the biggest. He'd run if a thief said 'Bo!' Why, he's shivering with fear as he sits upon that seat."

It was lucky for the highwayman that Munch did not hear this description of himself, or, patiently as he had submitted to the Captain hitherto, his indignation would certainly have got the better of him.

The man departed, and returned

presently to open the gates and to tell the Captain that Dr. Brown would see him and his servant.

At the same time, another man appeared, who offered to take the pony to the stables.

The Captain was very particular in getting his packages out of the vehicle.

He gave a dozen different directions to the pickpocket, and seemed in a fever of anxiety about the two canvas-covered boxes; but at last, when he had them safely in his own arms, he seemed better satisfied, and hobbled across the stone-flagged courtyard with the step of a man of ninety.

The man led the way into a square hall, paved like the yard, and lighted by one feeble oil lamp burning against the dungeon-like wall.

Here Dr. Brown, the principal of Stone House, was waiting to receive the two travelers.

He was a very tall man, and so painfully thin that his clothes seemed to hang about him in loose, baggy folds, as if a skeleton had been arrayed in ill-made broadcloth.

His hatchet face was of the color of a tallow candle; his eyebrows and eyelashes white; his hair a yellow, sickly red; his long bony hands white and damp, like the hands of a corpse.

There was much to terrify the bravest mind in the aspect of the ruffian who had admitted them; but in this man's face there was something far more hideous, infinitely more horrible.

There was the hidden venom of a loathsome but deadly snake, ever on the watch to destroy in silence.

The Earl of Eglintoun knew how to choose his instruments.

This man was a suitable keeper for his iniquitous abode.

"I am sorry to hear of a gentleman of your age finding himself in this unpleasant predicament," he said,- with studied courtesy, to the pretended old man, who had so muffled his face in a cashmere handkerchief, and dragged a black silk nightcap so far over his eyes, that it was quite impossible to get a full view of his features; nay, so wonderful a power had our highwayman over his voice and gestures, that he appeared between eighty and ninety years of age.

"But, on the other hand," continued Dr. Brown, "this is rather an awkward matter. You may imagine that in a house tenanted by a very large number of my unhappy fellow-creatures (in every one of whom I feel an interest which I can never describe), I scarcely consider it right to receive any visitors but the afflicted and their friends. At the same time, if you have no objection to a small room, there is one I can offer you for the night on the third floor, while your servant can be accommodated in another part of the building."

"I'm very much obliged to you, Dr. Brown," mumbled Blood. "I told your porter I knew you'd never refuse me. It's such a comfort to know you are in a respectable house when you have valuables about you. But, by the bye, as to my man, you need take no trouble about him; he always sleeps in my room. I'm a poor, decrepit old fellow, and I'm never to be left alone, the doctor says."

Dr. Brown exchanged glances with the man who had admitted the travelers.

"Oh, very well," said the physician; "let your servant be with you by all means, if that will add to your comfort. And now," he added, glancing at his watch, "as it is getting on for twelve, I will wish you good night. Bob shall show you to your room, and bring you some supper. He's rough, but good in the main. All my keepers are rough fellows enough—regular hearty men; but they know their business—yes, yes, they know their business."

He twinkled his cat-like grey eyes beneath their white lashes as he said this, and with another courteous bow, left the hall.

The man called Bob led the two up a winding stone staircase to the third floor, then along a corridor in which they met half a dozen men walking two abreast and carrying lanterns.

These men were all dressed in pret-

ty much the same costume as that of Bob.

They wore canvas trousers, colored woollen shirts, loose jackets, and worsted nightcaps.

Two of them had cutlasses hanging at their sides; the others carried guns.

"They're a rum-looking set of gentlemen," exclaimed Blood when these men had passed. "Who may they be?"

"The keepers," answered Bob.

"Them as looks after the lunatics?"

"Yes."

"And do they look after 'em with them there swords and guns?" asked the Captain.

"If you want a lesson in our affairs," answered Bob, "you'd better take it of Dr. Brown, for I ain't a-goin' to give you one——yet awhile."

Blood was silent.

He felt that they had entered into the very abode of murder, and that only their own discretion could ever get them out of it with life.

Bob ushered them into a small, square, stone-built room—a cell in all but the name.

It was furnished with a truckle bed, two worm-eaten wooden chairs and a broken table.

Here Bob left them, promising to bring them some supper directly.

"I wonder they let us in here to see all the villanous ways of the place," said Munch, when they were alone.

"Why?"

"Because of our telling folks when we get out."

"*When we get out!*" echoed the other; "they never mean us to leave this place alive. You see now the use of these two boxes?"

"Well, yes. I begin to think——"

"Exactly. No temptation less than the chance of the robbery and murder of two helpless victims would have ever induced them to admit strangers within these walls. That I knew. The men who entered this place must be such as will never leave it. That I knew! Villany is short-sighted, and the murderer, like every other scoundrel, is apt to be *too* clever, and over-reach himself. That I knew! You see, I was not far out. We are here——"

"Yes; and now we are here——"

"Whatever they bring us to drink, we shall manage to dispose of; but we shall abstain from tasting. The drink will be drugged. They will allow about an hour for its taking full effect upon us, and at the end of that time—*they will come!*"

"To murder us?"

"Precisely. Thinking us a weak and easy prey, Dr. Brown will most likely send only one; or at the utmost two men; for whoever comes will expect a share of the booty, and the doctor will wish to do the business economically. This man, or these men, will be made by us to reveal all."

"They will reveal——"

"Yes, or he may reveal, as the case may be. I have a fancy that the man Bob will come single-handed to cut our throats. In his consternation at finding us on the alert, and ready to receive him, he will fall easily into our hands. We shall wring from him the hiding-place of the girl."

There was admiration as well as amazement in the look with which Munch now regarded the highwayman.

"And to think of my taking him for a play-acting old madman!" he thought. "Why, I never thought anybody could come up so near to Duval. He's an out-and-outer."

Bob brought a loaf, some cheese, and a bottle, with a message from Dr. Brown apologizing for the scanty supper, but recommending the old port to his guests.

It is needless to say that the *old port* was left untasted, but Munch drank half a tumbler of the whiskey at the highwayman's request.

Captain Blood selected a short rope from the coil in the carpet-bag, while his accomplice loaded the pistols.

Thus prepared, they seated themselves on the bed in silence, and waited patiently the coming of the murderer or murderers.

It was exactly as the highwayman had predicted.

A little more than an hour after midnight a cautious hand was heard at the lock of the door.

At this terrible moment even the stout heart of the London pickpocket sank within him.

There might be a dozen ruffians come to murder them instead of the one man expected by the Captain.

But the latter had not been deceived.

The ruffian Bob entered the room alone.

The struggle scarcely lasted three moments.

The Captain griped the villain by the throat, swung him on to the bed, wrenched from him the open clasp knife he carried in his hand, and bound him hand and foot with the cord prepared by Munch.

"Dog!" cried the highwayman, standing over him with a pistol in each hand; "murderous dog, dare to utter one word, except to answer such questions as we put to you, and this moment is your last!"

The man was too astounded to make any reply.

"Where is Miss Floridor — By George, I don't know her other name!" added the Captain to himself.

The man shook his head; he knew nothing of the names of the patients.

"What have you done with a woman who was brought here lately. Black hair and eyes. She was brought here by force in a private carriage. Do you remember?"

The man nodded.

"Is she still alive?"

He nodded again.

"Where is she?"

"Two floors below this, number eighty-seven."

"Where are the keepers?"

"On the ground-floor at the back of the building."

"Are they on the watch now?"

"No. They go their rounds every hour; the last round was a quarter of an hour ago."

"Then we're free for three-quarters?"

"Yes."

"Good! Now the key of the outer-gate; I know you have it about you, but to save trouble tell me where."

"In my trousers' pocket."

"Thank you," said the highwayman, taking the key.

"Enough. Have you a lantern?"

"Yes, outside."

"That will do," said Blood. "And now, my man, we shall be under the painful necessity of leaving you bound hand and foot here, while we go and manage a bit of business we have to get through."

Having said which, the two left the room, locking the door behind them upon the ruffian Bob, who lay powerless and fettered upon the bed where he had been thrown.

They easily found the lower floor, and the cell numbered eighty-seven.

The door was only fastened with an iron bolt, which they withdrew, and entered the wretched chamber.

There was a corresponding bolt within; this they fastened, and was thus assured that they could not easily be interrupted in their work.

The beautiful Floridor lay asleep upon her wretched couch.

Munch ran to the grating, and set to work severing the bars with his file, while the Captain approached the bedside.

He found it impossible to awaken the unhappy prisoner to a sense of her situation.

"Never mind," muttered Blood; "we must set the poor girl at liberty first, and bring her round afterwards."

The filing of the bars was a long operation; the three quarters of an hour had nearly elapsed by the time it was completed.

Munch, who was something of a cracksman, too, had triumphantly fastened the rope to a cross-bar at the top of the window.

By the aid of this rope the three lowered themselves from the window to the ground below.

Munch was the first to achieve this descent; then Captain Blood took the feeble girl into his arms, and lifting her through the aperture as if she had been a child, dropped her safely into the extended arms of Munch.

He had only himself now to extricate from this deadly abode of peril.

At this moment the keepers came their rounds, and surprised at finding the door bolted within, knocked loudly for admittance.

The highwayman laughed aloud at them.

"Come in, gentlemen, pray," he exclaimed, pistol in hand; "I am quite ready for you."

The six men threw themselves against the door of the cell, which crumbled and burst open under their united force.

But the Captain was already through the window, and as one of the ruffians advanced, gun in hand, the muzzle pointed at the escaping man, Blood took a careful aim, pulled the trigger, and a pistol-bullet in the shoulder brought the wretch to the ground.

Five minutes afterwards the three were without the gates of Stone House.

Need we describe the feelings of Claude when he, fully recovered, found Floridor free at his side?

Blood was fully repaid by the shake of the hand that his friend gave him.

As soon as Duval had become calmed, the two comrades proceeded on the furtherance of their plan. Duval had his wife won, the Captain had yet to gain Frances, and then for abroad.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRAP.—THE HUNTER ON THE WATCH.—THE REVELATION.

We are in Swing the hangman's house again.

That interesting character was at dark to be seen roaming about his dwelling with a horse-pistol in his bosom and carrying a heavy club in one hand.

He was going the rounds, for he had established a watch over his grounds since the late adventure. He had not dared to face his daughter, and—all his rage and spite directed on the highwayman, more for having exposed him than for winning his daughter's heart, as he clearly saw he had done—he was waiting for the coming of Captain Blood, whom he was resolved to seriously wound, if not kill.

He had no doubt of the latter's appearance, sooner or later.

Frances was the bait, and Swing the sportsman ready to kill the victim the moment the trap was sprung.

For three days now, the hangman had been disappointed in his expectations.

At about ten o'clock of this evening in question, Swing changed his course.

He determined to keep close, though unseen, to his daughter, thus diminishing the chance of the highwayman having an interview with her unperceived.

Frances was in that room from which Captain Blood had made his Leap for Life.

She was deep in thought, for which she had ample food.

The discovery of what she was had confounded her.

There was a time, in her innocence, when she might have refused all of the highwayman's prayers for her to flee with him, but now, a hangman's child, she was only too willing to be the bride of such a man.

Her girlish dreams had vanished.

Nothing worse could fate have found for her than to make her what she was; to a sensitive, delicate, nice-minded creature like her, to be declared the child of a public executioner was worse than death.

She was sitting in a chair, and would only show consciousness of the outer world when, very faintly, the toll of a distant bell came to her ears.

"Another hour gone," she would say; and she appeared to recoil from contemplation of the miserable moments of her whole life before her.

All this time, Swing was crouched in a closet, with his eyes upon Frances, watching pretty patiently with the dogged obstinacy of the class he belonged to.

As the three quarters after ten were striking, two men stopped their horses about forty or fifty yards down the road from Swing's house.

They were Captain Blood and Munch.

The latter had consented to help the highwayman, and to accompany them down to the coast, leaving them when they should be afloat and away from England.

Blood came directly up to the rear of the house.

There was a light in the kitchen, but old Betty was not there.

The Captain stumbled upon a garden ladder, which he pressed into service.

The light in Frances's room, had attracted his attention.

He placed the ladder, mounted it and, removing his hat, peered into the room.

On seeing Frances was there, and alone to all appearance, he tapped on the glass with his finger nail.

The girl started after a while, and approached the window.

She nearly uttered a scream when she perceived who it was.

The Captain, too prudent to risk words, made her a sign that she should come with him.

Frances stood irresolute.

The highwayman waved his hand again.

"Wife?" was the word upon the girl's lips.

The Captain returned the mute interrogative by a look full of reproach.

Frances smiled consent.

All this, being in dumb show, had escaped Master Swing's observation.

He had seen his daughter rise, and this had removed her out of his view contracted to that part of the room that the keyhole of the closet commanded.

Frances hurried to the door and listened at it, keeping it half opened.

Then she hastily swept into her pocket her few little trinkets, and stepped to the very closet in which was hidden the hangman, and in which was her apparel.

At the same moment as she laid her hand on the knob, Swing did likewise

The two stood face to face.

Involuntarily, the girl gave a scream.

Instantly, Captain Blood dashed up the window sash.

Frances shrunk from the hangman and flew for her lover.

Swing, not seeing the latter, darted after her, and caught her by her sleeve.

The frail material gave way, and there, on the suddenly disclosed left shoulder, a peculiar red mark appeared.

Captain Blood was already in the chamber, and holding the girl's swooned form.

"Back, wretch!" cried he, holding a pistol menacingly, but reversed. And then he added, at sight of the peculiar mark on the fair skin, as though it awakened some old memory in him, "the coronet! by George, the coronet! I remember! the beggar on the heath! Oh, this girl must be the child of—of —what was the title?"

"Here's your title to the grave!" yelled Swing, forgetting his pistol and dealing a blow with his club at the highwayman. "Release my daughter, vile robber! or, if you do not, you'll have another taste of my quality."

"Your daughter!" repeated the Captain, "you liar! a wretch like you have such a child! never! As true as this girl is not your daughter, you bear still another name."

"Leave it unspoken, then!" howled the hangman, as he rushed by furiously on the other, that Blood had to let go the girl, and wrench the club from his assailant's hand.

"I have not got the papers here," said Blood, holding his opponent's hands, and forcing him to listen, "but I remember enough. You are really named Joorocks——"

The hangman's eyes flashed fire. The shot had struck home, as the speaker saw.

"You stole this girl in hope of the money when she comes of age," continued the Captain. "It is a sore trial for me to spare you but give me

the papers proving this girl's right to her lawful inheritance, and I will let you go."

"See how I laugh at you!" exclaimed Swing, freeing himself by a powerful effort, and thrusting his hand into his breast.

Was it to draw his weapon, of which he had just remembered? was it for another purpose.

The Captain suspected the former to be the motive, and—being sure that the hangman was no father of Frances—he drew forth his own pistol, cocked it and fired.

The hangman, with his hand on this half-drawn fire-arm, bent backward, his hair flared up with the fire, so close had been the discharge, and then he fell full length on the floor, still writhing.

The Captain stooped over him, and, feeling in the breast of the body, he removed the pistol, and then, next to the shirt, he found a package of two or three papers, bound up and sealed in an oilskin cover.

"I'll not examine them now," he said to himself. "Time enough," and with that he stuffed them into an inner pocket in the breast of his waistcoat.

"Dead, I suppose," he went on, looking at the blood running from the side of the hangman's head. "But I must away."

He looked around, peeped into the closet, of which the door had been left open, snatched up here and there a female's cloak and hood.

He hurriedly flung them upon Frances, and, lifting her, carried her down the ladder.

When the aged limbs of old Betty brought her, light in hand, to the spot where she had heard the pistol shot, she found her master sitting up, with bleeding head, and confusedly pressing his hand to his side.

In the distance, better ears than hers might have heard the gradually lessening sound of the quick beat of two horses' hoofs.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALMOST!—THE BEAGLES.—SWING SHUFFLES OFF HIS COIL.—DUVAL'S DEATH.

At dusk the little fishing-village of Lewenport, about ten miles from Dover, received an addition to its population by the arrival of Captain Blood and Frances, with Duval and Floridor.

They had left their horses at Dover, from which Munch started for London with them; the animals were to go towards rewarding him for his services.

"I don't like the look of this, Captain," said Claude.

"Nor I," returned the other. "These sea reasons may be all right, but I do not think this delay is well grounded. This Captain Marlow talks about the tide very knowingly, but——"

"Claude," interrupted Blood, "suppose one of us goes out and tries to find another vessel which will sail instantly."

"There's nothing larger than a rowboat in the place."

"Well, you stay here. I will see—if not here, a neighboring place must have one. This is no situation for us to delay."

The Captain rose, smiled on Frances, bowed to his friend and his companion, and moved towards the door.

It flew open and half a dozen men appeared in the threshold.

Claude made an exclamation and rushed to the window; below it there stood three or four men looking up.

One man came into the room from the door; it was Swing.

"That's your man," said he, pointing out the Captain to one of his companions, "Jack Singleton, *alias* Sixteen-stringed Jack——"

"And here's Claude Duval," said the other, who produced a gilt-crowned staff, "I apprehend Jack Singleton and Claude Duval. Put on the irons, Mason."

A couple of men stepped up to the highwaymen, innocently supposing that they would offer no resistance.

Instantly, the two highwaymen, as

though worked by the same spring, gently pushed the girls into a corner, and, drawing each a pistol, felled the two men.

Then they rushed right at the five remaining men.

The Captain reached the door.

"Fasten it!" cried Claude.

But meanwhile—Blood at the door, Claude struggling with the police officers—Swing had found the coast clear for a seizure of Frances.

But the latter uttered a scream at his detested approach, while Floridor with a little dagger that Duval had given her, stood on the defence.

Blood, who had his back to the door, saw this, and he flew at the hangman, upsetting one of Duval's antagonists as he dashed on.

Swing hurriedly fired a pistol at the highwayman, whom it missed.

This seeing, he warded off a blow that Blood dealt him, and, this knocking his useless fire-arm from his grasp, he snatched the little dagger from Floridor's comparatively weak hold.

Blood had grappled him, and the two struggled for a moment.

Suddenly, the door was beaten twice or thrice, and then a loud crash told that the men from below stairs had broken in to strengthen their friends.

Blood uttered a groan.

His friend had four or five overpowering him, though he yet fought. Floridor wrung her hands.

"One moment, Claude—I come!" shouted the Captain, half flinging Swing from him.

But the latter, shaking his right arm free, swiftly lifted and let fall the dagger. Small, but sharp and of good stuff, its whole blade disappeared in the highwayman's side. The guard struck his ribs with the force of a sledge hammer. He fell like a slaughtered ox.

Frances fell with a wailing sound over her lover's body. Claude's vigor and strength was exhausted, but at the sound of his friend's fall, it seemed renewed. His own pistols had been snatched from him. He tried to pull one from an officer's girdle, but in the action cocked and fired it where it was, and the bullet entered the man's thigh.

"Now we have him!" said Swing triumphantly, considering Claude to be completely mastered.

"Now, you have it!" yelled Claude Duval, wrenching his right arm loose from two or three pair of hands, and giving the exultant hangman a fearful, straight-out blow.

Swing, struck on the neck, fell backwards, a gush of blood spirted from his lips, the skin turned black where the blow had alighted, and his body was motionless.

His slayer in the next instant was handcuffed.

"The hangman of London will never twist hemp again!" was the remark of an officer examining Swing. "And Singleton, too, is gone. Four inches of steel in his heart has saved him from being choked some day. We'll put Duval in security over at Dover, and return for the bodies. What do you say? The women? Eh? oh, they won't come to any harm here. One of us can stay to watch, and keep these stupid bumpkins from interfering. You, Tom."

Tom expressing a desire to wait down stairs where he would not be bothered with the lamentations of the females, they all left the room.

Scarcely had they disappeared than Captain Blood rose to a sitting posture. The short blade had penetrated its whole length, indeed, but the package of papers, taken from Swing, it will be remembered, and forgotten where he had put it, had caused the point of the blade to turn and bend; the whole injury done to Blood was that of the crushing blow. His side was painfully bruised, but not a scratch was made.

He had been pretending death, since his recovering from the stunning effects. In a couple of minutes, the three made up their plan.

Frances and Floridor slipped out, and the man on the watch did not stop them.

However, he thought he might as

well step up stairs, and this he did, with a design on the pockets of the men there.

Instead of reaping such a harvest, the first thing he knew was that the supposed dead Captain Blood, or Sixteen-stringed Jack, had him by the throat.

About twenty-four hours later, all London learned that the far-famed Ladies' Highwayman, Claude Duval, was "in Newgate thrown."

If one charge had failed, there was no lack of others, and Claude Duval was a doomed man.

An attempt was made to rescue him at his former trip to Tyburn, which resulted successfully. Captain Blood was supposed to have had a hand in several rows that occurred along the line of march, but the guard was too strong. Duval could not escape his death.

There was a rumor that he was to have been pardoned at his last moment, and the hangman, influenced by it, delayed as much as he could, but not even a reprieve came.

One of the gallant couple with whom we have traveled, we hope the reader thinks pleasantly, has fallen. But there are some of his friends still living, and their adventures will be found faithfully recorded in "THE HIGHWAYMAN'S AVENGER; or, the Escape of Sixteen-stringed Jack."

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