Snaith John Collis

The Wayfarers

John Snaith

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Содержание

J. C. Snaith
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CHAPTER I
THE DEVIL TO PAY

When I opened my eyes it was one o'clock in the day. The cards lay on the table in a heap, and on the carpet in a greater one, the dead bottles in their midst. The candles were burnt out; their holders were foul with smoke and grease. As I sat up on the couch on which I had thrown myself at nine o clock in the morning in the desperation of fatigue, and stretched the sleep out of my limbs and rubbed it out of my brain the afternoon strove through the drawn blinds palely. The half-light gave such a sombre and appropriate touch to the profligate scene that it would have moved a moralist to a disquisition of five pages. But whatever my errors, that accusation was never urged against me, even by my friends. You may continue in your reading, therefore, in no immediate peril. The ashes were long since grey in the grate; there was an intolerable reek of wine-dregs and stale tobacco in the air; and the condition of the furniture, stained and broken and tumbled in all directions contributed the final disorder to the room. Indeed the only article in it, allowing no exception to myself, that had emerged from the orgy of the night without an impediment to its dignity was the picture of my grandfather, that pious, learned nobleman, hanging above the mantelpiece. A chip off a corner of his frame might be urged even against him; but what was that in comparison with the philosophical severity with which he gazed upon the scene? In the grave eyes, the grim mouth, the great nose of his family, he retained the contemplative grandeur which had enabled him to give to the world in ten ponderous tomes a Commentary on the *Analects of Confucius*. The space they had occupied on my book-shelf, between the *Newgate Calendar* and the *History of Jonathan Wild the Great*, was now unfilled, since these memorials of the great mind of my ancestor had lain three weeks with the Jews.

By the time my wits had returned I was able to recall the fact that the previous night, whose evidences I now regarded, was the last I should enjoy. It was the extravagant ending to a raffish comedy. Finis was already written in my history. As I sat yawning on my couch I was a thing of the past; I had ceased to be; to-morrow at this hour I should be forgotten by the world. I had had my chin off the bridle for ten years, and had used that period to whirl my heels without regard to the consequences. I had played high, drunk deep, paid my court to Venus, gained the notoriety of the intrigue and the duel – in fact, I had taken every degree in rakishness with the highest honours. I had spent or lost every penny of my patrimony, and fourteen thousand pounds besides; I could no longer hold my creditors at bay; various processes were out against me; the Jews had my body, as surely as the devil had my soul. But it was more particularly a stroke of ill-fortune that had hastened on the evil day. The single hair whereon the sword over my head had been suspended must have been severed sooner or later, even had it not suddenly snapped at four of the clock of the previous afternoon. At that hour I had killed a cornet of the Blues within a hundred yards of the Cocoa Tree, in the presence of my greatest enemy. Lord knows it was in fair fight, marred it is true by a little heat on the side of both; but the only witness of the deed, and he an accidental one, was Humphrey Waring, my rival and my enemy. He of all men was best able to turn such a misadventure on my part to account. The moment poor Burdock sank sobbing to death in Waring's arms, and he cried with his grim laugh, "You will need to run pretty swift, my lord, to prove your *alibi*," I knew that fate had reserved for the last the cruellest trick of all she had it in her power to play.

Possessed by the knowledge that I must inevitably perish in a rope, or less fortunately in a debtor's jail, for the instant the hand of the law was laid on my coat, the state of my affairs would

never permit it to be removed. I went home and hastily summoned a few choice spirits to my lodgings in Jermyn Street that evening; and I spent the last night of my freedom in that society, expecting at every cast of the cards and every clink of the bottle to hear the boots of the "traps" from Bow Street upon the stairs. Yet all night long they never came, and here it was one o'clock in the afternoon, and I still in the enjoyment of my liberty. And now, as I sat in the sanity of daylight, refreshed by an excellent sleep, I felt myself still to be my own man. Therefore I called to François my valet to draw up the window-blinds, and to have the goodness to bring me a bottle of wine.

This blackguard of an Irishman bore in baptism the name of Terence, but I called him François, because one holds that to be as indubitably the name of a valet as Dick of an ostler, and Thomas of a clergyman. Besides, I have such an hereditary instinct for polite letters, that I would as lief have called him after his own honoured patronymic as by that of our excellent Flaccus himself. François waded through the kings and queens and aces on the carpet, let the daylight in, and then withdrew to fetch a clean glass and a bottle of Tokay.

"The last bottle, me lord," says he.

"We drain the last bottle on the last day," says I. "Can aught be more fitting? *Finis coronal opus*!"

As this was the last time I should take the cup of pleasure to my lips, I made the utmost of it; sipped it carefully, turned it over on my tongue, held the glass up to the light, meditated on my past a little, on my present case, and what lay before me. I suppose it was a particular generous quality of the wine that kindled a new warmth in my spirit. Why, I asked myself, should I sit here, tamely waiting on my fate? Why should I be content to have my person contaminated with the dirty hands that would hale it to an ignominious death, or a thing less bearable? Why should I not cheat the Jews and my evil fortune in this last hour? Nothing could be easier than to leave the law in the lurch.

This course was so consonant to the desperation of my temper and affairs, that I had no sooner entered on the second glass of this last bottle, than I was fully convinced of its propriety. It was surely more fitting that a gentleman should select the hour and the manner of his exit from the world, than submit like a common ruffian to the dictation of the law in these important matters. To die by the hand of oneself is not the highest sort of death, it is true; but I am one who would advance, although the ancient and best writers are against me in this matter, that there are occasions when a man may best serve his dignity by renouncing that which has ceased to be a cherished object to him. In this, at least, I have Cato the younger with me.

Indeed I had already taken this resolve rather than submit my pride to those inconveniences that so depress the spirit, when a third glass of wine put me in mind of a thing the most importunate of any. There was a certain lady. Nothing can be more ludicrous than to consider of a ruined gamester broken by Fortune on her wheel, pausing in his last extremity for such a reason. But there it was. I could have wished to see the tears of defiance once again on her cheeks. In spite of the world, in spite of her family, of my evil history, of my cunning, plausible enemy, she had given me her proud little heart. She was the one person I might have turned to in this black hour, who would not have requited me with a sneer or a cold glance. Her stern old father had no sooner discovered how her affections stood committed towards me, and had learned the colour of my reputation, than he had whisked her away from town to his seat in the remote west country, and had vowed upon his soul to have me ducked in a ditch if I so much as showed my nose in those parts.

These thoughts of dear, insolent little Cynthia had induced reflections that I could well have done without. It was plain that this last cast of the cards had left the game in the hands of Mr. Humphrey Waring. He had long had the ear of the old duke, Cynthia's father, and no man knew better how to push the advantages my misfortunes had given him over me. He would marry the greatest heiress in the west country, hate him as she might, whilst Jack Tiverton, the worthless rogue on whom she doted, or, if it please you better, the Right Honourable Anthony Gervas John Plowden-Pleydell, fifth Earl of Tiverton, that ill-fated nobleman, rotted in durance, or writhed in a rope at Tyburn, or

spilt his brains on the carpet of his lodgings. But for all that I had a mind to attempt a little more mischief before I perished. Why not go to poor little town-bred Cynthia, immured in the country like a bird in a cage, and throw her obstinate old father and her cunning suitor into such a fright as they would not be likely to forget? Indeed, why not?

However, when I came to reflect on this scheme more carefully, I found that I had hardly zest enough for it. My ruin was too complete. Besides, it might cost Cynthia dear. I should have been well pleased to look on my pretty young miss once again and watch the tears course down her cheeks in the stress of our farewell, for I would have you know that I am a man of sentiment when in the humour. But it would be a hollow business and little of a kindness to the child to have her weep for such a broken profligate. I should purchase the discomfort of my enemies at too high a price.

Yet I must come to a decision speedily. Every instant I expected to hear the law upon the stairs. Should I spare it any further trouble there and then, or make an attempt to break out of town and lead it a dance across the country? The drawback in the first course was its somewhat arbitrary nature. It was so final and so certain that chance would have no opportunity. The drawback to the second was that I had not a guinea in the world. That morning I had staked my last and lost it. However, as I weighed the pros and cons with a whimsical deliberation I was taken with a fortunate expedient. Chance had been the ruling passion of my life. It had brought me to this pass. Why should I not employ it to solve this problem? I summoned M. François.

"Take two pistols," I said, "into the next chamber, but load one only. Cock them both, however, but use particular care that nothing shall suggest which is charged and which is not. Then bring them here and lay them side by side upon this table, still remembering not to betray the fatal one."

M. François bowed, and solemnly carried away the weapons from the sideboard. I awaited his return with an emotion akin to pleasure. I had tasted most of the delights that chance could afford me; but even I, who had staked houses, lands, servants, furniture, and every guinea of my fortune, had not yet gambled with my life. Thus, when I came to play the greatest stake that is in the power of any man to play, it was but fitting that I should enjoy some little exhilaration in that act.

M. François returned in rather more than two minutes with the pistols, and set them on the table on the top of the cards. They were both cocked, and it was impossible to distinguish one from the other. M. Francis coughed in his well-bred manner, and then sighed deeply.

"I beg your pardon, my lord," he said, at the verge of tears, "and I am sure your lordship will overlook the liberty on an occasion – on an occasion that is not likely to occur again. But may I say, my lord, with what deep regret I take farewell of your lordship? I am sure there could not have been a better, kinder master."

"François, I subscribe heartily to that," says I, "and I am sure there could not have been a bigger blackguard of a servant. And may I say, François, that I never took a deeper pleasure in anything than in parting with you; and I may even add that if a minute hence I am called elsewhere, I go with the less irresolution, because I am firm in the opinion that wherever it may be, I cannot be worse served than I have been at your hands."

"Your lordship is more than kind," says François humbly.

"No thanks, I beg," says I. "But, François, if chance, who hath served me nearly as ill as you have and for a rather longer period, sees fit to arrange that I shall perish by my own hand, I do not doubt that you will desire some small memento, some small souvenir of so fortunate an occasion."

"Your lordship is more than kind," says François, more humbly than before.

"You overwhelm me, François," says I. "If there is any little knick-knack your fancy turns to, you have only to mention it. The Jews will but claim it otherwise, and I would almost as lief it fell into your hands as into theirs."

"As your lordship so emboldens me," says M. François, "I should most greatly cherish the picture of your grandfather, that wise good nobleman, that hangs above the mantelpiece, for I am sure I could devise no more fitting memorial of his grandson."

"François," says I, "would I did not know you for a rogue, for the chastity of your taste does you so much honour it honours me. But would you bereave me of the last badge of my respectability? Friends, fortune, estate, the consideration of the world, all are gone, and you would now deny me the solace of my heritage. Yet I commend your wisdom even here, since if you rob others as you have robbed myself, you will presently be able to purchase half the kingdom of Ireland, and set up among the landed gentry. You will then, I doubt not, find an ancestor or two come not amiss. And if of my grandfather's pattern so much the better, for their virtue will purchase you more credit than any of your own. But I would recommend myself that you took a few ancestors over with the property. They would cost less in a lump. Besides, they tell me they are cheaper in Ireland than anywhere else, except France, where they are even more common than matrimony."

M. François was gathering himself to make a proper reply to this harangue, when suddenly we both heard the long-expected footfalls on the stairs.

"Secure that door," said I. "I will not be taken until chance hath arbitrated on my destination."

Saying this, without the hesitation of an instant I picked up one of the pistols lying side by side among the cards. François slipped to the door and turned the key. Then he went to the mantelpiece, took down the picture, and placed it under his arm.

"Farewell, my lord," he said, "I leave you with inexpressible regret."

He ran to the window, cast it open, and with the most astonishing skill and agility, squeezed himself through the opening, my grandfather and all; and the roof being well within his reach, he first laid the picture on the tiles, then drew himself up after it, and showed the cleanest pair of heels to the law as ever I saw. And I was so taken with the ready wit and contrivance of the rogue, that although I had the cocked pistol pressed to my temple, I could not pull the trigger for the life of me. For I stood all a-shake with very laughter, so that the cold muzzle of the weapon tapped now against my forehead, now against my nose, now against my cheekbone, till I vow it was a miracle the hammer did not descend. But in the middle of all this the door was tried and shaken, followed by a fierce tap on the panel, and then came the clear tones of a woman.

"Open – open the door. Jack, it is I!"

At the sound of that voice the pistol fell from my hands altogether. Striking the carpet with a thud, it exploded under my feet and knocked a great hole in the wainscot. For an instant the room was full of smoke, gunpowder, and a mighty noise; but the moment I recovered my courage I unfastened the door and confronted the cause of it – Cynthia Carew! She too was the victim of a not unnatural bewilderment, and as pale as linen.

"Ods sputterkins!" she cried. "What a taking you have put me in! I am all of a twitter. Whose brains have you spilt? Not your own, I'll warrant me, for you never had any. Give me a kiss now, and get me some ratafia to compose me, and we'll let it pass."

"Cynthia," I gasped, but giving her the first of these requisites, "how came you here, in heaven's name?

"Ratafia!" she cried, "ratafia, or I perish."

"There's never a drop in the place," says I. "No, nor cherry-brandy, nor aromatic vinegar neither."

"Another kiss then," says Cynthia, pressing her white cheek against me, and casting her arms about my neck.

I led her within and set her down on the couch. She bore all the evidences of having made a long journey. So far from being dressed in the modishness that was wont to charm St. James's Park, she was covered by a long, dun-coloured cloak, wore a country hat, if I'm a judge of 'em, in which the feathers were crumpled; her shoes were muddy, and she carried a strange look of fear and uneasiness that I had never seen about her before. I procured a clean glass and filled it with wine from the last bottle and made her drain it, for she looked so pale and overborne.

"Now," says I, "how came you here? and what brings you?"

"Oh, Jack," says she, "I am run away." She suddenly broke forth into a flood of tears.

"The devil you are!" says I.

"Yes," says she, sobbing as though her heart would break, "and I'm not sorry neither."

"You wouldn't confess it an you were," says I.

"No, I wouldn't," she sobbed.

I must admit that the sight of the sweet chit was the one thing in all the world that had the power to please me at that hour, yet there was not a thing that could have happened to leave me in so sore a case. Here had my prettiness come and thrown herself on my protection – on the protection of a man utterly ruined, whom the law was already dogging for his liberty, if not his life. In sooth I must send her back again. It was no sort of a reception, especially when one fell to consider the heroical fashion of her coming to me. But what else was one to do? I was at my last gasp, without so much as a guinea, or a roof for my head, since to stay in that house was to court arrest, nor had I a friend in the world to whom I would dare to recommend her.

"Cynthia," says I, "I dote upon the sight of you; I am filled with joy to see you sitting there, but – but – "

How could I tell the child!

"But – but?" She sobbed no more. Mopping her tears, she crumpled the sopping handkerchief in her little fist, sat perfectly upright in her seat, and stared so straight at me that I felt the blood hum in my ears.

"But – but!" says I again – devil take me if I could tell her.

"But – but?" says she on her part; and it was wonderful to see her blue eyes come open and her proud lips spring together like the snap of a watch-case.

"Well, Cynthia, dear, it is simply this," says I, going headlong into it. "You find me a ruined gamester, without a friend or a guinea in the world, who even at this moment is being hunted for his debts, and, if I dared say it to you, something worse. Now there is but one way out of it. You cannot stay here; there is not a friend to whom I may confide you; child, you must go back to your father."

Instead of growing red, the colour that shone I am sure in my face, she grew as pale as snow, and her eyes sparkled with a grim beauty that discomposed me more than it charmed me. She rose from the couch, lifted her chin out of her white throat, and kicked the kings and queens and knaves on the carpet in all directions.

"Never," she cried. "I will not go back to my father. I said I would not marry this Mr. Waring; whereon my lord said he would lock me in my room until I was of another mind. And he did lock me in it; and I broke out of it; and I will not go back, no, not if I must subsist on crusts picked from the kennel, and the clothes rot off my body, and I sleep o' nights in a dry ditch or the porch of a church."

"Faith!" says I, "that's well spoke, monstrous well spoke."

"I hate this Mr. Waring," says the little fury. "May I be crost in love, if I do not."

"And if I do not too," says I, "may my heart smoke in purgatory. But come tell me, is it for himself you hate him, or is it for love of me?"

"A plague take all catechisms," says she. "But I will tell you for another kiss."

I think two persons in love could never have been in a worse plight than Cynthia and I. There seemed no course open to us, other than to flee together, we knew not whither. Before even this could be considered, however, we had to find the means.

"What money have you left in your poke?" I asked her.

"Twelvepence exactly and a halfpenny over."

I whistled long and shrill. "Which is twelve-pence exactly and a halfpenny more than there is in mine. At nine o'clock this morning I staked my all, including three periwigs, nine pairs of silk breeches, stockings, five cambric brocaded waistcoats, silver-buckled shoes, sword, duelling pistols, house and furniture, the Odes of Horace, and my man-cook – staked 'em on the queen of hearts and lost 'em. Think on it, my pretty – lost 'em on the queen of hearts."

"I care not for that," says Cynthia. "I will not go back, and so you must make the best of me."

"But, child, what can I do when I'm taken?"

"You must not be taken."

"In that case," says I, "the only chance we have is to get away from here at once, furnished with the clothes we stand in, and the sum of twelve-pence halfpenny."

CHAPTER II
LADY CYNTHIA CAREW

Having come to this odd resolve, it behoved us to lose no time. But whither we should go, neither of us knew. North, south, east, or west, one latitude was as good as another. We should be equally served in each. As for the means at our disposal, we had the sum of twelve-pence halfpenny sterling. I am sure that much the same thoughts were uppermost in the minds of us both, for the moment I looked at little Cynthia sitting on the couch with a tight mouth and ratter quizzical eyes, I broke forth into a shout of laughter, which she returned so promptly that it became a question as to whom the honour of the first peal belonged.

In the midst of this pleasantry I walked to the door of the room and locked it again. I had no mind to be taken unawares by the enemy; and provided I was not, François' example had shown that a way of escape was always open.

"Now, my dear," says I, "we have no time to lose; let us be putting our few affairs in order. Look round this despoiled chamber, and tell me if you observe any article in it that could be turned into money at a pawnshop, or is likely otherwise to serve us on our journey. I am sorry to say that every object of *vertu* that I ever possessed upon which we might at a pinch have raised a seven-shilling piece has already been called upon to perform that office. There is one exception even to these, it is true, but that cannot help us now, and I rejoice to think so. For five minutes before your arrival I gave away to a connoisseur, a dilettante, a lover of the beautiful, Sir Godfrey Kneller's picture of my famous grandfather. I think I could never have held up my head again had I given up that eminent nobleman to the ignoble usages I have suggested. I foresaw this calamity; let me take the credit therefore of its aversion."

"You gave it away without receiving a farthing for it!" cries Cynthia aghast. "Oh, what a folly, Jack! Had we it now we could make thirty shillings of it at any dealer's."

"I know, I know!" says I triumphantly, "I grant that; therefore do you not more clearly see how finely I have acted by my grandfather?"

"Burn me if I do," says Cynthia. "Jack, what a fool thou art! For I see never a thing of value left in the place; or stay, we might put that pair of old iron pistols in a case and raise a loaf of bread on them. I suppose that on the floor is the one with which you tried to take your life, and as the one other's cocked, I suppose that's loaded too."

"Tried to take my life," says I. "Cynthia, what words are these?"

"A truce to dissimulation, if you please," says Cynthia tartly, "for feather-headed fellow that you are, yet do no better at it than any of the other arts and sciences at which you have tried and failed."

I turned to the table and began sorting a handful of cards to cover my confusion. A clever woman is the devil! Cynthia, to add a sting to her speech, picked up the discharged pistol from the carpet, ostentatiously searched for its case, and put it in. She then took up the other.

"Is this loaded, or is it not?" she asked.

"No, it's not loaded," says I. "Pull down the trigger and put it in too."

"Then, if it's not loaded, why was it cocked?" The question was decidedly disconcerting. I was by no means willing to go into the details of that matter, and therefore hesitated to find a reason.

"You don't know whether it's loaded or not," says Cynthia, sternly.

"Most certainly I do. Have I not said that it is not loaded?"

"And have I not said," says the impudent Cynthia, "that you don't know whether it's loaded or not?"

"But, my dear child," says I, "have I not positively said that the thing's not loaded?"

"Oh yes, I admit that," says the provoking creature. "But you must admit too, sir, that I have more faith in my own judgment than I have in yours. I say again that you don't know whether that pistol is loaded or whether it is not."

"I'll lay you two to one in hundreds that I do," says I hotly.

"Would not a case of iron pistols against the sum of twelvepence halfpenny be more appropriate in the circumstances?" says Cynthia.

"I believe you are right there," says I.

Cynthia then presented the pistol at the wall and a strange thing happened. The room was filled with a reverberating crash, and when the smoke that arose had lifted a little it was discovered that a large mirror had been shivered into a thousand pieces.

"There," says Cynthia triumphantly.

As for me, I stood aghast for a moment, perfectly at a loss to explain the pistol's strange behaviour. Then I suddenly broke out into a fit of uncontrollable laughter; the admirable François had loaded them both.

It was then the turn of Cynthia to stand aghast.

"I hope your misfortunes have not deprived you of your reason," says she, more tartly than ever; and added, "I knew all along that you didn't know whether it was loaded or not."

"Come, come!" says I, keenly anxious, you may be sure, to change the topic. "We have already tarried here over-long. I will tell you the whole story in a more convenient place and season. If we don't go at once, I am afraid we shall not go at all."

"True," says Cynthia, seating herself again on the couch with the most deliberate and provoking coolness.

"What new whimsey is this?" says I, utterly nonplussed.

"I think, my Lord Tiverton," says Cynthia, with remarkable gravity, "that you have overlooked an important particular."

"Which? What?" says I.

"Nay, my lord," says she, "I am the last person in the world to remind you."

That might be true enough so far as it went, but the pretty roguish chit composed her features and her person into such an affectation of solemnity, and there was such a saucy twinkle in her eyes too, that all the words in the English tongue could not have spoken more plainly than she did without uttering any. It is, I suppose, one of the highest gifts of her sex, though to be sure, would it were exercised more!

"Dammy," says I, "you mean – er – er; you mean that I must ask you to marry me."

Instead of replying at once, she bent down and picked up half-a-dozen cards from the floor, arranged them in the shape of a fan, and held them in front of her eyes.

"La," says she, "your lordship is too kind. Pray ascribe my blushes to my country breeding."

"Pah!" says I, "we have not the time for play-acting now. The moment is very ill-chosen."

"Oh, I grant you that," says she, "but as you will allow that it was none of my choosing, why should I forego the peculiar privileges that my sex have ever derived from this position? No, as I'm a woman, I will have this thing carried through in the most proper and approved manner. Ods lud, sir! what notions have you got! I will be coy if I choose, or haughty, or easy, or gracious, or mocking, or disdainful, just as my mood is and as I've a mind to be. Now then, my lord, down on to your noble knees, and pour forth your foolish speeches that are meant to be so grand, which you must forget in the middle, whereon you will descend out of a rather turgid poetry into a bald and somewhat blasphemous prose. For I will have your lordship to know that I will be wooed as a woman, else I will not be wooed at all. Down, down on to your knees, my lord, and up, up with your apostrophes."

"What a consummate folly is this," says I, "when at any moment we may be ta'en."

But the pretty little fool sat as demure as a mouse, not relaxing a lip or twitching an eyebrow, i' faith as adorable a picture of a person as any I've seen off a painted canvas. There was that tantalizing

air about her which at once invited, yet forbade; that aroused that which it denied. I vow nothing could have been more taking than the sight of little Cynthia sitting there as straight as any arrow that ever Cupid shot, her knees and heels together, and her hands spread out with the palms turned down, and her dainty toes peeping from underneath her petticoat. Indeed, so was I worked on by her graces and airs that I was like to forget the grim pass in which we were involved. Nay, I gradually began to solicit her in a formal manner; a piece of behaviour that contributed as much to her whimsical pleasure as it did to my embarrassment. And when in accents of undying regard, I came to ask for her hand in exchange for my heart and fortune, she was so charmed with the natural fervour with which I did it, that she stopped me imperiously, in the middle of much passion, and says: "I would have your lordship go over again that splendid passage that you have just uttered, that hath the fine swearing and the great humility in it. I never heard anything choicer; Mr. Betterton never surpassed it."

And when I had humoured her as much as she wished and that was not until I was thirsty and hot, and she was somewhat weary of keeping the strict attitude that she thought best suited to receive my addresses in, says she: "I declare, sir, you have pleased me vastly. You are as good a suitor as any of them all. Mr. Waring never wooed me half so well. As for Mr. Stokes, and Colonel Regan, and Sir John Dufty, and my lord Viscount Brighouse, you compare very well with them too. You have not the fine brawny pease-and-bacon appearance of Sir John, it is true, nor is your voice so rich and noble as the Colonel's, begorra, nor is your nose so well curved as Mr. Stoke's, nor have you a pretty little lisp like my lord Viscount, but in the sum-total of your attributes you do very fairly well. And therefore as your lordship's fortune is so considerable, and you have already gained the approbation of my father, I think the only course open to me – Oh, Jack, listen! What in the name of heaven is that?"

"You may well ask," says I. "One, two, three, four, five probably or more, according to their boots on the stairs, gentlemen from Bow Street come to wait upon us."

"Oh, what shall we do!" says poor Cynthia, clapping her hands.

"Keep very calm, child, and carefully heed what I say. They will not molest you; I am their game. But I doubt gravely whether I shall fall to them at present. My way lies through that window and along the tiles, and whilst they follow, you will simply go downstairs and walk out at the front door. Go as swiftly as you can down to Piccadilly to the gates of Hyde Park. And if I am not already come there before you, wait till I arrive. It is to be considered, of course, that I may have more difficulty than I apprehend in slipping these fellows."

Here the door was roughly taken and the next instant so heavy a blow was delivered against it as partly drove in one of the panels. I had just time to run into the adjoining chamber for a hat and a riding-cloak, to plant a kiss between brave little Cynthia's brows, and abjure her not to be afraid, when the door was driven in, and three or four ugly wretches came tumbling one upon another pell-mell into the room.

CHAPTER III
INTRODUCES A MERITORIOUS HEBREW

I had hardly time to open the window ere they were recovered of their entry and on their feet. Seeing what I was about to attempt they made a rush, but I did not bear youth and vigour in my limbs for nothing. With a quickness that I'll warrant would have done no discredit to a cat, I had poised myself on the precarious sill, and had twisted myself into a favourable position for reaching the roof. It was easily in reach, as this chamber very happily was at the top of the house. I had barely taken a firm hold on the iron gutter that ran along the edge of the tiles, before I had drawn up one knee, and was in the act of dragging up the other as fast as I could, when it was seized by a hand from the room below. Luckily for me, I had a firm enough hold of the roof to get some little purchase for my imprisoned leg, whereby I was enabled to deal my adversary a pretty smart kick in the teeth, which sent him cursing back into the room. Thereupon I scrambled willy-nilly, hands and knees, on to the tiles. Not one moment too soon, however. My pursuers evidently numbered fleet and active fellows among them. Their blood was up too. For scarcely had I gone ten yards along the edge of the tiles, moving on all-fours for safety, ere another fellow was also in possession of the roof. This was not at all to my liking, and a good deal outside my calculations, since I had not expected that these clumsy Bow Street runners would attempt to follow me in this fashion.

My pursuer gave a view-halloa and followed me so fast that I realized at once that at this game Jack was like to be as good as his master. Perchance the fellow was better schooled in this mode of procedure than I, for he was clattering behind me, preparing to grab my heels before I could take my bearings. I did not know where I was, and had not the least idea as to how I should get away. But one thing was plain. I had embarked on so bold a course that the moment there was a limit to my daring all would be lost. Therefore, hearing the Bow Street gentleman wheezing and grunting a yard or two behind me, I stopped and rose to my feet, and turned round so suddenly as considerably to endanger my own safety and to take him entirely unawares. And I sent my fist such a crack in his eye, that only a miracle saved him from toppling over the parapet into the middle of Jermyn Street, twenty feet beneath.

While Mr. Catchpole sprawled and wallowed with his arms and legs outstretched striving to save himself from falling over the brink, and howling to his mates, whose heads were just showing above the gutter, to come to his assistance, I took the occasion to alter my tactics. Instead of crawling along the edge, I began climbing up in a vertical direction. And my pursuer being but a runner from Bow Street after all, had been considerably cooled in his zeal, and accordingly allowed me rather more of elbow room, whilst his companions, of whom two more had now come upon the top, observing the nature of his accident, were in no such hurry as he had been to come by one themselves.

I mounted painfully enough as high as the chimney pots, not without some damage to the skin of my hands and knees, and a good deal of slipping and sliding. A game of hide-and-seek followed. Reaching the opposite slope of the roofs, which concealed me and put me farthest away from the enemy, I crept as swiftly as I could from chimney-stack to chimney-stack with ever a keen eye for a means of getting down again into the street. Some yards ahead I saw that the straight line of the tiles was broken by a dormer window. I made to this for here was the very chance that I desired. Alas! when I reached it I found it secured from within. I had no time in which to break a pane of glass in the hope that I might put my hand through and discover the fastenings. A couple of the traps had already found out in which direction I had gone, and were even now standing on the apex, and beckoning to the others. I moved away to another dormer window a few yards further on. It too was fast, but looking ahead I saw, greatly to my relief, that a third was standing open. My satisfaction had a short life, however. For scarcely had I made two yards towards it ere I observed a thing that in my haste I

had overlooked. The line of the houses ended abruptly; the open window belonged to another row. Between ran an alley or a narrow street, wide enough to make me pause in my career. Hard pressed as I was, I must confess that I had no fancy to attempt a leap so precarious. I turned to go back, but the enemy had followed so smartly on my heels that I saw in a glance that there was no chance of retreating by the way I had come. My only hope lay in a forward direction; I could not possibly retire. Nor must I hesitate an instant either. The closer I came to this gulf in the houses the more desperate it looked, but my resolve was already taken. A drowning man clutches at a straw.

Impeded as I was with a cumbersome riding-coat, I could not hope to make the leap successfully. Hastily pulling it off, therefore, I folded it up in some rude fashion, for I could not afford to lose it, and pitched it over a space between the houses. It landed in safety well over the immediate brink. The traps, apprehending the nature of the feat I was about to attempt, were coming along the roof with wonderful expedition. Indeed, they are almost within an arm's-length of me when I started on the run to make the leap. With teeth set, and it must be confessed some little sickness of anticipation in my spirit, I ran as hard as I could, and hurled myself into the air with a despairing energy. That I covered the gulf and landed with my knees on the coat I had cast across, I have always ascribed to that benevolent Providence that hath such a jealous regard for the worthless. And in sooth when I had actually arrived there it was one of the greatest wonders in the world that I did not fall back again in the recoil, or did not begin to roll sideways and so tumble over the lower edge. But somehow I recovered my balance before either of these calamities happened. Then I felt that I might breathe again.

There was precious little to fear that the men from Bow Street would be bold enough to follow me. For when I came to contemplate, now as you may believe with no little satisfaction, the magnitude of the hazard intervening between us, it cost me a shudder in despite of my complacency. And as in their case it was not a life and death matter on which line of the roofs they happened to stand, and they had no thoughts of adorable little Cynthia to spur them on to these great risks, I think they may be pardoned for giving back before that which I with so many sweats and misgivings had accomplished. Nor do I lay any unction to myself, since I am sure that had I stood in their shoes, or had I played for a lesser stake, I would have had none of such risks either. Nay, I am not altogether clear in my mind that had I not been heated by the fine excitements of the hue and cry I should have been wrought up to do it as it was. There can be little doubt, I think, that the chase makes a much nobler and more adventurous creature of the fox than ever consists with his vulgar and common character.

Seeing my pursuers had halted on the opposite brink, and were presenting such a helpless and bewildered appearance as plainly showed they had no stomach for a similar deed, I was able to resume my riding coat at my ease, and even to engage in a few words of conversation as I did so. Says I:

"Certainly, gentlemen, I think you are well advised in not seeking to come over. 'Pon my soul I would not have come over myself had you not pressed me so hard! Here is a guinea to drink my health, and now I will wish you good afternoon!"

Such is the power of habit that I fumbled in several pockets in search of a gold piece to toss them, ere I recollected the bankrupt condition in which I stood. Perforce I had to be content with a bow and a lifting of the hat, whereupon I went my way along the roof while they were left at the end of their wits to discover a means by which they might circumvent me.

I had not an instant of time to lose, however, if I was to make good my escape. There were doubtless persons in the street below who had had a keen eye for these proceedings. No sooner would they see in which direction the cat was to jump than they would act accordingly. Therefore it behoved me to be as bold and as quick as ever. The open dormer window offered the readiest mode of egress. I made to it at once, and peering within saw that the chamber, a bedroom, was very happily empty. I had no difficulty in squeezing my body through the narrow opening and so came into the room. Having done this, I securely fastened the window to present a further obstacle to my enemies. The great thing that lay before me now was to make my way downstairs as cautiously as I could, and to

slip out of the house without attracting the attention of its occupants, or of those of my foes who might be lurking about in the street. But much address was required to perform all this successfully, as you will readily understand.

First I opened the door of the bed-chamber with noiseless care, and then groped my way through the gloom and strangeness of the place to the stairs. And mighty rickety and full of noises they were when I found them. They began so sheer and abruptly, and so close to the bed-room door, that in spite of my caution, I was on them long ere I thought I was, and as a consequence nearly pitched headlong down their whole length. Mercifully I recovered my balance in the nick of time, but not before, as it seemed to my nervous ears, I had set up an intolerable clatter that appeared to echo and re-echo through every room of the house. Step by step, I crept down the stairs, and paused to listen on every one. It was so dark that I had to be very tenacious of the walls. But fortune was still on my side. There seemed not a soul in all the house, nor could I hear a sound. Yet every step I descended the place grew darker and darker; there was not so much as a glimmer of light from a door or a window to be discerned; while the walls were so close about me that when I stretched out my hands I could feel them on either side. Presently I ceased to descend, whereon much shuffling of my feet ensued, and I concluded that this was some kind of a landing. More shuffling and gingerly manoeuvring followed, and then the stairs began again, and the place grew darker than ever. The darkness became so great that I could not see my hand before my face; and as I had not the means about me to procure a light, nor would have dared to employ them had they been in my possession, I began to marvel where in the world I was coming to.

At last the stairs ended altogether, and on pushing carefully forward, my nose suddenly came against an unexpected obstacle. Running my hands over it, I judged it to be a door. I put my ear to the wood, but listen as I might I could hear no sound. Whither it led or what lay behind it I had not the vaguest notion, nor was there a speck of light by which I might make a guess. But when the handle of the door came into my fist, I decided not to flinch the situation whatever it might present. A bold course had been my salvation hitherto; come what might I would continue in it. Therefore, I cautiously turned the handle, and opened the door an inch at a time, I daresay I had got it about five inches apart when it was rudely grasped from the other side, and flung wide open in my face. A Jew stood before me, as true a child of Israel as ever I set eyes on. He cast up his hands and gurgled in his anger and surprise.

"Why, what the deffil!" says he at last.

"How do you do, sir," says I, cordially holding out my hand. "Proud to meet you, sir, infernally proud to meet you."

Although I had hoped that my air and tone were the very pattern of affability, I doubt if this Hebrew thought them so; or even if he did, he hardly seemed to think they became me in the circumstances as handsomely as I had hoped they would. For he gurgled and cackled, his tawny countenance grew redder and redder, his hands trembled, and he contorted his body into a truly fantastic shape. Meantime I gazed past him to see whence he had emerged, in the hope that I might get some clue as to what would be the best line of conduct to adopt. To my infinite pleasure I saw that I had come upon the threshold of a pawnbroker's shop, since a truly miscellaneous collection of articles lay scattered about it, whilst the character and nation of my inquisitor alone warranted the theory. Yet in an instant was my satisfaction turned to anger, for there, staring into my very eyes with all the meditative grandeur he had of yore, was that learned nobleman, my grandfather. It was well for M. François that he was not at that moment within my reach.

"What do you do here?" says the Jew, having discovered his tongue at last. "Do you think I do not know? You haf come to rob my house. Benjamin, bring your blunderbush. In broad daylight, too. O heaven, what effrontery!"

"My dear Mr. Moses," says I winningly, "what words are these? Effrontery – rob your house; to conceive that I, the best friend your tribe ever had or for that matter ever will have, should be thus

accosted by you! I am here as a client, sir; and to conceive that you of all men should deny a client when he takes these monstrous pains to come to you in privacy!"

Mr. Moses was a good deal reassured by my address. But after all his race are a good deal too tenacious to be put off so lightly. He demanded to know in what manner I had come there and he did it so boisterously too, and in a fashion so calculated to attract the attention of persons in the street that I judged it wisest to make a clean breast of how matters stood with me.

"Well, Mr. Moses," says I, "if you must know I am that great benefactor of your tribe, Lord Tiverton. My lodgings are about six doors up the street, and they have been visited this afternoon by the dirtiest set of minions from Bow Street as ever I saw. And so hard was I put to it to clear them that I took to the housetops, whereupon, seeing your dormer window open, I gave them the slip by climbing into it, and here I am. And mark you, my dear Mr. Moses, I would not so honour the dormer windows of all and sundry, no, rabbit me an I would. For I am mighty particular as to whose hands I would accept an obligation from. But if a friend cannot take a benefaction from a friend, then who in all the world is one to take it from? As Flaccus himself has said."

Mr. Moses, you may be sure, was mollified indeed.

"I am sure I beg your lordship's pardon," says he. "A thousand times most humbly I am sure I do. Benjamin, put by your blunderbush; and withdraw the curtains across the window, sirrah, for I have seen the traps walking up and down the street, and peering here and there and everywhere this last ten minutes; yes, that I have. Is there any particular in which I can serve your lordship?"

"Yes, by thunder, that you can!" says I. "I must get away from here unknown as quickly as you might count ten. The traps are still about in the street you say?"

"See, my lord, there is one going past the window now."

As he spoke I took the precaution of drawing farther back into the shadow of the stairs, for it was even as he said. The next instant Mr. Moses pushed the door to in my face, and as he did so, wheeled round to confront (as I guessed) two or three of the traps who were coming into the shop.

"A sheeny, by the Lord!" I heard one say, in a voice so coarse that it set my teeth on edge.

"What is your pleasure, good gentlemans?" says Mr. Moses in a tone of incredible politeness. "If I, a poor old clo'es-dealer as I am, can be of service to you, I cannot tell you how happy you will make me."

"Well, ole Father Abraham," says the foremost man, "we're on the 'eels of a hearl, d'ye see. We've been a-chasing of him on the 'ouse-tops, we have so, and he's just a-been a-squeedgin' of himself through your dormer window, and he's left us in the lurch, d'ye see. He's in your bed-room, you can wager, and we're a-going up to rout him out."

"Is he so?" says Mr. Moses. "God-a-mercy! is it possible? Benjamin, get your blunderbush, and go and bring him down."

I was so charmed with the comedy that was being played, that at some little risk I had opened just a small crevice in the door, in order that I might peer through upon the actors. Benjamin, a youth about as tall as the counter, but wonderfully keen and sharp of feature, put himself in possession of an antiquated fire-arm, probably the most obsolete weapon ever handed down from early times.

"Be damned to Benjamin," says the man from Bow Street, "and be damned to his blunderbush; we're a-going up to look ourselves."

"And wherefore, gentlemans," says Moses in a tone like silk, it was so soft, "should Benjamin and his blunderbush be damned? Benjamin is a good boy, and his blunderbush is a good weapon. If this earl is in my chamber, depend upon it one or the other shall bring him down."

"No; we'll go up ourselves, ole Shylock," says the other, "for this hearl is so full of hell, that as likely as not he'd beat Benjamin to death with his own blunderbush, crikey-likey! he would so."

"Nay, that he would not," says Mr. Moses, "for Benjamin would blow the heart out of him, if he but advanced one step upon him."

Mr. Moses was evidently a master of fence, and determined as my enemies might show themselves, they could make nothing of his subtle, cringing ways. They might have excellent reasons for overhauling the house, and going upstairs, as indeed they had, yet they had not the wit to enforce them. For every additional argument he had a new excuse to advance, which at least if it contributed nothing whatever to the case in point, yet served to obscure the issue and to distract and confound those concerned in it. It was truly remarkable how he managed to lure and cheat them with the most specious words that could mean nothing whatever; and yet at the same time, and therein lay his art, they listened to him and never once seemed to doubt his sincerity. And it seemed too that this cunning Hebrew had something of a trump card to play, and this he had reserved for the last.

"An earl did ye say, sirs?" says he, with a vast air of reflection. "It could not have been by any chance the Earl of Tiverton?"

"Yes, by thunder," they cried together, "the man himself."

"Well now, I call that whimsical," says he, "seeing as how I see his lordship running at the top of his legs past this window not five minutes before you came here."

"You did that," says one of my enemies, "then why in thunder couldn't you say so before, instead o' keepin' us argle-hargling here, you piece o' pork, you hedge-pig!"

With a stream of oaths and vituperation they tumbled out into the street, whilst Mr. Moses, with his hands outspread and a cringing, shrugging, smiling yet deprecating aspect, looked the picture of a highly ingenuous bewilderment. No sooner had they passed away in the hot pursuit of some phantom of myself, than Mr. Moses opened the door he had pushed so lately upon me, and informed me that the immediate danger was overpast. He waved away the thanks I offered him, with a great deal of politeness, assuring me that he was more than repaid by the happiness he took for having been of some slight service to so fine a specimen of the nobility as myself.

"But if there is any leetle thing in the way of pizness," says he, "I am the man, your lordship."

"Yes, Mr. Moses, I have been thinking of it," says I, and indeed I had. "Now you see I am very tolerably attired." I unbuttoned my riding-coat and threw it open to display as elegant a costume as ever I had from Tracy. "Unhappily I have not a guinea in the world" – let me do Mr. Moses the justice of recording that in the face of this announcement he retained his countenance wonderfully well. – "But I will barter breeches, coat, waistcoat, ruffles, stockings, buckled shoes, for a plain drab shoddy suit, some common hose, and a pair of hob-nailed boots. By this exchange I think we shall both be gratified; you on your side by receiving things of about twelve times the value of what you give away; and I on mine by obtaining a tolerable disguise to my condition when I start on my itinerary, for I hardly think I should recognize myself in such a uniform, whilst as for my mamma, dear sainted buckram lady! if at the end of all the journeying that is before me I come before the gates of Heaven in it, she will hold a bottle of vinegar before her fine-cut nose, and say *c'est un faux pas!* and get me denied the *entrée*. She will ecod! for I would have you to know, my dear Mr. Moses, I am of a devilish stiff-backed family. Look at my grandfather. What a majestical old gentleman it is, even as in his declining years he takes his ease in his pop-shop, with christening mugs and dirty candlesticks about him on the one hand, and saving your presence, Mr. Moses, a Jew dealer on the other. But there, my good fellow, we will not talk about it."

Mr. Moses, seeing his advantage in this proposal – indeed he was so excellent a fellow that had he not done so, I do not doubt he would still have tried to accommodate me – fully entered into this idea, and did his best to fish this chaste wardrobe out of the varied contents of his shop. Indeed such hidden stores did it contain, that after the contents of divers boxes, and cupboards, and back parlours, and mysterious receptacles had been examined, the necessary articles were forthcoming, and I was shown into one of the chambers leading from the shop, in order to effect this change in my attire.

It would have made you laugh to see the figure I cut – my snuff-coloured coat and pantaloons, fitting in most places where they touched, gave me such a rustical appearance that an ostler or a tapster became a gentleman by the comparison. The hose was rather better, however, but the boots

were not only the thickest and clumsiest as ever I saw, but were much too big into the bargain. A hat was also found for me that matched very well indeed with this startling change in my condition; and a thick, coarse brown cover-all in lieu of the smart riding-coat I had set out with. Mr. Moses certainly had as good a bargain as he could have wished, but certainly not a better one than his merits deserved; whilst I had come by the most effectual disguise to my station, and one well calculated to mislead Sheriff's officers and Bow Street runners, for in all my extended experience of the tribe they have ever been clumsy fellows, blind of eye and thick of understanding, incapable of seeing beyond the noses on their faces. With mutual respect and pleasure, therefore, and many pious hopes for the welfare of my grandfather, whom I was moved to say could not have been left in more worthy hands, I took my leave of Mr. Moses. And seeing he was a Jew, I must say that he was the best conditioned Jew as ever I met.

I took my way very cautiously on leaving the shop of my friend the Hebrew. At first I kept well in the shadow of the houses and peered carefully about. My enemies, however, appeared to be still away on the false scent. The twilight of the autumn afternoon was gathering in as I pursued my way towards little Cynthia. She was to have met me at the gates of Hyde Park nearly an hour ago. As I turned into Piccadilly without meeting with a sign of my enemies, for no reason whatever I was suddenly stabbed with the pain of a most bitter speculation. Suppose my little Cynthia was not there to meet me after all! Suppose I had tarried so long that, fearing I was taken, she had gone from the rendezvous! Suppose something unforeseen and mysterious had befallen her, as such accidents occasionally do! In a flash I realized how dear, how inexpressibly dear she was to me. If aught bereft me of her now, she, the one friend I had, the one creature who believed in me, worthless ruined fellow as I was, the one person who would dare to stand at my side and face the sneers and the scorn of the world, life would indeed have no savour left in it. I should neither have the heart nor the desire to continue in that which would become a burden and a mockery. And in sooth so did this terrible thought take hold of me, that a kind of fatality came upon me. I began to have a sense of foreboding, as they say one may have in a dream; I felt the blood grow slow and thin in my limbs; I was taken with a cold shivering; and my spirit flagged so low that I would have wagered a kingdom at that moment that some dire circumstance had happened to my love, and even more particularly to me.

In the very height of this fever of insane fears, I came to the end of Piccadilly, and there in the increasing gloom of the evening were the gates of Hyde Park. And there too, like a sentinel on guard, so proud and strict she was of outline, was my little Cynthia. She stood there all unconscious of the fact that the simple sight of her was enough in itself to reconcile a ruined man to his empty life.

CHAPTER IV
WE START UPON OUR PILGRIMAGE

All the way I had come I had heightened my disguise by mouching along with my hat low down over my eyes, the collar of my coat turned up to my ears, and my hands stuck deep in my pockets. And so effectual was this mode, that though Cynthia was awaiting me in fear and impatience, I had walked right up to her and taken her by the arm ere she knew I was so near.

"Oh, Jack," she sobbed, "I – I am so glad. S – something s – seemed to tell me that you would never return. I was certain you were ta'en, and that I should never see you again, except between the iron bars of a prison."

I kissed her.

"Foolish child," says I, with dignified forgetfulness, "to entertain such silly fears. Alas, you women, that you should give way to weaknesses of this sort! What would you say of us men now, if we were so easily afflicted?"

It was fine the way in which I wielded my advantage, and clearly showed to the shrinking little creature how ill the poor weak female character compared with the hardy, resolute male. But as this instance goes to show, I do not really think that the masculine character is so much sterner than the feminine; for is not its pre-eminence largely a matter of assumption? A man scorns and conceals the weaknesses a woman flaunts and cherishes.

The twilight was deepening rapidly and giving way to an evening of heavy clouds and rainy wind, when arm-in-arm we started to walk we knew not where. We started to walk into the night and the country places, away from our enemies, and from those who would sever or deter us. We had not the faintest idea as to the place we were bound for. One spot was as good as another. Involuntarily we turned into the park, although we knew not why we should. But I suppose we felt that every step we took into this mysterious nowhere of our destination, we were leaving the law behind, and that together, friendless and resourceless, but ever hand-in-hand, we were beginning our lives anew.

We moved away at a brisk round pace, possessed with the thought of putting a long distance between us and our foes. And in the pleasure of having come together again we walked lightly and easily for long enough, not heeding the way, nor the wind, nor the threat of the rainclouds and the dark evening. We rejoiced in the exquisite sense of our comradeship, and in the thought that every step we took together was a contribution to our freedom. We came out of the park again, and went on and on, past the houses of Kensington, and then past straggling and remoter places, the names of which I did not know.

In a surprisingly little while, as it seemed to us, sunk in the obsession of our companionship, we were groping in the unlit darkness of the country lanes, with the lights of the town we had left fading away behind us. But we must have been walking considerably more than two hours, and at a smart pace, to judge by the distance we had made. It was then that I pressed Cynthia's hand and says:

"Are you not tired, little one?"

"Nay," says she, "my feet are slipping by so light, I do not know that I am walking. I could journey on all night in this way."

I was vastly gratified by this brave speech. But for myself, although I too had no weariness, and to be sure I could not have confessed to it if I had, I was yet being bitten very severely by the pangs of hunger. All day I had taken nothing beyond a glass or two of wine. Therefore I now felt a pressing need.

"At least," says I, "I hope you are hungry?"

"Well, since you mention it," says she, "I think I am."

"That is well," says I, "for I am most abominably so. I believe I never was so hungry in my life before; and I am sure I never had scantier means of appeasing it. Only conceive of twelvepence halfpenny to the two of us for our board and lodging."

It now became our business to find an inn of the meaner sort, in which we might invest this munificent sum. But as we had long since left the bricks and mortar of the town behind, a house for our entertainment was not so easily come by.

We walked on and on, but still no welcome inn appeared; and presently the lamps of the great city itself had vanished, till we were left in the utter darkness of the country lanes. There was no evidence of a human habitation anywhere about, and we knew not where we were.

By this time both of us were tired as well as most bitterly hungry. Poor little Cynthia hung so heavily on my arm, that I knew fatigue had mastered her. Yet so brave she was, that despite all the pains and difficulties she endured, she would not admit that she was weary. Indeed, when I asked her to confess it, says she: "Nay, not I," as stoutly as she would have done three hours before. Yet when we came to a bank of earth beside the way, and I bade her rest upon it for a little while she could raise no very great objection.

I suppose two persons could never have taken their repose with more singular feelings than did we upon that bank of earth. Whither we were going that night, and what was to become of us we did not know. There was the sum of twelvepence halfpenny between us and destitution, but even this could not avail us in such a solitary darkness, in the absence of a house and human aid. Happily the night was wonderfully mild, and we in our coats and stout boots were warmly clad. Otherwise we might have perished where we sat. The pains of fatigue, allied to the pangs of hunger, had bereft us of both the energy and the inclination to proceed. We must have tarried on that bank considerably beyond an hour, mutually consoling one another. For my part little Cynthia's courage almost reconciled me to these present circumstances, but you may be sure I was bitterly distressed for her. I had admitted her into my care, foolishly no doubt, and because there was scarcely an alternative; and this was the sort of provision I had to offer. Come what may, something must be done. The child could never be left to suffer thus. I must find food and a sanctuary of some sort for her.

However, even as I pondered on our case, hunger and weariness did their worst.

For some time I had known by Cynthia's failing answers and the heaviness with which she leant against me, that she was becoming more and more completely overborne. And I'll swear so monstrous brave she was that never a word of complaint passed her lips, nor yet a tear escaped her. And then her little head nestled up to my coat-sleeve, and the next moment she sighed and was dead asleep upon it. In spite of her resolution, the excitements, the distresses and the pains of that long day had overpowered her. Yet I dare not have her pass the night in this exposure on a moist bank of earth, with the night-wind playing on her face, and the clouds that had banked themselves over the moon for ever increasing and threatening to descend upon us in a drenching rain. Therefore, dire as my own case was, I roused myself to a desperate attempt to discover a meal and a lodging for the night.

I had not the heart to try to arouse the poor child, as you may suppose; wherefore, disturbing her as little as I could, I gathered her in my arms, for after all her fine spirit she was but a feather of a thing, and carried her before me along the lane. It was an effort of despair, for the never-ending darkness revealed no glimpse of what I sought. Every now and then the wind brought a spatter of the expected rain; but this, when it came upon my lips, carried a kind of refreshment in it. I doggedly set my teeth and marched along with my warm burden, and I think the weight of responsibility that was in my arms, added to the one upon my heart, fostered a grim determination in me to succeed in my search at any cost. The lanes seemed interminable, and every one the same. All my limbs were one strange, numb ache; I had become so faint with hunger that I moved in a kind of delirium; and in the end every step I took became so mechanical a thing as to be an effort of the will without the co-operation of the senses.

Heaven knows what the hour was when one of these lanes I had been eternally taking all night long ended in a partly-unhinged gate. My first instinct was to snatch an instant's rest upon it; but this I dared not do. I could never have set my paralysed limbs in motion again had I done so. Indeed it was but the presence of poor little Cynthia in my arms that prevented my sinking to the earth as I stood. But looking beyond the gate I could indistinctly define various dull masses that I believed to be the outline of haystacks or farm buildings. Brushing through the rickety gate with an accession of new strength that the idea had lent me, I had not proceeded many yards in the stubble-field beyond ere I knew that at last I had come to a farmstead. There was not a glimmer of light to be seen anywhere, nor could I make out in the total darkness which was the house itself. Approaching nearer it grew plain that these were farm buildings. Considering, however, my exhausted condition, the lateness of the hour, and the probability that the house was some distance off, I decided to make the best of what lay before me. No sooner had I taken this resolve, than the moon, as if in recognition of it, showed itself suddenly for the first time that night from out of its wrack of rain clouds. By its aid and the smell issuing from within I was made aware that I stood before the entrance to a cow-hovel.

There was no door to it, therefore I was able to carry Cynthia straight in. The cows in their various stalls paid us hardly any attention as I groped my way past them. The place was of a somewhat considerable extent, and coming to the end of it, I discovered a space in the far corner where the clean straw was stored. Dispersing a bundle of it with my feet, I deposited my poor little one very gently into the warm bed thereby made. Careful as I had been not to disturb her, the change in her position had its effect. She gave the same sigh with which she had gone to sleep, and says:

"Jack, Jack, where are you? I do believe I've been to sleep."

"Then go to sleep again, my prettiness," says I.

"But what is this?" says she. "This is surely not the bank of moist earth in the lane I went to sleep on. Where are we then? What place is this so warm and snug?" A rustle. "Straw!" A sniff. "A cow-shed! Oh dear, I am – ! Oh, could we – ! and, oh, Jack, dear, how did we get here?"

The sound of Cynthia's voice and the knowledge that there was a roof for her head and a couch for her body at last, however mean they might be, did much to lift me out of my own sorry predicament. Faint and numb as I still was, my brain seemed to have its capacity restored. And at least I could gauge by my own sufferings those which Cynthia strove so valiantly to conceal.

"Are you not hungry, little one?" says I.

"Are you?" says she.

"Most damnably so," says I.

"Then I am too."

Now I would have you mark that hunger is a great wit. Cynthia sniffed a second time. "Cows," says she. "Oh, what good fortune!"

"But my dearest prettiness," says I, "hungry as we are I do not exactly see how these cows can help us. Although to be sure I will undertake to knock one down and skin it, and make the fire and such like menial offices, if you will cut it up and cook it."

"Goose that you are," says Cynthia. "You almost deserve to perish of your emptiness. What about the milk?"

"Odslife!" cries I, "to think that I should not have thought of that. Ye gods and little fishes, I must go find a pot, or a pail, or a pan to hold it in!"

The happy prospect of such sustenance endowed us both with new vigour. Without more ado I began groping about in this moonlit hovel to discover these utensils. But it was no such easy matter. Look where I might, inside the place and outside of it, amongst the straw and fodder, or among the cows themselves, there was devil a pail that I could see. Yet so insistent was our case that we could not be put off by any small detail of this sort. We were both of us thoroughly awake by now and fully bent on assuaging our distresses. And Cynthia in particular showed her good resources.

"Jack," says she, "give me your hat. It is bigger than mine."

"To be sure," says I. "I had not thought of that. But I will go and do the milking. I do not choose that you undertake these menial offices, my pretty, like a common dairymaid."

"I am afraid you can have no choice in the matter," says Cynthia, now thoroughly awakened and full of importance at the prospect. "You speak as though it were indeed the simplest thing in the world to milk a cow. 'Pon my word, sir, I would vastly like to see you at that exercise. It requires a mighty long apprenticeship, I would have you to know; and luckily I have had it during the time I have lived in Devonshire. Were it to be left to you, I am thinking we should come by precious little else than your good intentions."

I bent my head in silence under this merited reproof. Our resolve was a brave one, for in the darkness and strangeness of the place it was not easy to carry it out. However, Cynthia, armed with my hat, if you please, was not the person to stick at trifles. She groped her way among the cows in a most valiant manner, and presently, having the good fortune to find one with a calf by its side, her task was made lighter than it might have been otherwise. I encumbered her with my assistance. The assistance in question consisted in holding the hat, while she performed the more delicate operation. And I could not help remarking that for a town miss, who in Saint James's Park or Bloomsbury had quite enough of airs, affectation and incapacity to pass as a person of the finest *ton*, she showed a degree of aptitude quite foreign to her quality.

"It is rarely done," says I, as the hat grew weightier and weightier. "And I protest that you astonish me. It is as unmodish a performance as ever I saw. I wish some of your friends could see you now."

"Oh, Lord," says Cynthia, in great terror from beneath the udder, "I would not have them see me for the world. I vow if they did I should die of it."

"I believe you would," says I; "and I believe they would also."

Cynthia had the first drink from the hat, which, being of a good, stiff felt quality, and being pretty commodious too, for its business as you know was to enclose a great brain, it made an admirable receptacle. But to drink from it without spilling the milk was not by any means a simple performance. Great address was required, but the expert Mrs. Cynthia contrived it somehow. And when she fitted her lips to the brim, there was never a drop that left this quaint vessel but it went to its right destination.

"How warm and delicious it is!" says she, after bibbing a most immoderate quantity. "How refreshed I feel!"

Shaking with laughter, I followed her example. Yet the vigour with which I did it, combined with my clumsier masculine methods, had unfortunate consequences. I choked and sputtered and turned a good deal down my coat ere I was able to get any satisfaction out of my labours. However, when I had learned to control my impatience, and had found the true knack of drinking hot milk out of my own hat, it was almost worth enduring the pangs of so shrewd a hunger to have such an exquisite recompense. One hatful did not suffice us either. We returned to the cow again and again; and with such excellent consequences, that for the nonce, we were both strongly agreed that no meal of rare dishes served on silver with powdered servants behind our chairs had ever given us any pleasure to approach our present one. Indeed, so delicately satisfied did we feel within, and such a sense of sweet lassitude was stealing over us, as made the thoughts of our couch of straw a thousand times more delectable than any pillows and lavender sheets we had ever slept in – nay, we really marvelled that if this was a state of mind incident to a vagabond roving life, how any one could ever do aught else but adopt it? Truly it must be the ignorance of the world. People could not know of these Arcadian delights. Who would trouble else to be a peer, for ever sweating and fuming in the toils of one's position, spending one's days in contriving fresh devices for the defeat of weariness and in the excitement of new appetites? Who would game and drink every night in order to forget the *ennui* of the world, only to find day by day that instead of forgetting it, the intolerable oppression of it did increase?

After shaking down several bundles of sweet-smelling hay and making of it a rare soft bed, I was about to lie in it, when the propriety of the feminine character was most excellently manifested. With a good deal of confusion in her voice, and I'll swear in her face too, though unhappily the darkness of this far corner was so great I could not observe it, my companion intimated her modest doubts. It seemed we had not yet been through the hands of the clergyman. Be sure that this marvellously bashful proper miss did not use words of this rude character. In faith, I hardly think that she used words at all; and if she did, certainly not more than three at a time, and even they were of such a nature that taken by themselves they could have no meaning whatever. But so evident were the poor child's modest distresses, and so keen her desire not to act in anywise contrary to the conventions of that propriety in which her sex has ever been foremost, that I nearly cracked a rib with my vulgar mirth.

"So be it, Mrs. Puritan," says I. "But upon my soul more *bourgeois* reasons I never heard. 'Fore Gad, though, a most meritorious respectability."

Little Cynthia, however, was not to be smoked out of her demeanour. She persevered in it in the most straight-laced manner, and in the end I was fain to erect a barrier of hay between us, and build up a second couch for myself. Thus we might at a pinch be said to occupy separate chambers, though to be sure the partition between us was not stout enough to prevent us conversing as we lay in our separate beds. But it was little talk that passed between us. We were so delightfully weary that it began and ended in "Good-night!" The next minute an unmistakable indication came from Mrs. Cynthia's apartment, and a minute afterwards I was sunk in the honestest and therefore the most delicious sleep I had enjoyed for many a year. I neither dreamt nor wandered, but just dropt into a profound insensibility which was continued well into the daylight of the morning. This rare refreshment was destined to end in a somewhat peremptory fashion.

I think it must have been a kick or a blow that waked me. For I came to my senses with an unnatural suddenness and a curse on my tongue. It was broad day, and the misty morning sun was struggling in through numerous chinks in the roof and walls of the hovel. A farmer with a pitchfork in his hand was standing before me. He was almost inarticulate with rage. As I opened my eyes he burst out into a violent Doric that I hope these pages are much too chaste to adequately reproduce.

"Well I nivver in all my born days," says he, stamping his feet, and then rounding his period with a most ferocious kick on my shin.

"Get up, ye impident scoundrel, and I'll beat ye to purpose so I will. In my own barn, in broad daylight too. O the impidence, the domned impidence of it!"

The kick had greatly helped me to realize the state of the case. We had been discovered by the owner of the cow-house, and he, with true British respect for the rights of property, was not unnaturally incensed that two persons were so calmly infringing them. For by this he had discovered poor little Cynthia, whom I was able to observe through the frail portion of hay between us, sitting up in her bed with a very woeful, frightened countenance.

"Whoy theer's a woman too," says the farmer. "Well if this doan't beat all I ivver heard. O you impident hussy."

"My good fellow," says I, fearing lest he should deal Cynthia a kick also, "I am afraid you are under some misapprehension in this matter. Allow me to explain."

I thought it to be an occasion when the very nicest suavity of tone and manner was required, for the consequences were like to be uncommonly ruffling else. Therefore I could not have been more careful of my courtesy had I been addressing my remarks to the King. But all I got for my pains was the sight of a great bewilderment that suddenly ran in the farmer's purple face.

"Whoy, a dom'd foreigner," says he. "That makes it wuss, an hundred times wuss, that it do. I'll give you foreigner, I will too. A foreigner in my plaace, among my cows, lying in my hay. Come out o' it and I'll break your yedd in two plazen; once for yersen, and once for t' little witch with the blue eyes. How d'ye like that, Mister Foreigner?"

Crack came the blunt end of the pitchfork at me so smartly, that it was only the fact that I was expecting some small manifestation of the kind that enabled me to get up my arm quick enough to save my head.

As my attempt at a polite argument had had such an unfortunate effect upon him, I judged that I should best serve my skin by advancing a less formal sort of rejoinder, but one that might more directly appeal to his rustic character.

"Enough of this, sir," says I, "But just lay down your pitchfork, take off your jacket and step outside, and you shall be the judge as to whether I am a foreigner, or as good an Englishman as you are yourself."

The effect upon him was excellent. His anger melted at once at this proposal, so clearly was it after his own mind.

"'Tis fair speaking anyway," says he. "I could not have spoken it better myself. Come on this way, my lad, we'll soon set this matter to rights."

Cynthia was terribly frightened. She clung to my arms, and refused to let me follow the farmer into the yard.

"Much as I admire your solicitude, my prettiness," says I, "it is most highly inconvenient. For do you not see that this is as much an affair of honour as an appointment at Lincoln's Inn Fields? Mr. Chawbacon has suffered an injury at our hands, and you who milked his cow last night should be the last to deny it. Wherefore should he not have the satisfaction that he desires? You would not, I am sure, have me put off my gentility now that I cease to wear its livery. It is the only reparation that I can make to Mr. Chawbacon, and if I denied it to the honest fellow I should cease to respect myself."

Poor little Cynthia having no substantial argument to advance against this – indeed how could she have? – had recourse to a flood of tears, at once the most natural, formidable and convincing one her sex can set up. But greatly as her behaviour embarrassed me, I was committed with the farmer, and I have such an instinct in these matters, that notwithstanding Cynthia's very real distress, I could not possibly have backed out of my position with any shred of credit. Therefore taking off my great-coat I bade the poor frightened child wrap herself in it up to her ears and to stay where she was, that she might neither hear nor observe that which was going forward. She obeyed me in this, and lay sobbing softly to herself while I went forth to do battle with my friend the farmer.

On stepping out of the hovel into the yard I found my antagonist was surrounded by three or four of the farm yokels, and moreover was stripped to the waist. To judge by his expression he was plainly animated by the highest intentions towards me, and was prepared to give quite as much or even more than he was likely to receive.

"Now then, my lad," he says briskly, "I'm a-going to do as well by you as Tench did last week by the Fightin' Tinman. Now then, Joe Barker, and you, Bill Blagg, come on with them there pails and moppses."

To my infinite delight I saw that the two children of the soil in question were bearing two buckets of water towards us with a sponge floating on the top of each.

"We can't have this done in due and proper form according to the reggerlations," says this sportsman of a farmer in an apologetic voice, "because you see we've got no judge, and none o' these men o' mine could be trusted with the dooties. I wish Squire was here, I do so. We *could* have it all done proper then accordin' to the reggerlations. Squire was Tench's backer down Putney way last week, and knows all the reggerlations off by heart, does Squire. He only lives just across the road, and if you'll wait a minute I'll have him fetched."

"No, my good man," says I hastily, "we'll have no squires if you please. We can trust one another, I suppose. Let me suggest that a knock-down ends the round, and that we set-to again when we feel able."

"That seems fair," says the farmer. "But I should a-liked Squire to ha' been here all the same, and I'm thinking he'd a-liked to ha' been here too. He's the best sporting man in Surrey, is the Squire, and fair death on the reggerlations."

Having fixed up all the preliminaries of an encounter in this expeditious fashion, I proceeded to prepare for the fray. I imitated the farmer's excellent example, divested myself of coat, waistcoat and shirt, and bound up my breeches with a leathern belt I was able to borrow from a flattered and delighted yokel. It was in this negligent attire that I regarded my antagonist, and devoutly hoped the while that my little Cynthia was still sobbing among the hay in the hovel.

CHAPTER V
I VINDICATE THE NATIONAL CHARACTER

The farmer held out his hand with a grin, but quite in the approved manner, and I seized the occasion of shaking it briefly to run over his points. He was extremely broad: a hard-looking, powerful fellow, apparently capable of taking a deal of punishment. But his years were against him. He was considerably on the wrong side of fifty to judge by his looks, and in height I had the advantage of a full four inches. To judge by the attitude in which he set himself, I doubted whether, whatever his experience of these encounters, he had much science to recommend him. For myself I must confess I was hugely delighted with the whole thing, and entered into it with the spirit of a boy. A match or a contest or a wager of any kind has ever been peculiarly acceptable to me. Indeed was it not this fondness, amounting almost to a passion, that had so largely contributed to my present position? I had always, I think, been pretty ready with my hands; had had some little practice in night affrays with footpads and persons of that kidney; had witnessed more than one set-to in the ring; whilst as for the matter of science, I had in my younger days taken so keen an interest in this invaluable art, as to put myself under the tutelage of acknowledged masters of it. Therefore I was not without a certain confidence in myself, although there was a grim determination about the mien and air of the farmer that was not to be despised. He was unmistakably game and full of the true fighting instinct, but his years were no friends of his intrepidity.

Disregarding all subtleties and finesse, as well became his blunt, rustical, honest character, we had no sooner greeted one another and got our hands up, than the farmer came at me both hands pell-mell, with his head down, like a bull at a gate. His onset was so fierce and sudden, that I was by no means prepared to receive it, and he had me at a decided disadvantage. He had rained in a full dozen of short-armed blows, right and left, left and right at my face, at my ribs, at my chest, ere I could even so much as find my fighting legs, or bring into action any little skill that I might possess. My long-unpractised ward could not prevail at all against such an onslaught. I received half-parried blows on the mouth, which cut my lip and broke a tooth, on the right eye which partially closed it up, and a full one in the ribs. This last was the worst of all, as for a time it deprived me somewhat of my wind and made me sob to catch my breath. And while I was meeting with these misfortunes, the bystanding yokels, whose sympathies were all on one side and that not mine, as you may suppose, were dancing with delight, and shrieking their hoarse encouragement.

"Go it, varmer. Give un pepper, give un snuff!"

However, by this I had pulled myself together somewhat, and had found a means of coping with this hand-over-hand style of fighting. There was plenty of room to dodge in. This I began to make use of. Indeed it was the only chance I had of protecting myself, for I was quite incapable of standing up to the farmer's terrible blows. But as soon as I could find myself sufficiently to begin dancing out of his reach, the game turned at once in my favour. There was devil a bit of guile or finesse in the heart of my honest adversary. The moment I gave ground, he pursued me, hitting the air. Happily for me he was much too slow and heavy in this kind of warfare ever to get his knuckles near the place he desired.

In a little while his great jowl grew inflamed, the sweat poured off his forehead into his eyes, his breath came short and thick, and his hitting grew gradually weaker and less sustained. It was not yet that I went in, however. I continued to prance round and round him, there being plenty of room in which to do so; and at every futile blow he grew more unsteady. But all this while I had a keen eye for my opportunity. It was coming slowly but surely, for I was well enough versed in the matter to know better than to go so much as an inch to meet it. I waited then with a wary patience, sometimes letting him get nearer than I need have done to encourage him in his course. Not that this was necessary,

for the old fellow was as game as any pet of the "fancy" that ever buffed in the ring. But not again did I allow him to get his "ten commandments" home on me; I had had enough of that. And at last having allowed him to spend himself entirely, I quickly selected the moment of my advantage, even deliberated on it to make quite sure, and then stiffened every muscle into trim. I made a pretence of closing up with him. This had the effect of luring him into another futile rush. As he came hitting blindly, I feinted, and as he went past, my right went out at the most correct fraction of an instant, and down went the gallant farmer into the muck of his own barton. The Fighting Tinker himself could not have done it more neatly, I'll vow. But the old fellow was of a rare British mettle. He was no sooner down than he was up again. Apparently he was ashamed to be seen in such a humiliating posture.

I, for my part, had barely time to wipe away the blood that was oozing from my broken lip, ere the farmer was up and at me again. But I was not to be caught napping a second time. By this I was perfectly calm and sure of myself, for I felt that I enjoyed a command of the methods that were likely to bring me success. Instead of dodging from my opponent on this occasion I allowed him to come right up and literally hurl himself on his own undoing. For again at the exact instant I got a beautiful lead on to his point, and stunned as much by the unexpected check to his own impetus as by the blow itself, he fell flat on his back. This time he lay half stunned. He made several attempts to rise immediately, but was quite unable to do so.

Seeing him to be somewhat the worse, his yokels ran to him, whilst I went too, and rendered him all the assistance that lay in my power. He lay puffing and panting in the mire of the yard, half-dazed by his disaster, otherwise apparently not a penny the worse. He was still full of fighting courage; but unfortunately he lay as weak as a child from the shock of the blow and the fall. Strive as he might he was quite unable to rise. His yokels of course were at a loss to know what to do in the circumstances, but I did what I could by propping his head on my knee, and dispatching one of the men to the house for some brandy. And at this moment who should arrive but little Cynthia with a very white face indeed, and in such a quiver of distress as plainly said that she had witnessed the whole affair from the seclusion of the cowhouse.

"Oh," says she, taking charge of the farmer at once, and sponging his face and his breast with the cold water, "you are neither of you killed, I hope. Oh, you pair of ruffian wretches! Have you much pain, poor farmer? Lean your head on Jack, and take things gently a little. And do you, What's-your-name? bring his coat and put over the poor man's shoulders."

While these delicate attentions were going forward, my sturdy adversary was recovering remarkably.

"I'm all right, my wench," says he. "But I'm dom'd if I can stand up again, much as I should like. Your mate's done me fair for once, and I can tell you he's the only man hereabouts that ivver gave Joe Headish his bellyful. Dom'd if I don't go at 'im again. Here, let be; let me get up."

By a sudden effort he tried to rise, but immediately fell back again in a still more dilapidated state. But the arrival of the brandy did a good deal to restore him, and a little afterwards he was on his legs. Feeling himself in no condition to continue, reluctant as he was to admit the fact, he held out his hand, and we both subscribed to the articles of peace.

By the time I had donned my clothes in the seclusion of the hovel, and had emerged forth again in all the respectability of my great-coat, coat, waistcoat, and shirt, the farmer was thoroughly recovered and talking to Cynthia in the most friendly spirit. At my appearance, says he:

"I don't know who you are, young man; I don't know you from Adam, that I don't, but I respect you. You're of the right stuff, my lad, and pretty handy with your mauleys. I ax pardon for calling you a foreigner. Whatever part you come from, and whatever your occipation may be, dom'd if you're not as true-blood an Englishman as I am mysen. And I don't care who hears me say it."

"I thank you, sir," says I gravely. "But I am sure the apology should come from me. I on my side ask your pardon for using your cowhouse and using your milk in the small hours of the morning."

"Don't name it," says the farmer. "You're quite welcome to the best I've got. And dom me if it comes to that you shall have it too. You come along with me, and bring the little wench as well. Purty a little wench as ivver I see, she is so!"

I suppose it was the rudest and coarsest invitation either of us had ever had in our lives, but it was certainly the heartiest; and this I'll vow, there never was an invitation in this world more promptly and thankfully accepted. Indeed at the first hint of it our hearts almost leapt with joy, and then a tear sparkled in Cynthia's eyes as she curtsied to the farmer. It was really fine to observe the behaviour of the honest fellow. There was not a spark of animosity in him. He had arbitrated on the merits of the case in his own fashion, and he now acquiesced in the result with the same game spirit with which he had arrived at it. And I am perfectly certain for my part that there was more wisdom in the man's instincts of justice than may at the first sight appear. If all the world would recognize his as the accepted manner of adjudicating on its private and individual grievances, it would be found the best method, the one least likely to breed bad blood, and the one most calculated to engender a mutual respect in the parties concerned. And now having delivered this superior sentiment as a sort of grace before meat, let us follow our good farmer to his dwelling with the cheerful expedition that we did on the occasion itself.

The excellent man, although evidently puzzled as to who we might be – our mode of life was certainly such as to justify his gravest suspicions – was at great pains to conceal any doubts of our character and occupation that he might entertain. But the moment we entered the ample food-smelling kitchen of the farm, the ceiling hung if you please with hams, a rare dish of bacon frizzling before the fire, and a breakfast table that to our charmed eyes was almost overborne with good homely and appetizing things, we had to run the gauntlet of the farmer's wife. She was a little, keen-featured, hard-faced woman, with, as we were soon to discover, the devil of a sharp tongue. She ruffled her feathers as soon as she saw us.

"Lork-a-mercy!" says she, "I didn't know, Joseph, as 'ow you was a-bringing of company to breakfast."

"I didn't know mysen," says Joseph complacently. Then followed a moment of embarrassment. It was plainly the good man's duty to present us to his wife. She very properly expected it of him. But as in his own phrase he did not know us from Adam himself, he was at a loss to know in what terms to represent us. Nor did the pause that ensued help matters at all. The farmer's wife had from the first, as her manner showed, been by no means disposed to view us favourably. There was evidently something in our appearance that had caused her to take a strong prejudice against us. One cannot be surprised that this was the case, however, seeing that we were both unwashed, and as unkempt as we possibly could be, whilst to add a final touch to the picture we presented, I was embellished with a puffy and discoloured eye, and a bloodied lip. These misfortunes, when her good man had made appearances ten times more unfortunate by his hesitation, his wife was only too ready to take as a confirmation of her suspicions. We were a pair of worthless persons, and Joseph was unable to account for the sudden impulse that had led him to bring us into that respectable abode. For if we were persons of some credit, why did not Joseph say so at once? His wife sniffed, and after gazing at us in a most disconcerting manner, was moved to say:

"Joseph, I'm surprised at you. I'll have no wicked vagabond play-actors here. I've always done my best to keep this house respectable, and, please God, it shall always be so. How dare you bring such people here? I'll be bound you found them sleeping in your barn, and then, soft-hearted fool that you are, you bring them in to breakfast. Oh, I know; you can't deceive me. It is not enough then that they should trespass on your premises, lie on your hay, and rob your hen-roosts, but you must encourage 'em in it into the bargain, and bring them into this clean, wholesome kitchen that you know I've always took such a pride in."

The farmer turned as red as a cabbage. In his heart he was bound to admit that every word his wife uttered was true in substance. But he was a very honest fellow; and though he might feel that he

was greatly to blame for taking a couple of vagrants so much under his wing, he was not the man to go back on his hospitality. He stood by us nobly.

"Wife," says he, "what words be these? If I choose to ask a lady and gentleman to come and sit at table with me, shall my own wife insult them lo their faces?"

"Lady and gentleman!" says the redoubtable wife. "A pretty sort of lady and gentleman, ain't they? A brazen madam with a hat on. Oh, and curls too! Lord, look at her! If she's not a play-actress I've never seen one. And what a bully of a rogue she has got with her, too. Hath he not the very visnomy of a footpad? He's lately escaped from Newgate Gaol, I'll take my oath on't."

There could be no doubt that this good lady was blest with a tongue of the sharpest kind. Her husband was terribly put out by it. Poor little Cynthia was, too. For all her high breeding and her modish London insolence, which in circumstances favourable to it was wont to sit so charmingly upon her, she could hardly restrain her tears. I suppose it is that a woman can never bear to be ridiculed, or abused, or put in a false position. The poor child trembled and clung to my arm, while her face grew pink and white by turns.

"Oh, Jack," she whispered, "do say something that will put us right. Tell them who we are. I cannot bear to be spoken to like this."

"You surely would not have me spoil the comedy just now?" says I. "I am enjoying it vastly."

In sooth I was. I dare say it is that I am always keenly alive to these odd passages in life, and that I am more prone to seize the whimsicality of a matter than is a person of a better gravity. I vow it was finer than a play to me to witness a highly rustical farmer and his spouse violently quarrelling because Mr. Chawbacon had degraded his rural abode by bringing a duke's daughter into it. And here was the storm growing shriller, the farmer redder and angrier, and poor little Cynthia ready to faint with the humiliation of it all.

The state of the case was not improved when the farmer turned his back on his wife in the middle of her invective. And doubtless to define his opinion of her behaviour and to show that he was determined to stand by us, come what might, he very civilly asked us whether we would care to have some hot water from the kettle and go upstairs and perform our ablutions. You may guess with what alacrity we accepted this invitation; indeed nothing could have better accorded with our needs and our wishes. But no sooner had the farmer spoken to this tenor than Mistress Headish broke out shriller than before:

"What can you be thinking of, Joseph Headish?" says she. "Do you think I would trust two such rapscallion persons out of my sight in our clean upper chambers, and so many things to tempt their honesty in them, too? No; if they want to wash themselves, they must do it at the pump in the yard, as their betters have had to do often enough. And why people like that, leading the vagrant, masterless life they do, should require to wash themselves at all, I don't know. And as you have promised them a bite to eat, they shall have it, after they have washed themselves. But not in my nice clean kitchen. I'll send 'em out half a loaf of bread and a piece of cold bacon, and a mug of my good October ale, and they can take it sitting on the pump, and think themselves lucky to get it too."

"Peace, woman," says the farmer, in a voice of such dudgeon as did him the highest credit. "Are you the master in this house, or am I?"

To emphasize the inquiry he brought his hand down with such a force upon the breakfast-table as set the dishes rattling; whilst he indicated the answer by peremptorily bidding us follow him upstairs. This we were in something of a hurry to do, and we soon found ourselves in a spacious bed-chamber, which smelt of cleanliness to such an extent that, knowing how very ill our own persons must consort with it, we began to feel that the farmer's wife was justified of her grievances. That worthy shrew, having thoroughly aroused her honest husband, did not think fit to interpose any active resistance to his commands, but contented herself by staying below, and in delivering a shrill monologue from the foot of the stairs.

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