

THE KING OF THE PEAK

A ROMANCE

AGAIN IS THE FEAST SPREAD IN
HADDON HALL

WILLIAM BENNET

LONDON, 1823.

Edited by David Trutt

THE KING OF THE PEAK
A ROMANCE
AGAIN IS THE FEAST SPREAD IN HADDON HALL

		Chapter
INTRODUCTION	Page 3	
FOREWORD	Page 6	
OUTLAW OF HADDON	Page 7	XIII
DOROTHY VERNON AND EDWARD STANLEY	Page 7	XXIII
BUTTER THEFT	Page 10	XXIII
OUTLAW AND EDWARD STANLEY	Page 12	XXVII
SIR GEORGE AND EDWARD STANLEY	Page 21	XXIX
OUTLAW AND DOROTHY AND DISCOVERY	Page 23	XXX
EDWARD STANLEY'S ENGAGEMENT	Page 33	XXXII
WEDDING PLANS	Page 35	XXXVII
CAPTURE OF THE OUTLAW	Page 35	XL
OUTLAW AND GEORGE VERNON	Page 41	XLI
GEORGE VERNON'S WEDDING PLANS	Page 48	XLII
WEDDING AND ELOPEMENT PREPARATIONS	Page 52	XLIII
GEORGE VERNON'S DOUBLE WEDDING	Page 59	XLIV

Note: Chapter refers to source of excerpted portion in one volume edition of 1883.

Published 2010 by
David Trutt
Los Angeles, California
USA

email: davett@verizon.net
Web Site: www.haddon-hall.com

William Bennet was born in 1796 and died in 1879. He was the author of four novels between 1821 and 1827. He did not appear to make a success of these endeavors, and became a solicitor in Chapel-en-le-Frith, a town of Derbyshire. Bennet's third book, published in April 1823, was entitled *The King of the Peak - A Romance*. Bennet wrote the three volume work under the name of Lee Gibbons. There is no evidence that Bennet knew anything of Allan Cunningham's *The King of the Peak*, nor is there any similarity between the two tales.

Bennet's 'Dedication' to his novel includes events leading to its writing and provides interesting background to the story. "I have leaned over the battlements of Haddon tower, I have seen the Wye sparkle beneath ... I have walked amid the silent and deserted courts of Haddon, until my mind's eye has peopled them with the badged domestics of the King of the Peak, until hall and bower, gallery and office have swarmed with population, until I have heard or seemed to hear the notes of the minstrel, and the loud uproar of the revellers. Again is the feast spread in the hall; solitude gives way to life and bustle; the Vernon rises from his marble tomb in Bakewell Church, and is once more at the head of the genial board, surrounded by his two hundred retainers. I pass the old portal of the mansion, and again do I hear the baying of the stag-hounds, and the shouts and horns of the hunters. Again does the lovely Margaret Vernon bound past me on her courser, fleet at the wind, her hood thrown back, her rein loose, her cheek fiery red, her eyes bright as the sun."

Haddon Hall is personified by George Vernon and the world he has created. Dorothy will elope, but this is not a major plot of the story. It is the 'fiery' Margaret who has multiple suitors, not the 'mild and retiring' Dorothy.

Bennet asserts that there has been an oral tradition pertaining to the elopement. "That the ancestor of his Grace the Duke of Rutland did gain his bride in the manner described in the following sheets [elopement], the whole neighbourhood of Haddon will bear me out, at least if tradition be regarded as any evidence."

Bennet has the distinction of being the first to call Dorothy by the now familiar 'Doll'—"The wench is distraught [distracted] with her books," cried Sir George. "Why prithee Doll! Dorothy Vernon! come hither."

The main character of *The King of the Peak* is Edward Stanley, the younger brother of Thomas Stanley, and who is characterized in the story as irresponsible and wild and impetuous. The Catholic Sir Edward is involved in a conspiracy to dethrone Queen Elizabeth in favor of Mary, Queen of Scots. In the first of the three volumes, he travels from the Stanley household near Liverpool to Haddon Hall in Derbyshire. Edward Stanley hopes to woo Margaret from her fiancé, Thomas; failing that he hopes to improve his fortunes by making a match with the as yet unseen Dorothy. Finally he hopes to win George Vernon over to his revolutionary plot. The end result in Bennet's novel, however, is as history records it.

Bennet's novel is a long and convoluted tale; the romance between Dorothy Vernon and John Manners is a subplot, and their running away together an interesting diversion from the main theme of intrigue and deception. Bennet, however, lays the foundation for subsequent stories and novels to center the tale of Haddon Hall and the King of the Peak about the thwarted romance of Dorothy and John.

Bennet, speaking through Margaret, is the first to specify reasons for George Vernon to forbid the Vernon - Manners marriage. "He [John Manners] is of noble blood, but difference of sect [religious group] and ancient feud mar all cordiality between our houses." The two reasons, a Catholic - Protestant religious difference and an undefined "ancient feud" will be used by later authors as the foundation for the clandestine affair. These reasons are not acknowledged by any of the actual Manners' successors, nor is there historical documentation to this effect.

Bennet makes the error of having the pre-wedding ball take place in the not-yet-built Long Gallery. "This room above one hundred feet in length and nearly twenty broad, afforded ample space enough for the evening's revel." The ball in the Long Gallery, however, becomes a standard feature in future stories of the famous elopement, as well as part of factual descriptions of Haddon Hall.

The ball is to celebrate the coming wedding of George Vernon's daughters. He has arranged that Margaret will marry Sir Thomas, a match favored by both daughter and prospective husband; and on the same day Dorothy is to marry his brother Sir Edward, whose "desire for Margaret was by no means abated, and the thought that his loss of her was about to be sealed forever rankled venomously in his heart." Clearly Dorothy Vernon has not yet become the centerpiece of Haddon Hall.

What in later tales is to become Dorothy Vernon's Door "which led from the upper end of the gallery into the garden, was thrown open, and lighted with sconces" is described, but not associated with her, and has no role in the elopement sequence. But it is a convenient exit from the castle, and soon became a central part of the romantic tale.

The ball was a masked affair, allowing John Manners to enter and mingle with impunity. The "elopement" is better described as a surprise created by Manners to whisk away his Dorothy: "a small door leading from the avenue into the park [Haddon Hall gardens] was broke open, and a number of men armed and masked rushed upon them ... She [Dorothy] then kissed her sister, and bidding all farewell, passed the gate with the outlaw [John]."

Dorothy and John return, though unmarried, the same evening. They enter through the garden and up what will become Dorothy Vernon's Steps and through the famous door into the gallery. They encounter Sir George, who immediately forgives them. The next day Sir George presides over his daughters' double wedding as planned, though one of the grooms has been changed.

William Bennet visited Haddon Hall and encountered caretaker William Hage a short time after Allan Cunningham. It is supposed that Hage offered some version of the elopement tale; Bennet combined it with Haddon Hall as it was presented, and incorporated it into his sweeping story comprising three volumes with a total of eleven hundred pages.

Robert Bennet, son of author William, published a 'tighter' and grammatically updated version of a single volume in 1883—
"During the latter years of my father's lifetime I often discussed with him the desirability of republishing 'The King of the Peak.' His invariable reply was that at his time of life, having attained the ripe age of nearly fourscore years, he had neither time nor inclination for such an undertaking, but if I thought fit to do so after his death, he should wish me most carefully to revise the work, expunging of altering any portion of the text which I knew, from constant association with him, he would object to, and which I considered necessary to suit the taste of modern readers." This editor, in possession of both the 1823 and 1883 editions, has chosen the latter, as it retains William Bennet's style and language, while deleting repetitious and tedious passages.

What follows are excerpted portions of William Bennet's *The King of the Peak* which pertain to the romantic attachment of Dorothy Vernon and John Manners. The main and complicated plot of attempted subversion of the Protestant Queen Elizabeth in favor of the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots has been expunged. Brought into focus are the characters of Sir George Vernon, Dorothy Vernon, Edward Stanley, and John Manners masquerading as the outlaw. To a lesser extent are shown Thomas Stanley and Margaret Vernon, who is portrayed as a loving guardian of her sister, it is left to later authors to turn her into an unsympathetic and obnoxious prig. Bennet also begins the artifice of bringing historical characters of the time into pivotal positions in the telling of his story: notably Lady Cavendish, the famous Bess of Hardwick, and her husband the courtier William Saint Lo.

Story Background—

Dorothy Vernon, daughter of the King of the Peak, and John Manners, son of the Earl of Rutland, had met some weeks before and fallen in love. John and Dorothy were both of noble rank and suited for marriage. However John believes ancient feuds and religious difference between the Manners and Vernon families will cause Sir George Vernon to withhold permission for the marriage. Manners assumes the guise of an "outlaw" and roams the Haddon forests for clandestine meetings with Dorothy. They both hope that in time, will come reconciliation between the families. The identity of the outlaw is known only to Dorothy; not to her father nor to Edward Stanley, who hopes to marry her himself. It is suspected by many that the outlaw is a person of "noble blood" who, for unknown reasons, is haunting the woodlands.

OUTLAW OF HADDON

[Chapter XIII]

“Now, mark ye, Thomas Stanley—” said his brother Edward, “but yesternight, nay, this morning, our friend entertained me with the history of some romantic knight, a man of gentle blood, though his name be unknown, that often plays the outlaw in Haddon and Chatsworth woods. The rumour was, that he wooed the daughter, Dorothy, of the Vernon; and that Sir George Vernon has charged his keepers with the capture of this gay cavalier. Why may he not turn a hunter of deer? If he were an honest gentleman, he would play no hide-and-seek after this fashion, but come forward with his love, and tell it plainly.”

DOROTHY VERNON AND EDWARD STANLEY

[Chapter XXIII]

The character of the Lady Dorothy Vernon, mild, timid, and retiring, allowed the assurance of Edward Stanley for some days, no mode of displaying itself particularly towards her. Modesty, indeed, especially if it be tinctured with timidity, is an insuperable safeguard against the attacks of the libertine; the strength of the female possessed of this adamant shield, is perfected in her weakness; for she gives her assailant no chance of success, because she affords him no opportunity for action. She is the Fabius of amorous contest, and no Hannibal, however skilful, can force her into battle until he has demolished the outworks of her reserve. The confident soldier did not fail to make many attempts to enter into conversation with Dorothy Vernon; but though she replied to his observations with the utmost sweetness, her answers were laconically couched, so that he found it a painful task to maintain a discourse in which he had to provide all the materials for discussion, and he was the more piqued with the shyness of the Lady Dorothy, inasmuch as she evinced the most perfect confidence to her tutor, seeming to select him alone [Edward Stanley] from the whole company as an object of suspicion and distrust.

There was a definite cause, of which he was ignorant, why Dorothy Vernon avoided familiarity with him. A messenger had been privily entrusted with letters from the Lady Margaret Vernon to her sister, which, in a few lines, displayed more of the character of the intended guest of Haddon [Edward Stanley] than it is probable he would himself have disclosed in a month.

Margaret Vernon did not portray the whole of his vicious conduct, being fearful her letter might fall into other hands than those for which it was intended; but she said sufficient to put her sister on her guard, and to awaken in her mind a train of fearful suspicions, without which she could never afterwards behold the soldier. His pride, however, which was greatly alarmed at her caution, would not suffer him to abandon that which he now considered a chase of honour, a quest, which was to put to full proof those talents of address, that knowledge of intrigue, and that cool and steady perseverance which he held himself to possess, and which he had ever considered capable of subverting, or overpowering, all opposition.

He therefore changed his manner, dismissed the bullying swagger of the camp, and put on the diffidence and ingenuous candour of a youth unpaced in the roads of life. Refurbishing his memory, he endeavoured to strike out a little of that learning which he had long sacrificed to other pursuits, that he might not appear to intrude upon the lady's studies, but might seek to gratify his literary taste in keeping her company. He attended her also when she rode in the park, which, however, she never did, except in company with her father or her tutor, and took an infinity of pains to lessen or overcome her reserve; but her mind had taken its direction—the twig was bent, the tree was inclined, and at the end of a week he saw himself no farther advanced in her confidence than he was on the first moment of their meeting.

The disposition of Dorothy Vernon was not of that character which exactly suited Edward Stanley: it was too soft, too indecisive, and had not that showy smartness about it, that life and high tone of spirit which he admired in her sister; and although, in the opinion of most people she surpassed the Lady Margaret in beauty, yet hers was not the beauty ever in motion which fascinates by its variety. Her features, under a timid and sober restraint, seemed ever the same. In public company she never entered, as her sister, into those sallies of mirth or passion which cause an alternation of light and shadow on the countenance, displaying the lineaments in as many forms as the several feelings they portray; but her fine face at all times exhibited that repose and contemplative sublimity which we gaze on with breathless awe in the Madonna of Raffaello, and in some of the female forms of Canova, and which are rather calculated to command respect and admiration than to inspire tenderness and love.

The mind of Edward Stanley was not, however, of a character likely to be won by beauty of this kind. His soul, fierce and active, was dead to sentiment, and could not be kept so still as to catch one glimpse of that imaginative loveliness for which Dorothy Vernon was chiefly to be admired. Even as he sat by her in her study, or walked with her in the garden, where he had opportunities of marking and digesting every separate feature—the worldly policy of Stanley was too prevalent in his heart, to allow him the enjoyment of one pure feeling, such as attends the true conception of a face so characterized. He busied himself alone in finding means to circumvent his lovely companion; and, when he seemed to pore with intense ardour upon authors of morality, he was possessed with a devil which incited him to every manner of mischief.

As yet he had no definite object in view in seeking to win the affections of Dorothy Vernon. He highly preferred the bold and fascinating spirit of Margaret to the calm serenity of her sister, and at present had no thoughts of giving up his quest of his brother's mistress [Margaret]; but as he had an eye towards bettering his fortunes, he thought it best to have two strings to his bow, that if Margaret Vernon should persist in her aversion to him, he might at least, secure himself a moiety of the knight's [Sir George Vernon] estate by a marriage with her sister. He was sure of Sir George's consent to his union with Dorothy, an event to which, in fact, her father already looked forward with pleasure, and pushed on with all the encouragement he could afford his friend. Their community of faith and of political sentiment [Catholic], as well as the friendly intercourse which had long subsisted between the families of Stanley and Vernon, made it highly desirable to the knight that they should be incorporated; and Sir George had already laid down a plan, in his own mind whereby his favourite, Edward Stanley, upon his marriage with Dorothy Vernon, should exchange the name and arms of Stanley for those of Vernon which, from the failure of male heirs, would, as regarded his branch of the family, be otherwise extinct.

The Knight of Haddon, though not much used to calculations of advantage to himself, foresaw, that if he could match both his daughters into the Earl of Derby's family, it would be better than marrying them to the heads of other houses less distinguished by rank and popular favour.

It was, therefore, with no small gratification that he beheld Edward Stanley apply himself to the task of addressing Dorothy; and though he sometimes stormed heavily at being deprived of the gallant's company, and ridiculed him for his change of manner, yet, on the whole, he bore his privations with heroic philosophy.

Edward Stanley, amid the multiplicity of his designs, did not forget to keep a strict watch over Dorothy Vernon, that he might, if possible, learn whether any connection did actually subsist between the damsel and the outlaw; but he had hitherto neither seen nor heard anything that could raise suspicion. The outlaw was daily heard of as being seen in the parks of Haddon and Chatsworth: sometimes near the hall, and sometimes far distant, now on horseback and then a-foot; but Stanley could never learn that he came so nigh as to have any converse with his mistress, and almost concluded that the story of their amours was worthy the contempt with which it had been treated by Sir George. He did not, nevertheless, relax his observation, but continued to exercise a careful and incessant vigilance in all things that respected the lady.

[DIGRESSION: The earliest appearance of the BUTTER THEFT appears in this chapter, as servants of Haddon Hall interact with acquaintances from the Haddon woods.]

BUTTER THEFT

Winterbottom took the flagon from the table, and went to get it replenished; but he had no sooner quitted the hall than Anak, laying hold upon a large piece of butter, endeavoured to secret it in his pocket, notwithstanding the remonstrances of his more honourable sister, Rose. He was, however, interrupted before he had accomplished his purpose by the return of Winterbottom, and in the hurry of concealment thrust it into the breast of his doublet, not, however, unobserved by the steward, who nevertheless took no notice of the theft.

“The gentry will be here anon, boy,” said Winterbottom; “and so we must leave the hall. But come along, wench, come, boy into the kitchen; it's snugger than this wilderness; we'll have our ale brought thither, and thou mayst tell thy tale without interruption.”

He led the way by a short passage from the hall into the large kitchen of the mansion, wherein was a fire ample enough to roast a whole bullock at a time, and being accustomed to heat, sat down at a small table a little distance off, whereon the flagon was deposited. Anak was placed at the opposite side of the table, but directly in front the fire, and Rose between them, so as to be sheltered from it by both.

Anak protested, "But it's warmish here, i' faith; it'll melt a' the fat out o' me."

"Thou'lt be none the worse, boy," said Winterbottom; "but I warrant thou'lt take no harm; nay, thou canst not sit backward without being in the way. Mind it not, lad; I stand it every day. Come, get on with thy tale."

"Yea; ye see yesternight," said the woodman, holding his hand before his face, while the sweat poured down in copious streams, "two strangers knocked at the door—by'r lady, it's as hot as a lime-kiln. Marry, my bones will melt into marrow an I sit another minute; I canna bide it, by my troth."

"Thou dost not drink, boy," said the steward, filling his cup; "toss down another horn of ale, and it'll cool thee, I'll be surety. Thou seest we have no other convenient place to talk in."

"I'll be hanged, drawn, and quartered if ever I was so broiled and basted since my name was Anak."

"Truly, I think thou art, boy," said the steward, looking at Rose with an arch and significant smile; "for thy grease doth run out through thy hose. I' faith, thou'rt dissolving like stewed butter."

And, indeed, the butter which the woodman had put into his breast, being dissolved by the force of the heat, had run down his clothes, and now trickled in streams over his breeches and hose—a sight which struck him and his sister with speechless mortification, but gave high satisfaction to the steward, who, with his hands behind him, surveyed the deplorable condition of the unfortunate thief, and laughed until his sides clinked with the exertion. Anak, who now perceived he was detected, was, however, in most dread of an explanation, which seemed inevitable; but he was happily released from this dilemma by the return of the gentry.

The reveries of Edward Stanley, as he returned through the park to Haddon, were of a complexion scarcely more pleasant than those which agitated his restless soul before he arrived at the cottage of the woodman. He easily detected through the shallow veil which the wife of the woodman had spread over her knowledge, the sure and indubitable fact that an intercourse of a highly interesting nature, had for some time subsisted between Dorothy Vernon and the outlaw, whose handsome figure and deportment he could not refrain from recollecting with some twinges of apprehension.

He was not jealous, for he had no sentiment of love towards Dorothy Vernon; but he was fearful that the outlaw might in the end turn out to be some man of family, who, having his own reasons for cloaking himself in obscurity, endeavoured to gain the heart and person of his mistress, without any regard to fortune or the will of her father.

And if, indeed, an elopement should take place, and the husband of the Lady Dorothy should prove of ancient birth and a noble strain, as his very person and manners seemed to declare, it was barely possible that Sir George Vernon would persist in refusing a reconciliation; but, at all events, she would be then lost to him, and, that which was of more consequence, her large dowry.

His first resolution, therefore, was to watch carefully for some actual evidence of personal intercourse between the lovers; which he did not doubt but he should detect, as it was not possible for any man to raise a passion in the breast of a lovely, noble, and accomplished woman by the mere strength of visual perception, or the description of his person given by others. And he was, from observation, pretty sure, that Dorothy could have no interview with her lover in the daytime; for had he appeared on the outer side of the walls for the purpose of conversing with his mistress, he would have been seen by the servants and labourers employed about the hall. Stanley, therefore, concluded that the hour of assignation was in the dead of night. Such a time, too, was more agreeable to the cast of romance, of which such an amour would savour than the gaudy glare of day.

“Ay, let this Leander swim the Wye ’stead o’ the Hellespont,” said Stanley to himself, with great bitterness, as he thus concluded, “it will please his classical mistress. I would some water-fiend would hale him down into the depth; but what need I a fiend’s help? Is not my own arm a surer and stauncher aid? I will slay him; and our Sappho shall weep the death, ’stead of the absence, of her Phaon.”

It was also his intention, if circumstances favouring his expectation fell out, to let the Knight of Haddon into the secret of his daughter's amour, so that he might profit by any sudden and violent resolution which the knight should make regarding his daughter's future disposition. Stanley was well aware that if at this moment such a scene was exhibited to Sir George as that of his daughter in personal communication with a male stranger at such an hour, the knight, instead of interposing to save the life of the outlaw, would in his rage be the first man to plant a dagger in his heart. Insulted honour, pride, indignation, and blind fury, would all incite him to the most deadly vengeance; and so fierce and ungovernable was he in his hours of passion, although in general a man of boundless generosity, that Stanley did not doubt of receiving the hand of Lady Dorothy the very hour her assignation was betrayed to her father. He did not, for a moment, contemplate any resistance on the part of the maiden, for he knew that the anger of the Vernon was so much dreaded by every one, so feared and deprecated, that it was held by all persons within the Peak madness to contend with him.

Satisfied with this outline of his hopes, he resolved to sacrifice all other considerations to that of his love-suit. His vanity was ruffled, his pride assailed, by finding his suit to this mistress checked by a rival, and particularly by one who affected no signs of that rank which befitted him to contest such a prize against such a competitor. That he, a youth of handsome person and of a demeanour highly engaging, when he chose to assume a gentle character, of high birth, and of a reputation in arms, should fail against a rival whose person and manners were to him at least his sole reliance, was a humiliation not to be endured.

That he might be noble was probable, though he did not now enjoy those advantages of dress and attendants, nor appear in that *éclat* which frequently of itself captivates the female heart. But he knew that Dorothy Vernon possessed a mind whose sober and manly cultivation, and whose retiring modesty, wholly undervalued such advantages; and if she was assured that her lover was the man of birth that Stanley supposed, she would doubtless rest content without his assuming the badges of his rank.

“But what moves him, if he be noble,” said Stanley, as he drew nigh to the towers, upon the highest of which he could perceive the two sisters, “to skulk by day in these woods, and by night in yon vile hovel? I know of no man of name an outlaw, in fact; and yet there must be some reason for his not proffering himself openly as the suitor of Dorothy Vernon—perhaps a feud between their houses, or difference of party or faith, or want of means—ha! by my faith, he is yonder beneath a tree gazing at his mistress in the true style of your sylvan lover. Now might I take this knight of romance upon the sudden and slay him, surely; the deed were done, and his body sunk in the river, where nought but fish could find him, and no one might lay aught to my charge. But I will not play the coward for the first time. Down, thou fiend of dishonour.”

With a cautious step he approached his rival, who, wrapped in meditation upon his mistress, on whom his ardent gaze was now fixed, did not perceive his advance. He stood beneath a large elm tree at the distance of two hundred yards from the hall, with one foot rested upon its tangled and fantastic roots, and with his right arm, which was placed against the trunk, supporting his head. The feathers of his hat drooped upon his shoulder and concealed the greater part of his face from Edward Stanley; but the latter could not behold his manly but elegant form, and the graceful adjustment of his simple forester’s dress, without envy and detestation. He stopped short a few paces from the outlaw, desirous of detecting some sign of communication between him and Dorothy Vernon; but, if she had observed her lover, she was too cautious to evince any recognition of him; and though it was plain enough that the outlaw beheld his mistress, yet the only sign of his being aware of it was the intent look he fixed upon the tower. The foliage of the trees, which were thickly planted in this spot, sufficiently concealed him from general observation; but it was probable he would not have approached so nigh the hall, had he not heard of Sir George Vernon’s late direction to the keepers, commanding that he should not be molested.

Finding that the cogitations of his rival were likely to be of some continuance, Edward Stanley advanced close to him, and with a gentle blow on the shoulder, cried, “Ho, Sir Outlaw, what have ye done?” The stranger turned round at this familiar application, and looked upon Stanley, but made no reply. “What!” continued Stanley; “thou hast been dreaming of a saint, and now thou dost fancy the devil hath marred thy pleasure.”

“If thou art not the devil, Stanley,” replied the outlaw, with the like familiarity, “thou art a devilish impudent fellow. Thy peer is not to be found in the tennis-court or bear-garden.”

“Can the swains of Arcadia talk of the bear-garden?” said Stanley, with a sneer; “I thought they were all simplicity; that their pleasures were unsophisticated, and their loves as pure as those of angels. But it seems the follies of this vicious world will sometimes break in upon guileless hearts.”

“It were well for you, sir,” returned the stranger, “if you shared a portion of this simplicity. The deeds I have seen you attempt savour little of innocence or honour.”

“Honour, quotha!” continued the soldier, with a sarcastic laugh; “how high does thy honour reach? canst measure it? is it as high as this tree under which thou hast been playing the satyr, and peeping at yonder nymphs? or is’t as broad as the Wye, in which, Narcissus-like, I trow thou dost survey thine exquisite face? Canst grasp thy honour in thy hand, or stuff it into thy pocket?—Honour in an outlaw!”

“Wert thou armed I would tell thee, Stanley, I wear my honour in my scabbard,” said the stranger; “and though I confess it hath not so wide and so bloody a name as thine, though I am no genius of carnage.”

“Ha, perdition seize thee!” shouted Stanley, laying his hand on his dagger; “I will tell thee, miscreant.”

“Rest quiet, sir,” replied the stranger, with a calm smile. “I am armed above your match; at present I will take, at least, I will resent [be aware of], no offence.”

“Thou resent!” continued Stanley, in the same desperate, ironical mood; “thou art the veriest daw [simpleton] my eyes were ever curst withal; a lamb without gall, a lion filled with a honey-comb instead of a heart, a gallant mould informed by a villain spirit. I would fight with thee, though I brandished no weapon against thy rapier but a bull-rush from the river;—thou resent! thou mayest resent the fisticuff of a clown, or a broken head when thou dost catch one from his quarter-staff; but if thou dost not throw by that gentle steel by thy side, I will draw thy belt over thy ears, and break the weapon above thy head.”

With that contemptuous spirit for which Edward Stanley was remarkable, he seized the outlaw by the throat, with the intention of making good his degrading threat, but his adversary received his impetuous attack with the same unbroken firmness which he had constantly displayed, and, being a man of much greater strength than his rival, held him as fast, at arm’s length, as if he had been bound to the spot.

“Your life, sir,” said the outlaw, calmly, “is in my hands, and it is well for you, despite your gallantry, that I am not now in the humour to take it.”

“My life in thy hands, rascal!” cried the soldier, breaking from the grasp of his adversary with a violent effort, and plucking out his dagger; “if thou art what thou dost profess to be,—a man of blood and courage,—throw down thy sword, and come to the dagger-stroke. ’Tis the way of duel in France, where, ’tis like, thou hast been.”

“It is a way of settling disputes, sir,” replied the outlaw, “which, I am proud to say, has never disgraced my countrymen. I wear no dagger.”

“Then break thy sword to my dagger’s length,” cried the desperate ruffian; “and if thou fearest I shall have more point than thou, give me thy weapon, and take thou mine.”

“The matter is none so pressing,” returned the stranger; “besides, I have no skill in the use of such a murderous instrument.”

“By my life’s blood,” cried Stanley, “I do thee too much grace; thou art unworthy to combat with me—a fellow as destitute of courage as of reputation.”

“Whatever be my courage, sir, of which I will some time give you proof,” said his rival, “I thank Heaven that I am without such reputation as yours. The world may count it to thee for honour to be the most savage soldier that ever disgraced the annals of warfare; but thy career must damn thee in the opinion of every good man.”

“Let me be damned then in the opinion of such good men as thou art,” said Stanley; “the world will not count it to me for dishonour.”

“At least that part of it, the mad and brainless fools that gape at all things extraordinary, though even in evil,” said the stranger. “They will still stand by thee, and the more brutal and inhuman thou art, the more devilish and sanguinary is thy course, the more will they applaud and resound thy praises. Do but show a frantic valour, an insensible fierceness, and hedge it round with the slaughter of a thousand of thy brethren, and the Christian mob will cry thee up for a miracle of virtue, a compound of all that is great and good in human nature.”

“Peace hath commonly its apology from a coward,” said Stanley; “war his anathema. But before I will chop my battle-sword into a pruning-hook, may I go upon crutches, and sell sticks to the learned apprentices at the parvis [courtyard].”

“Thou hadst better do so,” replied the outlaw, “than sell thy soul to perdition for the lust of a blood-stained glory.”

“I would I knew thy name,” said Stanley, with a glance of bitter contempt, “that, if indeed thou art noble, I might call upon the shades of thy forefathers to witness the morality of their craven descendant. Bloodstained glory, thou heartless man! Why, is not the fame of every conqueror dashed with blood? Is not Alexander’s, Caesar’s, Martel’s, Coeur de Lion’s fame—the fame of all those heroes whose achievements are blazoned on the records of immortality—written in characters of blood—characters which shall not perish until that blood of which they were so prodigal shall have ceased to warm the bodies of posterity? And what man but thou, dead to the glory of thy country, can think upon the deeds of our Plantagenets without feeling his heart leap with exultation? Didst ever hear of my kinsman, Sir Edward Stanley, who fought at Flodden, and by his valour won that field? I swear to thee, that the remembrance of his deeds that day hath proved better worth to England in my single person than a thousand men. Spurred on by my kinsman’s chivalry, I have ventured on actions that thou couldst not look on, though safe and distant, without fear and trembling; and my comrades in arms, ashamed to be outdone, performed feats worthy of immortal glory.”

“Thy kinsman was a patriot as well as a soldier,” said the outlaw. “He differed in that from thee: it was to repel an invasion of his country, not to carry fire and sword into a distant one, that he fought so nobly.”

“Think ye that Flodden field [Battle of Flodden, 1513] bounded his exploits?” said Stanley. “He was a comet that blazed to the eyes of all Europe.”

“His name, then, would have been more respectable,” said the outlaw, “if Flodden had been the first and the last of his fields.”

“If it had been the first,” cried the Soldier, “it would have been the worse for England. No raw soldier might have won that field.”

“Ay, but there were many men of courage and experience in the English army,” returned the outlaw; “and, I trust, we should have won the battle, though your gallant kinsman had not been there.”

“No man but a Stanley could have achieved the deeds Lord Mouteagle did that day,” said Edward Stanley, proudly.

“Tush, man,” returned his rival; “Stanley is a gallant name, but there are many as good in the peerage of England.”

“Not one, by heaven!” cried Stanley; “Percy’s moon’s on the wane.”

“Or as Percy,” cried the outlaw. “There are men as noble, as virtuous, and as valiant as any man of your house, or of Northumberland’s.”

“I trow I am mistaken in thee, good fellow” said Stanley, “thou art a courtier [given to flattery and soliciting favor at the Queen’s court].”

“Speech among men met as we are,” said the outlaw, “can give no offence;—but I am no courtier.”

“I could have sworn thou hadst been,” replied Stanley, with a look of contempt; “and not so much by thy tender allegiance and squeamish loyalty as by thy holiday speech, thy patience of injuries, and thy sobriety of humour. I’faith, Master Outlaw, it is pity but thou wert married; for thou hast all the requisites of a cuckold in admirable perfection; and I see thou hast come hither to curry acquaintance with the horned folk, for the more familiarity with thy state when thou shalt come to it: wait with patience, and I’ll be sworn thou wilt in time attain thy degrees.”

“I can bear more now,” replied the stranger, retorting the contempt of his rival, “than even thy villainous wit can lay upon me. But I tell thee, for as bold as thou art, Sir Cavalier, there shall not one word of thine fall to the ground: I will hoard thine insolence in my memory, and when time serves, repay it thee with use.”

“Thou art over-honest for a strict usurer,” returned the soldier; “but, I pray thee, do not take a long day, like some of our gallants, who wittingly neglect the reckoning till remembrance grows stale. It may be villainous wit in them, but in thee it will seem cowardice.”

“I will prove to thee I am no coward,” said the outlaw.

“Thou mayst withhold thy trouble, man,” said Stanley, assuming at once an earnest and serious countenance; “for I do not take thee for one. I guess thee to be of noble birth, as thou art of a bold strain, else had I not played the advocate with the Vernon for thy safety.”

“And if thou didst, I am beholden to thy courtesy,” answered the stranger; “but I could have trusted my own sword with my freedom.”

“I did it out of no courtesy, Sir Outlaw, to thee,” returned Stanley, “but as a means of winning favour with thy mistress; thou shalt go free until with my single hand I bring thee a prisoner to Haddon. I will shame the fair Dorothy out of her love to thee, and bind it firmly to myself.”

“The Lady Dorothy!” exclaimed the outlaw, with an air of surprise.

“Why, man,” returned Stanley, “thou dost not hold me such a fool as to mistake this matter, if the whole country be wrong. It is not Margaret Vernon that is thy goddess, for she is Thomas Stanley’s; and thou art not here to take note of yon walls alone,—no, it is the fair, the modest, the learned Dorothy, the romantic maid, the Arcadian nymph, that loves with Plato, and prefers sentiment to pleasure. She would have thee an Endymion, and play the Diana,—nought but cold looks and frozen embraces to cool thy fires withal;—by Saint Bride this will not do for me.”

“You beat the bushes but will find no game,” said the outlaw. “Whatever my business may be within Haddon park, be sure I will let no one know it against my will—if you will have it that I aim at either of the Vernon’s fair daughters, with all my soul rest in that opinion; I will spend no word in setting you right, for the matter is of small import.”

“Yea, but it is of mighty import both to you and me, Sir Outlaw,” returned Stanley; “for if thou dost win thy prize, it will cross me in a point that will not brook opposition. But thou mayest save both blood and trouble if thou art not indeed her lover. Give me thy word of honour that thou dost not affect her, and I will pledge mine that, be thou who thou mayest, the Vernon shall not only hold thee safely, but, if thou wilt, receive thee as a friend right courteously.”

“Thou dost but play thy wit upon me now,” replied the outlaw, “perhaps with the intent of stealing into my secret: by my faith, sir, this is scarcely honourable.”

“Nay, let thy secret perish,” answered the fierce soldier. “I want to know my ground, and whether thou art friend or foe.”

“As thou art minded I am one or the other,” answered the stranger; “but I will not speak further on this matter.”

“Thou wilt not!” cried Stanley in a rage, “then, by my troth, I will hold thee for a dear enemy,—a foe that upon plain terms I will slaughter where I can. Look to it, from this moment there is no peace between us. I dare thee now to take the vantage of thy weapon, for if I meet thee, and our lot be changed, I will slay thee like a dog.”

“Thou canst not move me to dishonour,” replied the outlaw. “I would not be thy executioner, but thy conqueror.”

“Well, peace be with thee for this time,” cried Stanley; “but remember, thou dost bear my challenge.”

“I will bear nothing of thine,” replied the stranger. “If thou dost set upon me, thou wilt find me armed; if thou dost use foul means, the dishonour be on thy head.”

“Nay, I will seek thee with my good sword,” said Stanley, “and with no other weapon. Thou hadst best take thy last look of thy mistress betimes, for when we meet again, thy doom is sealed.”

“Thou art an insolent boaster,” said the outlaw with a smile; “the fate of our arbitrament [arbitration] is not in thy hands. Thou mayst have to beg thy life from me, proud as thou art.”

The spirit of the soldier rose to his brow as his rival uttered these words, and he grasped the hilt of his dagger as if he meditated an assault upon the outlaw, who stood upon his guard; but he suffered his rage to evaporate, and with a fierce stare replied,—“Fare thee well, Sir Outlaw; I will hold myself disgraced until I see thee again, until I strike my sword upon thy breast, and thy tongue, which hath wagged so rudely does lie as quiet as thy blade does now within its scabbard. I bid ye farewell, sir.”

With a countenance in which anger and contempt were mingled, Edward Stanley left his rival and proceeded to the Hall. He entered the Hall, after attempting, in vain, to rally his spirit, with a countenance darkened by rage, and depressed with moodiness.

“I have both whispered and spoke loud to the Lady Dorothy Vernon,” said Edward Stanley to Sir George Vernon, “but neither profited me; in truth, sir, I am not made of amatory stuff; there is no more love to be beat out of me or into me by a pair of fine eyes than there is valour in a person of cowardice. If a woman will have me without much wooing, and take my word for the little good I have in me, well—then will I marry, and prove a right loving husband; but I would rather cast dice for my life on the drumhead, than pass half a score years in repeating vows which would, perhaps, cost me more trouble to invent than the woman was worth.”

“If thou dost woo after this fashion,” said Sir George, “I do not marvel thou art yet a bachelor.”

“It is better than talking syllabubs,” replied Edward Stanley; “and if I were for once to flout a woman with the common cant of your downright lover, I’ll be sworn she would discover I was laughing at her. When I have joy in my heart, I cannot wear a sad brow; when I am wither-galled, the devil could not bribe me to cloak it with a smirking countenance. Beside, I hate that which most women love, I mean coquetry; I do not understand being smiled upon at one moment, and frowned on at another. If a good wench treats me well, I am thankful; if badly, I grow indifferent: such is my philosophy.”

“And thy philosophy may do for the camp, where your women are common property,” said Sir George; “but there is a difference between the crystal stream and a stagnated puddle.”

“A crystal stream should be the emblem of innocence,” said Stanley; “but sure it is no proof of a woman’s purity, that she expects to be raised, by the admiration of her lover, not only above her compeers, but all other women that were ever formed. A man now-a-days must become a fool, a creature sans common sense, a brainless gossiping milk-sop, if he wish to humour his mistress. There must be nought comparable with her in creation; the blazing sun, that the eye of man, how fierce soever, durst not encounter, and yon gentle moon, whose aspect softens the souls of the most valiant, are no more to be mated with her eyes than a piece of unwrought adamant to a diamond of the first water.”

“Well, sir,” said his brother Thomas, smiling, “you are in the vein—proceed.”

“It is true, by heaven!” said Edward. “Her breast must have more whiteness than the swan, though she be as grey as a Winchester goose; and her form surpass the symmetry of the Florence marbles, though she be as thin as a lath, or as round as a tun.”

“Well, Edward,” cried Sir George, “on my conscience thou art the very argument of male-scolds; as perfect a shrew in doublet and hose as ever sconced beneath pourfled petticoat. But are we to take all thou hast said for verity, for thine opinion? Wouldst thou not force thy nature some little to win yonder maid, Dorothy Vernon.”

The soldier cast his eyes toward the Lady Dorothy, who sat pensively on her chair, listening, or seeming to listen, to her tutor; and gazing on her mild and reposed features for a few moments, he turned again to her father, and grasping him by the hand, said, “To gain that maid I would nigh change. my nature.”

He said this more to avoid giving umbrage to Sir George than because he felt any affection for Dorothy, from whose feminine figure his eyes hastily wandered to the more robust and imposing graces of her sister. But he had not much time to contemplate those either sister’s charms. The hour of supper arrived, and Sir George, his guests, and family, retired from the parlour to the hall, for the purpose of enjoying their closing meal for the day. Edward Stanley took the knight’s arm as they passed along, and, whispering into his ear, requested he would watch with him on the tower for their friends appearance. [An allusion to a possible meeting with the supporters of Mary Queen of Scots. As will soon be seen, it is the author’s way of bringing about the events of the next chapter.]

To avoid observation, Edward Stanley and Sir George Vernon retired to their respective chambers at the same hour as the other inhabitants of the mansion, and suffered a considerable time to elapse, that the guests might betake themselves to repose, before they proceeded to the high tower. By almost imperceptible degrees the heavy trampling of the servants, the clapping of the doors, and the grating of the bolts and bars, died away, and were succeeded by a cautious murmur, broken now and then by the loud bark of the dogs, or the high and boastful neigh of the knight's coursers, and at length, by uninterrupted silence. All must have retired to rest, except the porter and one or two other servants, who had a charge to sit up for the arrival of expected guests; and these were doubtless comfortably seated in the porter's lodge beside the gate, drowning care in a flagon of double ale.

Sir George first left his chamber, and lighted by the rays of a brilliant moon, which darted in at every casement, he proceeded with silent steps to the room of Edward Stanley, and found him anxiously waiting for him. Without speaking, he made him a sign to follow, and passing onward, entered a suite of chambers which were at this time unoccupied; the entrance was concealed by the tapestry which overhung the wall, and when they were withinside of the first chamber, there was no visible mark which could guide them to any passage into the next; but Sir George, lifting up the arras, conducted his young Achilles safely through the labyrinth, and they arrived at the foot of a spiral staircase which brought them to the high tower. Up this stair they had occasionally to grope in darkness; but, in general, the scanty portion of moonlight which could make its way through the loopholes of the tower served them to trace out their road pretty distinctly. At length they arrived at the top of the stair, and clambering through a small hole, only large enough to admit of the egress of one person at a time, the knight and his friend stood on the top of the high tower. Above this, indeed, there was another small turret, which might serve for a watchtower, in open day; but they were sufficiently high to descry any object which appeared at the distance of one hundred yards from the wall of the mansion, beyond which distance the trees crowded together into a thick and dark wood.

The knight of Haddon and his young companion looked out upon the moon with great joy; not because it was still and lovely, but because it served them to observe distinctly the approach of their friends.

To the poet, or the lover of the beauties of nature, which is perhaps the same, the view from Haddon high tower, on such an evening would indeed have been a feast of mental enjoyment. It was such a scene,—

“As when the moon, refulgent lamp of night,
O'er heaven's clear azure spreads her sacred light;
When not a breath disturbs the deep serene,
And not a cloud o'ercasts the solemn scene.
Around her throne the vivid planets roll,
And stars unnumbered gild the glowing pole;
O'er the dark trees a yellower verdure shed,
And tip with silver every mountain's head.”

Let one of my readers stand upon Haddon tower on such a night, and he will nearly swear that the translator of Homer, who has added many beauties to this night-piece, stood there before him when he conceived the foregoing lines. The foliage of the trees, as the piercing rays of the moon darted through their branches, assumed a transparent and yellow hue; and the hills, which on all sides surrounded the residence of the Vernon, and whose tops could be descried rising high above the wood, were tinged with a silver light still more beautiful than the more sober yellow which was shed upon the trees. Above all, the deep blue of the sky, which was not defaced by a single cloud, presented the field of a picture quite worthy of the scenery depicted in it.

Whilst they were yet silent, Sir George being seated upon the leads of the turret to rest himself, after the toil of mounting the stair, and Edward Stanley having taken his station beside one of the battlements, so as to conceal his head within the shade of the indentation from any one that might be beyond the walls, the sound of a musical instrument was heard, as if arising from beneath the walls, and Sir George rose up to take a survey of the ground beneath. But Stanley laid hold upon his arm, and whispered, “Do not stir; we are going to have a serenade,—listen awhile, I pray ye.”

“It is perhaps your brother, who has thrown open his casement,” replied the knight in the same low voice. “Sure Margaret and Dorothy would not amuse themselves with piping at this hour? But, your lovers are privileged.”

“Are they so?” returned Edward; “you will change your opinion, shortly,—Hark!”

A sweet and melodious tune was once or twice played over, first exceedingly low, and then with more volume and freedom, upon an instrument, which, if it might be judged of by the sound, was a guitar or lute; and then a voice, denoted by its round and full tenor to be a man's, though blended with great sweetness, sang the following song:—

“Around me his arms twining,
My true love said to me,
When the summer sun is shining,
I will come again to thee;
When the summer sun is shining,
And the birds are whistling free,
Oh! then, my own dear true love,
I'll come again to thee.

When the mist is rising high, love,
And the lark sings o'er the lea,
I'll watch the dappled sky, love,
And come again to thee;
I'll rouse the moorcock early,
And drive the pheasant from his tree,
And then my own dear true love,
I'll come again to thee.

I love the deep-mouthed hound, love,
With dewlap hanging low;
I love with wind and stream, love,
In merry bark to row;
When I've chased the noble hart, love!
And sailed upon the sea,
Oh! then my own dear true love,
I'll come again to thee.”

“It is not Tom Stanley's voice,” said Edward, when the song was done, and eyeing Sir George with a keen smile.

“Nor any man of my household,” said the knight.

“I fear, noble knight,” said the subtle Edward, grasping the hand of his companion, “I fear we are betrayed. That voice is the outlaw's.”

“What!” cried the knight, in a voice which made Stanley fear he would be overheard, “the outlaw’s! By my life, I cannot—I will not believe it.”

“No more would I if I had not known the voice,” returned Stanley; “but be silent; listen,—we shall, perhaps, hear enough to convince us.”

Stanley had scarcely concluded the sentence, when a casement was opened in one of the rooms which looked out into the park, though which room it was, as that side of the quadrangle in which it was situated was advanced considerably beyond the tower on which they stood, they had no means of judging; and very few moments elapsed before the song of the outlaw was answered by a few disorderly notes struck on an instrument similar to his own. This was soon found to be a concerted signal, for the notes had not died away, when the outlaw, himself, in the same dress which he wore when Stanley met him in the park, came from beneath the trees, and approached the window. The heart of Sir George Vernon was in a flame; he muttered curses between his teeth, and could hardly be restrained by the persuasion of Edward Stanley, from shouting aloud to the intruder.

“Hold ye still,” whispered Stanley; “fortune hath smiled upon us, to bring us to sight of this treachery. My honour is concerned as well as yours, and I will right both; but be cool and patient.”

“Patient!” ejaculated the furious knight; “tell the fiends that are plunged in burning brimstone to be patient! What! to practise on me—on me whose power hath been feared within the peak more than the sovereign’s—on me whose anger no man hath dared to brave? May their hearts be withered!”

“Content yourself, noble father,” said Stanley, who feared the knight’s impetuosity would mar any further discovery; “I pledge ye my word to slay this bold knave, but do not lose me the opportunity by scaring him off the ground; and I shall hold myself honourably satisfied if you will promise me the hand of this romantic maid without further ado of begging and wooing; let me earn her with my sword, not my tongue.”

“Why, wilt thou accept her?” said Sir George.

“Accept her! ay, in good faith,” answered Stanley; “for though she has been weak enough to parley with this man of mystery, I’ll be sworn the blood of the Vernon will bear no contamination.”

“She is a rebel to my blood!” said the knight, bitterly. “To dishonour me by a clandestine intercourse. Oh, curse upon the villain that hath wrought her to it!”

“Hush, listen,—they speak,” said Stanley, leaning his head over the battlements. The lovers were both concealed from sight by the projection of the house; but their voices, though they spoke in a low tone, sounded distinctly in the stillness of the night. Some words had been spoken whilst Stanley and Sir George Vernon were in conversation, which they had not heard; for the voice of Dorothy was first remarked, and betrayed at once an artless affection for her lover which could not have been the growth of a short period.

“Thou wilt indeed be wearied, love,” she said, in a voice of thrilling tenderness; the dews of evening and the damp of these woods will betray thy health. Thou art well; but though the fair moon be shining so brightly, I cannot tell the rose upon thy cheek.”

“Would thou wert as safe and happy, my beloved, as I am well,” replied the outlaw. “Oh, what man is he that would not be afoot to gaze upon this glorious night, rather than pass it by in the death of sleep,—for sleep is death while it lasts: and sooth, then, above all men I should be abroad, who have two suns to light me, besides that brilliant orb. Thine eyes, sweet one, are brighter than yon moon: it enlightens the world, but thy eyes pierce my breast, they look upon my heart.”

“It is well for us that other eyes are not so piercing,” said Dorothy with a sigh. “I have constant fears for thee, love. Thou wouldst do well to quit this mystery and await some fairer fortune.”

“What fairer fortune can I wish for?” said the outlaw. “Do I not now gaze upon thee, and behold thine eyes beam upon me with love? Do I not hear thy voice quivering with tenderness? Do I not follow in thy footsteps by day and dream sweet visions of thee by night? By heaven, Dorothy! fortune hath not a fairer lot in her urn than mine.”

“Ah! thy bold spirit I know doth mock at danger,” said Dorothy, dejectedly. “But thou knowest not the rigour of my father. When I think of the perils that surround thee, my soul shrinks with terror lest thou shouldst fall a prey to our temerity. Thou art surrounded by men that would sell thy blood for gold, or for favour, if the Vernon required it; and the very thought that thou hadst dared to brave his vengeance would rob my father of all mercy towards thee. Fly then, my soul; I shall be more content if thou art in safety, though I see thee not.” She could not proceed, but endeavoured to stifle her emotion, which produced a sob from her bosom that was audible to her father and his companion.

“I will not believe thou art weary of me,” replied her lover. “Thou art an angel in truth and purity. But I cannot live without looking on thee; I draw in my life from thine eyes; I should perish miserably away from thee. Do not urge me to quit thee, then; for sooner shall the sun desert the heavens. Thou dost talk of dangers, but it is thy love, thy tenderness, that do conjure up affrightful images to scare thy mind withal. I am armed against all dangers whilst thou art kind, and whilst heaven doth preserve thee in health. What other peril can I dread? Thy father is noble, and though he might frown upon our union, he would not do me wrong.”

“He knows thee not,” replied the damsel; “to him thou art nought but the wild outlaw—without birth, without a name. Nor dost thou know the worst. Since I last enjoyed thy company—I dread to tell thee—my father hath bid me receive another as my destined husband.”

“Another!” exclaimed the outlaw, in a tone which bespoke a severe excitement of his feelings; “what other? Sure it is not that fierce soldier, Stanley?”

“The same, the same,” replied his mistress. “Ah! I see thou dost know him;—he is fierce, indeed, but not more fierce than he is cunning and designing; bold and daring is he, but not more so than he is hypocritical and depraved. Whatever is false in honour hath its centre in him. I pray thee, love, beware of him, if thou dost love my peace.”

“Be at rest, sweet Dorothy,” returned her lover; “suffer not the image of this evil genius to disturb thee. If Sir George be warm and peremptory, he is yet a father, and will not force thine inclination. But why wilt thou not set me at rest, and danger at defiance, by giving thyself up to my entreaty? Thou hast but to leap into my arms, and all doubts, and fears, and apprehensions are over. Believe me, love, it must come to this at last.”

“Hush, my beloved!” replied Dorothy, in a calm tone; “do my ears no violence. Let other lovers place their felicity in the gratification of sense, but let our enjoyments be pure, unalloyed by mixing with baser passions. That I love thee beyond all I can express, beyond all that hath a signification in language, I do not blush to confess, for thou art worthy, oh! most worthy to be beloved. But though thou art thus knit to my soul, and though to live without seeing thee daily, and to forbear our sweet communion, would nigh go to weary me of life; yet I durst not, I could not, I will not so stain my honour—the honour of a noble house—as to quit the mansion of my fathers clandestinely.”

“No, dear love,” Dorothy continued, “I should fear to encounter the armed shades of my stern ancestors, and that they would repel with scorn the flight of their unworthy descendant. Time covereth the shorn lamb; time healeth the anguish of the heart. We must have patience.”

“Time, sweet Dorothy, is a cheat, a very dissembler,” replied the outlaw. For he doth ever hold out better things, which, when they appear are as hollow and delusive as those that are gone by.”

“Ah, love!” exclaimed Dorothy, “thou dost speak the language of passion not of judgment. Thy heart is in a flame, it is scorched with its own fire. But, I pray thee, allay the storminess of thy disposition, and let thy reason, which should be the helm of every Christian mind, govern thy mental bark.”

“Thou art a sweet lecturer,” said her lover; “but as well mightst thou preach against gluttony to a wight that is famished, as against ardour of spirit to a man placed as I am. The romance of life which I am engaged in, the wild aspect of this lovely country, the bold nature of the men I herd with, all urge me into an unusual excitement of soul which I cannot overcome.”

“Why dost thou, then, continue this savage mode of existence?” said Dorothy. Return, my beloved, to society; resume thine own gentle nature, and await the disposition of Providence upon our fate.”

“Believe not that I will quit these woods without thee,” said the outlaw; “I would sooner turn outlaw in reality, and live upon the produce of my bow,—become a second Robin Hood in these haunts, where he and his merry men played many a bold freak,—than quit thee for a day; and think not, sweet Dorothy, that there is less virtue or pleasure in the state I now live than in that which is my right. Surely this gorgeous scene we are now enjoying surpasses the most gaudy one of the court.”

“Thou art in the right, my beloved,” said Dorothy, “to regard this scene as unrivalled by human splendour; and how much is it to be mourned that such heavenly harmony as it displays hath not many admirers of thy character! I cannot but believe the most depraved feel some touch of delight at the sight of its wonders; but, believe me, these sylvan shades are not at this day the resort of the spirits of Arcadia; they are haunted by a race of men whose breasts are the habitation of every fierce passion and wild desire: strife is their daily business; they are the champions of contention; and bloody revenge for slight provocation doth characterise every mountaineer throughout this upland district.”

“Yet I have found them as faithful and as generous as they are stalwart and valiant,” said the outlaw. “It is true, they are neither civil of speech nor slow in anger, but they are trusty both in word and deed; and I would much sooner confide my life to the hands of a race of this character than to the cringing and frowning slaves of our great cities, who would sell ye for a *marvedi*. Have then no fears for me, love,—my life is as safe as if thou thyself hadst the care of it; and here daily will I make the merry green-wood ring to my hounds and horn, and at night will I watch the bower of my beloved, till our fate becomes kind, and joins us never to sunder.”

“Ah! thou wilt be faint for lack of rest; already,” said Dorothy, “if I could part with thee, I would say, hie to thy retreat; but whilst I look upon thee, my soul will not unclasp herself from thine image.”

“And if I were to gaze upon thee,” replied the outlaw, “for a hundred years, my senses would need no repose. Love is to me sufficient of repose; it is a balmy rest which none but true lovers can enjoy.”

“Thou art growing wild,” returned his mistress; “and yet if I were near thee—but let us silence these tumultuous passions, they do but increase our regrets, they cannot assist our union. Oh! that thou couldst appear publicly, and claim me for thine own bride; I should nigh kill thee with kindness, my big heart would go near to suffocate thee in its caresses. Go, get thee hence; I am as mad as thou art.”

“Nay, be not angry with thy love,” said the outlaw.

“I am not;—not with thee, my life,” answered the maiden; “or if I was, pardon me, I repent me heartily. But I fear I shall grow too fond of thee: go, do leave me, I pray thee; if thou stayest, I know not what these ecstasies may force me to.”

“Would they might force thee into my arms,” replied her lover.

“What! dost thou too conspire with my evil passions?” said Dorothy; “thou that shouldst support me against mine own heart.”

“Ill should I repay the kindness of that sweet ally,” returned her lover, “if I were to take part against her. But do thou confide in that gentle monitor, thou wilt have no cause for regret.”

“My heart, I fear, is like a treacherous governor,” said Dorothy: “it would betray the citadel to the enemy, and say it had done good service to its sovereign.”

“But I am not thine enemy, Dorothy,” replied the outlaw.

“No, sure, I meant not that,” said the damsel; “pardon me, I say I know not what. I am a foe to dishonour, and I would not, in becoming thy wife, bring the slightest tarnish on thine unsullied reputation; therefore I will teach my heart to become cold, until I may with propriety receive thy love.”

“Thou hast sure but little love if thou canst teach thy heart a lesson so unfeeling,” said the outlaw. “Propriety! In the name of Heaven, what mean you by the word? Not, sure, until we receive your father’s blessing; for he will bestow ten thousand curses upon any man of my race sooner than profit one with a good word.”

“Alas, it is too true!” replied Dorothy.

“And then our principles of faith,” said her lover, “would be an invincible bar in the way of his consent. Would the Vernon, the proud supporter of his forefathers’ ritual, and the more obstinate because that ritual is in misfortune, match his daughter with one he would deem a heretic.”

“Never!” ejaculated the furious knight, in a loud voice which might be heard some distance in the park. Both Dorothy and the outlaw, at that dreadful negative, stood like two statues, petrified with fear and astonishment.

The heart of Dorothy was wrung with the greatest anguish. At first she appeared to think that the sound was supernatural, that the veto they had heard so distinctly was delivered by some of her dead forefathers; but as her recollection returned, the tones of her father’s voice were too easily distinguishable not to be immediately recognized, and she concluded at once that their whole interview had been overheard. Desirous alone of saving her lover, who she did not doubt would be sacrificed to her father’s vengeance, in case he should fall into his hands, she cried, “Fly, fly! dally not thy time, love, but away into the wood. We are betrayed, discovered—our fate is sealed—away love, farewell! It breaks my heart to say it—farewell, fly!”

“I will not fly without thee,” replied the outlaw. “Leap down into my arms. Come, sweet Dorothy, there is no time now for maidenly fears; leap down, and let us fly together. By my soul, they shall hack me to pieces before I will quit this spot without thee.”

“Nay, but for the love of heaven, for my sake,” cried the anguished maiden, “fly alone. I should but encumber thee, and we should both be lost. I will not go; but do thou preserve thy life for my sake. I conjure thee, if thou hast any love for me, to fly: they are upon thee, love. Away, away!”

“I will not budge a foot,” said the outlaw, firmly, and, drawing his sword; “let that smooth traitor Stanley come forth; he has thrice dared me to combat; now let him take his ground.”

“Nay, then, farewell, father!” cried Dorothy, placing her foot on the ledge of the window; “open thine arms, love; I will fly with thee as I may. Adieu, fair Haddon! I am lost to thee for ever.”

She was on the point of throwing herself from the window, and her lover had stretched out his arms to receive her, when she was arrested in her design by some person who caught her by the clothes. She turned round with a piercing shriek, and fell backwards into the arms of her father.

“Oh, Vernon! false Vernon!” cried the outlaw, who beheld what passed, “thou tyrant, give me my love; nay, be sure I will have vengeance and justice.”

“Thou shalt have a foot of shining steel,” cried Stanley, leaping down from the window with a naked rapier in his hand. “Thou didst call for Stanley; here he is; what want ye with him?”

“I want thy life, villain!” cried the outlaw, rushing upon him. “Thy life, dog.”

But it happened unfortunately for the lover of the fair Dorothy, that he had not only to do with a consummate swordsman, and a man whose cool courage and insensible valour were unequalled; but that he had, in his rage, lost all command of himself. In his first assault upon the wary soldier, therefore, he received a severe flesh-wound, which did not, nevertheless, abate his fury; but he pressed on and exhausted himself against the malignant skill of his adversary, who reserved himself for his turn in the assault, when the strength of his foe should be expended. And it was not long before he [Stanley] took the offensive with a rancorous determination which could only have possessed the mind of such a fiend; and using all advantages, soon threw his weakened rival back upon the sward, and, aiming his point at his throat, would have despatched him had not his arm been clutched upon by a woodman friendly to the outlaw.

Stanley made a fierce cut at the head of the woodman, but the blow was received on a large green branch of a tree, which until now had been concealed behind the woodman, and the outlaw, having recovered his breath, sprang upon his feet, and snatching the clumsy weapon, took his foe by surprise, and at a blow laid him senseless upon the earth. He had scarcely performed this feat, before the woodman, seizing him by the arm, hurried him away into the wood.

The tread of many persons was heard upon the staircase, and the Knight of Haddon, grasping the hand of his daughter Dorothy, and accompanied by Edward Stanley, entered the hall. The countenance of the knight, which even the presence of unknown guests could not temper, exhibited marks of fiery indignation; whilst his lovely daughter, drowned in tears and pale with apprehension, hung like a drooping lily upon his arm.

“Come on, thou piece of treachery,” cried Sir George, dragging his daughter forward; “come forward and show thy hypocritical visage to my guests. Henceforth I will not quit thee a moment; my eyes shall rest upon thee, and scare thy soul like the evil sight. Sit down there, traitress, and see thou stir not, or by my father’s soul, though thou art of my blood, I’ll bathe my whinyard [a short sword] in thine.”

“How comes it, ye sodden-headed villains,” he continued, to some of the domestics who brought in lights, “that there have been piping and caterwauling around this house o’ nights, and that ye could never hear?—that a rascal, a cut purse o’ the dark could bewitch my windows to fly open, and none of ye see him? Answer, ye reckless knaves, or I’ll have ye beaten to death.”

One of the domestics, careful not to increase the anger of his passionate lord, replied,—“That music had been heard by many of the servants, and it was pretty generally believed that the outlaw was the performer; but they were not aware of any intercourse that subsisted between him and the lady Dorothy further than Sir George knew himself.”

“Ha! had I listened to that rumour,” said the knight, “and laid hands upon that audacious villain, I had done right. But I placed a foolish confidence in thee, girl, and thou hast repaid me for it as every doting fool ought to be rewarded. But it is not yet too late for revenge; he that contemns my power must fly far to escape it. Hark ye, knaves: let horses be saddled for pursuit of this traitor by daybreak.”

“Unto thee, Edward Stanley,” continued Sir George, “I owe all that is left of my reputation, perhaps my life; unto thee I owe the chastisement of the presumptuous bully that durst despise my vengeance.”

“You owe me nothing, noble knight,” replied the artful soldier; “fair Dorothy, doubt not, would have seen and deplored her weakness. Had I known of this romance and suffered it to pass for the time, my hope of proving a successful wooer would not have fallen a jot.”

"What!" exclaimed Sir George, with affected astonishment, "wouldst thou still marry her? Wouldst thou, shamed and blurred as she is, rebel-spotted and disgraced, accept her for thine honourable wife?"

"Ay, be thankful to heaven for the gift," answered Stanley.

"Then take her, she is thine," said Sir George; "from this hour I shake myself clear of her, and right glad am I to 'scape with my honour unsoiled. Stand up, Dorothy, and give him thy hand, he is thine husband."

"Oh, no, not mine," cried the damsel, in affright; "he shall never be my husband. Cast me off, disclaim me, forget I ever drew the breath of life, let me live in misery and contempt—I will abye all rather than marry him."

"What!" exclaimed her father, "dost thou cavil at my word? Has thy treachery been detected, which ought to humble thee to the dust, and dost thou still stand upon thine inclination? I prithee do not anger me more; I am already somewhat heated."

"Heaven knows I would obey you if I could," replied the damsel; "but you shall not say I deceived you further by promising to accept this gentleman when I never intend to marry him. My mind is made—I will never wed him."

"I will not ask thee again," said her father; "thou shalt be questioned by the priest at the altar."

"And I will answer solemnly 'No,'" replied Dorothy; "I will not record my own disloyalty."

"Wilt thou discover the name of thy paramour?" cried her father, sternly, "and so redeem thy disloyalty."

"I pray ye forgive me," replied Dorothy; "I should but prove more base and abject; I will not gainsay that which ye have seen and heard; but further, tortures should not wring from me. That I have done aught dishonourable pardon me if I deny—at least further than holding an intercourse unknown to you; but do with me as seems good to you. I have nothing more to say."

"No, thou hast said enough," replied Sir George, "but I have done with thee; thou art no more mine. I will but be thy gaoler until thou art married to this noble youth, then let him look to the taming of thee. Ho, knaves! some of ye prepare an inner chamber. Doth the Lady Margaret's room look upon the court?"

A domestic answered in the affirmative.

"Thou shalt lie with her," continued the knight; "no more of your star-gazing by night and your labyrinths by day." The Knight of Haddon then left the hall, attended by his daughter, whom he conveyed to the chamber of her sister; and having thrust her into it, locked the door and carried away the key.

The remainder of the day was occupied by Sir George Vernon in despatching couriers to Earl Derby [father of Thomas and Edward Stanley] and others of his friends and kinsmen to invite them to the wedding of his daughters. Edward Stanley also wrote to his father to desire his consent, according to form, to his marriage with the Lady Dorothy, which he had no fear of being refused; for if Earl Derby could have been influenced by worldly considerations, in addition to her birth, beauty, and accomplishments, she was one of the richest heiresses in England. And in full confidence of his father's approbation, Edward Stanley had fixed his marriage to be solemnized on the same day as Margaret Vernon with his brother—an arrangement which was favoured by the impetuous disposition of the Knight of Haddon. At the same time, orders were sent to Furnivale, the London tailor, for a whole wardrobe of fine clothes for each of the brothers; whilst a host of mercer, embroiders, and all occupations "that serve to rig the body out with bravery" [*Triumph of Time* by Beaumont and Fletcher], were put into requisition for the ladies' bridal clothes.

CAPTURE OF THE OUTLAW

[Chapter XL]

[A band of men led by Edward Stanley search for the outlaw in Haddon woods. They encounter the outlaw accompanied by a party of woodmen. A conflict ensues, of which the outlaw's party emerges triumphant.]

It seemed fortunate for the outlaw's enterprise that there was not only sufficient light from the moon to guide his party, and to make sure that they had captured the right men, but that the wind was so high and the night altogether so rough and boisterous, that there was no chance of the noise arising from the conflict being heard at Haddon, and consequently no fear of a rescue. But the very circumstances which appeared in the outlaw's favour very soon proved disastrous; for his party had not advanced many roods from the bridge before they were encountered by a body of horse, whose approach, through the deafening yell of the wind, had not been heard. A loud cry of "The Vernon!" from the outlaw's followers proclaimed their recognition of the King of the Peak, and each man, abandoning his leader, fled into the wood. The outlaw, who walked with Stanley, and who scorned to be the first to fly, was immediately seized upon by his late captives, who grinned with malicious joy to see him at their mercy.

“What, ho! sir of the greenwood!” cried Stanley. “The tables are turned—we will not indeed part soon.”

“Ho!” cried Sir George Vernon, who, pressing through his followers, now approached Stanley, “what is the meaning of this? And what man have ye in keeping?”

“His worship o’ the wood!” answered Stanley, “the right noble and gentle outlaw.”

“What! have ye done that knave at last?” cried the knight. “As I live, sirs, ye have done me excellent service.”

“Not better than you have done them,” replied the outlaw, boldly. “They never saw the face of the Vernon more gladly.”

“The villain set upon us with a rout of twenty armed and masked thieves,” said Stanley, “and they took us at ’vantage too, or we had captured the whole gang; we were in full march to their rendezvous when ye came up, and on seeing you the valorous followers of this romantic knight could not find heart to stand a second racket.”

“They have done very wisely,” said Sir George, “and I am glad on’t. Their leader will be sufficient for an example, and he shall swing if there be a branch in Haddon Park that will bear his weight. Some of ye look to him and give these gentlemen your horses.”

Several of the knight’s followers instantly dismounted, and providing Stanley with horse, released them from their charge over the outlaw, who, notwithstanding the menace of Sir George, preserved a calm and cheerful countenance. When this exchange had taken place Sir George ordered them to return to Haddon.

They now returned at a sharp pace to the Hall, where they soon arrived, and the outlaw was placed in confinement for the night, being told to prepare for severe examination on the morrow.

Stanley perceived that Sir George was serious, and became immediately grave. “For the outlaw, he has been seen to drive the deer, and he may legally, I take it, be held captive until he can be properly examined; at least unless, as I fear, he may prove some man of rank; in that case we must act as the exigency demands.”

“Wherefore do ye judge he is of quality?” said the knight.

“I value him by his free air, his gay manners, and his gallant bearing,” answered Stanley; “they are qualities not easily gained by men of low degree. His courage is of the right mettle.” The company then broke up and sought their chambers to seek repose.

All the inhabitants were stirring betimes [early] the following morning. The news that the famous outlaw was taken and brought to the Hall was soon spread among the domestics, and through the waiting-women reached the ears of the unfortunate Dorothy before she arose. These tidings overwhelmed her with grief. Whilst her lover was free she thought little of her own confinement, and had still hopes that they were not to be separated forever; but she knew so well the fiery disposition of her father, and dreaded so much the depraved and unrelenting spirit of Edward Stanley, that the capture of the outlaw appeared almost the seal of his fate. She threw her arms round the neck of her sister, with whom she had slept since the discovery of her amour, and fell upon her breast choked with sorrow.

“Dorothy, sister, sweet wench!” cried Margaret, dreading that her sister would expire in her arms, “for the love of heaven give not way to this rage of grief. Believe not that a finger of thy love shall come to harm. Nay, Doll, for my sake; thou wilt break my heart.”

“Oh, he is dead already!” exclaimed Dorothy, raising her head, from which her eyes seemed bursting with grief; “he is in hands as ruthless as the rock; he will—he will be murdered. Oh, sweet sister! what must be done to save him?”

“Be thou more easy,” answered Margaret, “and I promise thee he shall not die unless we all die with him. I will see Thomas Stanley [Margaret’s fiancé]; he shall know the history of your loves; he will not stand by and see a noble gentleman slain.”

“Oh! let me die, so my heart’s love be rescued,” said Dorothy; “let me forever be prisoner if my sweet John [first mention of the outlaw by name] be freed.”

“I will not fail thee,” replied her sister, with great affection; “I will use all means, as if this fatal cloud hung over myself.”

“Ha, thou art my better angel!” cried Dorothy, clasping her in her arms, “thou art thrice my sister. How should I fail without thy aid! Blessed be heaven for the bold spirit thou art graced withal.”

“Nay, dear Doll,” returned Margaret, with a smile, thou shalt witness some of my valiance before thy love shall suffer wrong. I will arm me in my father’s corslet and fight manfully by his side. He shall not lack rescue if I can wield sword or partisan.”

“Ha, thou dost strive to cheer me,” returned Dorothy, with a faint smile; “but thy sun-like humour hath to melt the ice of my fears, which is thick indeed. Bethink thee, Margaret, it is not the open violence of our father that I have to dread alone, and that is fearful enough to think about; but the treachery, the secret practice of Stanley, who hath no soul, no conscience, no humanity, no remorse. Oh, sooner would I trust a babe within the paws of a bear than my dear [John’s] heart within the reach of his rival’s dagger.”

“I prithee, sweet sister, do not aggravate thy sorrow,” answered Margaret. “Of little trust is the man thou dost fear, but he durst not for his life soil the walls of Haddon by playing the assassin. Our father is violent, but not murtherous; he might strike with the sword, but he would not stab with the dagger.”

Whilst she was yet speaking one of their women entered the chamber and informed them that Sir George Vernon had commanded that they should remain in the Lady Margaret’s apartments, and, that he might insure obedience to his will, had actually locked the out door of the suite of rooms occupied by Margaret, and carried off the key. This was a new subject of tribulation to the sisters, not only as it prevented their personal intercession for the prisoner, but also as it portended some evil intention towards him on the part of Sir George, of which he was unwilling his daughters should be witnesses.

“What is to be done now?” said the ill-fated Dorothy, regarding her sister with a glance of unutterable despair; “what will now become of him? Ah, my stricken heart, thou art sorely beset.”

“Have patience, sweet sister,” answered Margaret. “The window is not so high but we can speak to Thomas Stanley if he stand in the court. He must now act for us, and as he is bold and faithful shall his love be fortunate. Good Luce, reach out my tablets, I shall be dressed ere it be ready.”

The waiting-woman soon procured the writing materials, which, indeed, being frequently used by Dorothy Vernon in her studies, were kept in the chamber, and Margaret sat down to address a note to her lover.

The letter was brief enough, and ran thus:—"The outlaw is taken, his life is menaced, and there is little hope from the mercy or justice of his enemies. To thee do Dorothy and I confide his safety. He is of noble blood, though it may be he will not confess it, and his death, which would soon reach her highness' ears, would draw ruin, sure and instant, upon all that are concerned in his miscarriage. Use all thy wit and courage in his defence, and bring us news of thy success, if thou wouldst ever see me smile on thee again."

Having concluded, she hastily folded up her billet, and bade her attendant go to the out door, and desire some of the domestics to send Sir Thomas Stanley into the inner court.

"Ha, I fear," said Dorothy, "good Sir Thomas is too mild and peaceable, too easily prevailed on, to cope with such bold and subtle men."

"Thou knowest him not, dear Dorothy," answered Margaret; "he is a true Stanley, as dauntless and mettlesome as any of his race, else would I not match my hand with his. On my honour, I know not a man to whose protection I would sooner trust my life."

She threw open the casement, and the knight immediately came forth from the hall, and stood beneath the window.

"Good morrow, sweet Margaret," said Sir Thomas; "I marvel the fairy hath not pricked thy finger for lying so long a-bed."

"We are prisoners," replied Margaret, hastily; "I fear to speak with thee long; read this billet, and take a turn or two in the garden; if no one observes thee, come again."

She threw down the letter, which the knight picked up and put into his pocket. She then closed the window, and he withdrew to the garden.

"Think ye he will assist us?" said the timid Dorothy.

"Oh, do not doubt him," answered Margaret; "were his place filled by thy bold outlaw, and he in durance, my hope would not be better. Come, wench, arouse thee. Thou art not wont to be so low in spirit."

"Nor should I if he were free," replied Dorothy. "But my soul is fettered with his body. I have lost all heart and courage."

"Not all, I warrant thee," returned Margaret. "Let us get this day over, and to-morrow brings Earl Derby to Haddon. He, be sure on't, will not see thy love suffer wrong. And in him, too, is my trust to unmask his subtle and dangerous son, and to punish his hypocrisy. Would the day were spent."

“Ah, I see thou dost doubt Sir Thomas Stanley’s power,” cried Dorothy; “thou dost fear, despite thy looks, that his mediation may fail.”

“I do not, truly, dear sister,” answered Margaret. “But I fear his mediation may arouse the fierce fiend in his brother’s breast. The presence of Earl Derby would impose a calm on all; the countenance of that noble peer, his age and dignity, could not be viewed by the worst without awe and respect.”

A pebble thrown against the window announced the return of Sir Thomas Stanley, and Margaret again opened the casement.

“Well, hast thou read my billet?” said Margaret, “and durst thou undertake the achievement?”

“Thou art but playful, fair love,” replied the knight, with a smile, “when thou dost question my courage. There is nought to fear; but come what may, dear Margaret, thou shalt not see my face while the gentleman is in danger. I pledge ye my honour for his safety, at least while I can wield weapon in his defence. I knew not he was so well known to ye as your epistle hints he is; I had already resolved he should meet no illegal violence.”

“But where is the outlaw?” said Margaret.

“At present confined in the high tower” answered Sir Thomas Stanley; “but he is forthwith to be brought down for question to the hall. But, prithee, who is this Robin Hood? May not one know his name?”

“I may not tell thee,” replied Margaret; “I am bound, and so is Dorothy, as fast as our sacred words have power, to conceal him, until we have his license to be more open. He is of noble blood; as noble, dear Thomas, as thine own; but difference of sect and ancient feud mar all cordiality between our houses. If thou wouldst save our house from ruin, save this youth from danger.”

“I will hold him as dear to my heart as my own brother,” answered Sir Thomas.

“Ha! hold him, I pray thee, dearer than does thy brother Edward,” said the maiden, “or his life is not worth a bracken-spring.”

“Fear nought from Edward Stanley,” replied her lover; “he shall do as ye would have him.”

“He shall, or rue his opposition,” answered Margaret. “But away to the hall, lest they be hasty. Come back with joyful news.”

“Or I will never come back,” replied Sir Thomas.

He kissed Margaret’s note, which he still held in his hand, and after she had closed the window, returned to the hall.

Sir Thomas Stanley, on his re-entering the hall, found the Knight of Haddon seated in the midst of his domestics and retainers. Most of these had been summoned by Sir George, but some were drawn thither by curiosity, or by the anxiety which any one within the precincts of Haddon naturally must feel to know the issue of so novel and interesting a scene as was about to take place. At the moment Sir Thomas entered the hall was in deep silence. The lord of Haddon was delivering to his assembled retainers and friends his reasons for dooming the outlaw to death, which he seemed resolutely bent should be his fate.

“Hath not this burglar done me wrong?” said Sir George, with great vehemence. “Hath he not despited me to my teeth, destroyed my deer, and lorded it over my keepers, as well as planned the robbery of that which is dearer to me than life, my daughter, and of that which is dearer still, my honour reputation? Ye will say, is he not punishable by the laws of the forest? No, friends, it is said this thief, this poacher i’ the dark, is a man of blood and quality. May I put him to the common forms of justice? he will slip through her fingers like an eel. Yes, loving friends and kinsmen, this suborner of my house, this robber of my fame, will ’scape my vengeance and openly laugh me to scorn.”

A murmur of approbation, begun by Edward Stanley, buzzed through the hall.

“I see,” continued the knight, “ye have too much love for my house, too dear affection for the fame of my fathers, to bid me sit down with this indignity. If the law will not burnish my soiled honour, wherefore, kinsmen, should not I, when I have the means, scour away the defilement in the blood of my foe? Shall I dance attendance on the courts, when I wear a sword and can right myself? Never shall this be till the glory of the Vernon be veiled in the dust; never till the name be worthless—worthless as this base outlaw.”

The knight paused again, and pulled his hat over his brow. His eyes lightened with indignation, and he frequently grasped the hilt of his dagger, as if to indicate his remorseless resolution.

“If this foul traitor deserved not his doom,” continued Sir George, “I would not bring his blood on my head for the worth of England. He hath braved all ventures and now must bide his doom. Bring him forth.”

Attended by a guard of Sir George Vernon’s domestics, the outlaw now entered the hall, and as he was brought in front the Knight of Haddon, Sir Thomas Stanley pressed through the crowd and took his station beside his intended father-in-law.

Sir George surveyed the handsome and careless countenance of the outlaw with a fierce and angry scowl, which betokened him no good, and the mood of Edward Stanley and some of the friends of the Vernon would have afforded him little comfort if he had been inclined to seek it in their regards. But his eye wandered freely over the assembly, and his spirit was not checked at the sight of his enemies' rancour. He stood firm and calm before the proud King of the Peak. But with this undaunted spirit no jot of insolence was mingled. He was soberly brave, not contemptuously hardy, and rather seemed disposed to pay to Sir George Vernon the respect that was due to his rank and his age, than to dare him to further mischief by an open disregard of his power. All the domestics, indeed all present, pressed as nigh to him as possible, that they might have a close view of the man that had made Haddon woods so famous; and as he unbonneted on taking his station before Sir George, a murmur of admiration at the manly beauty of his features ran through the hall. Even the eye of the Vernon appeared to relax somewhat of its ferocity as he gazed on the ingenious and noble countenance of his foe, and Sir Thomas Stanley was his friend before a word had dropped from him.

"A proper man, i' faith," whispered one retainer to another, "a right handsome gallant. Marry, 'tis no marvel what hath happened. The Lady Dorothy, I'll be caution, is not the only woman that hath thrown soft looks upon him; and he seems as bold withal as Master Stanley. Well, I say Sir George will answer if he does him wrong."

"Is the outlaw disarmed?" said aloud another retainer, wishing to ingratiate himself with his patron by an eager severity towards his prisoner; "I thought I spied a dagger beneath his cloak."

"Search him," said Sir George; "not that we fear him, but a felon has no title to bear honourable weapons."

"A felon!" exclaimed the outlaw, while deep blushes covered his cheeks; "Sir George Vernon, you are an ancient man, and I have reason to hold you respectfully, else, by the worth of my honour—"

"What dost he rate at it?" said Edward Stanley, with a sneer; "if thou wert to turn it adrift, I trow there are few that would give it harbour. A thief's honour indeed! Nay, sir outlaw, an ye will, bite your lips off. I say thief, robber, jack o' the dark, cut-purse, and draw-latch; thou art all of these and each in particular."

“Edward Stanley,” said his brother, plucking him by the sleeve, “cease thy railing. Thou doest neither show thy blood nor courage in thus using thy tongue like a bully.”

“Tush!” cried Edward Stanley impatiently, “I marvel Sir George forgot to lock thee up with the women; so should we have been spared a pestilent overflow of gall and a villainous assortment of ill names. Get thee gone!”

“How, sirrah? you forget yourself,” said his brother.

“No; I am well advised how I speak,” replied Edward; “tempt me no further; out of my sight!” He spoke in a low tone, but so fiercely, that Sir Thomas was for some moments struck dumb with astonishment.

“Brother as thou art,” at length replied Sir Thomas, with a groan which the libertine’s unkindness drew from him, “thou shalt answer me for this.”

“Thou shalt answer me,” said Edward Stanley. “If I had not feared the sight of a sword would quail thy silken courage I had sought thee long ago. Thou art my father’s son, tempt not my mood.”

“To me thy mood has little danger,” said Sir Thomas.

“’Tis well for thee then,” answered his brother; “but if thou wouldst not that my angry words should mean somewhat fatal to thee or me, keep thyself clear of what is about to follow. Do thou step in between the knight’s anger and this outlaw’s life, and thine own shall pay the forfeit.”

“Thou shalt see what I will do anon,” replied Sir Thomas.

While this fearful dialogue passed between these brothers the outlaw was deprived of his cloak and dagger, which indeed he gave up without resistance; and Sir George, waving his hand for silence, said—

“Were I to do even justice, I should hang thee up on the next tree; for thou hast been caught in the very act of thy trespass; nay, I myself have seen thee and heard thee do that which to most men would be an ample apology for taking thy life. Hearest thou me, sirrah?”

“I hear, Sir Knight,” replied the outlaw.

“Well, what hast thou to say in thy defence?” said Sir George, “what apology for having abused my house and stained my honour?”

“Sir, I have done neither,” replied the outlaw. “That I have loved—that I do love your daughter, I would not deny though the confession brought me death. I protest that the reputation of your house is as sacred to me as my own life. Had it not been unstained I had not sought the love of your daughter. Both her honour and yours, for me, are as pure as heaven.”

“For thee, Sir Vanity!” cried Sir George, “and who art thou? what man of note whose love would be no dishonour to the Vernon’s daughter?” The outlaw remained mute. “As I live, continued the Knight of Haddon, “thou art a false dissembler, a pretender to that thou art not. If thou wouldst convince me that thou art not a cheat, a bold and saucy pilferer and vagabond—if thou wouldst save thine own life, declare openly thy name and quality.” He paused, but the outlaw did not speak. “What, knave!” continued Sir George, “not a lie ready?”

“A lie!” exclaimed the outlaw, burning with passion.

“A lie! ay,” continued the Knight of Haddon, “do not hold it strange. I say a lie. Thou hast spent thy wit, and thou canst not coin so readily as is necessary. Villain, have not thy associates been liars ever? thieves and reprobates, dogs of plunder, wolves hungry and savage? Thou hast a person truly from which one would expect better things; but it is not the first time that a low-born rascal has been cased in a comely carcase.”

“Before high heaven,” cried the outlaw, laying his hand upon his breast, “I am none of those characters your bounty hath lavished upon me. What I am and who I am I will not tell to any here; but he that in this presence says I am beneath him, lies.”

“So shalt not thou for this fortnight,” cried Sir George, mightily enraged at his bold bearing; “so long shalt thou whistle in the wind. Lay hands on him!”

“Nay, stand off! what would ye?” said the outlaw, looking round him with a determination of countenance that awed the followers of the Vernon.

“Seize him,” cried Sir George, “and hang him on one of the arms of the trees opposite the window where he talked with his mistress.”

“By my life, not so,” cried the outlaw, striking down the man nearest him, whose sword he disengaged from the scabbard in a moment, though the owner had lately endeavoured to draw it without effect. “Now let any man advance upon me,” cried the outlaw, throwing on his hat and brandishing the heavy sword around his head, “and I will cut him shoulder from shoulder.”

As he uttered his threat, which all present seemed to respect, Edward Stanley, with great coolness, drew a pistol from his belt and levelled it at the breast of his rival; but before he could discharge it, Sir Thomas Stanley grasped the weapon, and though he failed to wring it from the hand of his brother, he held it so much aloof that if it had gone off the ball would not have taken effect.

“Do him no wrong,” cried Sir Thomas aloud; “I will be engaged for him, he is of noble blood.”

“Sir Stanley!” cried Sir George Vernon, “thou didst not know this fellow but lately; thou canst have no better knowledge of him now.”

“I can, I have,” cried Sir Thomas; “I pledge ye my knightly word that he is what I say—of noble birth—of a race that will work woe upon that hand that scathes him.”

“Be it on mine,” cried his brother, struggling to free himself. “Loose thy hold, Tom Stanley; he shall die.”

“He shall not die,” replied Sir Thomas; “wherefore should he die? His lineage doth give him pretension to the hand of my fair sister, and Sir George’s fancied dishonour is done away. I will engage for him, he shall wed the fair Dorothy within this hour.”

“False villain!” cried Edward, gnashing his teeth, “thou wouldst cheat thine own brother of his love and right.”

Sir George Vernon, unwilling that his hall should become a scene of blood, called for silence. “Hold, and put up your weapons. Will ye turn this house into a den of thieves? Edward Stanley and the rest of you, put up, or ye are no longer friends of mine. Let my own servants secure this roisterer.”

“Nay, on my life!” cried Edward Stanley; “he is my foe, and I will assault these twain if there be no one will second me.”

“I fear not, Edward Stanley,” cried his brother, “thou art the vilest one here. Give back, sirrah [form of address implying disrespect]! I will not spare thee, though thou art of my own blood. Advance not a foot; thou art hardly fit to die.”

“I say desist, Edward Stanley, or thou art my foe!” cried Sir George. “For shame! Is this my hall that ye riot in, as if it were a common beer-tavern? We came here to do judgment gravely, not engage in a rout and skirmish.”

“Let them [Thomas Stanley and the outlaw] go forth out of the house,” cried Edward Stanley, whose passion was nigh irrepressible, “and meet me point to point on the sword—both of ’em. Come, rascals, brace on your valour for once and turn out. I will teach ye a measure without music; I will lesson ye in the sink-a-pace. Out, dogs, curs, scoundrels that ye are!”

“Heaven forbid I should soil the honourable name I bear,” replied his brother with great calmness. “No; rather will I stand against those of my blood that would do so. I will not see murder wrought on an innocent man; that he is so I dare avouch.”

"I prithee peace," cried Sir George Vernon. "Now, Sir Thomas Stanley, what proof of this man's nobility have you? Who is he?"

"I pray ye, Sir Knight," cried the outlaw, who conjectured that Sir Thomas possessed the whole of his secret, "betray me not. As you love your own honour, and heaven knows you have full dearly proved it, show that regard for mine with which you have respected that which is of much less moment, my life. I cannot—I will not survive the shame of being blazoned abroad with the lies of the vulgar added to my tale; let them hear of the outlaw of Haddon, but let my true name remain unknown."

"Would I knew thy name!" cried Edward Stanley; "I would have thy romance printed with the story of Troy's siege, that thy adventures lie on every stall."

"I cannot betray that which I do not know," said Sir Thomas; "till this hour I never saw this gentleman, and his name and lineage are as strange to me as you."

"How, son Stanley!" said Sir George Vernon. "Saidst thou not he was noble—of a high and potent race?"

"And so he is," answered Sir Thomas, "I am assured of it by one that is infallible."

"Perchance by his fair mistress," said his brother with a sneer.

"It was not the Lady Dorothy that gave me this assurance," answered Sir Thomas; "though, if she had, her word had been sufficient. But I beseech you, Sir George, let your decision upon the wrong you count yourself to have suffered from this gentleman, abide the assistance and counsel of Earl Derby [father of Thomas and Edward], who will be here to-day. Let him go back to his prison with your honourable word for his safety, and then await the judgment you shall jointly come to."

"I must know more of him," replied Sir George, anxiously fixing his eyes upon the outlaw. "Wherefore, if thou art indeed a gentleman, cam'st thou not to woo my daughter, as a gentleman should, in fair and open day? Why seek her clandestinely, if thy means and intentions were honourable?"

"For one reason which you know," answered the outlaw, "which you overheard in the last converse I had with your lovely daughter—which your own word—a word never to be forgotten—sealed and ratified—the difference of our faith."

“Ha! true indeed,” returned the knight; “thou art a heretic. Art thou a good queen’s man [are you a Protestant]?”

“Ay, sir, her faithful subject,” answered the outlaw boldly.

“Thou knowest, I’ll be sworn,” continued Sir George, “that there are some here who love her not.”

“I would not so much belie myself as to deny my experience,” replied the outlaw; “you have now done what you scarce would answer to the law, if I should incline to question ye.”

“And wouldst thou so, if free?” said the Knight of Haddon.

“The courtesy you have shown me is not so great as to beget much forbearance,” said the outlaw; “but you are the father of her who holds my heart in her hand; you are safe from my revenge.”

“Why, thou hast spoken as a noble and valiant youth,” returned Sir George, “and thy frankness hath gained thee liberty. Go, Sir Outlaw; thou art free; my honour is healed by having thy life in my hands, and I will not so stain the name I bear, nor the house of my fathers, as to smirch either with thy blood. Go; thou shalt be in my ward of safety till thou art free of Haddon Park.”

“You will not, indeed, give him freedom,” said Edward Stanley; “at least not now?”

“Indeed, son, I will, and now, forthwith; he is free already—my work is past,” said Sir George.

“Good father, you have done nobly,” said Sir Thomas Stanley.

“Refresh thyself, Sir Outlaw,” said the Knight of Haddon, “and then make the best of thy way. Some of ye attend him to Bakewell.”

The outlaw bowed, and being furnished with his cloak and weapons, quitted the hall. As he crossed the court he cast up his eyes to a window where he saw Dorothy and Margaret Vernon, and kissed his hand to them. Margaret, who little expected to see him free, uttered a cry of delight, but Dorothy fell senseless with joy into the arms of her sister.

There is a tradition at this day in the neighbourhood of Haddon, that the King of the Peak caused a murderer to be hanged upon a tree in his park, without awaiting the formality of a trial. How this self-constituted judge managed to escape a trial himself, the tradition does not say.

Edward Stanley beheld the departure of his rival with throes of savage indignation, for he had fully concluded that when Sir George had got him into his power, he would have fulfilled those threats which he had vented against the outlaw in the heat of his anger. With Stanley himself to threaten was to act. He had never the grace to recant a meditated evil purpose, but what he doomed he executed. The nature of Sir George, however, was very different. He threatened vehemently, but he was never known to be advisedly cruel, to do an act of inhumanity or injustice when he had time for reflection and counsel. Thus it happened that the Knight of Haddon, whose resolution on the preceding night was fixed for the destruction of the outlaw, became completely changed in the morning, and the end of his convictions was the liberation of the prisoner, which gave indescribable disgust to Stanley. The fierce soldier, nevertheless, said little, though his countenance betrayed the rage of his heart, and at length, throwing his sword behind him, he darted towards the door in great haste.

"Now, Edward Stanley," cried Sir George, "whither away?"

"I am hot," answered he sullenly; "I must cool myself with a few turns in the park"

"Go," returned the knight, with more than usual seriousness; "but thou shalt first give me thine honourable word not to cross weapon with the man that has left us."

"Why should I not?" said Stanley insolently. "If you pardon him his injury to your house, I will revenge the insult he hath wrought on *my wife's* honour."

"*Thy wife!*" said the knight in astonishment, "as yet she is my daughter, and *no* wife of thine."

"Not mine! cried Stanley furiously. "Think again, Sir Knight, for your honour's sake. Not mine!"

"I say not thine," answered Sir George, whose blood began to warm at the imperiousness of his guest.

"Not mine!" reiterated Stanley to the assembled guests. "Bear witness, did not this man—"

"Villain!" cried Sir George, enraged at his plainness.

"Nay, sir, I will be heard," cried Stanley. "though thou chafe thy beard off. I say, you comrades, bear witness if this knight did not give into my hands his daughter Dorothy, disclaiming all further right to her, making over to me, as her lord and husband, all claim to her affection and obedience."

"Thou didst not understand me, knave," cried Sir George, pacing the hall with impatience.

"I thought I did," replied Stanley. "Thy words were plain; I took thee for a man of honour."

"And sayst thou I am not?" cried the knight, halting and turning fiercely to Stanley.

"If you withhold that you have given," answered Stanley, "in the face of the world I say you have no honour."

"Edward Stanley, thou art mad to tempt my mood," said Sir George.

"Tush! I will not bate my breath for the mood of any man," said Stanley. "I will claim my right. Wherefore have you freed my foe? In this you have done me wrong."

"He was no captive of thine," answered the knight; "thou wert his when he fell into my hands."

"You do me injustice to let me here," cried Stanley, "when I would seek my revenge."

"Seek it another time," replied Sir George. "The man is in my ward whilst he is on my land, and it is broad. He is a gentleman of blood, and will not fly thee."

"He is a gentleman!" cried Edward with a sneer. He is nigh akin to gentility as a draft horse to the first race of Arabian steeds. But it is time to try my horse's mettle [and leave Haddon]."

"What now? What would you do? Stay, thou hot-headed knave," said Sir George, whose affection, notwithstanding their late quarrel, was knitted to Edward Stanley, "ye would not quit me for what has passed between us?"

"Why should I stay?" replied Edward Stanley; "to see my bride given to yon dastard?"

"Thou liest, Edward Stanley," said the knight. "Perdition seize me if I would give her to any man but thee, though he were a crowned king." Stanley, then approaching Sir George Vernon, gave him his hand which the knight shook heartily.

"Gentlemen," said the Knight of Haddon, "I entreat ye, now we have nought to think on but our bridals [a double wedding: Margaret to Thomas and Dorothy to Edward]. Let every man put on his gayest looks with his gayest clothes, and think of nought but revelling and jollity. Tom Stanley, hie thee to thy love's chamber. Here is the key; set the birds at liberty."

"Right heartily sir," answered Sir Thomas, who, taking the key, ran away joyfully to the apartments of Margaret Vernon.

“Prepare yourselves, gentlemen, to receive Earl Derby,” said Sir George; “I expect him, with every hour’s tide, and with him a gay company. Let them not catch us in the livery of wrath, but in that of buxom enjoyment. Come, sirs, exert yourselves.” The attention of Sir George was soon aroused by the appearance of a large company of persons on horseback, who advanced upon the great road to the Hall.

The cavalcade of Earl Derby [father of Thomas and Edward], composed of relatives, distinguished guests, together with many of the household officers of Lord Derby, and the attendants of the several personages, a group of more than a hundred persons, slowly ascended the bank, and were received at the gate by Sir George Vernon with great courtesy.

“How shines the sun with your health and fortune, fair sirs?” said Edward Stanley, in welcoming the group; “Earl Derby, good morrow.”

“Well, Edward.” replied his father, “thou art at last vanquished. I give thee joy, lad.”

“The lady will give me more, or my predictions are nought,” answered his son.

The remainder of the day, except that part of it which was consumed in taking their meals, was spent by Sir George Vernon in receiving guests, a great number of whom, the friends and kinsmen of Earl Derby and himself, had been invited. The ladies busied themselves in the order of the ceremonies and in examining, fitting, and disposing to the best advantage the bridal dresses and other paraphernalia necessary on this occasion.

An unexpected visitor that day was Lady Cavendish [Bess of Hardwick, the widow of Sir William Cavendish; soon to be married to Sir William St Lo, Captain of the Guard to Queen Elizabeth]. The Lady Cavendish, attended by a couple of serving-men on foot, entered the court, and Sir George very gallantly assisted her to alight. Having gone through the common forms of salutation, she made no stay with the knight and his friends, but, apologizing for abruptly leaving them, passed on to the apartment of the Lady Margaret. “By my life,” said Sir George, “the Lady Cavendish is still a fine woman. What an eye she has still in her head, and what a leg to stand on!”

When in the evening Lady Cavendish took her leave and prepared to return home, Dorothy’s agony became almost insupportable. She threw her arms around the neck of the dame, and stifled her sobs in her bosom, inattentive to the consolations of her sister, who feared she would, in her frenzy, let fall something that might alarm the Lady Derby and her daughters, and put them on their guard.

But Lady Derby and the rest of the females imagined her passionate feelings to proceed from that coyness which most young women in her situation feel, or find it necessary to affect. By degrees, however, her agitation subsided, and rallying her spirits, she bade Lady Cavendish good night, beseeching her that she would be early in her attendance on the morrow. [It becomes apparent that the outlaw, John Manners, is well known at the court of Queen Elizabeth, and that Lady Cavendish is part of a plan to bring together Dorothy John. The status of Lady Cavendish is such that she has no fear of Sir George Vernon. However, there is no historical evidence that Lady Cavendish was in any way involved in the Vernon - Manners romance.]

Whilst this scene of lamentation was being performed upstairs, the hall exhibited one of glorious hospitality. About fifty persons of distinction and kinsmen, either by blood or marriage, of the two houses of Vernon and Stanley, besides an innumerable number of gentlemen holding situations of trust in the families of the several noble guests, sat around half-a-dozen large tables that crossed the hall, exhibiting such a spectacle of festive enjoyment as few houses of our modern nobility can boast. It was then the custom to celebrate the eve of any great event with almost as much ceremony, at least with as much hilarity, as the day on which that event was actually solemnized. Not only the nobles, knights, and gentlemen in the Hall, but all the domestics and servants and the peasantry upon Sir George's estate, were invited to partake of his hospitality. The bells of Bakewell church rang incessantly, and the children in quaint, antique habits performed dances and gambols in the park, where good ale was brought out in barrels to regale those who could not press within the courts of the Hall. Such a scene had not been remembered as Haddon at this time exhibited, and has, it is likely, never since been equalled. Bonfires were lighted on every hill, and the progress of every hour told, by the roar of enjoyment proceeding from all quarters, that the good cheer of the King of the Peak had not failed of its effect.

The Arcadian scene in the park did not cease with nightfall. The moon shone out, and the revellers, who were mostly woodmen, preferred enjoying themselves under the naked cope of heaven to slumbering soberly at home. A fat buck or two were brought down by some marksmen, and the hides being instantly flayed, they were broiled upon the embers of the fires, and greedily devoured by the drunken boors, who at length, satiated with liquor, or unable to stand, fell upon the sward, and there reposed until morning.

According to the etiquette of the time, Sir Thomas Stanley and his brother Edward, attended by all the younger male guests, and accompanied by a large band of instrumental performers, appeared at an early hour the following morning beneath the window of the apartments where the brides slept, and serenaded them with a number of soft and amorous tunes; whilst the rustics, again roused to their diversions, made the park echo with the firing of guns, the sound of horns, drums, and all kinds of minstrelsy.

The solemnization of the marriage, was, according to an ancient custom in the family of the Vernon, to take place at night, and the day was to be filled up with revelling, feasting, sports of all kinds, and a grand masque. The business of the day, after the serenade, proceeded with a sumptuous breakfast, of which five hundred persons partook. All persons, however, were too eager to commence the diversions that were proposed to sit long at breakfast. The young men and maidens, decked out with ribbons and copper lace, speedily formed themselves into parties for dancing, and executed many dances with great agility if not with abundant execution. There were also companies of archers who shot at the popinjay, for back sword, sword and buckler, and cudgels, wrestling, and all other country sports.

But the rustics were speedily called from their own diversions to behold the exercise of some of the noble guests, who were mounted on their steeds, and prepared to engage in the celebrated play of running at the ring. The arena for their exploits was a flat piece of ground in front of the Hall, and just beneath the battlements, from which the ladies and those gentlemen that did not play beheld what passed. In the middle of the arena was fixed a tall post from which extended a hook bearing the ring, which hung loosely upon it, and to carry away this ring from its position at the point of the lance, and with the greatest grace and dexterity, was the object now about to be sought by those gentlemen who addressed themselves to the adventure. Much ceremony was used by the more unpractised cavaliers to avoid the first run, while those who were masters of the game absolutely refused to lead the way, expecting some sport from the failure of the tyros; and at length Sir George was obliged to speak to them from the battlement.

“For the love of your mistresses, gallants,” cried the knight, “some of ye set on, or I shall be obliged to come down and show the way myself.”

A number of competitors had a run at the ring, with a couple succeeding in bearing the ring away on the lance. Thomas Stanley went at it next, and failed in his attempt. At length Edward Stanley, who had for some time merely looked on, when the ground was pretty clear, dashed away at the utmost speed of his horse, and without a thought of failing bore away the ring, which slid down his lance, and shouting "Another!" checked his horse before he had ridden five yards beyond the goal, and returned at full gallop to his post. This feat he achieved five times running; and for the grace and ease with which he performed what seemed to others a difficult exploit, he received a thousand bravos and huzzas from the bystanders.

Many others tried their skill, but there was not one that could compete with the practised arm of the soldier. Even Lady Cavendish, to whom he was far from agreeable, could not help giving her testimony to his accomplishment in the exercise. "I confess," she said, turning to Sir George, "he is not equalled in this play by any cavalier I ever saw."

"I think not," replied the knight, "and yet Saint Lo was once a right sure hand. But wherefore, cousin, came he not with you?"

"He left Chatsworth yesterday morning on business," replied Lady Cavendish, "but promised it should not be a matter of small weight that detained him from your solemnity. He will come, though it be at night, and begged I would crave leave for him to use you without ceremony. He may, perhaps, bring with him a friend [or an outlaw in disguise]."

"A hundred, if he like," answered the knight; "the more friends he brings, the better shall he be welcome. But come, fair ladies, the play is over; if it please ye, we will descend."

A magnificent and ample dinner, for which all had gained themselves appetite except the anxious Dorothy, succeeded these sports. Of what it consisted, how it was arranged, and the other particulars concerning it, our readers must spare us the recital, because it is now necessary that we come to something of more moment than even eating and drinking. Those that think otherwise are at liberty to shut their eyes and use their own fancies in delineating this scene of old English hospitality.

The evening shades at length superseded the bright and joyous day, and the more distant woods of Haddon Park were shrouded in the dim veil of twilight. But the hall, the courts, and the open part of the park surrounding the castle were illuminated by the splendour of ten thousand torches which cast a glare upon the waves of the Wye and upon the amphitheatre of woodland that rises behind the Hall. Again bonfires were lighted on every hill, and the roaring of guns, drums, and trumpets, the note of the sweet-toned harp, and the shouts of the revellers, resounded from all quarters.

But we leave the good people below-stairs to their own enjoyments, and conduct our readers to the dancing gallery, where precisely at eight o'clock the company began to assemble. This room, above one hundred feet in length, and nearly twenty broad, afforded "ample space and verge enough" for the evening's revel. It was magnificently lighted, and beautifully adorned with chaplets of flowers, which gave it an air of Arcadian beauty. A passage also, which led from the upper end of the gallery into the garden [Dorothy Vernon's Doorway], was thrown open, and lighted with sconces; and much taste was displayed in illuminating the gardens, which, rising terrace above terrace seemed like a Roman theatre decorated for the shows. The light was not strong enough in the gardens; but lamps were placed at the end of each avenue, so as to give a soft and delightful hue to the place. It was in fact necessary that the revellers should have some cool spot to retire to occasionally; for their number was so great, the evening was so warm, and the heat thrown out by the innumerable lights so intense that it would have been impossible for the gentlemen, and much less the ladies, to have confined themselves the whole evening to the gallery. In the midst of the dancing-room was a large recess, around which the musicians were ranged, and they had already tuned their pipes and commenced playing when the company began to assemble.

Most of the young people, in addition to the masquerade of their dresses, wore visors, particularly the ladies; but the Earl of Derby and his Countess, the Knight of Haddon, the Lady Cavendish, and other of their maturity, were without. Many of the gallants, too, adjusted their masks so negligently that they were easily discovered, and few of the ladies chose to remain so closely disguised as that their lovers could not discriminate them from the surrounding fair.

The grooms were alone out of masquerade. Thomas and Edward Stanley were alike clad in suits of white satin flowered with silver, and richly decorated with pearl ornaments, and in their hats of the same stuff were enormous plumes of white ostrich feather. A person who did not know them would have thought that Edward was the elder, for though he was less tall and not so stoutly made as his brother, his countenance was darker, his features more fixed and callous. Thomas Stanley was all openness and hilarity, and moved about with a quick step and jocund eye among the ladies, giving and receiving infinite pleasure. Edward, too, was active and buoyant as usual; but there was frequently mischief in his eye.

The gentlemen had not to use much entreaty to persuade the ladies to dance. Their hearts and heels were too light for them to remain idle, and they gave their hands to their partners with great vivacity. A measure was first stepped by a lady whom Sir George instantly recognized as his daughter Margaret, and a gentleman whose identity he was utterly at a loss to discover.

“Know ye that cavalier?” said he to Lady Cavendish, who stood by; “by my heart he hath a gallant person.”

“Is it not the Lord Dudley?” returned Lady Cavendish.

“No,” replied Sir George; “I saw him but now in a yeoman’s jerkin. I should have thought it had been Tom Stanley, but their dress are diverse, and yonder stands my son-in-law.”

While they were yet speaking Sir William Saint Lo joined them, and slipping aside his mask, discovered himself, saying—“Well, Sir George, you owe me something for being here; I have nigh killed myself with hard travelling to witness your bridal.”

“And I am right glad to see you,” replied the knight, shaking his hand warmly; “and thank you for your courtesy. But where be your friends, Sir William? my Lady Cavendish here assured me you would grace our ceremony with some of your friends.”

“But one, good sir,” replied Sir William, “and his is now pacing a measure with yon fair lady.”

“By my troth, a gallant gentleman,” returned Sir George; “a native of this country, sir?”

“Of England? yes,” answered the courtier; “Sir William Peto [a fictitious person played this evening by the outlaw] by name—a man of family and fortune surpassed by few.”

“Sir William Peto!” exclaimed the Knight of Haddon with great surprise; “I have heard of him—a great courtier is he not?”

“A most goodly ornament of the court,” answered Saint Lo, “a man of great parts; he is the continent of all humanities; they were inhuman who said otherwise. I know not whether his wit is surpassed by his learning, or his attainments by the talents nature hath endowed him withal; his person, as you see, is marvellously handsome, and visor never cased a face that ladies would sooner look upon.”

“Hereafter I shall be glad to know him,” replied the knight of Haddon.

“As he now burns for your good fellowship,” said Saint Lo, “he is a man, sir, can do much at court. I know not wherefore, but he was as hot to be at your solemnity as myself.”

“Commend me to him,” said Sir George; “he hath done me much honour.”

“Will your ladyship honour me with your hand?” said Saint Lo to Lady Cavendish.

“Not to dance, sir,” answered his mistress; “I prefer being a spectator—the gratification of my eyes to that of my feet; but I will excuse you, servant.”

Sir William bowed, and readjusting his mask, walked away among the crowd of revellers. At the same moment the measure was concluded, and the stranger led Margaret Vernon to her seat, and placed himself beside her. A coranto was next danced by a number of belles and beaux, in which Sir Thomas Stanley joined, having the Lady Dorothy for his partner; and whilst it was being executed Edward Stanley left a crowd of ladies and gentlemen with whom he had been conversing, and came to Sir George Vernon.

“Now, Edward,” said the knight, “why dance you not? when I was as young as you are there was no better nor gayer dancer i’ the court.”

“No,” replied Stanley, “but I have no great skill in dancing. I mortally hate your measure which is as slow as the movement of a munition waggon. Of your coranto, I like not the figure, a cinque-pace is well enough, and that I’ll try when I can find myself i’ the humour. But what gallant is he who danced with the Lady Margaret?”

“Hist!” whispered Sir George, looking at Lady Cavendish, who however was conversing with Earl Derby. “He is a courtier—Sir William Peto.”

Stanley then left Sir George, and seeking out a partner, joined in a cinque-pace with a good deal of grace as well as spirit. The gallery now became exceeding hot, and many of the ladies and their gallants extended their promenade into the garden. Among the rest the stranger, or Sir William Peto, as Sir George now held him, supported Margaret Vernon; and as he passed the knight, who stood at the head of the gallery, very near the door which communicated with the garden passage, bowed very low, and received his salutation in return. The evening was fine, the stars shone out, and the waning moon began dimly to peep forth, casting a galaxy of light along the horizon. Scarcely a breath of wind disturbed the foliage of the trees, and there was a gentle coolness, a dewy and luxuriant freshness in the air, as well as a fragrant odour arising from a great quantity of rose trees which grew beneath the windows of the mansion, that made the garden indescribably delightful to the fair revellers. A band of musicians was stationed in an arbour at the further end of the first terrace, and the melody of the music, the fragrance of the flowers, and the soft aspect of the evening made the place resemble a scene of enchantment.

Every eye was bright, every heart bounded, save the eye and the heart of Dorothy Vernon, who leaned on Sir Thomas Stanley, faint with fear and sick with anxiety. She neither heard the jests of her companions, nor saw their joy, but alone contemplated her own situation, and trembled at the uncertainty of her fate. It is true she had not been much troubled with the attentions of Edward Stanley; for whether he thought he should soon have enough of her, or that it would savour of fondness if he bestowed much of his company upon his own bride, or that he altogether disregarded her, we do not know, but she seemed quite indifferent to him, and he made not one effort to detect her beneath the masquerade she wore, leaving her entirely to the entertainment of any gallant who should think her worthy his courtesy. She had not indeed lacked attention, for Sir William Saint Lo, Sir Thomas Stanley, and many other gentlemen had almost constantly surrounded her.

The company who first entered the garden [Dorothy and Margaret Vernon, Thomas Stanley and William Saint Lo and the stranger, known as William Peto] had not promenaded long before many others entered also, and the several avenues were speedily filled with detached parties of masquers, who, as they passed each other, diverted themselves with mutual remark and repartee. Sir Thomas Stanley, in particular, who was in high spirits, fired at all that came within earshot.

Sir Thomas Stanley, with the Lady Dorothy on his arm, had hung somewhat behind, whilst the Lady Margaret, the stranger, and Sir William Saint Lo had left the lower garden, and were now pacing the upper, where there was less company, with animated steps. Thither Sir Thomas and Dorothy followed them; but they had scarcely ascended the flight of steps that led from the lower to the upper garden, when the former party left that also, and proceeded up another ascent into that sequestered avenue called the Lady Dorothy's Walk, whither Sir Thomas and Dorothy also pursued them. A person could scarce see the moon through the trees.

A small door leading from the avenue into the park, opposite which they now were, was broken open, and a number of men armed and masked rushed upon them, and seized Sir Thomas Stanley. The Lady Margaret Vernon also, who was nigh at hand with Saint Lo and the stranger, was also secured, but Saint Lo and the stranger were left at liberty and provided with weapons. At the same time the sound of horses' feet was heard beyond the wall, and the stranger, pulling off his mask, discovered the features of the outlaw of Haddon.

"Stir not, speak not, as ye love life!" cried he. "Dorothy, bid your sister farewell. To-night shalt thou be out of the reach of tyranny."

A forester instantly appeared, and assisted to attire the Lady Dorothy in a riding gown and hood. She then kissed her sister, and bidding all farewell, passed the gate with the outlaw and Saint Lo. In a few moments, those within the avenue could hear the outlaw, his bride, and Saint Lo depart at full gallop; and when they had got out of hearing, the men who held Sir Thomas and Lady Margaret released them, and passing the gate, galloped away on horseback after their leader.

Some of the masquers wandering in the garden were drawn to the noise, and created a clamour until all the gentlemen who were out of doors flew to the avenue and surrounded Sir Thomas and Lady Margaret. The gardens were now a scene of consternation; the ladies frightened at something, though what it was they did not understand, crowded into the gallery, and spread terror throughout the room, whilst one of the knight masquers, leaving Sir Thomas Stanley to entertain the others with an account of the adventure, flew to the gallery, and bursting among the ladies, bawled out—

“Woe betide, woe betide! —a most villainous plot! a most devilish plot! woe betide! Get ye arms and to horse forthwith. I say forthwith —”

“Wherefore? what mean ye, sir?” said Sir George Vernon, much enraged at this interruption; “why come ye thus with a fearful tongue, striking these ladies’ hearts with wonder and dread? Who are you?”

“Who am I, forsooth?” cried the knight, endeavouring to tear off his mask; but it stuck fast in some part of his ruff, and showed only the upper part of his face. “See ye not who I am?”

“Ay, Sir Knight,” answered the Knight of Haddon; “and now, sir, what hath aroused your spirit to this noisy commotion?”

“That which will arouse yours to ten times the pitch on’t,” replied the knight. “Your daughter Dorothy is spirited away, rapt out of our hands—soused upon as Jupiter swooped Ganymede; the outlaw hath carried her off.”

“Thou liest, traitor! this cannot be. He durst not do’t for his life,” cried Sir George, whose features were fearfully convulsed.

“Nay, but the fair Margaret will avouch it,” cried the knight, “and so will Sir Thomas.”

“Thou liest! I will not believe it,” said Sir George. “Edward Stanley, look to thy bride; the loss will be thine if she be gone indeed.”

He had little need to counsel the fiery soldier, who, snatching a rapier from a corner where the gentlemen had deposited their swords, flew to the garden, and in every face he met found a confirmation of the knight’s tidings. He was speedily followed by Sir George, Earl Derby, and the rest of the gentlemen, who furnishing themselves with weapons, ordered their horses to be instantly saddled. Upon arriving at the avenue Earl Derby found his sons in high altercation.

Edward Stanley stamped furiously on the ground, and brandishing his weapon in a menacing attitude, cried—"Thou art a traitor, Thomas! By my life, it is not possible but thou shouldst know the plot. You and Saint Lo have consorted with this felon to rob me of my bride."

"How, Edward Stanley!" cried his father, hastening between them; "wherefore dost thou accuse thy brother? on what ground? How has he betrayed thee?"

"He conducted the fair Dorothy hither," replied Edward, "he and Saint Lo. Will ye make me believe that he could not have defended her, though unarmed, till he might call assistance?"

"No, marry, for there were a score of armed villains," said the knight who was present in the garden; "it was not in the force of man to keep the lady."

"Peace, thou cowardly rascal," cried Edward Stanley." This brother of mine and his bride were the known defenders of the outlaw; had they not been so, he would have swung in the wind 'stead of living to do this deed. But why stand we here? To horse!"

He pushed his way through those who stood around, and opened the gate as a body of horsemen rode up to it. Several of them sprang from their steeds, and a man whose noble mien and rich harness showed he was their leader, led into the avenue a score of harquebussiers, who, before any resistance could be made, surrounded all persons present. Edward Stanley, enraged at the sight of this company, made a fierce thrust at the leader, but his rapier broke short upon the cuirass of his opponent, who said, with great coolness but severity—

"Break no more swords, Colonel Stanley; my arms are proof. Earl Derby, I am your lordship's servant."

"My good Lord Rutland," said the Earl advancing, "I knew you not — my trouble blinded me; what must be done with this wilful boy?"

"May I crave your hospitality, Sir George Vernon?" said the Earl of Rutland, in a tone which showed there was not much cordiality between him and the knight of Haddon. "Will it please you to show us a private chamber, where I have somewhat to say that it befits you to hear? Meanwhile, good Sir Thomas Stanley, return you to the revel with these gentlemen. I have heard of your solemnity, and would not mar it. Assure the Lady Dorothy, I will not, if 't be possible, rob her of her groom [referring to Edward Stanley.]"

[Lord Rutland is unaware of his son's romance and elopement with Dorothy. He came to Haddon Hall to defuse the efforts of those loyal to Mary Queen of Scots, who have attempted to use Edward Stanley to bring Sir George Vernon to their side.]

"My lord, I can spare satire," replied Edward Stanley; "I have not to tell you where fair Dorothy is."

"Indeed you have," said the Earl Rutland, "if she be elsewhere than here."

"She has been carried off by Sir William Peto and Saint Lo," said Sir Thomas Stanley; "we were but now about to engage in pursuit of her."

"Peto! a phantom!" replied Earl Rutland; "but you wrong Saint Lo, for he is here with me. Ho! Saint Lo, come forward."

The courtier instantly appeared, and Sir George Vernon said, "Now, traitor of a double stock, whither hast thou borne my daughter?"

"The horse that bore her," replied Saint Lo, "was guided by her own hand; she is safe from your tyranny."

"What! was't tyranny to withhold her from matching with an outlaw, a felon, a robber?" cried Sir George; "was't tyranny to marry her to the son of Earl Derby?"

"The man she will marry is as good as he," replied Saint Lo. "I mean no abatement of respect to my good Lord Derby, but I say that John Manners is as good a man as Edward Stanley."

"How! my son!" said Earl Rutland; "my John, mean ye, Saint Lo? This cannot be."

"Yet so it is, my lord," replied Saint Lo; "your son hath long loved the fair Dorothy, hath long haunted these woods in habit of an outlaw. The differences that have held the houses of Manners and Vernon apart forbade all hope of a marriage with consent of friends, and they would have deferred it till a fairer opportunity, but the time pressed. John Manners besought my aid, and my friendship could not refuse it. Besides, this pair of lovers are every way equal, in blood, in fortune, in fair alliance. What can ye wish for more? Their marriage will heal the feuds that have subsisted hitherto between ye. Two fair objects will be rendered happy, and Colonel Stanley may not complain, for had not this plot succeeded, the Lady Dorothy would have died rather than become his wife."

"I see, my Lord of Rutland," said Earl Derby, "this is news that hath somewhat surprised you; but on my honour I think heaven hath especially ordered these events. Sir George, I am led to believe, from what my lord hath let fall, that Sir William Saint Lo hath rendered ye service in more points than one. But if it please ye let us retire; we may converse in private more freely. Thomas Stanley and friends, return ye all to the gallery, and calm the fears of the ladies."

Sir George then led the way, followed by the Earls of Derby and Rutland, Sir William Saint Lo, and Edward Stanley; and passing through the hall, he conducted them to his own parlour.

"I visit Haddon," said the Earl of Rutland, when they had seated themselves, "for the prevention of treason. At once know, sirs, that Mary's representative met Saint Lo as Sir William Peto. Our gracious sovereign Elizabeth would not admit that any man of the house of Stanley, that any kinsman of Earl Derby, was treacherous. In her whole proceedings was she guided by Sir William Saint Lo, and guess then whether or not you have cause to esteem him your enemy."

"It seems not, my lord," replied the knight of Haddon, "and I frankly crave his pardon for that which has passed."

"The queen hath bid me say thus," continued the Earl of Rutland, "Sir George Vernon and the rest are pardoned even before they sue for mercy. Colonel Stanley, if he choose it, may find employment in her highness' army."

"Come then, I will accept her offer, and become her soldier, so she will not rust me with peace. And so farewell, for I will not stay to revel it where I have lost the argument of my pleasure [Dorothy]."

"Stay but a while and I will bear you company," said Earl Rutland. "This outlaw of my blood and his fair partner cannot pass the guard I have stationed around, and must return, or they will be brought hither to me."

"Away, away!" cried Stanley. "If I see your son I shall strike him dead, though it were through the heart of his mistress."

"Ay," said the Earl, smiling, "but not through my steel corslet, unless you get a weapon of better temper than the last. But come, we will leave Haddon."

"Nay, my lord," said Sir George Vernon, "tarry our bridal; and as it seems Edward Stanley has given over his claim upon my daughter, let your son have her with all my heart, if you cry content."

"My lord, this is nobly said," said Earl Derby.

“I cry content with all my heart!” answered the earl of Rutland; “but now am I on state business, and must accompany Colonel Stanley to London. Take it not ill, I beseech ye; from my soul I wish both the couples joy and continual satisfaction.”

The Earl then gave his hand to Sir George Vernon, who received it with great demonstrations of pleasure, and held a long conversation with his new kinsman, whilst Edward Stanley went out to prepare himself for his departure. Soon afterward Edward Stanley, attended by Earl Rutland and his cavalry, left Haddon.

The Earl of Derby, Saint Lo, and Sir George Vernon then returned to the gallery, where, instead of the life, the bustle, the gaiety which but lately pervaded it, they found a whispering anxiety, a fearful tremulous curiosity among the women, and among the men a lifeless and motionless languor, that told them the effects of the late scene were not to be overcome easily. By the exertions of the Earl of Derby and his son, together with the raillery of Margaret Vernon, whose courage was obliged to exert itself, the company at length in some measure recovered their vivacity; but no female could approach the garden door, which was now closed, without a feeling of trepidation. They had again struck up the dance, and the ladies had assumed a little confidence, when a loud knock at the garden door threw them again into consternation. Sir Thomas Stanley flew to open it, and throwing it to the wall, admitted the Lady Dorothy Vernon and her gallant outlaw.

“Where is my father?” cried the maiden, rushing into his arms. “Pardon me, pardon me!”

“Pardon me, dear wench,” said Sir George, whose eyes filled with tears, “and forget what is past. But where is my son? Where is John Manners?”

The outlaw, for we will still call him so, came forward, and the knight heartily embraced him. “Come, musicians,” cried the knight, “now strike up. Good, my guests, recover your spirits, and let me introduce this noble youth to ye as my son. Fair ladies foot it deftly, and heaven grant ye partners to your liking, both for the dance and for life. What, son, Earl Rutland met with you? You might not pass the guard?”

“Even so,” answered his son-in-law; “we were utterly desperate, when we met my father and Colonel Stanley.”

“And then ye were utterly mad, I'll be sworn,” said the knight; “but here is my Lord Derby will be glad to see the outlaw of Haddon.”

The revels continued until midnight, when, as the Vernon's family use was, the two couples were solemnly joined in holy matrimony in the chapel of Haddon, and after a supper wherein neither the quantity nor quality of the viands could be reasonably surpassed, the entertainments for that day concluded.

Tradition does not say how long the festivities of these weddings were kept up, but their splendour has remained unrivalled unto this day. There have been many bridals, and many noble ones, in the county of Derby since the marriage of Dorothy and Margaret Vernon, but they have passed away with all their enjoyments, they have sunk into oblivion, leaving the ceremonies we have endeavoured to describe blooming, we trust perennial.

Such, gentle readers, is the end of our eventful history. If it please not all, yet it will give pleasure to some, and those particularly who either live near or are familiarized with the woods of Haddon and the ancient residence of the King of the Peak.