THE QUEEN'S FAVOURITE

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A Story of the Restoration

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE QUEEN'S FAVOURITE ***

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Cover art

[Frontispiece: "THEY TOOK REFUGE WITH NURSE

PATIENCE"
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The Queen's Favourite

A Story of the Restoration

BY
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"The White Standard" &c.

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CHAPTER I
"The king has come in to his own again"

In a large, sombre apartment, in the palace of the Louvre, there was unusual commotion. The Queen Dowager, Henrietta Maria, was seated in a crimson gilt fauteuil, wearing her widow's black robes, for she had never cast off the mourning she had donned for her murdered husband, Charles I; and indeed she had unwillingly suffered any of her attendants to array themselves in brighter colours.

"Until he is avenged," she would say; "until his murderers have suffered what he suffered, if that be possible!"

Behind her, leaning on the back of her chair, was her young daughter, a girl of sixteen–that child who had never seen her father's face, who had been brought over to France by stealth in swaddling clothes, who had suffered all the miseries of exile, and shared all the poverty which her mother's position had forced upon them.

Everybody knows the story of how the queen kept this child in bed in winter, because they could afford no fire in their room. Possibly she did this to shame the king, Louis XIV, who denied the necessaries of existence to the daughter of Henry IV.

The princess was at the present time just passing from girlhood into womanhood. She gave promise of great beauty, which was to be fully realized. There was a triumphant look on her face; indeed, on the faces of all those present, for kneeling at the queen's feet was a messenger who had just arrived from Holland bearing the news that a deputation from England had waited on her son, Charles II, and had invited him back to England, entreating him to suffer himself to be placed upon that throne which had cost his father his life.

After the envoy had delivered his message, a great silence fell upon all present. The queen, for a few seconds, seemed incapable of realizing the truth.

It is at this moment we introduce our readers to her court.

Suddenly a little voice broke the silence, and a childish figure, a girl of ten or eleven years old, sprang forward, and holding out with both her little hands a somewhat shabby white satin gown, she pirouetted into the centre of the room, and, dancing on the tips of her toes, sang gaily: "The king has come in to his own again; the king has come in to his own!"

The ice was broken: a general movement took place. A young woman in a tight-fitting black gown and a white cap sprang after the child and passionately shook her.

"How dare you; how dare you!" she exclaimed; but the child twisted herself free of her, and ran lightly to the Princess Henrietta, hiding herself in the folds of her gown.

"Let her alone," said the queen, "she has spoken for us all." And a smile such as had not been seen on that royal face for many a day crept over the widowed queen's countenance. Regaining her self-command, she said to the messenger still kneeling before her:

"I thank you for the haste you have made in coming to us, and I bid you return with equal haste to my dear son, and tell his majesty that all loyal hearts rejoice with him, and that we await but his command to join him in England. Until then we will abide here as patient and loyal subjects."

The messenger arose, and bowed low, saying;

"I have no doubt that the king will desire your majesty's presence as soon as he has taken possession of his kingdom." And with that he bowed himself backwards out of the room.

With the disappearance of the messenger etiquette slackened; there was much talking and not a little laughter. Suddenly the door leading into the anteroom was thrown open, and all the elite of the court of France, all those faithful followers of the Stuart cause who had escaped out of Cromwell's hands and taken up their abode at the French court, young and old, gay sparks of the aristocracy, and grey-headed men and women who had lost lands and fortunes in their master's cause, pressed forward. Their day had come at last; surely they would now reap the fruit of their devotion.

The queen rose and went into their midst with all that stately courtesy for which she was remarkable, and her young daughter, following her example, gave her hand to be kissed, smiling with that wonderful charm and look of gladness which was destined to fascinate so many hearts.

Once more the doors were thrown wide open, but this time heralds announced:

"Le roi, le roi!"

Queen Henrietta stood still, but, as the king entered, she advanced a few

steps to meet him, curtsying deeply.

"Ma tante," he said, "I would have been the first to congratulate you, but news flies so fast, you have already heard what I would gladly have imparted to you myself."

"You are very good, my nephew," answered the Queen, "but sorrow has followed me for so long, that I can scarcely allow myself to hope that my dear son will succeed his martyred father in peace and without bloodshed."

"What matters that to you, ma tante? If blood has to be shed in a good cause, there is no regretting it; and there are those here present," he added, turning round and facing the courtiers, "who will not hesitate to give their lives for their rightful king."

A murmur ran through the crowd, and the whole assemblage bowed low in acquiescence. One voice rose above the others:

"His majesty speaks like Solomon; we are ready to shed the last drop of our blood for our royal master. Long live King Charles!"

People said that Queen Henrietta Maria had grown hard in her trouble. At the present moment the softening element of joy crept into her heart and brought tears to her eyes.

"Grand merci, grand merci to you all!" she repeated; and the king, taking her hand, led her to her seat, himself occupying the fauteuil which had been hastily brought for him.

A whispered word to Henrietta, repeated by her to the gentlemen of her household, and the crowd of courtiers disappeared, leaving the king and his aunt alone. Even Princess Henrietta and her little companion were dismissed.

What took place between the royal aunt and nephew was only known some years later; but the queen was well satisfied with the result of their conversation, for the strings of the king's purse were opened, and the poverty which so long oppressed her disappeared.

The princess and the child Agnes felt this change more than anyone. There was a mystery concerning Agnes; but mysteries about personages were very common in those days. In this great Civil War children had been lost, families had disappeared, no one quite knew who might be who.

When people questioned as to who this child was, the queen answered haughtily:

"Her name is Agnes Beaumont. Who she is and whence she comes I know; that is my secret, and must suffice all men."

It was on a cold winter's night nigh upon twenty years ago, and snow lay thick upon the ground, when Patience had found her way to the Palace of the Louvre, and begged and prayed, and almost forced herself into Queen Henrietta's presence. It was in the early days of the queen's widowhood. She had pawned

all her jewels; she had sent all her money to the assistance of her son; and she herself was living a beggar on the bounty of the King of France, and that was measured out stingily. Poverty was in the air; the great rooms assigned to her in the Palace of the Louvre were bare and cold; and when Patience succeeded in forcing her way into her presence, she found the queen cowering over a few embers in the great fireplace, with the young princess, then only a child of eight years, gathered in her arms for warmth.

Approaching the queen, Patience knelt before her.

"Do you not recognize me, your majesty?" she said.

The queen looked at her.

"Yes, I recognize you," she said; "you come from my friend," and in a low voice she mentioned a name, adding:

"What of her?"

"Dead," answered Patience, "even as her husband died after the great battle, and with her dying breath she bade me bring you this." And opening back her cloak she showed, lying in her arms, a sleeping child of some eighteen months old.

"Why did you bring her here?" said the queen, throwing up her hands in despair. "What am I to do with her? We have scarce food for ourselves. How shall I feed her?"

"Have no fear on that score," said Patience, "I will feed her. Only let her live under your shelter, protected by your name; for there are those who, if they found her, would cast her out or do her some evil turn. You know that well. They have entered upon her possessions–they hold what by right is hers; therefore she must be cared for until such time as she can claim her own, or till you can give it to her."

"Then I wot she will wait a weary while," said the queen.

Whilst they were speaking, Princess Henrietta had approached the child, whose eyes were now wide open, and who was struggling to rise.

"Oh, how pretty she is! Look, Mother!"

And she said truly. She was a lovely babe, with soft, golden curls clustering round her little face, and large brown eyes. She was laughing, too–laughing with the merry gurgle of a happy babe–stretching out her little hands towards the princess. She looked the very child of joy, and yet she was a child born of bitter sorrow.

"She is like her father," said the queen. "I never knew a man more gloriously happy than he was; and she has the same look in her eyes."

"She never weeps; she never moans," said Patience. "Ah, madame, she will bring you sunshine and good luck!"

As she spoke she unwrapped the child and placed her upon the ground. A

beauty, a perfect beauty she was, and the princess clapped her hands.

"Oh, you must keep her, Mother, you must keep her!"

"I have no choice in the matter. She is my dearest friend's child. Yes, I must keep her, Patience." And from that hour Agnes was the Princess Henrietta's daily companion.

This princess had also been born in sorrow and nurtured in it. She had no playfellows. She had led the dreariest life that any child could lead until this baby came; but from that hour her whole nature changed. She laughed, she played, she danced with her; there was noise, there was life, in that dark apartment. Whatever ills others had to bear, Agnes never suffered. Patience was always there, and Patience sufficed for her, and often for the princess too. They occupied a tiny chamber leading out of the queen's room, and this was their haven of rest, their playroom.

Sometimes even the queen would come in there and sit down and talk to Patience, not as to a subordinate, but as to a friend, and that is saying a great deal for Queen Henrietta Maria, whose pride and arrogance were proverbial.

Everyone was sure Agnes was of noble birth, because, as she grew older, she was brought up nobly and had the same teachers as the princess. They were neither of them overweighted with study; it was not the fashion in those days. They learnt French from their surroundings, a little writing, a little reading, a smattering of Latin, because the queen was bringing up her daughter as a Catholic, and she must needs follow the Mass in her Breviary. This sufficed; but they learnt dancing, and little songs, and thus a certain amount of gaiety emanated through them into the dark Palace of the Louvre.

This gaiety was in Princess Henrietta's blood. Was she not a granddaughter of Henry IV, that great lover of pleasure?

So these two children ignored the death-traps which lay under their feet, those oubliettes which had swallowed up so many men and women. They did not see the ghosts that others saw gliding along the passages, which led to mysterious chambers, down narrow staircases, ending they knew not where. They did not care. They would escape from Patience and play their games of hide-and-seek and touch-wood, their cries of childish joy ringing through the corridors and starting the echoes. Men would smile at them, and women shake their heads, but no one bade them be silent. Sometimes even the king in the distance heard them and would smile. "That is the wild Henrietta and her companion," he would say.

"Shall they be silenced, sire?" asked a courtier once.

"Nay, nay; it is good for them to laugh," he answered. "Their weeping days will come. It were a sin to silence them."

On this day, when the princess and Agnes were sent forth from the king's

presence, they took refuge with Patience, and, curling themselves up on the window-sill, began to talk.

"I wonder if we shall have as good a time in England as we have had here!" said Agnes. "I feel as if I were going to lose you, Princess. You will be a great lady at court, and I am only a child and nobody. I wonder what this England is like! I have heard that the sun shines but little there. I do not feel much love for it or for the people. I never can forget that they killed their king, your father."

"If I cannot forget, I shall have to make believe I can," said Henrietta; "but as to what England is like, I know no more than you do," she added. "I was brought over from England just as you were, an infant in swaddling clothes, by my dear Lady Dalkeith, so we are equal there."

"Except that you know who you are, but I am only Agnes Beaumont, with neither father nor mother, nor kith nor kin, no one save Patience to care for me."

"We care for you, my mother and I," said the princess, drawing the child closer to her. "What more do you want?"

"Never to leave you," said the child passionately. "I would be your handmaid, your servant." And, as if a sudden fear had taken hold on her, she clung to the princess.

"You foolish child," answered Henrietta. "Of course you will always stay by me. Where should I be without my little Agnes?"

"But kings and queens, I have heard, cannot do what they will; they cannot even love where they will," said the child.

"That is true," answered Henrietta, "but you are only a child. Who will mind you? Besides," she continued thoughtfully, "you are Agnes Beaumont today, but you may be a great lady in disguise. Courtiers will crowd round my brother's throne; those who have been against him will be for him, now he is king, and you, the queen's favourite, my favourite, may find both kith and kin in your prosperity."

"I shall not care for those who forsook me when I was cast alone on the world." And Agnes tossed her beautiful head proudly.

"Why trouble?" said Henrietta. "Let us take life as it comes; we are so young. We are going to have a good time–a right good time!" And she wiped the tears from the child's face, kissed and hugged her.

At that moment the door opened and the queen came in. Her face, too, was radiant, and she brought with her a ray of sunshine, as if Nature itself shone upon her. She sat down beside the two girls and laid a hand on each of them.

"We shall soon be going to England," she said.

"Oh, Mother, tell us about England," said Henrietta. "We know nothing about it."

The queen's eyes filled with tears. "For ten years," she said, "I was the

happiest and best-beloved woman in England. There was no man like your father, Henrietta: the greatest lover and the best husband. He gave me for my dower-house a palace on the Thames, upon which the sun always shone, from west and east, north and south, beneath whose windows the whole world passed, barges with pennons flying and with music playing all the live-long day, and oft far into the night. Ah, it was a glorious time! Who would have thought of the misery to come!" She put her kerchief to her eyes and wept audibly.

"It is over, Mother, it is over," said Henrietta, kneeling beside her.

"It can never be over," answered the queen. "Those joy days are ever present with me, not even when your brother has avenged your father's death upon his murderers shall I forget. My sun is dimmed for ever." And a look of hatred came over her face. "We will not talk of it," she continued, shrugging her shoulders in her quick French way. "You want to know about this England, children? Well, we shall go back to Somerset House. It is my own, given to me by my husband, and there we shall dwell. It is a beautiful place, full–as I have told you–of sunlight; very different from this gloomy Louvre."

"But we have been very happy here," said Agnes. "I fear our play-days are over."

The queen smiled and stroked the child's face. "You are growing a big girl, Agnes; we must think of something better for you than play, ma mie."

Patience coming in broke this strain of talk. She and the queen went to the farther end of the room together in consultation.

Indeed, for the next few months there was much planning and much talking. It was the month of May when King Charles went to England, and England became old England again in its festive gaiety. From the moment Charles set foot on English soil at Dover with his brothers the Dukes of York and Gloucester, and was met by General Monk and courtiers, who knelt to welcome him, England went mad concerning him. On the twenty-ninth of May, which was his birthday, he made his solemn entry into London. We are told the streets were railed, and windows and balconies were hung with tapestries, flowers were scattered in his path, and all was joy and jubilee. So he entered triumphantly that Whitehall where the king, his father, had suffered so cruelly. It was a strange metamorphosis. Those who had been the father's bitterest enemies now bowed before the son. They called him the "King of Hearts". From his people he would receive a "crown of hearts", they said; "the duty of all men would be to make him forget the past; he was to be the most glorious king of the happiest people. Such was his welcome!"

All this was reported to his mother, still living at the Louvre, waiting for her summons to go home, and the whole of that summer passed in joy and laughter. Princess Henrietta was courted by foreign potentates and even by kings, but the

queen would not part with her.

"She has shared my troubles, she must share my joys; she must go home with me," she said.

In the autumn the queen set sail with her suite for England, and after what seemed to Agnes a weary journey by sea and land, they reached London, and were conducted through the city to Somerset House, the "Queen's House" as it was called.

Agnes kept close to the princess. Nothing Patience said to her was of any avail; she was determined; she set her lips and pushed her away.

"I will not leave the princess," she said, clinging to her gown.

"Let her alone," said Princess Henrietta; "she is my charge, Patience." So she kept her in her room, and they slept together that first night; yet, strange to tell, they knew not why, both fell asleep weeping.

"It is a bad omen," said Patience; "evil will come of it;" and she looked down sadly upon those two young faces wet with tears.

CHAPTER II
Newbolt Manor

"Well, Ann, all I can say is, that, though I hate turn-coats, I am thankful my father has ranged himself on the right side at last. Others are doing like him. We know full well that one of Cromwell's own daughters was against him. Fairfax and Falkland, those great and noble men, both fought for the liberties of England against their king. General Monk, who is bringing Charles home, was a republican; but times have changed. It needed a strong hand like Cromwell's to govern England without hereditary right, only with might. Richard Cromwell, good fellow though he be, could not do it, and he knew it from the first. He has had enough of ruling, he told me so but the other day; he is only too thankful to retire into private life, farm his own land, and smoke his pipe in peace. So we need not feel any compunction over the fact that our father has given in his adhesion to the king at last, and now I shall be at liberty to follow the dictates of my heart. I was too young to fight for our martyred king, but I am of age now, and will at once enlist in his son's service. Let us hope we may have our rightful king and our rightful liberties as well. I'm for King Charles! Hurrah!" And Reginald

Newbolt took up his hat from the table beside him and tossed it gaily into the air.

His sister, Ann Newbolt, laughed at him as she echoed his "Hurrah!"

"I am glad of it," she went on; "you cannot conceive how glad, Reginald! You can never know what pain and grief the murder of our king has been to me. I think my father felt it sorely, and yet he has always held that it was a necessity."

"He had no hand in it," cried Reginald sharply.

"Not directly," answered Ann. "I believe he would not vote either for or against, which vexed our mother greatly."

"It was a mistake," said Reginald, his young face lighting up with a certain sternness. "A man ought to know his own mind: it should be either 'yea' or 'nay'. My father would have had me enlist in Cromwell's army, young as I was; but I would not, and, thank God, I did not! I can show clean hands and a loyal heart to Charles Stuart when he lands."

"Will you go up to London with my father?" she said.

"No," he answered, in the same stern voice. "I shall go alone, and lay my virgin sword at my king's feet."

His sister looked at him with intense love and pride. They were the only children of Colonel Newbolt, who had served the Republican cause throughout the Civil Wars so well that Cromwell had rewarded him with gifts of land and property which had belonged to old Royalist families, who had either disappeared in the struggle or been dispossessed. The most important of these was the Abbey de Lisle, a lovely estate in Westmorland, amidst the moors and fells, just bordering upon Yorkshire. The house had been an old monastery of great fame. Its chapel had been one of exquisite beauty a hundred years before, but under Thomas Cromwell's ruthless hand, in the reign of Henry VIII, when monasteries and abbeys were sacked, it had been reduced to ruins, and so remained, unroofed, with the grass growing up the nave and through the aisles. Ivy clambered round the delicate pillars, and moss lay thick on the steps leading up to the broken altar.

It had been bestowed by Henry on the De Lisles, and with it, as was believed by many, a curse had been inherited, uttered by the last monk who passed out of the monastery grates. It ran thus: "The abbey and its lands shall go from the De Lisles, even as it came to them, by fire and sword".

Now the prophecy had been fulfilled. Gilbert de Lisle, the last of his race, had fallen fighting for King Charles in the Battle of Worcester. He left no children–the race was extinct.

So Cromwell had bestowed the land and all that appertained thereto, the dower-house and the abbey itself, upon Colonel Newbolt, to be his and his heirs' after him. Thither he had brought his wife and children, had spent a considerable sum of money in restoring the house, which had been injured during the war; but the chapel remained a ruin–even that was a concession–and many blamed

him for not razing it to the ground. Cromwell's soldiers had finished Henry VIII's vandalism, mutilated the few remaining statues, and broken to pieces the stained-glass window over the altar.

In the country around it was whispered that at midnight there were shadows seen coming and going, ghosts of the dead monks, whose tombs had been desecrated, but whose bodies still rested in the crypt below the altar, awaiting the great judgment day.

Reginald and Ann Newbolt had been little more than children when they came to the Abbey, and the very atmosphere of the place seemed to seize upon their imaginations. They felt kindly towards the dead monks and towards the De Lisles, whose portraits hung in the long gallery which ran the length of the quadrangle. They became, to their father's horror, Royalists. Reginald at fifteen refused to join the Parliamentary forces, though his father could have obtained for him a first-rate appointment. Had he been older, he would have gone straight over to the other side; but the final defeat of the king and his death prevented him from taking that step.

A year or two before our story opens the young man had gone abroad, had visited King Charles in Holland, and sworn allegiance to him. This was unknown to his father, and upon his return he had contented himself with following the natural course of events, fully persuaded in his own mind that when Cromwell should cease to rule England, the English nation would recall their rightful monarch.

His was not an isolated case. There were many young men–ay, old men too–in England in whom Charles's death killed republicanism and awoke once more the smouldering embers of loyalty.

As for Ann, she had not hidden her feelings any more than Lady Fairfax had done; she worshipped the martyred king. Their mother was a Puritan, of an old Puritan family, and the defection of her children was a source of infinite trouble to her. She ruled her house with Puritanical strictness. Morning and evening the whole family assembled for the reading of the Bible and for prayers. She herself dressed in the plainest attire, without furbelows or jewels of any kind. Her maids and the men who served in the house were clothed after the same fashion. Ann at one time sought to array herself something after the mode of the French court, with laces and ribbons, and with her hair curled; but her mother would not have it, and more than once she was sent to her chamber to dress herself decently; and so wisely Ann yielded to her mother, and wore the plain muslins and sober colours which marked a Puritan girl.

With her son Mistress Newbolt never discussed matters, for she knew that he would not yield to her one inch. He had told her once and for all, when he was quite a lad, that he was a king's man, and that he would never draw his sword in

any other cause. He was her own son, as steadfast as she was, in holding fast by what he considered to be right. At the present moment she was deeply grieved at her husband's action in furthering the accession of Charles II.

It was of no use for Colonel Newbolt to reason with his wife, to show her that the kingdom could not be governed by such men as Richard Cromwell, and who else was there to govern it? The nation at large called for their sovereign, for their old race of kings; and he, Colonel Newbolt, hoped and believed that the new king had learnt wisdom in exile, and would govern with equity and justice. He said as much to his wife, but Mistress Newbolt laughed scoffingly. "Did you ever know a Stuart govern wisely?" she asked. "That man, Charles Stuart, will surely bring his mother back again and lodge her in Somerset House with her French people and her priests, where so lately the Lord Protector hath lain in state. Ay, the tide has turned, and you with it; but as for me, I stand by the good cause, as befits the daughter of one who fell at Dunbar."

So there was a sharp division in the house. Mistress Newbolt spoke little, but they sometimes heard her singing slowly and fervently in her own room to the old tune sung before the victory at Dunbar:

"O Lord our God, arise and let
Thine en'mies scattered be;
And let all them that do Thee hate
Before Thy presence flee".

Hearing her one day as they stood together at the window in the picture gallery,

Ann said to her brother:

"If only she does not persuade our father to change his mind again!"

"She will not do that; my father's mind is fixed for once," answered Reginald. "He said only the other day, 'The great Lord Protector is dead; there is none to take his place; we can but trust the future to God. It were foolish for me to set my face against the new order of things. I should neither make nor mend, and I should probably lose all I have gained–my lands and my money'."

Ann bent her head. "Yes, that holds him," she said. "He loves this place; he would not part with it on any consideration."

"But suppose the rightful heir should turn up?" said Reginald.

"There is no rightful heir," answered Ann; "the last man died at Worcester, childless."

"Was he married?" asked Reginald.

"Oh, yes!" said Ann; "there is an old woman down the village who knew him, and saw his young bride when he brought her home to this very house, a

lovely girl, she said, too tender to weather the storms of these rough times; so when her husband died, she, broken-hearted, died also."

"And we have stepped into their place," said Reginald; "at least, there is no one to reproach us with it. No one seems to have any claim except perhaps some distant cousins of the late De Lisles I once heard of."

"Have you ever tried to find out aught concerning these De Lisles?" asked Ann.

"Yes I have," answered Reginald, "for I have always had a sort of feeling against ousting people out of their rights."

"Ah, well! it would make no difference," said Ann, "for my father told me that the deeds which gave us this estate were well and securely made out to him and to his heirs for ever."

"For ever!" repeated Reginald, with a light laugh; "as if there could be a for ever in this world." And he turned on his heel and went his way across the quadrangle beneath the great porch, where Ann lost sight of him.

"If he did find a lost heir," said Ann, "he is capable of throwing up his inheritance, at least if he were the master, which he is not."

As Reginald swung down the broad avenue of lime-trees, he saw his father coming towards him. It vexed him, for they had but little in common.

Colonel Newbolt was a man who had risen from the people. He had displayed considerable military talents, which Cromwell had been quick to recognize and to make use of; so he had pushed John Newbolt, stirring up his ambition and throwing titbits to him as one does to a hungry dog, and Newbolt had responded. He was not a man likely to go back, or to suffer himself to be defrauded of what he had gained honestly, as he considered, therefore he now persuaded himself that the change in his political opinions was both desirable and lawful. His position had been, according to his lights, honestly won, both in the field and in Parliament, where he had taken his seat. It was but natural that he should desire to retain his place and wealth, and hand them down to his son.

He was glad that circumstances had enabled him to join hands with Reginald, and, as is often the case, his new loyalty was somewhat exaggerated, almost to bravado.

"Well, Reggie, will you be ready to ride to-morrow?" he asked boisterously, as he came up towards him.

"Where to?" asked the youth.

"Why, to London, of course, man! We must not be laggards. I would not miss the king's entrance into the city for a hundred pounds."

"I had not thought of going so soon," said Reginald; "but if you desire it, I will accompany you."

"I do desire it," said his father; "we will go together."

"As far as London," said Reginald; "but as for presenting myself with you before the king, I cannot do that; I have no place at court."

"Tush, tush, man!" said his father, "we will soon find you one."

"Thanks! but I am in no hurry," said Reginald; "nevertheless I will ride with you. I should like to see the pageant, and shout 'Long live the king!'"

A cloud had gathered on the colonel's brow. He perceived only too clearly that his son was unwilling to appear at court under his auspices, and he did not dare to press the matter, because, though Reginald was always respectful and in a general way obedient, the father was afraid of him. He knew it was a case of "so far and no farther".

"When are you thinking of starting?" asked Reginald.

"Not later than to-morrow early," said the colonel, "so see you are ready. You had better take two men for your own service, and I will take two for myself. Look to their clothes, their horses' harness, and their appointments altogether. I would not be behind my fellows."

"Am I to go as a Cavalier or as a Roundhead?" said his son.

"Roundhead!" answered his father furiously. "Who talks of Roundheads? Are we not all Cavaliers? Why, if you play your cards well, you may yet be Sir Reginald Newbolt."

"Nay," said Reginald, "there are many better men than we are, Father, who have won knighthood fighting for the king; they must come first, we after, if at all."

"Nonsense!" said his father; "if our new king picks and chooses like that, he will make a great mistake. Why, who are bringing him back? Not Royalists, but Cromwell's men. Let him remember that!"

Reginald shrugged his shoulders. "At least I should not put myself to the fore, if I were you, Father."

"You are a fool, Reginald. If I hold back I shall seem half-hearted, and that would never do. I shall ride and meet the king on his way to London, and join his escort. Will you come with me or not?"

"As far as London we will ride together," said Reginald, "but then we will part company. You are an old soldier; I am not yet sworn in."

His father looked at him askance. "Do you doubt me, Reginald?"

"Not for one moment," answered his son; "but in this matter I desire to stand alone. We can never tell, Father; I have a clean record, which may be of use to you."

The colonel laughed. "I don't think I run much danger. Why, there is scarce a man who is welcoming Charles to London who has not fought with the Parliamentarians. He would have to take a scythe if he were to sweep off the heads of all those who have fought against him. And there is the Treaty of Breda to

protect us."

"You forget the clause," said Reginald.

"Tut, tut!" answered the colonel. "De Vere and a few others will be arrested; the rest will get off."

"Possibly," said Reginald, "but I doubt it."

At that moment the supper-bell rang out from the belfry, and father and son went together into the great hall, which had been the refectory of the monks. It was a beautiful place, with carved oak panelling and fretted roof; but Ann noticed as she sat beside her father that he was somewhat querulous that night, and drank deeper than was his wont.

"Has anything happened?" she asked Reginald after supper, looking at her father.

"Nothing that I am aware of," answered Reginald. "Good-night, little one!" And so they parted.

Father and son rode forth together the following morning on their way to London.

CHAPTER III
Somerset House

Somerset House, the English home in which Agnes now found herself, was very different from the magnificent but sombre Louvre she had left.

It stood almost in the centre of a great bend of the Thames, so that from its fine terrace could be seen, on one side the city of London, with its countless spires and its old bridge, on the other the king's palace and gardens of Whitehall and the great Abbey of Westminster.

Built by the Protector Somerset, it had been greatly improved for Queen Henrietta Maria, who had furnished it with consummate taste.

On its charming south front, looking out over the river, in full sunshine, were the queen's principal apartments: her presence-chamber, private sitting-room, and her bed-chamber, all protected by the guard-room. Her windows looked down on wide, trim lawns, in the centre of which was a basin and fountain, while beyond was a broad terraced walk, the walls of which were at each high tide washed by the Thames.

A handsome flight of steps led down to the river, where the queen's barge

was moored. The Thames was a high-road full of life and movement, for every nobleman kept a splendid barge, rowed by many men in fine liveries.

Beyond the queen's apartment were the smaller rooms occupied by the Princess Henrietta and Agnes Beaumont, who, though she was but twelve years old, was raised to the dignity of maid of honour to the princess, thus establishing her right to be always beside her in private and in public. Agnes was tall for her age and slim; the golden curls of her childhood had darkened to a rich auburn; her features were delicate but very marked; her complexion fair, with a soft pink colouring which suited well with the brown eyes and dark, long lashes. She had been a beautiful babe, and now she was a fair girl, little more than a child still, but giving great promise of a beautiful womanhood.

Young as she was, there was a stateliness in her carriage which betokened high birth. More than once the queen laughed with Patience:

"We cannot hide her dignity if we would," she said; "she carries her head too high for common folk."

Patience smiled. "Well, well," she said, "her father did the same. The proverb says, 'Pride will have a fall'. Thank God she cannot fall much lower than she has!"

"Nay," answered the queen, "we will make of her a duchess. My son the king noticed her the other day and remarked upon her beauty, and he is no mean judge," she added with a light laugh.

But Patience flushed crimson. "I would sooner his majesty did not cast his eyes on her," she said in a low voice.

"Pshaw!" answered the queen, "she is but a child."

"A child who will be a woman before we know it," said Patience. "His majesty's court is too gay for such young fledgelings."

"Well spoken, Patience!" said a man's voice behind the queen. "Why, methinks my lord Cromwell's spirit still dwells amongst us in our own house. You will be a Puritan yet, Patience."

Patience made no answer, but bowed and went out.

Then the speaker, Lord Jermyn, took the queen's hand, kissed it, led her to a chair, and at a sign from her sat down beside her.

"Patience is right," he said. "I would keep those children away from Whitehall as much as possible. The king has had but a dull time of it in exile; he is making up for it now."

Henrietta shrugged her shoulders. "My nephew's court in Paris is no better," she said, "and there Henrietta, when she is Duchess of Orleans, will have to live, and probably Agnes will go with her."

"Time enough for that," answered Lord Jermyn. "Do not brush the bloom off the flowers sooner than need be. They are the prettiest couple at court, those

two, in their young freshness. Have you spoken to the king concerning Agnes?"

"No, there's time enough," answered the queen. "It were difficult for the king to act at present. The estates have passed out of his hands, and he would raise a hornet's nest if he attempted to take them from their present owner."

"I think you are wrong," said Lord Jermyn; "the sooner such things are done the better. If his majesty cannot restore to her her rightful heritage, then he must create a new one for her."

"That is probably what he will do," said the queen. "These are early days, and his hands are full. His first duty is to do what he is doing, punish the murderers of his father."

"Ah, well! he is doing that without mercy," said Lord Jermyn, and there was a certain bitterness in his tone.

"Do you regret it?" asked Henrietta, looking up at him.

"I suppose it has to be," he answered. "But such men as Harrison and Carew are being raised to the dignity of martyrs; they die like men for the cause they believe in. There, we will not speak of it. I wish it were all over."

"I agree with you, my lord," said the young Duke of Gloucester, who had just come in. "I wish it were all over, this judging and this killing. I cannot pass in the streets but I see the scaffolds, and men dying thereon with such firmness and show of piety, with a semblance of joy in their sufferings." And the young Duke covered his face with his hands. "Mother, cannot you stop it?" he asked.

"Stop the avenging of your father's death! Nay, Henry, that I cannot do."

"Then, Mother, pray the king not to have the scaffold so near us as Charing Cross, or else I will go hence and never visit you. My Lord Jermyn, plead for me." And the prince hastily left the room, and, going along the gallery, knocked at the door of his sister's apartment.

It was Agnes who opened to him. She was startled at the pallor of his face.

"Is your royal highness ill?" she asked.

"No, Agnes, but I am sick at heart and I am sorely puzzled."

"Come in," said she, "and tell us what ails you."

The young duke entered, threw himself into an arm-chair by the hearth, covering his face with his hands. The Princess Henrietta came and knelt beside him.

"Tell me what ails you, Henry?" she asked.

"I would go hence, Henrietta, to that kingdom where my father wears an immortal crown; these earthly baubles are not worth the lives they cost. It is all so puzzling. What is truth? My Father died for it because he believed in his cause. These regicides who voted his death are as sure as he was that they are in the right. I was in the crowd to-day when a man was being dragged upon a hurdle to his shameful death. His face was placid and even cheerful. A low wretch called

out to him, 'Where is your good old cause now?' and he answered with a smile, clapping his hand upon his heart, 'Here it is, and I am going to seal it with my blood.' And as he went on his way I heard him call out, 'I go to suffer for the most glorious cause that ever was in the world.'" As if maddened by the sight he had seen, the young duke rose, saying, "It is all wrong! It is all wrong! There is no right; I wish I were out of it!"

They soothed and calmed him, and he remained all the afternoon in the princess's apartment; but Patience did not like the look of him.

"He is sickening for something," she said.

Later, when he tried to stand he could not, his head was dizzy; so they carried him to his chamber and they sent for the leech. Perceiving he had high fever, they bled him, and said, "He will be well on the morrow."

Upon the morrow he was not well; indeed, the fever had gained upon him and his mind wandered. His sister Henrietta would have gone to him, but the leech would not permit it.

"We cannot tell what he is sickening for," he said.

A few days later the whole court was scared, for it was known that the Duke of Gloucester had been attacked by that terrible disease small-pox, which made as much havoc in high places as in low slums. That he had been up to the very last with the young girls, caused both the queen and Patience great anxiety. They were removed at once from Somerset House and taken to Hampton Court, that they might breathe fresh country air, and so rid themselves of infection. Matters went badly with the prince. The disease assumed its most virulent form, and within a fortnight his wish was granted; he had passed from earth to heaven.

And so the court for a time was thrown into mourning, and Henrietta and Agnes were not permitted to return until there should be no fear of any further infection. When the first shock was over they enjoyed beyond measure their country life; those beautiful gardens laid out by Cardinal Wolsey afforded them never-ending pleasure. True, it was winter time; but the ponds and lakes were frozen over, and after much pleading and the taking of many precautions they were suffered to go upon the ice under the care of some of the gentlemen of the court. Neither of them knew how to skate. Henrietta was timid and would not even try to go alone, holding on to her cavalier's hand, and sometimes hardly moving; but Agnes grew impatient.

"Look at that young man and the girl out yonder!" she said, pointing to a couple who were skimming over the lake like birds. "It seems so easy."

As she uttered the words the couple approached and heard her. The young man was handsome, with fair hair and blue eyes, and with a certain nobility of face. The girl was like him; there was no mistaking they were brother and sister.

"You are right. It is quite easy," said the girl, as she caught Agnes's last

words. "Will you let us help you?"

"Oh, I shall be so glad, so very glad!" answered Agnes. "It is cold and stupid standing here and creeping about." And before Patience could intervene, she had given one hand to the girl, the other to the young man, and was off between them, slipping and sliding and laughing. But they steadied her and told her how to use her feet, guiding her gently, making it so easy for her that soon she began to feel at home, and with her natural boldness ventured to say:

"Now let me go, let me go alone!"

"You can't," said the young man; "better not try to-day."

"Oh, I must!" said Agnes, and so they let her go.

One step, two steps, then she staggered; but they caught her before she had time to fall.

"You will soon learn; children always do," said the young man.

"Child!" she cried; "I am not a child. I am over twelve years old, and maid of honour to Princess Henrietta Maria. Who are you?" And she threw up her head and looked him in the face.

His blue eyes laughed quizzically: "I am Reginald Newbolt," he said, "and this is my sister Ann. We are not grand people like you."

"I am not grand at all; I am nobody," Agnes answered, colouring. "I must go; Patience is signing to me, and Princess Henrietta is shivering on the side of the lake. Will you come again to-morrow and help me? I should like to be friends with you."

"We shall be only too glad," answered Ann. "We will come every day as long as the frost lasts. Now we will take you back to your people."

They took her hands and made her skate in time with them.

"To think I can go so well with you and not alone!" she said. "It is annoying."

"You need not fear," said Reginald. "In a few days you will go alone; you have the knack of it."

They reached the edge of the lake where the princess and Patience were standing.

"Oh, it is so cold!" exclaimed the princess, shivering; "and it is very imprudent of you to go off like that, Agnes."

"I am sorry to have vexed you," the girl answered; "but it was just lovely. Will you not try, Princess? This is Mr. Reginald Newbolt and his sister Ann."

Doffing his cap, Reginald bowed to the princess and Ann curtsied. Henrietta having recovered from her ill-temper, as she always did quickly, had seen that to all outward appearance they were gentlefolk. She gave them a stately bow, then repeated:

"Now we must go home, Agnes; I am frozen."

"I must take off my skates first," answered Agnes, and she sat down at the

edge of the lake while Patience undid the straps. Then she rose.

The princess took Patience's arm and turned towards home. Agnes followed with Mr. Delarry, who said:

"You make friends easily, Mistress Agnes. Do you know who that young man is?"

"Did you not hear me tell the princess that he is Mr. Reginald Newbolt, and that it is his sister who is with him?" she asked.

"Well, they make a handsome couple," said Mr. Delarry. "Newbolt! Did you say this man's name was Newbolt?"

"Yes," said Agnes; "do you know them?"

"I know him after a fashion," answered Mr. Delarry. "His father is, I believe, Colonel Newbolt. He is, like many another, an old Parliamentarian who, to feather his nest, turned king's man and welcomed the king back. The young man is seeking a commission in the king's guards and will probably get it, to the detriment of other and better men."

Agnes's face clouded over. "I am sorry his father was on the wrong side," she said.

"You need not trouble, or you will have to be sorry for many," said Mr. Delarry; "but this young fellow is a new recruit, and never drew his sword in the late war. They say he refused a commission in Cromwell's army."

"I am glad of that," said Agnes, her face brightening. "There will be no harm in my skating with them to-morrow, will there, Mr. Delarry?"

"None whatever, if Mistress Patience sees none. He is a handsome fellow, Mistress Agnes, and will make a fine cavalier."

"I like handsome men," she answered, with childish glee; "and his sister too is pleasant, but she is prim."

"I hear her mother is a strict Puritan," said Mr. Delarry, "and that the colonel had much trouble in getting her to come up to London with his son and daughter. She will not show herself at court, much to his displeasure. Have a care, Mistress Agnes, or you will be turning Puritan too!"

"Oh, no!" Agnes answered, laughing. "I do not like them at all, at least the few of them I have seen in the streets. Patience has pointed them out to me; they are mostly dressed in black, with white ruffles and high hats; they look very stern. The women have black cloaks and white coifs. I like our own pretty clothes best, and our gay cavaliers with their broad hats and sweeping plumes."

Delarry smiled at her. "You are such a child, Miss Agnes, still. I thought you were to be a grown woman when you came to England."

"Oh, it is coming, coming very fast!" she said. "Good-bye, Mr. Delarry!" And she left him, and ran forward to join the princess.

"You talk to everybody," said Henrietta to her reproachfully. "I never knew

such a child. What have you been talking to Mr. Delarry about now?"

"Only about my new friends," answered Agnes. "Oh, you will be nice, Henrietta, and skate with them to-morrow, won't you? They just fly over the ice. It is the most delicious sensation I ever knew. They say in two or three days I shall go alone, and then," she added mischievously, "let who can catch me."

CHAPTER IV
New Friends

On the following day Henrietta was nothing loath to have good sport with Agnes, and Patience was forced to yield to their desires. Down to the lake they went, found the Newbolts there, and after a little persuasion Henrietta ventured on the ice. They brought a chair for her, and she was content at first to let Mr. Delarry push her; but Agnes gave her hands to Ann and Reginald and went off. Presently she came back alone, so sure of foot was she; her figure was so light and easy.

"Do try," she said to Henrietta; "it is just lovely!" And the princess let herself be persuaded.

Other gentlemen and ladies joined them, and there was much laughter and many tumbles, but no one was hurt. The time passed quickly, until the winter day was drawing to a close, and still they were not tired.

"I should never be tired," said Agnes, her face rosy with the keenness of the air, and her eyes very bright.

This went on for well-nigh a week. The court party they were called; they were so happy. All the commoners made way for them as they went hither and thither, gliding over the ice. Indeed, people came from afar and stood on the edge of the lake looking at them.

The princess, Agnes, Ann, and Reginald, were the principal actors in that scene. The two girls, muffled in their soft furs, with their petticoats above their ankles, showing their pretty feet, were a sight to rejoice the heart, as the sight of all young things must be. The winter sunshine glinted in Agnes's bright hair, and lit up her dark eyes with the happiest, softest merriment.

"I never saw such a pretty creature!" said Reginald to Ann, when she had left them after the day's sport.

"Take care. You will be losing your heart to her!" said Ann, laughing.

"I have done that long ago," he answered. "The first time she looked at me she took my heart away with her. If I had not been a king's man before, she would have made me one."

"She is but twelve years old," said Ann, laughing; "you will have to wait long for her, Reginald."

"And the time will seem but short," he answered, "if I may but see her once and again. Do you know her name, Ann?"

"Agnes, I have heard; nothing more," she answered. "But that young man, Delarry, said casually that she had been the darling of the queen-mother and the princess ever since she was a baby. Nobody knows aught about her save the queen and Mistress Patience, who carried her over to France when she was almost in swaddling clothes."

"I was sure of it," said Reginald. "She is a child of one of the great old families; she looks it, my little sweetheart!" And from that time forth Reginald hovered round Agnes, and people laughed at her and called him her knight, and she was mighty pleased and made no little boast of her handsome cavalier.

It was all so open, so fresh, this budding love; without depth or passion, it had sprung up like the flowers, and like them was pure and serene. There was no past, no future for those young creatures; they lived just for the hour, as with flying feet they skimmed the ice, the fresh, sharp air cutting their faces. The joy of life was with them and upon them as it never would be again. They did not recognize how with each fleeting moment a joy-note sounded and died away. In after-years they would listen for the echo with that intense longing of hearts which have known unalloyed happiness; would they hear it again, or would it go from them for ever, with the flitting moments? Blessed are those who like them have heard it, whose lips have uttered the words, "I am so happy, so happy!"

They came like a song of joy to Agnes's lips as she went hither and thither with Reginald beside her. He, bending towards her, said with a note of triumph in his voice:

"I would this might last for ever, my little sweetheart—-"

"For ever!" she repeated. "For ever! Why not?"

He had not the heart to cast a shadow on that joy. Why tell her nothing lasts for ever? And so he only answered, "Why not?"

On the morrow the order came: "Back to Somerset House; the air is purified; Christmas is coming; you must come back."

Before leaving, the princess sent for Reginald Newbolt and his sister, and they bade each other farewell. "It will not be for long," said the princess. "I will ask my mother, the queen, to make you one of her maids of honour, Mistress Ann; so you may live with us, for I have taken a great liking to you."

"I am afraid the queen will not favour me," was the quiet answer. "I have

not been brought up after your foreign fashion. I do not know your ways or manners. I am a plain English girl."

"Oh, that does not matter at all! We have many English ladies in our suite, and the queen loves them well."

"But my mother would not let me dwell in the queen's household; she says it is godless," said Ann, colouring deeply; "it would, I think, break her heart."

"Ah well," said Henrietta carelessly, "you must please yourself if you are so over-strict."

"Say rather, I must obey my mother," answered Ann; "but nevertheless I am grateful to you and thank you." And she stooped and kissed the princess's hand. So they parted.

As she was going out Patrick Delarry met her. He was an Irishman who had been with the queen in France, and of earthly possessions had few; but he was a true Irishman, full of jokes and fun, taking things lightly even as the Stuarts did, and, because of this very carelessness, the noble sweetness of Ann had attracted him.

They met in the corridor leading to the grand staircase. He paused, bowed before her, saying, "This is no farewell, Mistress Ann; we shall meet in London."

"Maybe we shall; maybe we shall not," returned Ann. "The princess is very good and desires to give me a place at court, but my mother would not hear of such a thing; she is strict in her conduct, and has brought her children up as strictly."

"I am sorry," said Delarry, "but I daresay she is right. Still, that will not prevent our meeting, Mistress Ann. Your father is serving the king; your brother will have a commission in the Guards; surely you will mix in good society?"

"I greatly fear not," answered Ann. "My mother says that young maidens should remain at home, and that the court is full of snares."

Delarry laughed. "It is pretty bad," he said, "but you will remember that if you owe your duty to your mother, you owe it also to the king, your master. If he bids you attend upon his sister, surely you will not refuse. Somerset House is not Whitehall."

He spoke with significance, and Ann coloured slightly, for she knew well that the king's palace was far too gay and frivolous a place for young maidens who respected themselves.

"If I am summoned to Somerset House," she said, "and my father desires I should go there, I hope my mother will let me, for the princess is very sweet to me and my heart inclines towards her. As for little Agnes," and she laughed lightly, "I do not think we shall lose sight of her. My brother has lost his heart to her."

"That is very evident," said Mr. Delarry; "she is a pretty child."

"I must bid you adieu," said Ann. She curtsied and went quickly on her way down the corridor. Delarry stood a second and watched her till she disappeared.

"A pretty Puritan maiden; I didn't know they were so smart," he thought. "It will not be my fault if we do not meet again before long, Mistress Ann." And so he too went his way.

That same afternoon the princess and Agnes, with Patience, entered the royal coach, and were driven back to Somerset House. They were neither of them very cheerful, and the way seemed long and cold, for the air was heavy with snow ready to fall. London looked dark and sombre when they entered it, with only the great torches flaring as the torch-bearers held them on high in front of the coach to guide the driver through the narrow streets of the city. The courtyard of Somerset House was also lit up; but it was a sad home-coming, nevertheless, and the queen-mother welcomed them with tears.

"I do not know how it is," she said to her daughter. "I loved this country once and I was happy; now I am miserable here. I would go back to France; this death of your brother is an evil omen."

"Nay, Mother, do not go just yet," said Henrietta. "We have come home at a bad season of the year. You tell me that the spring is lovely in England; let us wait and see;" then, sitting before the fire, she and Agnes told her what good sport they had at Hampton Court, and they spoke of Reginald and Ann.

The queen frowned. "Patience is over-indulgent to you," she said. "You have no right to make the acquaintance of strangers, especially of these upstarts. You say the father is Colonel Newbolt; he was one of Cromwell's men. Now, because it suits himself and his purse, he is a king's man. To-morrow, if it suits him, he will be the people's man again. I am sick of it all."

"Do you not think it well, Mother, to encourage these people to become faithful lieges to the king?" said Henrietta.

"Faithful!" said the queen, with a mocking laugh. "I have ceased to look for faithfulness anywhere. As soon as you are married, Henrietta–and that will, I trust, be before long–we will go back to France. Your brother's court does not suit me, and his friends do not suit me. Your brother, the Duke of York, is enamoured of Clarendon's daughter, Ann Hyde, and there has been much scandal–a secret marriage. It has set the people talking. I tell you I am sick of it all. There is a vulgarity which savours not of kings in the whole tone of England now."

Her daughter did not answer her; she could not–she did not understand what was amiss. She was but a girl still. When she was a woman she understood better.

Fortunately it was nearly Christmas time, and so that season brought a certain amount of gaiety and brightness. They were not accustomed to make as much of it in France as in England, where, then as now, everyone rejoiced,

everyone made merry. It had gone out of fashion to a great extent during the Commonwealth, but people were glad to go back to their old ways and drag the Yule-log into the great hall. It was a good season for the poor, when before great fires bullocks and sheep were roasted whole in the streets. There were mummers, and morris-dances, and all manner of sports.

To Agnes's great disgust a week or two before Christmas she received a letter from Ann, telling her that they were going away down to their country place, because their mother could not abide in London. She was willing to feast the poor in the country and those who needed help, but the frivolities of London did not suit her, and she would not stay there. Indeed, she was afraid her mother would not let her come back, which grieved her sorely, for she loved her friends, and would have gladly served the Princess Henrietta.

When she received this letter Agnes wept bitterly.

"Is there no means by which she could be brought to court?" she said to Patience.

"I know of none except by the king's command," said Patience, "and unfortunately the queen-mother is not well inclined towards the Newbolts."

"Where is their country place?" asked Agnes.

"How should I know?" answered Patience. "They are new people who have old lands which by rights belong to others."

She spoke bitterly, and Agnes noticed it.

"Well," she said, "I like the Newbolts; I met the colonel last week when he was presented to the king. He is a fine man, but the queen received him coldly; and when I asked the princess why her mother did so, she said, 'Because she misdoubts all old Parliamentarians. There is not one of them but had a hand in my father's death'."

"'Well, at least Reginald hadn't,'" I said. "He was very young at the time, and both he and Ann have told me that when they heard of the king's death they wept and stamped their feet at their father, saying it was a shame, for which their mother flogged them both and sent them to bed with bread and water. 'But it only made us more loyal,' Ann said. By the bye, Patience, do you know I saw Reginald ride past the other day on his way to Whitehall in the full uniform of the King's Guard? He looked so handsome."

"Where did you see him from?" asked Patience.

"Oh, from the stained mullion window in the corridor behind my room. I often go and stand there because I see into the Strand. I think I like the town better than the river."

"Happily, it is a stained window, so people do not see you," said Patience. "It is not seemly for a maiden to be staring on to the public road."

"But people do see me," said Agnes. "Reginald saw me, and he saluted. You

know he is my knight, Patience."

"I know I will not suffer you to behave thus," said Patience. "A cavalier saluting a maiden at her window, above all things a maiden in Somerset House! It must not be, Agnes; you are old enough to know better."

"I do not know what I am," answered the girl impetuously. "Sometimes I am a child, sometimes a girl, sometimes I am almost a grown woman, as suits your fancy, Patience." And the big tears gathered in her eyes and rolled down her face.

"My pretty, my pretty, do not weep," said Patience, and she put her arm round the girl's waist and drew her upon her lap. "You must mind what I am going to say to you, Agnes," she continued. "You are not like other girls, and you must be circumspect. You have no one to defend you from evil tongues, no one to lift you up if you were to fall; you are alone. The queen loved your mother; your father died for her husband, and so she harbours you; but she may not always do so. The day may come when she will go back to France, and that will be no place for you when the princess is married."

"Why not–why not?" said Agnes. "I shall go with her."

"Not if I can help it," answered Patience. "I love you too well, my dove, to let you scorch your wings in the court of the Palais Royal and Versailles. We must remain in England, Agnes, and the king must pension you; it is your due."

"But have I no kith or kin, no one belonging to me?" asked the girl.

"No one," answered Patience, "at least that I know of."

"And did my father and mother leave me no wealth and no lands?" said Agnes.

"What gold they had," said Patience, "I took to France with me, and all these years it has served us. There is not much left, and as for lands they are forfeited. Cromwell did what he chose with them and gave them to whom he would. So you see, my child, you must be prudent. One thing you have which you must hold–your good name."

"Agnes Beaumont," said the girl.

"That is not all, you have another name," said Patience, looking at her, "but I have sworn not to reveal it to you until your wedding day or till you are of age."

"Why not?" she asked. "Why should not I know my own name?"

"Because it might be a danger to you," answered Patience. "There are those who might wish you ill and do you wrong. When you have a husband you will have someone to defend you; when you are of age you must judge for yourself."

"Does no one except you know who I am?" asked Agnes.

"Yes, the queen-dowager knows, and the king," said Patience. "When he gives you back what is yours, then he will tell you himself what your station is."

Tears gathered in Agnes's eyes.

”I do not like it,” she said. ”Have I anything to be ashamed of?” she asked, her voice trembling.

”Ashamed!” exclaimed Patience. ”No, indeed! far from that. I tell you it is for your own personal good, to shield you from those who have taken your lands from you and who might resent their being restored to you. You are the last of your race; your very birth has been hidden, but it will all come right one day if only you will be patient.”

”Very well,” said Agnes, ”I will ask no questions; I will wait. It does not really matter, only I heard someone say the other day, ’Agnes Beaumont! What Beaumont is that?’ and no one seemed to know.”

”It was your mother’s name,” said Patience; ”you have a right to bear it, for you were christened Agnes Beaumont. Your father’s name alone is wanting, and that you will surely claim one day, either you or your husband for you.”

”Oh, that husband!” said Agnes, laughing; ”I wonder who he will be!”

”A noble gentleman, I trust,” said Patience, ”who will give you back all that you have lost.”

Agnes pouted.

”I do not care to go to any man as a beggar girl,” she answered proudly.

”That you surely will not,” answered Patience. ”Have no fear. And now let me dress you. The princess is going to Whitehall with the queen to-night, and you are to accompany her. It is a mistake, a great mistake,” continued Patience; ”you are too young.”

”Ah! but I like it,” said Agnes; ”I like going to the king’s court, and, if the Princess Henrietta goes, surely it cannot hurt me.”

Patience shook her head.

”I am not so sure of that,” she said.

”Oh, well, never mind!” said Agnes; ”you dear old thing, you are always frightened lest something should befall me. Let me wear my satin gown embroidered with rosebuds to-night; it becomes me well.”

”You cannot,” said Patience; ”the court is in mourning still, have you forgotten?”

”Ah! yes, I forgot,” said Agnes. ”The poor duke. Well, give me my lilac gown with the black knots.” And thus soberly attired she went to court.

CHAPTER V
May-Day

Time flies for the young; the days, the weeks, the months seem to have wings; they heed it not, they are glad, because each day is a new joy, a new surprise.

So it was with the Princess Henrietta and Agnes. They had no cares, at least Agnes had none. She loved the winter, the biting cold, the snow, the frost; she would go out with Patience in all weathers, and ofttimes with the princess to St. James's Park, where they would skate and otherwise disport themselves. Gradually, however, Agnes fell into the background; she was too young to be at all the court parties, and Patience observed this to the queen-dowager.

"She is but a child, and the late hours are injuring her," she said; "let her abide at home with me." And the queen acquiesced; indeed, she knew full well that the king's court was no place for the young.

Arrangements were being made for Henrietta's marriage to the Duke of Orleans, and many noblemen and courtiers came over from France to greet her. Her time was much taken up with all this, so that Agnes naturally drifted into a quieter world, and was seen less and less in public, excepting when there were grand receptions at Somerset House. Some of these she was permitted to attend, for girls were older for their years in those days than they are now; still, she was not as much at home in the court circle as she had been when she was only a spoilt child. She did not care for, or rather she did not understand, the compliments which were sometimes addressed to her–for she was very pretty, nay, she was beautiful, and attracted not a little attention from women as well as men. She was a general favourite, and if Patience would have allowed it she would have had many invitations and have been made much of. But Patience was a very dragon of propriety.

"You shall not go," she said. "You are too young."

"I do not care to go," Agnes answered. "I cannot abide it."

More than once Patience found her asleep, her pillow wet with tears. She did not question her, she guessed what it was. The first sorrow in her life would soon come. In June the Princess Henrietta was to be married, and then they would be parted and she would be alone.

"That will not be good for the child," Patience reasoned. "What shall I do with her, where shall I take her?"

A curious thing happened. Ann Newbolt had returned to London and little by little had wound herself into Patience's good graces. More than once they had met in the park when Agnes was taking her morning airing. Ann was given to coming thither at the same hour with two dogs which she brought with her to give them a free run.

"I could not be without them," she would say, "and so I begged Father to let me bring them up from the manor for company's sake. Our big London house is so dreary."

Now Agnes had never had any animals of her own, and her delight was great when, after a few outings, Cæsar and Juno–for so they were called–learned to know her, and would bound across the park when they saw her coming, and well-nigh knock her down with joy. She would run with them, she would play with them. At first this was much to Patience's displeasure; but Ann had her old nurse with her, and she said to Patience:

"Let the child be, let her run and play; she is too much cooped up in your palace. Do you not see she is growing pale?"

Ann chimed in, "She is like a hot-house plant; you are forcing her, Mistress Patience."

"Not I," returned Patience, "but those who surround her, those who do not understand that she is a child."

"Why do you not take her into the country and let her run wild for a year or two?" asked Ann's nurse. "Then you would bring her back as fresh and fair as a rose. Court life is not good for children."

"I would I could do it," said Patience; "but I am not mistress."

"Shall you go back to France with the queen?" asked Ann.

"No, I will not do that," said Patience; "I would rather carry her away and hide her. King Charles's court is bad enough; what the Duke of Orleans will be I dare not even think. No, I will keep my sweet lamb unspotted if I can. She knows no evil, therefore she sees none, though she be hedged in with wrong-doers. But that will not always be. I promised her dear mother I would protect her, and so, help me God, I will."

"You will do well," said Ann. "She is a sweet flower, and worthy of all care; I would she were my sister."

"I pray I may live to see her an honest man's wife," said Patience.

Such conversations as these were frequent between the two, Patience not having the remotest idea that it was the Newbolts who possessed the lands which should have been Agnes's heritage.

The Newbolts were equally ignorant that Agnes was a De Lisle. To them she was, and had ever been, plain "Agnes Beaumont", the queen's favourite and the Princess Henrietta's devoted companion.

But enlightenment was soon to come to Patience. The winter passed, and the spring began to show itself. The trees in the park were budding green; April showers succeeded March winds, and there was much gaiety in London. Gilded coaches went and came in the streets, barges floated up the Thames, and no one troubled, though many knew, that the royal exchequer was well-nigh empty. The people adored their king as they had never adored his saintly father. Wherever he passed there were shouts of, "Long live the king!" and his smiles and bows were received with enthusiasm.

Never had a king been so popular. There was laughter and merriment everywhere, dancing and songs even in the streets. The only place where any decorum was observed was at Somerset House. There the queen-dowager dwelt, and the people did not love her. She never had been a favourite. Many people were ready to lay the blame of her dead husband's errors upon her shoulders, so they frowned upon the queen-dowager and her sombre court, while they laughed at the merry court at Whitehall, and would not listen to the evil reports of the goings-on within its precincts.

The pendulum had swung back; the order of the day had changed; they treated Charles, his follies, his sins, as they might have treated the peccadilloes of a spoilt child. When he rode forth in his gilded coach or went on horseback through the city with his favourites and his brother, the Duke of York, in his rich attire of gold and satin, his long, curled wig, great hat with plumes which swept almost on to his shoulders, the people were wild with delight, and would press round him in their eagerness; and he would speak to them, calling them his good people, bidding them make way for him, with that wonderful charm of manner, that smile, which was the inherent gift of the Stuart race, and won every heart. They cared not what he did nor what he said; he was their king, their chosen one, their beloved. If he squandered money they laughed, and hardly grumbled at supplying his extravagances. Had he not suffered dire poverty in those evil days when Cromwell sat in his seat and the Puritan preachers thundered their maledictions against him from St. Paul's Cross? Every old English custom which could be raked up was brought to the fore, to the extreme delight of all men. He touched for the king's evil, and the sick believed they were cured. In the people's imaginings he could not do wrong, though wrong stared them in the face.

In olden days there had stood in the Strand a big May-pole, which was decorated on the first of May with flowers and ribbons, and round which sports, and dances, and great merriment were wont to take place; but when the Puritans were masters they exclaimed against this device, as they did against everything that savoured of pleasure, which they considered unholy. So the ancient May-pole, which stood a hundred feet high in the Strand, had been hewn to the ground; there were no more sports on May-Day. Indeed, there were few sports in England at all during that season of strict observance of the Sabbath.

Young men and maidens well-nigh forgot how to dance. They went softly, they laughed but little, because at any sign of outward rejoicing their elders frowned upon them. The faces of the men seemed to grow longer, the pretty curls on the maidens' heads were smoothed away beneath tight-fitting caps. It was not a genial time, and so now, when the sun shone, and the flowers burst forth, there arose a gentle murmur throughout the land: "Let us have our May-poles again."

London was, as usual, the first place whence this cry proceeded, and thousands responded to it–the king and the Duke of York among the foremost. Yes, they would have a May-pole, larger and finer than any previous one.

The citizens of London determined to make a display of their loyalty. We read in an old tract of the times, called "The City's Loyalty Displayed", how this tree was a most choice and remarkable piece. "'Twas made below bridge" (that is, below London Bridge), and brought in two parts up to Scotland Yard, near the king's palace of Whitehall, and thence it was conveyed, on April 14, 1661, to the Strand, to be erected there. It was brought with streamers flourishing before it, drums beating all the way, and other sorts of music. It was so long that landsmen could not possibly raise it; therefore the Duke of York, Lord High Admiral of England, commanded twelve seamen to come and officiate in this business.

They came, and brought their cables, pulleys, and other tackle, along with six great anchors. After these were brought three crowns, borne by three men, bareheaded, and a streamer displayed all the way before them, drums playing, and other music; people thronging the streets with great shouts and acclamations all day long. The May-pole then being joined together and looped about with bands of iron, the crown and cane ("the sceptre"), with the king's arms richly gilded, was placed on the head of it. A large hoop like a balcony was about the middle of it. Then, amidst sounds of trumpets and drums, and loud cheering, and the shouts of the people, the May-pole, far more glorious, bigger, and higher than any that had preceded it, was raised upright, "which", we are told, "highly pleased the merry monarch and the illustrious prince, the Duke of York, and the little children did much rejoice, ancient people did clap their hands, saying, 'the golden days had begun to appear'. A party of morris-dancers came forward, finely decked with purple scarves and their half shirts, with tabor and pipe–the ancient music–and danced round about the May-pole."

This went on for some time, and there never was seen again such a May-day as in this year of Our Lord, 1661.

From the windows of Somerset House Princess Henrietta and Agnes watched the ceremonies. The putting up and the decking of this token that "the summer had come ", aroused a more tenacious loyalty than ever.

Day by day, as they watched, Agnes's excitement increased; it was no use for Patience to tell her she should not be seen at the open window.

"I must, I must!" she cried; and, indeed, it would have been cruel to hinder her.

All over England that May-Day was remembered long afterwards. The king had come into his rights again, the people had come into theirs, and they would not be gainsaid.

As for Agnes, she tried to put care on one side, though she knew that Hen-

rietta's marriage loomed not far distant; sometimes she wondered what was to become of her when it was accomplished. Once or twice she approached Patience on the subject, but she frowned and answered her:

"Do not trouble, child. Think ye that you are of less account than the sparrows on the house-tops or the lilies in the field?" And she would hurry away, leaving Agnes with her own thoughts and her own fears.

No wonder if on the child's face there came a serious expression, a certain sadness, which is often to be seen on the faces of children who are motherless and fatherless, a sort of yearning for something, they know not what, that has been denied to them.

And yet Agnes was not unhappy. Mistress Newbolt had refused at first to come up to London, but the colonel had insisted she should do so.

"It is injuring Ann's prospects," he said, "and I cannot entertain guests in a house where there is no mistress." Therefore she had been obliged to yield, but she did so only in so far that she ruled the servants and saw that there was no wilful waste. For herself she remained in her own apartments, and would not join in the entertainments which her husband delighted in, neither would she permit Ann to do so.

Thus it came to pass that Agnes and Ann drew closer and closer one to the other. Not a day passed but they saw one another. Agnes delighted to go to their house, and, strange to tell, Mistress Newbolt took a vast liking to her. She would let her follow her into her store closet; she would let her watch her make the dainty comfits for which she was renowned; and she would send her away with all manner of good things piled in a little basket which she kept for that purpose. But if she did her these kindnesses, she insisted that every time she came to see her she should go with her to her closet, and there she would read to her some portion of the Bible and would pray with her. Agnes conformed meekly to her desires. She looked upon her as a saint, and though she was stern and cold, and never caressed her, there was a certain motherliness about her which appealed to the child's heart.

So the month of June came, and the Princess Henrietta was carried over to France to meet the saddest fate that can befall any woman, namely to marry a bad man. Agnes thought her heart would break when she bade her and the queen adieu. Indeed, she fell quite sick with sorrow, lay on her bed, turned her face to

the wall, and would not be comforted.

CHAPTER VI
A First Parting

Queen Henrietta had been loath to part from Agnes, and she would have kept the child about her person had it been possible for her to do so, and had Agnes been a few years older; but to take a child just budding into girlhood alone, without any other companion, or without any definite object in view, to the French court seemed folly.

It had been settled that Patience should make a home for her in England. The queen had spoken seriously to the king about Agnes, and he had settled a pension on her, "until I can do better," he said. "But we must first find out to whom her estates have passed. I'll enquire into the matter. I do not suppose I shall be able to restore them to her; but something shall be done either when she marries or comes of age. Till then I will give her a suite of apartments at Hampton Court."

"That is good," said Henrietta, "and my little lady shall have her town house too, for I will leave Patience in charge of my private apartments in Somerset House. I do not care for all manner of people to have access to them, and so Agnes can come to town when she likes."

"And to court when she is old enough," said Charles, with a merry laugh and twinkling eye.

"No, your majesty," answered Henrietta, "she must wait for that till my return, and until her position is settled. She has no womankind to watch over her except Patience, so she must abide at home."

"As you please," said Charles carelessly. So the matter was settled.

Henrietta explained all this to Patience, Agnes standing by and listening. They even went out to Hampton Court and looked at the apartments which the king had ordered to be prepared for her. The rooms were bright enough, looking out upon a sort of private garden, in a wing of the palace. The queen thought them poorly furnished, and added many little comforts and graceful remembrances, which made them look more home-like.

At times over this unfortunate queen's soul, seared and wounded by sorrow, the old gaiety, the warm, affectionate nature with which she was endowed,

would once more show itself, oftener perhaps to Agnes than to anyone else, even oftener than to her own daughter.

"She grows so like her mother," she said one day to Patience, tears filling her eyes, and then she would give Agnes some present, and make much of her.

"My little girl," she said at parting, "it costs me a great deal to leave you behind, but I think Patience is right. You have much to learn. Apply yourself to study; both you and Henrietta have been neglected. It does not matter for her–the women at the French court are for the most part ignorant, some of them can scarcely read or write; but your home will be in England–your father and mother desired it–and some women are very learned in England. I have left you good teachers, a tutor, and a governess, so see that your time is well employed."

Then she kissed her.

It was a very lonely little maiden who walked on the terrace of Somerset House, a beautiful dove-coloured greyhound, which the queen had given her, her only companion. The animal kept close to its little mistress, thrusting its long muzzle into her hand as if to console her, its speaking brown eyes looking up at her as if to say, "Never mind. We are both young; we shall see them again"; and so she paced up and down the terrace, then, bidding Duke lie down and wait for her, she entered the chapel–a lovely piece of architecture, the work of Inigo Jones–the doors of which were always kept open, though, now the queen was gone, they would be closed.

It required considerable tact in those difficult religious times to bring up a child born of English parents in the midst of the French court. But Patience was a wise woman, broad-minded, and with what was then an almost unknown quality, a vast toleration. She held an anomalous position in the queen's household, even as Agnes herself did; but the marked deference the queen-mother showed her, made it evident that she was a person of high station. The education both of Agnes and the Princess Henrietta was left, to a very great extent, in her hands; it was the same with the religious teaching, the princess had the court chaplain, but Agnes knelt with Patience and learnt the great truths of religion from her lips; she guarded her soul as she guarded her body, she would allow of no religious discussions in her presence. To the grand services of the Church of Rome she did not take her. "You are too young, you would not understand," she said; but morning and evening she would go with her into one of the many beautiful churches in Paris, and in silence and devotion watch and pray. So the child learnt all reverence and the great gospel truths. The Bible was a familiar book to her, read in their quiet chamber. "When you are older you will learn many other things," she told her; and since they had come to England Agnes had awakened to the knowledge that the Christian Church was divided against itself. Sometimes the thought troubled her. Her soul was growing, she was striving to see and un-

derstand. Instinctively now, in this her first sorrow, she sought comfort where alone she knew it could be found, and so she entered the beautiful chapel and knelt and prayed that her friends might be given back to her. Then she crossed her arms on the back of the prie-Dieu, and her tears flowed fast and little sobs escaped her. Suddenly she felt a hand laid on her shoulder, and looking up she saw Patience. They both gazed into each other's eyes and smiled.

"Be comforted, sweetheart," whispered Patience; and the beauty of her face, the saintliness of it, struck Agnes as it had never done before.

In truth, Patience, even in appearance, was by no means an ordinary woman. She had a marked personality, was tall and slight, holding herself very erect, always dressed in black, plainly but not inelegantly. She had a certain distinction about her. In age she could not have been more than forty, and she did not look that even. Under her white coif her brown hair waved softly; there were no wrinkles or marks of age upon her face; her hazel eyes were clear, but with an ineffable sadness in them–indeed, sadness was the note which Patience struck. She was seldom seen to smile; even when Agnes was a little child she played with her sadly; but she loved her so intensely that the child did not feel this sadness. She would sooner be with Patience than with anyone; Patience meant home to her. She seldom openly caressed her, but then her whole life toward Agnes was one caress, and instinctively the child felt this.

Now she rose quickly from her knees, and threw her arms round her neck, murmuring:

"At least I have you, my own dear Patience; you have not forsaken me."

"Did you think that possible, my darling?" And taking her by the hand, she led her out into the open. With a short bark of joy and a prolonged whine, Duke sprang upon them.

"I was looking for you," said Patience, "and could not find you. Duke saw me coming along the terrace, and bounded whining to me. 'Where is Agnes?' I asked him. He turned, leapt towards the chapel, looking round to see that I followed him."

"Ah, he is a dear dog!" said Agnes, laying her hand on his head. "Why were you looking for me, Patience? You knew I should not be far."

"Because you forget you are alone now," was the quiet answer, "and you must not wander away; it is not safe for a young girl like you to be alone. You know how seldom I left you and the princess, and then you had an attendant."

"I thought that was for the princess," said Agnes, "because of her high dignity. It does not matter about me; I am nobody."

A slight smile played round Patience's mouth. "We are all somebody," she said; "we have our honour to safeguard, and a young maiden cannot be seen alone, in these times especially."

"Is that why I am to have a governess?" asked Agnes sharply. "I do not like it; let me stay with you, Patience."

"For you to run away as you have done now?" was the answer. "Besides, you need someone to teach you many things of which I am ignorant."

"And I am to have a tutor too; I cannot require both," Agnes continued. "We shall be happier alone, Patience, you and I. I will promise you I will work and never run away; and when you want to leave me, to see after the queen's affairs, Ann Newbolt will come and sit with me or stay with me if her mother will let her. I cannot have a governess sending me to the right and to the left; it would drive me wild; *that would* make me run away."

"Well, we will see," said Patience; "I am not much inclined for it."

"Oh, you are not inclined for it at all!" said Agnes. "Think of someone always present in our quiet evenings, or when we stroll about as we are doing now; a third party would not be pleasing to either of us. If I must needs always have someone with me, then there is old Martha; surely she will frighten anyone away, and snarl like an angry dog if man, woman, or child come within ten yards of me."

Again Patience smiled–she never laughed. It was a sad smile, as if there lay beneath it a whole world of memories.

They moved to the edge of the terrace and looked up and down the river. The waters sparkled and shone in the sunlight of this lovely June day. Barges went and came, boatmen shouted to one another, the sky was blue, the light of the sun was dazzling: it was one of those days which have a touch of Italy in them–the very air was warm with perfume, and the scene was so bright that it seemed to sweep away the great sadness which had oppressed Agnes.

"Yes, you will think about it, Patience," she persisted. "We must be happy together, you and I. After all, I knew the princess would go one day."

Once more the tears gathered in her eyes; but they did not fall, for coming towards them was Reginald Newbolt.

He made them a deep bow, his plumed hat sweeping the ground, and his young handsome face alight with kindly sympathy. He saw the tears in Agnes's eyes, but taking no note of them, said:

"My mother has sent me to ask you on this lovely day to go with her in our barge to the park at Greenwich, which adjoins the palace. It is well in the country, and the air is fresher there than it is here in the city. You must come, because my mother so seldom proposes anything approaching a diversion. I have not known her go beyond the precincts of her own home for years. I think, Mistress Agnes, you have thrown your spell upon her."

Agnes blushed. "I should like to go," she said. "Can we, Patience?"

"Why not?" was the quiet answer, for Patience knew that Mistress Newbolt

had conceived this plan to divert Agnes from her sadness.

"Yes, we will go," she said. "Where is the barge?"

"At London Bridge. You can use your own till you get there, then you will use ours. Ann and mother will be waiting for us."

A barge not unlike a Venetian gondola always stood moored to the steps leading down from the terrace to the water's edge, so they had not far to go. The distance to London Bridge was but short, and during the journey to Greenwich Agnes found herself made much of, not allowed to grieve or feel herself alone. She was verily a spoilt child, and whilst Patience and Mistress Newbolt sat beneath the trees in the Park, Agnes, Reginald, and Ann wandered into the quaint old garden of the palace known as "The Queen's House", filled with all the blossoms of summer, scented with great bunches of lavender and sweet marjoram. As they strolled about there the strength of her youth overcame the sorrow of her heart, and the great world in which Agnes had lived so lonely, fine gentlemen and ladies, valets and maid-servants, all those accessories to court life, seemed to drop away from her as useless and cumbersome. The sweetness and simplicity of nature, as she had never known it before, crept over her. She had lived all her life in palaces surrounded by etiquette, now for the first time in her life she walked with quiet folk, with neither queens nor princesses, only with this simple maiden Ann and this young man, who, notwithstanding his military attire, was so easy and kindly of manner that she had no fear of him. To divert her thoughts Reginald and his sister talked to her about things of which she knew little–the country, the flowers. They told her, too, of Newbolt Manor, and how pleasant it was up in the bonnie north.

"But you have not always dwelt there?" said Agnes.

"No," answered Ann, "we are new people. Cromwell gave it to my father for his services. One thing comforts me," continued Ann, "we have turned no one out, for there was no heir; the last owner was killed fighting for King Charles."

"It would not have mattered if there had been an heir," said Agnes, a little bitterly; "we Royalists were dispossessed of all we had. What was the name of the people who came before you in the land?"

"De Lisle," said Reginald shortly.

An old man busy weeding a pathway suddenly drew himself up and said sharply:

"De Lisle! Who talks of the De Lisles? They were accursed and driven out, possessors of church lands. Fire and sword have purified them; they will come back again."

He looked from one to another till his eyes rested on Agnes. Pointing at her, he added:

"Yea, verily, they will come back to their own again. Hate drove them out;

love will bring them back."

There was a prophetic tone in his voice and a flash in his eye; both died out, and he went back to his weeding.

"Let us go into the park," said Agnes; "he has frightened me, I know not why."

Passing through a side gate they entered the park, crossed a stretch of level grass, and came to the foot of a steep hill.

"Let's see who will reach the top first," said Ann gleefully. "Not you, Reginald, that would not be fair." And off she went, Agnes running beside her, the one a strong north-country girl, the other a fairy creature, who had never climbed a hill in her life. But Agnes was so light, so swift, that she outran her companion, and stood at the top of the hill clapping her hands and laughing with pleasure. Reginald with long strides had followed them.

"You are a fay," he said. "Now let us run down."

"All of us!" exclaimed Agnes, excited with the unusual motion, and the fresh breezes which came from land and river.

"Give me your hand," said Reginald, "or you will be tripping."

She would have resisted, but he took it. And it was well he did, for she had not reckoned on the impetus of a downhill race, and more than once her foot slipped on the green sward; but he held her firmly, and they reached the bottom, laughing merrily, her pretty golden hair all ruffled with the wind, her face flushed, and her eyes bright.

Ann was equally joyous. They were a merry trio when they joined Patience and Mistress Newbolt under a great oak tree, where a cloth had been spread, pies, and cakes, and a heap of ripe strawberries presenting a tempting meal.

Verily there are bright days in life which leave their mark in our hearts, and bring a rush of gladness to the eyes and a smile to the lips when we recall them.

This day was a red-letter day; it had begun sadly, but it ended brightly. They re-entered the barge, and in the quiet evening twilight they floated up the great river on the top of the tide, and, landing once more at Somerset House, bade each other farewell, with a feeling of regret that so lovely a day had its ending.

CHAPTER VII
A King's Vengeance

For some time past both Mistress Newbolt and Ann had noticed a great restlessness in Colonel Newbolt's speech and manner. He was given to great rages. If anyone came suddenly into the house, he would start up and question them as to their business; indeed, it seemed to his family as if he feared something.

Ann told Reginald this one day, and the young man looked grave.

"I am not surprised," he answered. "Matters are getting serious; the king's exchequer is somewhat empty and difficult to refill, and those about him are not scrupulous as to the ways and means by which it may be replenished. You know that all the principal regicides, eighty or ninety odd, some of the best men, have already been dragged to the scaffold, and in most cases their property has been confiscated. But this does not suffice; there are hundreds of others, gentlemen and commoners, ministers, all sorts and conditions of men, who, if they did not vote for the king's death, did not vote against it. Many have been arrested and thrown into prison; some have fled to Geneva, where they are safe; others are in hiding; but some, like my father, have remained at home, fully persuaded that no harm is likely to befall them, seeing they have given their adhesion to Charles II. But I am much afraid this will not be enough. Courtiers are turning a cold shoulder to them, and I find myself somewhat put on one side.

"I should not be surprised at any moment if my father were called to account and in a certain measure made to refund, for the old Royalists are clamouring to be restored to their estates and to be rewarded for their fidelity. Charles tries to satisfy them in many cases, but not in all; he cannot, and there is much discontent. An empty exchequer and followers who have despoiled themselves for their masters are difficult to deal with. It is not a pleasant prospect, and both he and his ministers seem to think the only way of meeting it is by taking back what Cromwell gave, if it can be proved that the recipients were accessories to Charles's death."

"And our father commanded a regiment of horse at Whitehall on the very day of the king's execution," said Ann, looking up.

"I know it," answered Reginald. "It was his duty; he was under orders. If this knowledge comes to the king's ears, then his command, probably his estates, will be taken from him and he will be brought to trial."

"That is what troubles him, then," said Ann.

"It is enough to trouble any man," answered Reginald. "You see, he is trying to serve two masters, which never answers, in this world or the next."

"What would you have him do?" asked Ann, aghast.

"Do! There is nothing to do," said Reginald, "until the bomb bursts; then, if there is still time and he can escape out of England, his life may be spared, but his estates will be forfeited, and Newbolt Manor will pass into other hands. A case of pure bartering," he added. "His majesty will rob Paul to pay Peter; it has

ever been the same."

"Can nothing be done?" asked Ann. "I do not care for the loss of Newbolt Manor, but I care for our father and our mother; it will break their hearts."

"I see nothing for it but to wait," said Reginald. "It is not likely that our father will be passed over; indeed, I am not sure myself that I shall not come in for a certain amount of opprobrium."

"They cannot touch you, you were only a child," said Ann.

"No, they cannot touch me. I am in the king's service, and I did him homage before he came to the throne; but still there are so many with better claims seeking advancement, it is difficult for me to hold my own."

Even while they were speaking there was a sound of many steps outside in the street and in the hall, and a porter came in in haste.

"Sir," he said, "there are men here asking for the master in the king's name!"

Ann's face turned deathly white.

"So soon!" she exclaimed.

"The sooner the better," Reginald answered; "it will be the quicker over."

"My father is not here," he said, going into the hall and addressing the men. "I do not know even if he is in the house. You had better assure yourselves of this; but first let me see your order."

The commander of the company handed him a sheet of parchment. The colour mounted to the young man's face as he read the order of his father's arrest, "to answer certain questions as to his having been treasonably concerned in the late king's death".

[image]

"THE COMMANDER OF THE COMPANY HANDED HIM A SHEET OF PARCHMENT"

Ann had followed him. He bent his head and whispered to her:

"Go to our mother, but do not tell her."

She was trying to slip away, but she found her passage barred by the officer in command of the company.

"I regret it, madam," he said; "but I cannot let you pass until the house has been searched and we are assured the colonel is not here."

"I never told you he was not here," said Reginald. "I bade you search for him."

As he uttered these words, a door at the farther end of the hall opened, and the colonel came forward.

"What do you require of me?" he asked.

Before anyone could answer, Reginald handed him the paper.

"It is well," he said; "I have expected this. I did not tell your mother nor you, children, because I would not have you needlessly anxious; now it has come to pass, I leave your mother to your care, Reginald. Deal gently with her. Nay, weep not, Ann. You are a soldier's daughter; it is not seemly." Notwithstanding his rough words, he took her in his arms and kissed her.

He shook Reginald by the hand, then saying:

"Gentlemen, I am ready for you," passed out of the hall, and, mounting the horse that was waiting for him, rode away surrounded by a guard of soldiers.

Ann and Reginald remained alone with the frightened servants, who crowded around them. In a few words Reginald told them what had happened, adding, "I do not think there is any danger for my father's life; but that he will suffer imprisonment and be heavily fined is probable. I would entreat of you all to keep quiet, and in public not to make more ado than you can help."

Reginald was a great favourite in the household; he was young and generous, and they served him willingly. So with a loud voice they all promised obedience, adding also their hope that their master would soon be amongst them again.

"I do not think there is the least fear but that he will," Reginald said assuringly, and so they dispersed, and Reginald and Ann remained alone.

Ann was very pale, but she was not trembling. She had a courageous heart, and was at the present moment thinking more of her mother than of her father. She knew full well that her mother had always been averse from her husband joining the present king's cause, and she felt sure now that she would call this a just retribution; but she would not take it the less to heart, for under a cold exterior she had loved her husband dearly, and served him as a true and honourable wife.

Whilst the two stood hesitating, the door opened and Patience and Agnes entered.

"What's happened?" asked Agnes. "We saw a troop of soldiers riding away; the street was full of them. They seemed to have a prisoner in their midst; we could not see who it was."

"It was my father," said Reginald. "He has been arrested for consenting to the late king's death."

"May the Lord help him!" said Patience. "Has there not been bloodshed enough already, that they must be ever seeking for more!"

"I do not think it is a case of blood," said Reginald, with something approaching a sneer in his voice. "I think money will settle this;" and the words and manner of the young man revealed a bitterness which had been growing in

his heart for some time past. He and Ann had been so eager for King Charles to come back, they had welcomed him with such unfeigned joy, such belief that he would bring back all that was noble, all the greatness, the courage, and the bravery, the high moral tone which had been his father's, that whatever errors there had been in the past would cease now, indeed were already forgotten. Had not the whole race of Stuarts been chastised? Had not the whole nation suffered? And therefore they welcomed the king back as their chief good. The crown was his by Right Divine and by the will of the people. He had come back, and made merry, but he had no thought of forgiveness in his soul, only a fierce desire for vengeance against those who had slain his father and sent him into exile. That father had been a saint, and they slew him. The son was a great sinner, and they bowed down before him.

Reginald thought, and others thought with him, of all the blood that had been shed. They had hoped that a great pardon would have sealed that home-coming, instead of which it was vengeance and blood; whilst in the very palace where they had witnessed the death of Charles I, there was revelry and evil living, and an ignoring of all sacred things.

Their idol was broken, and their ideals had faded into nothingness. For the young this is a terrible experience: it cuts them to the heart, it wounds them to the soul. As men and women grow older they become accustomed to the daily and hourly disappointments of life. The shadow of death has passed over them, the lights have gone out; either they have grown hard and self-contained, or they have learnt to look beyond this world and patiently abide in faith, hope, and charity, until they shall pass into the kingdom of everlasting life. But the lesson has to be learnt, the road has to be trodden, and the pricks hurt their feet. The nobler the girl or the youth, the harder it is for them to lose their ideals.

Reginald was passing through this phase. He had built so much on this home-coming of his king, he had thought of him almost as a god, from his youth upwards; the son of that blessed saint and martyr, how should he be less than a hero! The disillusion was great, the sorrow was greater. Had he been of a less sensitive, a less noble nature himself, he would have thrown all care to the wind, have joined the revellers, and been content to lead the wild life of the young Cavaliers who had returned with Charles from foreign lands, and who now thought of little else but of making up for the years which had been passed in poverty and exile. Those lean years had taught them no lesson of frugality or decorum; rather they had made them impatient of restraint, desirous of making up in folly and extravagances for the years they called wasted.

Truly they were wasted, for they had brought forth no fruit. The lesson God would have taught to the race of Stuarts and their adherents had been of no avail. These men were like the Israelites of old, they had neither ears to hear nor

eyes to see, and the few faithful ones, who loyally in England had waited for and prayed for their coming, were now sick at heart.

Yet Reginald had no thought of throwing up his allegiance; it was based on too good a foundation–his God and his king. He could not serve one and forsake the other, and so, though his heart was sore within him, and he felt that dark days were coming both for him and his, as a brave man he looked straight before him, trusting in a higher power than his own to deliver them from evil.

CHAPTER VIII
Arrested

It was Patience who sought Mistress Newbolt in her chamber and told her in a few words what had happened. It was even with her as her children had thought it would be.

"It is the Lord's justice," she said. "His will be done." She straightened herself, went down to her household, and rebuked Ann when she wept.

"Shall not the Lord chastise His children?" she said. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth. Indeed, I am well pleased that our God careth for us so well that He does chastise us; for, seeing we were so prosperous, I feared He held us to be of no account, but now I am exalted, and my spirit is glad within me, for the Lord has laid His hand on my house."

This enthusiasm was wonderful; her face, which before had been sad, shone now with an inner light of satisfaction. She went about her duties with an energy and a briskness which had long failed her.

The maid-servants exclaimed, "The mistress is of cheerful countenance; is it seemly that she should rejoice over the master's misfortune?"

If she divined their thoughts she paid no heed to them.

"Poor ignorant souls, they cannot understand," she said to Patience, who, to tell the truth, herself did not understand why the wife should rejoice when her husband was sent to prison and was in danger of his life.

She remembered how sorely she had grieved over the misfortunes which had befallen the royal standard, and how she had mourned for those who were then laid low.

"It is not natural," she said to Agnes; "we must accept the will of the Lord,

but we are not bound to rejoice when He afflicts us."

Reginald had left the house almost immediately after his father's departure, to find out where he had been taken to and what could be done to further his release, so Agnes and Patience remained with Ann and cheered her as best they could. Mistress Newbolt needed no cheering; she busied herself arranging her husband's clothes, packing them to send to his prison, wherever that might be, and she employed the maids in taking off the lace ruffles from his shirts, replacing them with plain linen ones.

"He shall not appear before his judges like a popinjay," she said, "but like a sober, righteous man."

"Mother, you are wrong," said Ann. "He is a king's man now, and is serving the king. Why will you try to show forth to the world that he was ever aught else?"

"Because it is my duty, my joy," she answered, and she would not be gainsaid.

"Do not trouble," said Patience to Ann. "Let her have her own way. You can easily supplement what is lacking."

The day seemed long to them all except to Mistress Newbolt, whose pale face had a red spot on either cheek from the excitement of her heart. Her muslin kerchief was crumpled, a thing Ann had never seen before, and her hands trembled as she went about her work.

Once Agnes crept on tiptoe to the small closet which Mistress Newbolt called her own, where she was wont to read and pray. Opening the door gently she looked in. The window was wide open, and Mistress Newbolt stood before it grazing up into the sky, which was dark, threatening rain; but sunshine or rain, storm or clouds, were naught to her, her soul had soared beyond these earthly signs of fair weather or foul. Her hands were clasped, her face was turned upwards as if she saw a vision, and from her lips a quick flow of words poured forth so rapidly that Agnes had difficulty in following them.

It was more conversation than prayer, as if she were speaking to the Almighty as to a familiar friend, thanking Him for having thus cast His eye upon them, and chastening her husband for his sin. She prayed also for Reginald and Ann, that they might be reclaimed and brought back into the true fold. Then came an impassioned act of worship:

"Glory be to Thee, oh Lord Most High!" and so on.

Agnes stood transfixed. She had never heard the like before. It moved her as if a great wave had swept over her. She listened, drinking in the words with wonder and astonishment.

"It must be even as the prophets of old spoke," she thought. "I wonder if she is right and we all wrong;" and even as she was thus thinking Mistress Newbolt

turned round, saw her, came quickly, took her in her arms, and almost carried her to the open window, crying in exultation:

"Lord, behold this child! Make her Thine; teach her Thy ways; make her worship Thee, the only true God, in truth and equity."

So tight were her arms wound round her that Agnes could not move. She held her as if she would have almost carried her up to heaven in her exultation. Looking into her face it struck Agnes as strangely beautiful; she had never seen it thus before. Her eyes were as coals of fire; the lips parted as the impassioned words dropped from them.

Suddenly the woman collapsed. She loosened her hold of Agnes, staggered, and would have fallen had not the girl upheld her; but she threw her off, and, casting herself on the ground, broke forth into fierce weeping. The bands of iron which had bound her soul gave way and she could only cry:

"Save me, oh God, save me, for Thy mercy's sake!"

With that delicate instinct which is inherent in some souls, Agnes felt that this was no place for her, that she had no right to look upon the weakness of this strong woman, and quietly, with tears pouring down her face, she left the room, closing the door behind her.

She paused for a moment on the landing, then, descending the stairs, found her way into the little sitting-room, where Ann and Patience were waiting for her. The discomposure of her face revealed to them at once that something unusual had happened.

"Have you seen my mother?" asked Ann, coming forward.

"Oh, it is too terrible, too terrible!" said Agnes, her tears bursting forth again, and, letting herself fall on the settle beside Patience, she clung to her for protection.

"What has happened, dear? tell me," said Patience softly.

"Nothing has happened," was the quiet answer, "but her grief is terrible to see."

"I will go to her," said Ann, rising.

"It is of no use," said Agnes, standing before her; "let her be. Her soul is wrestling with the Lord; she wants no human help; we do not understand her."

"I know what you mean," said Ann, "I have seen her in that state before. When my father declared that he would welcome King Charles and join himself to the royal cause, she was three days and nights shut up in her own room and would see no one; she would eat nothing but bread and water, and we heard her pacing up and down, talking to herself, apostrophizing the Almighty, praying aloud. Sometimes she would sing psalms or hymns. As I tell you, she remained three days in this state, and then she came forth haggard and thin, but quite calm. 'I have left it in God's hands,' she said; 'what He doeth will be well done.'

Go home, dear friend," Ann continued. "You can give us no help, we must await events. I do not think my father's life is in danger, but how long he will be deprived of liberty, what his punishment will be, we cannot tell until his trial, and that may be retarded for many months. We were going to Newbolt Manor for a few weeks. Now, of course, we must remain here. I am sorry, because my mother's health suffers from the confinement in London, but I know nothing will move her hence so long as my father is in prison."

"Of course not," said Patience. "We shall also remain in town for the present. The king has gone with his court to Hampton, and I do not care to be there when that is the case, for there is no peace–the gardens are full of gallants and fine ladies–so we will remain at Somerset House until the king returns to town."

"I am glad of it," said Ann; "it is a comfort to feel that you are near me. We have many acquaintances, but few friends."

"You must count us as friends," said Patience.

"I will gladly do so," answered Ann. "I feel as if I have known you all my life."

"Therefore, if you have any fear, send for us," said Patience. "Now we will bid you farewell."

The distance between the Newbolts' house in Drury Lane and Somerset House could be traversed in a few minutes, but nevertheless the streets were by no means pleasant for women to walk through alone, therefore Patience and Agnes had come in sedan-chairs, which were waiting in the courtyard. These were now brought forward into the house, as was the custom, and, taking a tender adieu of Ann, they got in and were carried out. Agnes drew the curtain on one side, waved a last adieu, and then Ann turned away and went up to the first story, where was her mother's apartment.

She was sad at heart, and felt at a loss as to how she should comfort her, for she knew full well that there was no disguising the fact that her father had been a prominent man under Cromwell, also that he had commanded a body of horse at the late king's execution. One thing alone was in his favour: his name was not on the list of those who had voted for the king's death.

It was late at night when Reginald returned. He had no good news. His father, he had ascertained, was in Newgate, but he had not been able to gain access to him.

"I fear much," he said, "that there is a traitor somewhere, for why have we been thus suddenly attacked? The king was quite aware from the first that my father was a Parliamentarian; the only thing he did not know was that he was present at the late king's death. It is upon this charge that my father has been arrested. We cannot clear him; it is quite hopeless; we can only trust to the king's

clemency, and that," he continued, "is of no great account. I am much afraid that I shall be obliged to resign my commission, and thus, though I am blameless, I must suffer, and the king will lose a good servant."

"Do you think he will be arraigned for treason?" asked Ann.

"No, that he cannot be," was the answer, "seeing that he was only captain at that time of a body of horse. He obeyed orders, and he kept the street clear in the precincts of Whitehall, but he was not actually on the spot."

"And though he has never allowed that it was so," said Ann, "in his heart I believe he grieved that the execution was carried out."

"His refraining from giving his vote was a proof of it," said Reginald. "Where is our mother?"

"In her own apartment," said Ann. "It is no use your trying to go to her; she will see no one. Agnes was with her, and I think she frightened the child; she has been very much excited all day. Martha tells me she has gone to bed, which is proof that she has worn herself out. She may be more composed to-morrow. You see, she considers our father's arrest a retribution."

"And she may not be quite wrong," said Reginald. "If he had only voted against instead of keeping silent, he would have been not only safe from molestation, but honourably revered."

"That he could not do," said Ann. "I have heard him say that though he disapproved of the king's execution, he did not see how otherwise order and justice were to be restored, or the Civil War ended."

"The whole thing is ineffably sad," said Reginald; "it is too late in the day now to discuss the pros and cons. Go to bed, Ann, and sleep; you will need all your strength and courage to face the next few months." And so they bade each other good-night and parted.

So worn out was Ann that her head was no sooner on the pillow than she slept; but Reginald sat till an unusually late hour in the house-parlour thinking matters over and trying to find out who could have betrayed his father.

He rose at last, and stretched himself, muttering, "It is folly and to no purpose my seeking to find the man; there are so many witnesses of my father's presence at Whitehall. We must abide by the results; but I will see Sir Nicholas Crisp to-morrow, he has always been kindly disposed towards me, and stands high in the king's esteem. He may perchance speak a word in my father's favour." With

this he also retired to his chamber to await the events of the morrow.

CHAPTER IX
Old Newgate

We have all read, and we all know by hearsay, how, till within the last century, the prisons were worse than the lowest hovels. We know and honour the men and women by whose influence humanity was brought to bear upon them. What they must have been two centuries earlier passes all imagination.

We learn from old chronicles that as far back as 1218 the prison of Newgate existed. It was built in the portal of the new gate of the city, and from that fact took its name. Two centuries later it was rebuilt by the executors of the famous Sir Richard Whittington, Lord Mayor of London, and his statue with his cat stood in a niche. This building was destroyed in the great fire of which we shall soon be telling. It was here, in old Newgate, that Colonel Newbolt was imprisoned– a noisome place, within high, dark, stone walls, without windows, where the prisoners were crowded together irrespective of age or sex. At the time we are writing of, it was crowded to excess. To obtain a wisp of straw to lie upon at night, and the space necessary for a litter, meant a hand-to-hand fight between the occupants.

The jailers reaped a rich harvest, charging fabulous prices for the merest necessaries. There was no provision made for sickness, not even for the ordinary decencies of life; men and women of every class were herded together.

It is easy to imagine Colonel Newbolt's feelings when he was thrust into this den. On the first day he bore it with a certain amount of equanimity, feeling assured that he would be released on the morrow; but when two or three days passed by, and all the money he had on his person was expended, he was seriously disquieted, wondering why Reginald or some other of his friends did not come to his rescue. He could not know that Reginald had been daily at the prison, and had expended a considerable sum of money in pleading with the jailers for news of his father. He was dismissed with the assurance that his father's name was not on the prison list; they could not find the man.

This answer was given purposely. It would not have suited the jailers to find their man too soon, for then the enquiry money would cease to fall into their pockets, so they sent Reginald to Aldersgate and to smaller jails, of which there

were several. Four days had elapsed after his father's arrest before Reginald was admitted into the prison and allowed to interview him.

He was horrified when he saw him. From a hale, fine-looking soldier he had dwindled into an old man, with sunken eyes and haggard face. His lace ruffles and jabot had been torn to shreds. He had had no change of linen, the lappets of his coat had been wrenched away, his head was bare, and his hair bleached.

He staggered as he came into the guard-room, and in his impotent rage shook his fist in Reginald's face.

"What do you mean, sirrah," he cried, "by leaving me in this condition?"

"Father, I did not leave you," said Reginald, tears gathering in his eyes. "I have been here daily, and could get no news of you. They have sent me about to the right and to the left; only to-day have I found you."

"The rascals!" said the colonel in a low voice, fearful of being overheard. "I am starved, Reginald," he continued, "I am unclean. I would sooner die than remain thus; ay, they will kill me before they bring me to trial. Is this what the king promised us? Is this the royal clemency?"

"Hush, Father, hush!" said Reginald, for in his excitement he had raised his voice. "I have brought gold; I will see what I can do for you."

He looked round, and seeing a keeper whose face seemed less evil than the others, he beckoned to him.

Slowly and sullenly the man came forward.

"Look here!" said Reginald, "if you can find the smallest cell in which my father can be alone I will give you fifty crowns."

"If you offered me a hundred I couldn't do it," said the man; "the place is crowded from top to bottom, and more prisoners are coming in every hour."

"But surely there must be some place less horrible than the one I am now in," said Colonel Newbolt. "I am herded with the scum of the earth. I hear nothing but cursing and swearing all the live-long day and throughout the night. I am covered with vermin. I will give thee a hundred crowns, sirrah, if thou wilt get me out of this."

The man thrust his hands into his pockets. A hundred crowns was an offer he did not often get.

"I am sick, sick unto death," continued the colonel.

"Then I will report you to the head keeper," said the man quickly, "and he will report you to the governor, and he will–I don't know what he'll think proper to do."

"In the meantime must I go back to that hell?" said the colonel. "Give me a knife and let me cut my throat!"

"We don't have that sort of thing done here," answered the jailer; "we keep no knives and no ropes inside the jail."

"Listen!" said Reginald. "Surely there must be some place, some cell in which there are three or four privileged prisoners, where you could manage to put my father until I take measures for his removal. Go at once and speak to the head jailer."

Saying this, Reginald put money into the man's hand. "Not a groat more do you get," he said, "if you do not succeed, but I will double it if you do."

He turned away, and, taking his father by the arm, succeeded in finding a seat in a far corner of the room.

"See, Father, I have brought you food!" he said. He cut the strings of a basket which he had been carrying and drew forth a pasty, some white bread, and a flask of brandy.

The prisoner flew at the brandy. Reginald was forced to stop him.

"Gently, Father, gently," he said, "you will make yourself ill; there is no hurry." And he handed him bread and meat, which he ate ravenously.

The keepers, noting that the young man wore the king's uniform, and that the old man, even in his soiled clothes, had an air of distinction, let them be. Besides, Reginald was generous with his money; he knew there was no other means by which to gain a little respite.

When his father had eaten and drunk, more perhaps than was good for him, he laid his head back on the wall and went to sleep. Reginald kept watch over him. Once or twice the keepers came up and would have roused him and sent him back to the common prison, but Reginald pleaded:

"Let him be a little longer," he said; "I am waiting for a message from the governor." Again money passed from hand to hand, and they were let alone.

Not till the day was far advanced did the first keeper return.

"The governor will see you," he said; "follow me."

Reginald looked at his father. If he roused him now would he be sensible?

"Father!" he said, bending over him.

The colonel started and opened his eyes, but his mind seemed to be wandering. He stood up, gave the word of command, as if he had been on parade, then, looking round him, he said: "Where am I? What does it mean?"

"He is in delirium," said Reginald in a low voice to the keeper. "Take hold of him on one side and I will take him on the other; the governor can judge for himself." So they crossed the room, the old man muttering and talking to himself, until they came to the governor's room.

To Reginald's surprise, he proved to be an old friend of his father's, who, however, had kept fairly quiet, and had not been in any way offensive either to the Commonwealth or to the king's Government. It was not in his power to remedy the state of the prison, and he had no thought of attempting to do so. A prison was a prison in those days. Prisoners, if refractory, were chained up like

wild beasts and kept on bread and water. They lived or died, as the case might be; some went under at once, others, thanks to stronger constitutions, managed to survive, until they were dragged on hurdles to execution, or by some lucky chance found their way out of that prison-house, brutalized, hating both God and man.

When the governor, looking up, saw Reginald and his father, he said shortly:

"When I heard your name, I wondered what Newbolt it was. How happens it that your father has let himself fall into this strait? I thought he was a cleverer man."

"There must be a traitor somewhere," said Reginald. "My father has taken the oath of allegiance; he went with General Monk to meet the king on his return. I, who have never drawn sword in any other cause, hold a commission from the king in his own Guards. But some traitor has informed his majesty of what, alas! is only too true, that my father was captain of a body of troops who kept the streets at the time of the execution of his most gracious majesty, Charles I–hence his arrest."

"Ah, that is compromising!" said the governor. "Do you know who the informant was?"

"No, I do not," answered Reginald, "but I will make it my business to find out. There is no denying the fact that my father was on duty that day. He was arrested four days ago, and see what it has made of him! He was a strong, hale man when he came here. I ask your clemency for him."

"It is a common case," said the governor. "The class of men to which your father belongs cannot stand this place. I will do what I can. He has caught jail fever. Put him in yonder chair."

The keeper and Reginald obeyed, the old man talking and jabbering all the time.

Reginald stood before the governor, who continued: "You see, we cannot put him back into the public room, and there is not a free cell. You may believe me or not as you choose, the prison is literally swarming. Knight," he said, addressing the keeper, "is there any hole you can give the colonel to lie in until I can get him removed?"

"There is the cell at the end of the right-hand corridor, where that madman was confined; he died yesterday. His body was thrown out to-day, but the cell has not been cleaned yet; it is not fit to put even a dog into."

"Let it be done immediately," said the governor. "Let fresh straw be laid down and the colonel carried thither. I give him into your hands, Knight. I think you will find it worth your while to treat him well," he added, with a glance at Reginald.

"I have promised him a hundred crowns; I do not care if I make it two hundred," answered the young man.

"Sir," said Knight, "I thank you. May I leave the gentleman here whilst I see to the cleaning of that dog's kennel?"

The governor nodded.

Worn out, the colonel's head fell on his breast; he was in a sort of coma.

"I'll write a letter," said the governor, "which you may take to the Secretary of State, or, if you prefer it, to the king himself. If you can get an audience, that might be better. If your father is really to be prosecuted, he must be removed from this prison to Aldersgate."

"I do not think he will be removed anywhere except fro his last resting-place," said Reginald.

"Tut, tut! men do not die so easily," said the governor. "That is our strong point. I will represent that if the colonel is left here he will certainly die, and then who would pay the fine, which will be the least thing imposed upon him? The king's exchequer, they say, is empty, and there is nothing to be got out of a dead dog; therefore, you see, it is to their interest to keep him alive. Rest assured they will nurse him with the utmost tenderness, so that, if he be hanged, he may be hanged alive, and his lands forfeited to the crown. If he dies now, you will inherit; you have committed no misdemeanour. On the contrary, you are the king's man, and they cannot, in all decency, prosecute you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," said Reginald, with evident disgust. "Write the letter for me, sir, and I will carry it."

The governor scrawled a few lines, folded it, and gave it to Reginald.

"I think you will find that serve your purpose," he said.

"May I send clean linen and clothes for my father?" asked Reginald. "He cannot remain as he is."

"I should advise you to send nothing, but to bring everything," said the governor; "otherwise I greatly fear he will not benefit much. This is a den of thieves and robbers."

Reginald hesitated for a moment, then he said:

"And my mother! When she knows I have found my father, nothing will keep her away."

The governor shrugged his shoulders.

"Then you must bring her, that is all," he said. "Knight will let you in the back way. Your father will not be so bad to look at when he is in his new cell. Now you must be gone; I have given you more time, young man, than I have favoured anyone with for months. Look through that window in the wall and you will see the crowd waiting to interview me."

"I am more than grateful to you, sir," said Reginald.

"All right, all right!" answered the governor, holding out his hand. "We will try to pull him through; not that it will be easy, I warn you."

"I fear not," answered Reginald; "nevertheless I thank you, sir," and, bowing to the governor, he turned round to where his father still sat in a deep, heavy slumber: his face was crimson, his hands, as Reginald felt them, were burning.

"I have cleaned the place up as best I could, sir. Shall we take him there at once?" said Knight, coming up.

"Yes," said Reginald shortly; and between them they carried the colonel down two or three long passages, lined on either side with cells. At the very end there was an open door, showing a cell of about eight feet square. Upon the ground in one corner was a heap of straw, which, with a table and a chair, both riveted to the wall, and a basin, completed the furniture.

"I found this here thing in the corner of the public room where the gentleman has been lying. I don't know how it has escaped the eyes of his late companions, but it has. I got it and brought it here. He will want it," said Knight.

Reginald recognized his father's cloak, so they wrapped him up in it and laid him in the straw which was strewn on the damp floor.

"Look here, man," said Reginald, "I must go. I have pressing business. Here are the hundred crowns I promised you, and for every week he stays here and you care for him decently, you shall have as much again. I shall be back in a couple of hours with sheets and bedding, and all that is necessary for his comfort. You must fetch the doctor, and whatever he orders that you must provide."

"Very good, sir, I understand," said Knight. "But I have other duties, you know; I cannot be always here."

"Pass them over to someone else. I'll pay, as paying is the order of the day. Do you agree?"

"I should be a fool not to," answered Knight. "I'll see to the old man; you shall have nothing to complain of." And with that half-promise Reginald was obliged to be satisfied. With one more look at his father he went out.

Knight followed him, closing and locking the door.

"You will lose your way unless I take you out," he said to Reginald. "You had better not come in at the front gate in future."

So saying he guided him into a small courtyard, which was evidently seldom used. In it was a huge mastiff, which walked to and fro, snarling and growling. He sprang forward to meet the two men, and would have flown at Reginald if Knight had not caught him by the collar.

"Speak to him, caress him, then in future he will never hurt you," he said. "When you come back, bring him food; you must be friends."

Reginald had a great liking for all animals. He spoke to the mastiff, which, after a few minutes' inspection, sniffed around, and suffered him to stroke him.

"That's all right," said Knight, satisfied.

Taking a key off a bunch at his side he opened a side gate, and Reginald passed out into the street opposite the Old Bailey.

"You have only to ring that bell when you return," he said, pointing to a long iron chain by the door. "I shall answer."

Reginald nodded, and went forth with a heavy heart, feeling as if years had passed over his head since he penetrated within the mighty walls which separated the prison of Newgate and its inmates from the outside world.

CHAPTER X
A Legend

When Reginald returned to his mother he found her waiting impatiently for him; indeed, she had done so for the last three days. Her whole time had been spent between prayer and waiting, seated in the window with her hands folded.

In the morning she attended to her household duties–she forgot nothing. It was with difficulty that they could get her to take any food; she seemed to have no need of it. Now, when she saw Reginald coming up the street, she said to Ann:

"He has news–he has found your father." And she went to the door to meet him.

"Well?" she asked.

"Yes, I have found him," said Reginald; "but you must not rejoice too soon, Mother, for he is in a terrible condition."

"Dying?" she asked.

"I cannot say, for I do not know," answered Reginald. "He is very ill–his sufferings have been great, and he is now delirious. I saw the governor, and he had him removed to a cell by himself. He is in want of everything. There are no rules to prevent our taking anything we choose to him."

"And I may go to him?" she asked.

"Yes, you may go to him, but Ann must not," said Reginald; "the place reeks of fever, small-pox, and every other disease. You must be prepared for the worst, Mother."

"Whatever the Lord orders is for the best," she answered.

"But what is to become of Ann? She cannot remain in this house alone,"

said Reginald.

"Take her to Patience," said Mistress Newbolt. "She can abide with her all day, and at night when I return you can fetch her–if I do return."

"At sunset you must leave the prison, Mother; it is the rule."

"Very well," said Mistress Newbolt, "I will abide by the rule. Now order a coach; I have everything ready."

"I am afraid not everything," said Reginald. "He lacks bedding, sheets, the veriest necessaries. I left him lying on straw in a damp cell. I will order a cart to come round to take the larger luggage, but you must go in a coach."

"I can walk if necessary," said Mistress Newbolt; "it is no great distance."

Two hours were spent putting things together, providing food, broths, and jellies. Ann went about with her mother, thinking of everything. When all was ready and the coach was called, she said to Reginald:

"Shall I not be allowed to go?"

"No, it is not a fit place for you," said Reginald; "and you would do no good. I don't know when I shall return myself, therefore you had better get your women to take you to Somerset House. You can tell them how matters stand, and I shall probably fetch you at nightfall, or when my mother comes back."

Whilst they were still conversing, Mr. Delarry came up. It was by no means the first time he had come to the house–indeed, he and Reginald were very good friends, and he would frequently drop in to supper–but he had been away with the king at Hampton Court, and had only just heard of the colonel's arrest.

"I am deeply grieved for you," he said, "and I hastened here to tell you so. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing at present," said Reginald. "I have been three days finding my father, and now he is sick unto death; I do not know whether he will live. I am taking my mother to him. I have no time to say more, so farewell!"

Mistress Newbolt appeared on the steps, and Reginald hastened to help her into the coach. Many of the servants had followed her, and were weeping. Although she was a stern mistress, she was a just one, and they all respected her.

"Delarry," said Reginald, before following his mother into the coach, "will you see my sister to Somerset House? She cannot stay here alone, and neither my mother nor myself can be back before nightfall."

"If she will allow me to do so, I shall esteem it a favour," said Delarry. "And, Reginald, let me know if I can be of any use to you; I am at your service."

"Many thanks!" said Reginald. "It is something to feel that one has a friend in these hard times." The two young men shook hands, Reginald took his place beside his mother, and they drove away. Ann went slowly back to the house, Delarry following her.

"Shall you go at once to Somerset House?" he asked.

"In about an hour," she answered. "I must put my mother's room in order, and attend to a few household duties. But do not let me detain you; my own woman will accompany me."

"You would not grieve me thus?" said Delarry. "I esteem it a high honour to have been asked to take care of you."

"Very well," said Ann, "come back in an hour, and I will be ready."

He did so, and accompanied her the short distance from Drury Lane to Somerset House. They made no haste, for they liked each other's society.

When they reached Somerset House they found Patience and Agnes on the terrace taking their mid-day airing.

"We did not venture to come to your house," said Patience, after greeting Ann and her companion, "for fear of disturbing your mother. We felt sure if you had news that you would send us word."

"We have news," said Ann, "but it is of such an evil kind that the telling of it is grievous to me."

"Still we must hear it," said Patience.

They sat down on the bench facing the river, and there Ann told them all she knew.

"It is a very terrible state of affairs," said Delarry, looking serious; but he did not venture to say how serious he thought it, for he knew full well that the king was still very bitter against anyone who had had a hand in his father's murder. Nevertheless he tried to speak cheerfully.

"It will be better," he said, "for Reginald to go to the king himself. He is rather partial to the young man; indeed, only the other day he asked why he was not in attendance. He then learnt of the arrest of Colonel Newbolt, and expressed his regret that the son should have to suffer for the father."

Ann coloured. "That means that Reginald will have to resign his commission," she said.

"I am afraid so," answered Delarry. "It would hardly do, when his father is imprisoned for connivance with the regicides, for him to remain in the king's service. But we cannot tell. Charles is a strange character; he may not choose to accept your brother's resignation."

"It was not Colonel Newbolt's fault that he was on duty on that day at that place," said Agnes.

"No," said Delarry, "that was a coincidence, but still the fact is there."

"Don't let us talk about it," said Ann; "it will not mend matters."

"My friend is right," said Agnes. "We will talk of other things. Is there any news from France, Mr. Delarry?"

"Yes, the king heard from her majesty the queen no later than yesterday. The marriage of the duke and the princess is to be the occasion of great festivities;

it is to be conducted with royal state. The King of France is making much of the bride."

"I wish I were in Paris," said Agnes; "I know just how it will all be. I think I like Paris better than London."

"Oh no, you don't!" said Ann. "You must not. You are an English girl, and must love your own country best."

"So she will in years to come," said Patience. "There is so much in habit. She has always lived in France. The sun shines more brightly there, and the days are longer."

"And people are less stiff, and they are kinder and more courteous," said Agnes. "You English are so cold! I have lived a long time here now, and I have only one friend–that is you, Ann."

"And is it not a grand thing to *have one friend*?" said Mr. Delarry. "We may have many acquaintances, little lady, but a friend is a rare gem."

Having said this, Mr. Delarry rose and took his leave.

Patience and the two girls went up to their own apartment, and occupied themselves at that fine tapestry work at which Agnes, like all French ladies, was an adept. Ann was not so clever with her needle, but she loved to watch her friend, whose proficiency was astonishing; the flowers, the birds, the figures, seemed to grow under her fingers.

"I wish I could work as you do," she said.

"I love it," answered Agnes; "it makes me forget. When I have any trouble or any vexation I come to my framework and create a bird, or a flower. Sometimes I dream dreams. It does not matter what I do, but I grow quieter and happier."

"You are a town girl, and I am a country girl," said Ann. "I have lived all my life in the open, in the midst of the flowers and the birds, with my dogs and horses, riding and hunting with Reginald and my father over miles of moorland. Oh, it is glorious! Would you not love it?"

Agnes looked up. "Love it? Indeed I am sure I should!" she answered. "Patience said just now we grow accustomed to things; that is true. I was accustomed to the great dark rooms at the Louvre, and the long dull days; but sometimes, I remember, I used to feel suffocated, as if I were a bird beating against the bars of the cage. I used to look up through the windows at the sky, and long–oh, how I used to long!–to have wings to fly away."

"And yet you say you like France better than England," said Ann.

"I knew of nothing better," said Agnes. "I loved the queen and I loved Henrietta, but still I have always known that it was not my own life, that there must be something better! We used to go to Fontainebleau sometimes, but we children never went beyond the edge of the wood. We were allowed to wander in the great gardens, which were very beautiful, with long avenues of trees and a

big pond full of tame carp, which came when we called them, and which we used to feed. It was a great pleasure, but still it was not liberty. I longed for liberty, to ride, to walk, as the desire might come to me. Ah, you are very happy!" she said to Ann. "Tell me about that place up north of which you speak so often."

"Newbolt Manor?" answered Ann. "It is the most beautiful place in the world. Long, long ago it was a monastery, and belonged to a religious order. There are the ruins of the most lovely chapel you ever saw; and although the house has been restored and rebuilt, there are still parts of it which belong to the old days–the great hall, the refectory, and the library. They are very beautiful, with much carved oak and many stained-glass windows."

"And it belonged to the De Lisles!" said Agnes thoughtfully.

"Yes," answered her companion, "and there is a long picture-gallery containing portraits of the family of De Lisles; and now I come to think of it, Agnes, there is one picture of a child who lived a long time ago–oh! a hundred years ago, perhaps. You are exactly like her; is it not strange?"

"Very," said Agnes. "Go on and tell me more."

"Well," said Ann, "the story is that when the monks were driven out, King Henry VIII gave it to a certain Reginald De Lisle."

"How did that old man at Greenwich know anything; about them, I wonder?" said Agnes. "How did he know the De Lisles?"

"That I cannot tell," said Ann. "He may have been an old servant, and have known the legend that the De Lisles, being possessed of church lands, would be driven out."

"It has come true," said Agnes.

"Only to a certain extent," said Ann. "They were not driven out, they died out; the race is extinct."

"How then can they come back again?" asked Agnes. "You know he said they would."

"Ah! that I cannot tell," answered Ann. "If he were an old servant of the De Lisles, the wish might very possibly be father to the thought."

"But," said Agnes thoughtfully, "supposing it were a mistake, and that one day a De Lisle should turn up and claim his own?"

"I do not suppose it would make much difference now," said Ann. "The land is ours as far as lawyers and parchment can make it so."

"You would be sorry to lose it," said Agnes.

"Yes, I should," answered Ann. "I love the place, and I would like to think that Reginald would have it one day, and that he would marry and have children; and so it would go down from generation to generation, a fair heritage."

"As it was with the De Lisles," said Agnes thoughtfully. "Ah well!" she added, "it does not much matter; the world passeth away, and the glory of it."

Instinctively the words had come to her lips–how they did so she knew not–it was the inspiration of a moment. She had dropped her needle whilst listening to Ann, and there was a strange, dreamy look in the great dark eyes as she gazed through the window up to the sky which overhung the river. The summer day had come to a close; she could no longer see to put her stitches into the canvas. A sense of unreality crept over her, a sort of feeling as if she had lived in another world once upon a time–she was, and she was not–a spell seemed laid upon her. Would she awake and find her present life only a dream?

Patience's voice roused her.

"Ann Newbolt," she said, "a messenger has come from your brother. Neither he nor your mother can return to-night. He requests me to keep you with us."

"My father is dying, then?" said Ann.

"The messenger does not say so," answered Patience, "merely that they cannot leave the prison."

CHAPTER XI
A Brave Woman

Sooner or later we all find a place which fits us in the world, and when Mistress Newbolt crossed the threshold of Newgate to take charge of her husband, unwittingly, even to herself, she had reached her bourne. She did not know it, she did not realize it till long after; but her work had found her, and she was not one of those who, having put her hand to the plough, would turn back again.

An ordinary woman would have shrunk from the misery which surrounded her, but she never did. All the sorrow, the discontent, which so often troubled her, ceased to be as she stood beside her husband in that narrow cell. With strong hands, helped by Reginald, she arranged his bed; she spoke to him, she comforted him; even in his delirium he knew her and clung to her. That he was desperately ill she saw at a glance, but even the doctor, a rough, hard man, when he came to visit him, grew soft in Mistress Newbolt's presence.

"Madam," he said, "I cannot tell whether he will live or die. His life is in your hands."

"Not in mine," said Mistress Newbolt, "but in God's."

"We do not hear much of God here," said the doctor roughly. "It is verily a

God-forsaken place; but your presence is potent, your care may save him."

"I can only stay here a few hours," she answered, "at least, so I am told. I will do what I can."

"You may stay here as long as you choose," said the doctor. "I will speak to the governor."

And so it came to pass that Mistress Newbolt was established at Newgate. That first night her husband was seized with such violent delirium that it required two men to hold him down.

Reginald therefore remained till early morning, when, exhausted, the patient dropped into a deep sleep. Then his mother bade him go and rest.

"You have your duties to attend to; you have Ann to see after," she said. "I am sufficient here."

"Will you not be afraid to remain here alone, Mother?" asked Reginald.

"Afraid!" she answered, "of what? Is not God with me?" And that strangely inspired look came into her face. "I feel as if my place were here, as if at last I had found my appointed task. Go, and do not trouble about me or your father."

Reginald kissed her hand.

"You are wonderful, Mother," he said. "I will return this evening before the prison gates close." And so he left her.

As Mistress Newbolt stood in the passage she heard cries and moans, loud voices, and bitter plaints.

"Are those the prisoners?" she asked of Knight, the jailer.

"Yes," he answered, "they are hungry dogs to-day. They declared that the morning allowance of food was insufficient. There was not a hunch of bread for each man, and it was sour, not fit to cast to the dogs."

"How was it so?" asked Mistress Newbolt.

The keeper shrugged his shoulders.

"How can I tell?" he said. "It is bought by contract. As we get it we give it them. Those who have no money of their own, and no friends, come badly off. Your husband is sleeping, will you come and look at them?"

Mistress Newbolt acquiesced.

He took her down the passage to a great iron door, in which there was a sliding panel, not large, but large enough to allow an outsider to look into the interior. The keeper drew back the panel, and shrill voices fell upon her ears, uttering curses and foul language. She saw men and women with scarce any semblance of humanity, rather like wild beasts. Some were tearing at hard crusts of bread, others at meat of the worst kind; men belaboured the women and thrust them back, snatching the food out of their thin hands. And they in their turn clutched at them and tore their hair, scratching their faces in their madness. One or two had infants in their arms, parodies of childhood.

"It is terrible!" said Mistress Newbolt, her pale face paling.

"Here is gold," she said to the keeper; "go fetch me food! I will give it them. And look you," she continued, "that you are just, and bring me full measure for the money."

Her stern eyes stared straight into Knight's, and he, as if affrighted, looked away; nevertheless he took the gold and departed to do her bidding.

Mistress Newbolt faced the opening again and called out, "Peace, peace!"

Her words were received with a loud yell.

"Peace? There is no peace here."

"Peace, peace, God's peace be with you!" she continued; and then in a loud voice, which rose above the turmoil, she began:

"Our Father which art in heaven."

Shrieks of mockery greeted her words.

"He who would have bread let him pray for it," she cried out. "Surely it will come to him who asketh."

A loud voice greeted her words.

"We have asked, and they have given us stones for bread," said a gaunt man.

"Because ye have asked amiss," she answered. "Down on your knees and I will pray for you."

A moment's hesitation, then there was dead silence, and that crowd fell down as if moved by some invisible power.

"Repeat what I say, after me," she cried. "Our Father."

And so through that blessed prayer, the like of which there is none other, these poor wretches, the outcast of the earth, followed her, repeating the words, some with sobs, some still cursing between the words.

As the Amen died out, Knight stood beside her.

"Open the gate and let me in to them," she said, "and then do as I bid you."

She took a great white loaf from the basket he had brought.

"There are more coming," he said in a low voice; "this is not all your bounty gives."

"A knife," she said. "I will break each loaf in four. Open the gate," she continued, "and I will go in and feed them myself."

"They will tear you to pieces," said Knight.

"No they will not," she answered; and she stood erect as one inspired.

The jailer took the bunch of keys from his side, unlocked the door, and she passed in.

In a second she was surrounded.

"The bread, the bread we have prayed for!" they cried.

"It is coming," she answered; and she took the lumps of bread which Knight handed her. Quickly they were snatched from her.

Suddenly she stopped, for she saw that the men in their greed were thrusting the women back, and fighting their way towards her.

"Cowards!" she cried, "stand back! The women and the children. Have you nothing human left in you? Shame! Shame!"

There was a deep growl of anger, but slowly the men fell back, and the women rushed forward, kneeling at her feet, kissing her hands. Their souls were touched, and she, stooping over them, bade them rise, and gave them food. She took one child in her arms and fed it with her own hands.

"Water!" they called out, "water!" And they showed her a pitcher filled with a foul liquid.

"Water, bring water!" she repeated; and the keepers brought it as they would have brought it at an angel's word.

She held the jars to the parched, thirsty lips, and they drank, all those who could get near enough; but it was not enough, there were so many.

"That is all," she said at last. "I have no more; but to-morrow I will come back and feed you again; only be human and know there is a God who careth for you. Ye have sinned, but He will pardon you if you repent. He suffered, though He was sinless, and you are sinners. It is but just that you should suffer for your sins. Listen to what the psalmist of Israel sang." In a loud, clear voice she recited the 77th Psalm:

"'I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice, and he gave ear unto me'," and so on to the end.

Where there had been such an uproar there was now a grave stillness, save for the groans of the men and the weeping of the women. She stood with the half-naked child still in her arms, and looked down upon the people, her tall figure resting against the unclean wall of that prison-house. Her voice was steady; her eyes had in them that strangely luminous look of inspiration.

When she had finished she gave the child back to its mother.

"If they will let me, I will come to you to-morrow," she repeated, "and so each day. Only be patient, and the Lord will be with you."

As she spoke she backed out of the cell, and disappeared from their sight.

The keepers told the governor they had never had such a quiet day; the prisoners seemed subdued. They took their portions of food at night and hardly murmured. There were many brutes amongst those men, and many shameless women, but their passions were curbed and their evil tongues silenced.

Mistress Newbolt went back to her husband and tended him all that day, praying beside him with such earnestness, and with such impassioned eloquence that the warders came and stood at the door of the cell and listened. There was not one of them who would not gladly serve her; she might ask what she would of them, they did it.

The governor, hearing what she had done, though knowing it to be against the rules, said:

"Let her do what she will for the poor wretches!"

And so every morning for ten long days she went in to them. Some passed away, but the greater number remained. Every day she added something to her bounty: she gave the women cloths and brooms, and bade them try to keep some order and cleanliness in the cells; but it was impossible, and she soon recognized it was so.

Some days she would repeat a few verses from the Bible to them, and they would listen. Her heart would be glad then, thinking she had won them, but on the morrow there would be fresh cursing, swearing, and evil-speaking. Still, she never wearied. She brought fresh water and clean linen, and dressed their wounds; she brought milk for the little children; she spent herself and her wealth for these outcasts. They grew to look upon her coming as the one thing in the twenty-four hours for which they lived.

"Our mother's coming," they told one another, as the hour approached, and like children they watched for her.

It was wonderful how her strength stood it all–those long days and nights at her husband's pallet, and the horror of her surroundings.

The order came at last that her husband should be removed to Aldersgate to await his trial. The class of prisoners there was of a higher degree, and the prison was less crowded. But the order came too late; they could not move him.

"He will die on the way," the doctor said; "he must die, therefore let him remain here in peace."

When she was not tending the prisoners or waiting on her husband she was praying, this marvellous woman, in whom verily the blood of martyrs must have flowed. She grew gaunter and gaunter, but there came into her face a look of enthusiasm, as if she no longer belonged to this world, but to the heaven of which she spoke.

"If Ann is to see my father alive, I must bring her soon, Mother," said Reginald, on the eighteenth day of the colonel's illness.

"He will not die until the twenty-first," she answered.

On the morning of the twenty-first it was evident that he was sinking, that he would not outlive the day, and so Reginald went for Ann and brought her to the prison. He had told her something of their mother's doings, but it was difficult for anyone who did not see it to know what that prison life was, and Ann was spared the horror. In the cell where her father lay dying everything was spotless. There was scarcely standing room for two or three people, but the door was left open; there was no fear of his escaping–the spirit would go, but the shell would remain, until it was given back to earth. Man could not hurt him; he

need not fear being called to any earthly judgment.

So changed was he that Ann hardly knew him. If she had not known he was her father she would not have recognized him. Looking at her mother, she saw it was the same with her.

"Can this be my father," she thought, "by whose side I have ridden over moor and fell, whose voice was so strong to command, whose presence was so good?" And then, looking at her mother, she grew faint with fear.

There was something unearthly in Mistress Newbolt's appearance: her tall figure had grown supernaturally thin, her hands and face were transparent in their whiteness, her eyes shone with kind and tender pity–they were no longer cold and hard as they had been.

When Ann, overcome with grief, sank by her father's bedside and sobbed out her sorrow, she felt her mother's hand on her head, and her voice whispering:

"Nay, my child, do not weep; it is well with him. We have prayed together, he and I, when God has vouchsafed to him short glimpses of reason, and I am persuaded that his soul is safe in the hands of his Maker. Do not trouble; it is well with him."

Then she knelt beside her and poured forth her soul in prayer. It was wonderful to hear her; she was as one inspired; the words flowed forth in a stream of unbroken eloquence. The warders, the keepers, the women of the prison, all gathered round to hear her, and many having come to mock, remained to pray. Throughout the day this went on.

Towards evening Reginald came to take Ann away. Suddenly life seemed to come back to the dying man. He sat up; they put pillows behind him. He looked around him, and seeing Ann and Reginald, beckoned them to come to him. Laying his hands on their heads, he blessed them.

"I have one desire," he said. "I have loved lands, and wealth, and all the good things of this world; now I know they are of no value at all. I charge you two to discover if there be any child, kith or kin, of those who possessed Newbolt Manor before it came into my hands. If so, give it back to them; if not, then do as the disciples of old–succour the poor, make a home for the destitute, let the wealth go back to God who gave it. You will remember?"

"I will remember, Father," said Reginald; "have no fear."

Colonel Newbolt sank back on his pillows as if content, and quietly, without an effort, as if he were falling asleep, passed away.

His wife rose from her knees and covered his face. At a sign from her all those present left the cell, except her children. They remained with her until the last offices for the dead had been accomplished, then, at her command, hand in hand they went forth; she remaining alone to keep watch beside him who had

been her husband.

CHAPTER XII
A Faithful Friend

In the life of every one of us, from the cradle to the grave, there are landmarks. The child's first tooth, its first step as it half tumbles across the floor into its mother's arms, the first word from the baby's lips, are stages in the child's life and in the mother's heart. So it goes on imperceptibly–the child, the youth, the man, school and college; these come to all. But there are waves which sweep over each individual soul, casting it ashore; a master wave, drawing us into the great sea of destiny.

The death of Colonel Newbolt changed the current of more lives than one. Ann had adored her father, and when Reginald took her forth out of that prison-house where he lay dead, she was as one stunned. How great the change in her life was to be she did not then conceive, for in the first hour of a *great* sorrow, that sorrow alone holds us.

Ann went back to Somerset House, and Patience and Agnes tried to comfort her; but on the morrow Reginald fetched her, and she went home to her mother.

Then a strange thing happened. One morning, as Patience and Agnes sat at work, a commissioner came and informed them that the king had given orders that the queen's apartments, and, in fact, the whole of Somerset House, was to be put under repair. This was to be done quickly because of the king's marriage and the return of her majesty, the queen dowager. "Therefore", he said, "the king desires that you should remove to Hampton Court, to the apartments he has given you there."

Patience listened in silence, and when the messenger had departed she went and shut herself into her own room and did not appear till supper-time, much to Agnes's astonishment, for she had never before been left so many hours alone. The first words she spoke startled Agnes.

"You heard the order for us to leave this house and go to Hampton Court," she began. "Well, I will not obey, because I do not choose that you should live in the midst of the king's court. I find," she continued, "that with great economy, and by living in some quiet country village, I have money enough to keep us for two or three years. Will you be content to live thus?"

"I shall be glad to do so," said Agnes. "Ever since we were at Greenwich my heart has yearned for a country life. I told you a long time ago I was tired of courts. Take me where you will, Patience, as far out of the world as it pleases you. Of course, Ann and Reginald will know where we go?" she added.

"No," said Patience, "nobody must know. I am taking you where it would be a danger for you to be known."

Agnes's face fell. "But I love my friends," she said, "and would not be wholly parted from them."

"For the present you must be," said Patience. "What the future holds in store for you I cannot tell. May the Lord guide our footsteps in the right way!"

When Reginald called the next day to ask them to come to his mother and Ann, they were gone–no one could tell where, no one knew. They had left soon after dawn, taking Martha with them, also Rolfe, a north-country man who had accompanied Patience to France many years before. Evidently Patience had judged these two to be fitting persons to serve them, to be trusted.

Sad at heart, Reginald returned and told his mother what had happened.

"I am sorry," she said. "I was going to ask Patience to take charge of Ann, because this night I had a call–I heard voices and I saw visions. The spirit of the Lord bids me forsake the world and serve Him only. Nothing must hinder me, and yet Ann stands in my way; she is there before me, blocking my path. What can I do with her? The Lord calls me and I must go. Within those prison gates my work lies; my work is the saving of the souls which He has given into my hands."

"But, Mother," said Reginald, "what can you do for so many?"

"Do!" she answered. "I will feed their bodies and souls; I will teach them and I will preach to them, if perchance I may save but one soul alive."

"And who will care for you, Mother?" asked Ann.

"The Lord," answered Mistress Newbolt, "He will care for me."

Tears were pouring down Ann's face.

"Ah, Mother, you will surely need someone," she said. "I will tend you, I will love you, I will care for you; my heart tells me this is my work. We will leave this great house. We will take just two rooms without the prison gates; you can do your work and I will do mine. When you are weary you can rest, and I will tend you. Shall it not be so, Reginald?" And she turned to her brother.

"Ann speaks wisely, Mother," said Reginald. "Let her remain with you."

"I will not hinder you, Mother," said Ann; "I will help you. To Newbolt we cannot go, because you know my father has willed that we should not dwell there."

"In any case," said Reginald, "I doubt if we shall keep it long. The king's greed is great; he would not have suffered us to remain. Doubtless, now that

my father is dead, he will take it in payment for the fine which would have been imposed."

"Then sell it at once, and give the money to my poor," said his mother.

"If I can," answered Reginald; "but I doubt if that be possible. For myself, I shall go abroad. Surely better days will dawn ere long!"

He might well say this, he might well hope this. Throughout England and Scotland a religious persecution was waging: the Act of Uniformity was passed. Against the Independents and the Presbyterians the utmost rigour of the law was enforced; the prisons were filled with nonconformist ministers and their people. Many compared this time to the great St. Bartholomew massacre of the Huguenots. And what was still more grievous to all righteous souls, the court was a hideous place, full of evil-doings, grieving those who retained still the faintest semblance of morality.

The marriage of the king did not improve the state of things; indeed, it made matters worse, for the misery endured by the young queen, Catherine of Braganza, was very great. She was left in solitude, her own country-people were taken away from her, and she was forced to consort with the king's friends, who, for the most part, were distasteful to her.

All the ideal dreams which Reginald and Ann had dreamt fell crumbling to the ground. They looked back with something almost of regret to the days of Cromwell's rule, when the strictest observance of religious duty and of virtue was at least commended. Their hearts were sore within them. How would it end? There seemed much trouble in the future for both of them.

"If only a war would break out I would volunteer," said Reginald. "I will not stay at home. If I cannot serve my king at home, I will serve my country by sea or by land."

"And I will serve my mother," said Ann; and timidly, because she feared her, and yet fondly, because she knew she was her mother, Ann threw her arms round her neck and whispered softly in her ears:

"Where thou goest I will go; thy God shall be my God."

Mistress Newbolt did not return the caress, she merely answered:

"It is the will of the Lord. Thou shalt abide with me."

That same day she dismissed all her servants, acting justly by them, even kindly, for she gave them their full wages and something over; then she and Ann went together into the city, and found two or three rooms at the top of a house in the Old Bailey.

Ann, who had been accustomed to open air and freedom, wondered how she would live there; but she did not oppose her mother. On the contrary, she fell in with her views, and for the next day or two they were busy moving what furniture was necessary from the great house to the poor lodging. Ann thought

of many things, and her activity was very great. She piled up the linen, she took all she imagined could possibly be for their comfort; but her heart sank as she went up those narrow stairs, meeting ever and again strange faces of men and women such as she had never looked on before. To her it was an ugly life: would anything make it beautiful? She never thought of that; she only knew she had to live in the midst of it, and she prayed for strength to do her duty.

Sometimes for days together she never saw her mother. She wondered where she was, until at last Reginald told her that the governor had sent for her. It came to pass that when Mistress Newbolt ceased to go amongst the prisoners they had become insubordinate and had clamoured for her. Therefore the governor besought her to renew her work amongst them, for it meant a certain amount of peace, which no one else could secure, and she answered him:

"I was waiting for your call, sir; God told me it would come. I am ready."

So Ann was left alone in the upper part of the strange house, with only an old woman whom she had taken to help her in the work, for her mother would have no servants. The old woman lived in the same house in a garret, and she had no belongings. The neighbours said that in winter time she was well-nigh starving, but in the summer she hawked flowers in the street, and sometimes fruit.

"You will do that no longer," said Ann. "I will feed you, and you will do the rough work for me while my mother is out."

Thus it was arranged. At first Ann would send her marketing–she was herself afraid of being alone in the streets–but gradually, as she grew familiar with her new life, she ceased to do this, and went out herself to make her purchases. The air did her good, and, as her mother gave her but little money, she had to be economical.

One day, as she and Reginald were walking down Drury Lane, she asked: "Where has all our father's fortune gone?"

"Our mother is spending it," he answered. "There are the rents of Newbolt Manor; she gets them all. I went to see our lawyer the other day. He told me that by my father's will everything went to our mother, unconditionally. She is mistress of everything; we are dependent upon her."

"It is not right," said Ann; "we shall be beggars."

"I am afraid we shall," said Reginald, "but it cannot be helped. You will care for our mother; I, as best I can, will care for you both; but the glory is gone out of my life."

"Tut, tut!" said a man's voice, and a hand came down heavily on Reginald's shoulder.

He turned sharply, put his hand to his hat, exclaiming: "My Lord Craven!"

"I was coming on behind you, and I heard you say that wicked thing, that

the glory was gone out of your life," said Lord Craven, "and you but a lad still. You are starting in life, and because you have one disappointment your heart fails you. Is that being a man? Turn in with me, and we will speak together. I am no longer young, and verily the glory has departed out of my life." And his quaint face, neither old nor young, grew very sad.

Lord Craven had been all his life the champion of the Protestant religion throughout Europe, and the acknowledged knight of that beautiful but unfortunate queen, Elizabeth Stuart of Bohemia, aunt of Charles II. The queen had come to London, and had lived a few months at Lord Craven's house in Drury Lane. She had died in the early spring, and so a life-long service had come to an end, and disappointment and ingratitude were to be his reward.

This is the romance of history, savouring of that mediæval worship of a woman which we meet with once and again, the Lauras and Beatrices of life; stories scattered here and there to show us what so few realize, the spiritual side of the life of man and woman; love which is content to live, asking for nothing, looking for nothing that this earth can give, wholly unselfish, content to serve, content to worship.

Both Reginald and Ann knew Lord Craven's story well, they knew his devotion to the queen and to the Protestant faith, also his untiring goodness to the whole Stuart family. They had seen him, as all the world had seen him, follow the coffin of his "queen", as he always called Elizabeth Stuart, holding in his hand his plumed helmet, in which was fastened always a small white glove, his token of service. Many mocked, some smiled at the little Lord Craven, as he was ofttimes called; but in their hearts all good-minded men honoured him.

That the earl should address him thus familiarly was a high honour for Reginald, and he felt it as such.

"My lord," he said, "I thank you, but I have my sister with me, and cannot leave her."

"Mistress Ann," said Lord Craven, and his kindly face smiled down upon the girl, "it seems to me we do not live far apart. Had you not a house about here?"

"Yes, my lord, we lived in yonder house," answered Reginald, and he pointed to their old home. "But my father was arrested and thrown into prison. He is dead, and we have moved to a humbler lodging."

"I thought as much," said the Earl. "Come and tell me all that has befallen you." And with that graciousness which bespoke the man who had lived in courts, he bowed, and, looking at Ann, added:

"You will do me much honour if you will accompany your brother to my house." And he doffed his hat, with the white glove.

Ann curtsied, and the three turned back together until they reached the

great portal leading to the earl's house at the corner of Drury Lane and Aldwych. The door was wide open, as was often the custom in those days, and men-servants stood here and there ready to receive and execute their master's orders. Passing through the great hall, the earl conducted his guests to his private library, where he mostly sat himself. It looked out upon gardens, and seemed to all intents and purposes far removed from the busy world. Over the mantelpiece was a lovely portrait of Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia, and beneath it was written:

"Your most affectionate and most obedient slave, who loved you and will love you incessantly, infinitely, unto death".

Such was the vow William Craven had made as a young man, and from which, now his hair was grey, death alone had released him.

To Ann and Reginald in their youth, with the glamour of life still before them, this room seemed a sanctuary.

"Sit down, sit down," said the earl, "and tell me what your trouble is, and why the glory has gone out of your young life."

He smiled as he repeated Reginald's words. He recognized in them the impatient cry of youth.

Reginald never knew how it happened, but he poured out his whole soul to the earl. He told him how he had refused to have anything to do with Cromwell and the Commonwealth, how he had vowed allegiance to King Charles and the Stuarts, how his father had been, so to speak, done to death, and how he himself, seeing what the court of Charles II. was, had lost heart.

"You have been serving a man and not a cause," said Lord Craven; "that is why you are in this plight. Forget the man, and think of the cause. You do not know the Stuarts as I know them. They are a wild race–they will not be curbed either for good or evil–daring, brilliant, beautiful!" He paused, his eyes turning involuntarily to the portrait of his queen. Then he continued, "They hold men's hearts in their hands, and they break them without more ado than if they were of common clay. Look back to their past history!" he exclaimed, and his face had in it a strange beauty as he stood before the two young people and spoke to them. "Think of Mary Stuart; she lost her crown, her kingdom, everything, for love, and others lost everything for her. It is in their blood; they cannot help it any more than men can help kneeling before their shrine and worshipping them. We were a score of gentlemen who first vowed ourselves to the service of the Princess Elizabeth when she went forth out of England to wed the Prince Palatine. They are all dead; I am left alone. Do you think I have not suffered? And yet you, because you have high ideals and are disappointed, turn away in disgust, and would go over to the enemy."

"No, not that," said Reginald, "not that, but I will not be a courtier. I will be what you are, my lord, a soldier. I will fight if there be still a cause to fight for."

"I think that will be easily found," said the earl; "there is likely to be war with Holland before long. If you are truly desirous of seeing active service, I will take care that you have a place found for you. Will you serve under Prince Rupert?"

"Indeed I will," answered Reginald. "I could hope for nothing better."

"Then take courage," said the earl, "I will speak for you. You say that your father is dead. He was like many another; the tables turned. Your estates are likely to be forfeited, you will surely have heavy fines to pay, but beyond that, seeing that you are yourself in the king's service, and that you have never drawn sword against him, you will not suffer. What estates have you?"

"We have but one large estate," said Reginald, "and my father with his dying breath bade me return it either to its lawful heirs or to God's poor."

"Where is it?" asked the earl.

"Up north, in Westmorland," answered Reginald. "Newbolt Manor it is called now, but it was once De Lisle Abbey, and belonged to the De Lisles."

"That's strange," said the earl; "poor Gilbert De Lisle! I knew him well. He was killed at Worcester, and he left a fair young wife, who died of a broken heart in child-birth. I never heard whether the child lived or died."

"I have always understood it died," said Reginald, "and that there was no heir to the estate."

"Ah, well, then the king will bestow it on some of his favourites," said Lord Craven. "And your sister, has she no fortune, no dower-money?"

"My father left some money," answered Reginald, "but my mother is spending it." And then rapidly he told the earl of his father's imprisonment and death, and how by natural instinct his mother had taken up work in the prison, and now was spending all the wealth they had upon it.

"Then, Mistress Ann, we shall have to see to you," said the earl; "only prevent this brother of yours from forsaking the cause. It has had its dark days; you must live them down. Be not down-hearted," he said, turning to Reginald. "We cannot make the world as we would have it; we must take it as it comes and make the best of it. Resign your commission in the King's Guards, and go abroad to Holland; I will give you an introduction to Prince Rupert."

Reginald hesitated for a moment.

"My mother and my sister," he said, "I cannot leave them unprovided for."

"I will see to them," said the earl; "they shall not suffer. We cannot afford to let young earnest souls like yours go adrift."

"Thank you!" said Reginald, "I will think the matter over and bring you my answer, if you will let me; but in any case I thank you for your kindness to us strangers."

"You are no strangers," said Earl Craven. "I have heard of you from my

friend Delarry." As he said this he looked at Ann, whose face coloured and eyes drooped. "Moreover, I have watched you both. I knew of your father's arrest and of his death, and I shall be glad to be of service to you. I am afraid the king is making enemies of those who would be faithful servants, so, as is my custom, I must step into the breach."

"And we thank you," said Reginald; "your generosity will not have been bestowed in vain."

He bowed to Lord Craven, Ann curtsied, but the earl held out his hand to them both.

"We are friends. Think of me as such," he said; "for I am a lone man, and would gladly boast of a son and daughter such as you are, to comfort me in my old age. My house is open to you; when you need me you will not be refused."

With that he turned away, and Reginald and Ann went out together.

"Surely it is God's hand," said Ann. "We were well-nigh despairing, you and I, Reginald, and now we have a friend."

"Yes," answered Reginald, "not too soon; the world seemed very dark, and now, well, I see the sun."

Ann looked up and smiled at him.

"So do I," she said, and they went on together with light hearts. The young are so glad to cast a burden off their shoulders, to greet the sunshine, to welcome hope; it is the prerogative of youth!

CHAPTER XIII
The Hamlet of St. Mary's

It was but a tiny village nestling in the midst of moors and fells. The river Eden ran through it, and all around was the richest verdure, woods and plantations, such as can only be seen in Westmorland, one of the smallest but also one of the most fertile counties in England.

It was just before harvest time–the golden corn waved over many an acre. A tiny church stood with its white turret just under the hill-side; beside it was the vicarage, and there for many a year the Rev. John Ewan had dwelt and ministered to a scattered moorland flock. He had come there as a young man with a young wife. She lay in the little churchyard, and of their three children there remained

but one, a girl of sixteen summers, who kept house and served her father with untiring devotion. She had never been beyond the radius of the three counties which bound Westmorland, and she had no ambition to wander. She had no companion save her father; she rode and walked with him. He had taught her all she knew, and that was considerably more than most girls, for the winters were long and the days short, and in the evening, over the fireside, she read much, and she listened to her father as he spoke to her of things of the past. She knew much of the history of England; it was a passion with her, and she had ever been a rigid loyalist, as her father was.

Strange to tell, throughout the Civil War this little village and its minister had been left unmolested, and yet it was at no great distance from Appleby; but then it was such a little place, and the farmhouses were so scattered. Often during those days of internal warfare they had seen men on horseback, Roundheads and Royalists alike, ride in hot haste through the village, and Jessie had longed for them to stop. She would have dearly loved to speak with them, but they passed on. There was nothing to tempt them in the dozen low thatched cottages which clustered together; there was no inn for them to halt at for refreshment, so they invariably rode on. Almost at the top of the hill, beyond which the moorlands stretched, there was an old farmhouse. No one knew to whom by rights it belonged. Some said it was part of the De Lisle estate; others that it was tithe land, and the vicar could lay claim to it. Be that as it may, it had been long uninhabited, when one morning a serving-man stopped at the vicarage gate and asked to see the minister.

He was shown into a room with great rafters across the ceiling and walls lined with books. At a table in the centre, at his desk, sat the vicar. He was a man something over forty, with a handsome, clever face, but with a look of abstraction in his eyes not unusual in one who lives far away from the world and its doings. This morning he had two companions, a big sheep-dog and Jessie, the latter curled up in an arm-chair deep in her book.

"A man wants to see you, sir," said the woman servant, opening the door just wide enough to put in her head.

"Show him in, Mary," answered the vicar; and a big man in a rough brown jerkin, leggings, coarse stockings, and hob-nailed shoes entered, holding his cap in his hand. He was a man of about five-and-thirty, with a mass of brown hair and a somewhat reddish beard.

He came up and stood at the vicar's table. As he did so he laid a letter before him.

"My mistress has sent me with this," he said; "will you please read it, sir, and give me your answer."

The vicar looked at the man.

"It seems to me I have seen you before," he said.

The man shook his head.

"It is many a long day since I have been in these parts," he said.

"Then you *have* been in these parts before?" asked the vicar.

"Will you read the letter, sir, because I have left the missus in the wood out yonder," he answered shortly, adding, "We have travelled all the way from London, and shall be glad to have a roof over our heads."

Jessie twisted herself round, looked at the man, then rose, saying quickly:

"There is no room in this village, and no inn; you must go farther on to Dearham."

The man looked at her, a queer smile lighting up his rugged face.

"There be the Holt, missie, I ween."

"The Holt!" exclaimed Jessie; "people don't go to the Holt, do they, Father?"

During this conversation the vicar was reading the letter which had been given to him. It consisted of four pages of close writing, and the vicar's face changed more than once while he was mastering its contents.

When he had finished he laid the letter down and rested his head in his hands.

"Well, sir?" said the man anxiously.

"I will go back with you, my man," he said.

"Jessie," he continued, "the key of Holt Farm is on the nail; take it, go quickly and open the house." And without another word he and the man went out together.

Jessie rose, took the key, whistled, and went to the door, the sheep-dog at her heels.

"Where be you going, miss?" asked Mary, looking out from the half-open kitchen door.

"I am going to Holt Farm," she answered, "to open it."

"What for? It was aired last Monday," said Mary.

"Father told me to go," answered Jessie; and with that she left the house, went through the garden and the adjoining churchyard, crossed a low stone bridge which spanned the river a few yards lower down, and began climbing the hillside.

It was pretty steep, but she did not feel it; she had been born among the hills, and fells, and dales. The dog bounded before her, sniffing the balmy air, odorous with the scent of the heather and the multitudinous wild flowers which grew on the hillside. It was a good walk before she reached the wicket-gate, and, lifting the latch, went into the farm garden.

A gravel path led up to the house. There were no weeds, no overgrowth of any sort, as is often the case in an uninhabited homestead.

He had never given any reason for his doing so, but the vicar had himself kept the place in order, had had repairs done when necessary, and had seen that the garden was trim and neat, and that every week the windows were thrown open. The house was literally buried in trees, so that till you came close up to it you could not see more than the outline of a building. There had been no clearance made for the last fifteen years, and the boughs of the elm-trees touched the windows.

It was not a large place: a stone house with a deep porch in the centre, on either side of which were long low windows, with lozenge-shaped panes of glass. On the first and only story were two similar windows, that was all; but the house extended far back, looking out upon a somewhat large court-yard, in which there were stables and outhouses, as was common in farmhouses.

Jessie turned the big key in the door; it opened immediately, and she entered a small, square hall. It was red-tiled and furnished with some oak chairs, and a great clock of the kind we nowadays call a grandfather's clock. From this hall a staircase led to the upper rooms. On either side of the hall were doors, which Jessie now threw open. The one on the right hand showed a long, low, oak-panelled room, with a large fireplace, a great oak table in the centre, a sideboard, and a dresser, upon which were arranged plates, and dishes, and great pewter mugs.

Evidently this was the dining-hall and kitchen in one, for beyond was the scullery. Everything was spotlessly clean, save for a light covering of dust. The door on the other side of the hall led into a parlour, which was furnished with unusual luxury for those days. The sofas and easy-chairs were covered with a delicately faded chintz. There were taborets and small tables, scattered here and there, of highly-polished oak, upon which stood vases and big bowls of old china. A pair of virginals occupied one corner of the room, and beside them, on a stool, lay an unstrung guitar. It was a room which conjured up dreams. Who had dwelt there? What gentle soul had once touched those now broken cords, or let her fingers run over the notes of the virginals? There were portraits also on the walls, not many; but two attracted the eye at once. They represented a young man in full court dress of the time of Charles I, and a young girl, a child almost, in a white satin gown, with strings of pearls round her neck, and her fair, golden hair in curls about her forehead.

Jessie from her childhood had always loved this room. Once or twice she had asked her father whom these pictures represented, and what was the story of this house where no one dwelt, but he had answered:

"I cannot tell you, Jessie. I was a young man when I came here. I only saw the mistress once–when she was dying. Don't ask me anything more, child!"

So she had dreamt of many things, and made pictures to herself of those

who had once lived in those rooms.

Upstairs there were two bed-rooms with great beds in them, one shrouded in damask, the other in white dimity.

Looking out of the window she saw her father and the man coming up towards the house leading three horses. On two of them women were riding on pillions; the other one had no rider, but instead a girl was running on in front. She had thrown off her cloak, for although it was early morning the day was warm, and she was bareheaded.

Jessie went out into the porch, and, looking down at this girl, saw that her face and figure were unlike any she had ever seen before. She resembled a lily, tall and willowy, with golden hair, upon which the sun now glinted, and with a face so sweet that at a distance it might have been an angel's.

She was evidently impatient, for she ran quickly on in front of the others. Once she paused and looked back, and Jessie heard her call out:

"Is it up there–all the way up there?"

And her father, raising his hat, had answered her:

"Yes, up there, my child."

In a short time she had reached the wicket-gate, caught sight of Jessie in the porch, and laughed at her, such a glad, merry laugh, which seemed to bring joy with it, and stir up all the echoes in the old house!

Jessie started. Could it be that she heard that laugh re-echoed from somewhere? But she had no time to listen; her hands were taken, and rosy lips pouted to kiss her.

"You have come to welcome us!" exclaimed the girl. "That is good of you. Oh, I am so glad to be here; I am so tired!"

"One would not think so," returned Jessie; "you have come so quickly."

"Of course, of course I came quickly, because I am so tired," was the merry answer. "Let me see." And she pushed her way past Jessie and ran straight into the parlour.

"Oh, how sweet! how pretty!" she exclaimed. "I thought it would be ugly and desolate. Patience would not tell me; she said she had seen Holt Farm long long ago, and verily it looks as if someone had just gone out and left it for us. Oh, I shall be so happy here, so happy!" And she let herself fall into a great arm-chair, which seemed to swallow her up.

Just at that moment the vicar and Patience reached the house. The vicar lifted Patience down, and, turning, said to Rolfe, the man-servant:

"Take the horses round to the back. I will come and show you the way to the stables."

"Thank you kindly, sir, I know the way," answered Rolfe. "You had better get down here," he added, speaking to the serving-woman, and he lifted her to

the ground; but she was stiff with her long journeyings, and would have fallen if he had not steadied her.

"Lack-a-day!" she exclaimed, "I hope this is the end of our journeyings. A poor place, and a lonely one! Why, man, we might be murdered up here and no one be any the wiser!"

"Have no fear; you will not be murdered," said Rolfe, and, taking the three horses by their reins, he led them away.

Patience had entered the house. Her face was very white, her eyes full of tears, as she stood inside the parlour door looking around her.

Agnes, when she saw her, sprang up.

"Patience, you never told me it was so beautiful! It is the loveliest little place I have ever seen."

"It is a very humble home," said Patience, "but it is home."

"I have never had a home before," said Agnes, "only big rambling palaces. I shall love this; it breathes of love." And, taking Jessie's hand, she said, "Take me, show me everything."

Jessie looked at her father. This impetuous young person was a revelation to them both; life was so still and calm at St. Mary's, for so the hamlet was called. A little way down the river there had once been a chapel, dedicated to the Virgin. It formed part of an old convent, but the convent and chapel had been destroyed in the time of Henry VIII; a few stones only remained to show where it had been, but the name of St. Mary's had remained to the hamlet.

"Well," said Agnes, "are you not going to show me anything?" And she frowned at Jessie.

"Yes, yes! Come, I will show you all!" Jessie answered quickly, as if she were bound to obey this newcomer.

"First tell me your name."

"My name is Jessie," was the answer.

"And mine is Agnes. That will do; now, Jessie, come along." And the young feet pattered away over the tiled floors, through the kitchen and scullery, out into the court-yard, then up the stairs, and through the bed-rooms, awakening echoes where there had been a long silence.

Patience looked up at the vicar.

"Have I done well?" she asked.

"I think you have done well and wisely," he answered.

"And you, is it well with you? How beautifully you have kept the place. It is just as we left it."

"I have done my best," the vicar answered; "it has been a labour of love. I thought you would bring the child home one day."

"It is time I did," she answered.

CHAPTER XIV
The Mystery Cleared Up

"Father, who are these people who have walked into Holt Farm as if it belonged to them?" asked Jessie that same evening. "Is it for them you have kept it so beautiful?"

The vicar hesitated a moment, looked at his daughter, then said quietly:

"Yes, Jessie, it was for them."

"Why have you never told me about them? Have you known them long?" she asked.

"I baptized that child," he answered, "and I buried her mother; she lies beneath the chancel in our little church."

"Where the cross is in the pavement, Father?" Jessie asked.

"Yes, there," he answered.

"There is no name," said Jessie softly.

"No, there is no name," answered her father.

"Does she know?" asked Jessie.

"Do you mean does the child know?" asked the vicar.

"Yes; who else should I mean?"

"I cannot tell," he answered; "I do not know myself."

"And the person who is with her?" asked Jessie.

"She knows everything; more than I do," answered her father. "She carried the child away, and I have not seen her since; only from time to time I have heard from her, and have had sums of money sent me to keep the house in order. It belongs to her. Now you must ask no more questions, and you must answer none. Can I trust you?"

"Of course you can," said Jessie, with a little touch of temper. "How beautiful this Agnes is!" she continued; "she is like two persons in one. She has the golden hair of the lady in the picture, and the laughing brown eyes of the man."

"You saw that?" asked her father.

"Of course I saw it; anyone would," she answered.

"Well, then, say nothing about it," said her father.

They sat down to their evening meal. Mary, the faithful servant, who had

been with them ever since Jessie's birth, who had nursed the mistress, who had seen the other little children laid beside her to rest, was excited to-night, and could not keep silence as she waited on the vicar and his daughter.

"The people in the village are all agog to know who the newcomers are," she said. "Only a few are left who remember the coming and the flitting from the Holt, fifteen years ago. They remember the christening of the babe and the burying of the mother. Old Thomas, the sexton, says he's sure the child's name was Agnes. Can that girl be the child?"

"It is even so, Mary," said the vicar, "but you need not talk about it. Let them say what they will. In a few days they will quiet down, and we shall hear no more gossip."

"I am not given to gossiping," said Mary in an injured tone, "but it's not that easy to shut other people's mouths."

"Don't try," said her master; "let things be."

The vicar was right. Things let alone settle down by themselves, and before a month was over Agnes and Patience had stepped into their places; it was as if they had always been at St. Mary's.

To the child it was a homecoming, a joy to her who had never had a home. From the first it was settled that she should go every day to the vicar to be taught with Jessie.

"She is very ignorant," Patience said, "she can barely read or write in English; but she is quick, and I shall be much mistaken if she does not learn as fast as you can teach her."

So the girlish figure running down the hillside, crossing the bridge, picking her way over the tombstones of the little churchyard on her way to the vicarage garden, was soon a familiar sight. The men and women going to their work in the fields wished her good morrow, and she answered them with a glad voice and a brilliant smile, so that at last many went out of their way to win that smile and that gracious greeting.

"She be that beautiful," they would say amongst themselves, and gradually a few remembered how the vicar had baptized a babe who was born at the Holt and how he had buried the mother a few days later. "If she be that babe," they said, "surely she be one of us." And they straightway adopted her.

Holt Farm, though not in itself an extensive holding, consisted of fields which had always been used by the vicar for grazing purposes. Also there was an acre or two of agricultural land, where the corn and the barley waved in their seasons. The vicar had superintended the farming of all this, and had gathered in the money, but now Patience took all things into her own hands. She engaged the labourers, she presided over the dairy, and the cattle and the poultry yard became a great feature of the place. Rolfe was her head man and Martha saw to

the house, and the vicar went each day to the Holt to see that all was well with Patience, and if she needed counsel, he gave it.

This homecoming of these two strangers changed many things in the hamlet of St. Mary's. Holt Farm became a centre to which they all looked. In that scattered parish for miles round the peasants soon learnt that for every ill and for every sorrow they would find help and sympathy there, so they came without fear and returned to their own homes cured, they said, both in body and soul.

Never for one moment did Agnes complain of the tasks set her by the vicar. Jessie was always there, and Jessie always helped her as long as she needed help, but she had come to her teacher with a clear, untired mind, and everything was easy to her. The vicar was a wonderful teacher; as he had taught Jessie, so he taught Agnes, not dry regulation lessons, but the pith of knowledge of people and of things. He let her talk; he let her tell him all her difficulties. She had but little clear knowledge of religion. This he put down to her foreign life. What she did know was indeed a strange medley; but with his strong mind he made things plain to her, so that she learnt to see and to understand rightly.

She was very confidential with him, as if he had been her father.

"I do not know anything about my father or my mother," she said one day, "only that they are dead." And tears gathered in her eyes so that the vicar was moved. He laid his hand on her, saying, "I baptized you, Agnes, and the same night your mother died. Will you come and see where her body lies until the great resurrection day?" He took her by the hand, and Jessie followed them. The three knelt before the altar, in front of which was a black cross embedded in the stone. It had been the vicar's own handiwork.

When they rose from their knees Agnes asked under her voice:

"What was my mother's name?"

"Go home and ask Dame Patience," said the vicar. "I cannot tell you; she is your guardian."

Agnes went home, and that night the vicar came and spoke to Patience, and told her she had best tell the child the mystery of her birth.

"It is no mystery," said Patience, "only because we feared those to whom Cromwell might give her lands, and what evil might befall her in consequence, have I kept it secret, and the queen also." Then, taking Agnes by the hand, she pointed to the two pictures and said:

"That is your father, Sir Gilbert de Lisle, and that is your mother, Agnes, his young wife, and my sister. This place belongs to me, it was part of my inheritance, and when your father joined the king's army he entreated me to bring his wife hither because it is a quiet place, and because to leave her alone at De Lisle Abbey would have been to expose her to great danger if the king's army were routed. I consented, and he brought her himself to the Holt, and here they parted never to

meet again. Our worst fears were realized: your father was killed at Worcester, and from that hour your mother never lifted her head. She waited to give you birth, and died within the week, desiring me to take you as soon as I could over to France to Queen Henrietta Maria. I was loath to do so; I would sooner have kept you here. But she proved right, for before long Cromwell laid his hands on everything, distributed lands and estates, and a child like you, with no one to protect you, would probably have fared badly. We heard that the whole of the De Lisle estate had been bestowed upon a Parliamentarian, but who he was we do not know."

Agnes turned sharply round:

"But I know," she said.

"Who?" asked Patience.

"Colonel Newbolt!" answered Agnes.

"How do you know?" asked the vicar.

"Because, as Aunt Patience knows, his son and daughter are great friends of mine, and as we were talking one day they told me they had come into lands belonging to Royalists. I asked the name of the Royalists, and Reginald answered, 'The De Lisles'. Afterwards Ann told me all about the De Lisles, and the legend concerning them. Then again, I heard from an old man that though they had been driven out the De Lisles would come back again. But Ann and Reginald are my dear friends! I will not have them turned out for me! They would have gone of themselves if they had been asked, but they shall not be asked; they are my friends." And she burst out weeping.

It was such an unusual thing for Agnes to weep that Patience took her in her arms, and petted and made much of her.

"We will leave things in God's hands, my child," she said. "If He gives you back your own it will be well; if not, then it will be well also."

"What do I want more than I have?" said Agnes. "I am your child, my own dear aunt, and this place shall be my home; here I was born, and here my mother is buried–I am content."

"So be it," said Patience. "No one shall trouble you; we will dwell in peace together."

Verily they did dwell in peace, buried in this little out-of-the-way spot. If Agnes sometimes thought of her old friends, she silenced her longings, for to find them she must go back to a world which she did not love, to London or to Paris, to courts and court life. In the quiet hours of study her mind grew with such rapidity that even the vicar marvelled.

Jessie was no laggard at learning or at work of any sort, but Agnes outstripped her, with that quiet ease with which she did everything. Her beautiful soul was reflected in her form and face. To see her was to love her. She was a

sunbeam going in and out of the cottages, running to and fro, kneeling in church; wherever she passed, brightness followed in her wake.

Excepting at night she and Jessie were never parted. The Holt and the Vicarage were one home for both; so they grew side by side, Jessie a quiet maiden, very wise and good, ordering her father's house, teaching in the little school, visiting the sick all day. In the evenings the two would sit together reading or talking, the vicar and Patience would join them, and the former would bring tidings from the outside world. Two or three times a year he would go into Appleby, and then he would come back with a great store of court news. He told them of the battles which were being fought at sea, of the selling of Dunkirk–a shame to England–of stories of De Ruyter and many other great captains.

"England is losing her prestige," he said, "by sea and by land. The king loves pleasure too well, and his country too little."

Like tall lilies the two girls grew, side by side, with sunshine in their hearts and on their faces. The tender blossoms of spring, the bright summer days with their fruits and flowers, the mellow autumn with its crimson sunsets, the snows of winter, went and came almost unheeded by them, for each season had its joys. There was not a cloud on those young brows; unreasoningly, as if it were a natural thing, they rejoiced in life. Shadows had gone before and might follow after, but for the time they walked in light.

CHAPTER XV
At Court

Men stopped their work, women turned out on to their door-steps, to see a king's messenger riding through the hamlet of St. Mary's. He drew rein at the vicarage gate, threw himself off his horse, and would have knocked at the door had it not been wide open; so he called out:

"In the king's name, parson!"

The vicar, bending over his next Sunday's sermon, rose hastily and came out.

"Are you Parson Ewan?" asked the man.

"I am," answered the vicar, straightening himself.

"Then can you tell me if a woman by name Patience Beaumont is living

hereabouts at a place called Holt Farm?"

"Certainly she is," said the vicar. "She has dwelt there for well-nigh three years."

"Will you direct me to the farm?" asked the messenger.

Without any further answer the vicar stepped out into the garden.

"You have but to cross yonder bridge and go straight before you. Holt Farm stands just behind that clump of trees."

"It is a steep ride for a horse," put in the man.

"Yes; you would do better to go on foot," answered the vicar. "I will see to your horse; you will find it here on your way back."

"Thank you!" said the messenger, "I shall be glad to walk. I have been riding since dawn."

"You come from London?" asked the vicar.

"Naturally," answered the man. "Do you not see I am a king's messenger? But I come from a queen." And he showed on his sleeve the embroidered lilies of France entwined with the rose of England.

"Queen Henrietta Maria of France?" said the vicar slowly.

"The same," answered the man, giving the reins he still held to the vicar. "Have you no inn in the place?" he asked.

"No," said the vicar, "but you will find good refreshment up yonder. I would offer you some myself, but it is better for a man to do his work first and eat and drink afterwards. You have not far to go."

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps you are wise," he said, and went off.

The vicar watched him. "What news can he have brought?" he thought. "Is our peace going to be broken into?" And a look of regret crept over his face. Three peaceful years is a span in a man's life which he does not willingly see disturbed.

He turned, re-entered the house, and was met by Jessie in her bibbed apron, her hands white from kneading the bread.

"Who is that man, Father?" she asked.

"The king's messenger," he answered.

"What can he want? Why has he come here?"

"That I cannot tell you," answered her father. "We shall probably know in due time."

"If I had not my first batch ready for the oven, I would run up to the farm at once," she said regretfully.

"Better wait, my little girl," said the vicar. "If it is good news it will come to us quickly; if it is bad, there is time enough. Go back to your bread-making; I will go back to my sermon."

"Oh, that is all very well!" Jessie muttered to herself, "but I am always afraid of what will happen up there, lest something should take them away again, and then, then what should I do?" And tears gathered in her eyes.

If Jessie had had few joys in life, she had had no sorrows, so that even this little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand in her horizon, frightened her soul. She went back to her bread-making, but her heart was no longer in her work, and the bread suffered; it was long rising, and she felt guilty when on the morrow Mary remarked:

"It's not so light as it might be, Jessie."

Agnes was in the garden tying up some plants, gathering the roses, and clearing away any dead leaf or bud which had faded on the bushes. Suddenly she heard a click at the garden gate, looked up, and saw a man in the royal livery she remembered so well, just walking up the gravel path to the house.

He saw her, came up, and doffed his cap.

"Are you Dame Patience Beaumont?" he asked.

"No," she answered, laughing; "I am Agnes Beaumont. Patience is my aunt. What do you want with her?"

"I have a letter for her," answered the messenger, opening a satchel which was flung over his shoulder, and drawing forth a somewhat large packet. "I was to deliver this into her own hands," he continued. "Will you call her? And then will you bid your serving wench give me some food? I have ridden hard since dawn without breaking my fast, and I am both hungry and thirsty–more thirsty than hungry," he added, with a meaning look.

"Come this way," said Agnes, and though she was clad in simple homespun, with a white kerchief folded across her bosom and an apron tied over her skirt, and though she wore thick high-heeled shoes–on which, however, were silver buckles–there was about her a something which spoke of gentle birth. She walked so erect, so easily, with such an unspeakably graceful swing.

The man watched her curiously. He was accustomed to court dames, queens, and princesses.

"If you will come this way," she said, "Martha will give you food and drink, and I will take your letter."

He followed her to the back premises, and, opening a side door which led into the kitchen, she called out:

"Here is a king's messenger, Martha, asking for Aunt Patience. He has travelled from London, and is hungry and thirsty. Will you see to him?"

"Lack-a-day!" said Martha, coming forward, "I guess he'll bring us no good."

"That's a hard speech, Mistress Martha," said the man. "Why should I bring

you ought but good from her gracious majesty, Queen Henrietta, whose servant I am?"

She stood before him and looked at him.

"Why," she cried, "you're Peter Kemp!"

"And you be Martha," he said. "Well, the place has agreed with you, Martha; you look ten years younger." And he caught hold of her two hands and shook them.

"Supposing you give me my aunt's letter," broke in Agnes with a stately air, "you can greet each other after."

"I beg your humble pardon," said the man, and fumbling once more in the satchel, he drew out the packet, and without any further trouble gave it to her.

[image]

"HE DREW OUT THE PACKETS"

She turned to go, but remembering, looked back and said somewhat haughtily:

"You can feed him now, Martha."

She was hardly outside the door when she heard them talking, fifty to the dozen. She paused, and looked doubtfully at the packet in her hand.

"Is it for good or evil?" she murmured; then she added quickly: "Why should I fear? Surely what God sends must be good."

She was no longer a child but a girl, verging upon womanhood, tall, not over slight of figure, but, as we have said before, graceful and perfectly built. The face was the same child's face; the tendrils of golden hair still clustered round her head and lay on her white neck; the brown eyes had the same luminous, laughing look in them; her colouring was rich and perfect, a little sunburnt, like a ripe peach, and the lips were ripe too.

A door led from the kitchen to the living-room, so she had not far to go. Patience was sitting at the table with a pile of snowy linen in front of her, which she was sorting and arranging with housewifely care.

"Aunt Patience," said Agnes, going up to her, "a king's messenger has just brought this;" and she put the packet down before her. Then she stood at the other side of the table, her hands on her hips, watching her aunt, who took the packet up, turned it over, sighed, and exclaimed:

"Ah me, I have always feared this day would come!"

"Why have you feared it?" asked Agnes sharply.

"Because I am very much mistaken if it does not mean an uprooting," said

Patience.

"But if you do not choose to go, must you?" asked Agnes.

"Yes, I must," answered Patience. "You are old enough to understand now, Agnes, that I owe it to your father's honour to show you to the world as his child, the heiress of the De Lisles. There is no need now to hide it; if the queen has sent for me it is because she is of the same mind." With that she broke the seal and read the queen's letter.

It contained an express command for her to come to London and bring the child, Agnes De Lisle, with her, with all the papers necessary to prove her father's marriage with Agnes Beaumont, and her own birth.

"But I do not care," said Agnes. "I do not want to go; I am quite happy here."

"We are what we are born," said Patience. "Have you forgotten your catechism, 'to do your duty in that state of life in which it has pleased God to place you'? We will go to London, Agnes, and come back here if we can, my child."

Then Agnes threw herself face downwards on the table and sobbed her heart out. Patience herself was as white as the linen which lay before her, but she never swerved from what she believed to be right. That, too, was her nature; she gave no thought to her own likings or dislikings. Young as she had been when her sister died, all these years she had lived for her child and her duty. She sat quietly waiting till Agnes's storm of sobs should cease. Upon this scene the vicar entered.

He was evidently very serious and very much troubled. Patience looked up as he entered and their eyes met for one second, then she looked away, and a faint flush coloured her face. He went up to Agnes.

"My little girl," he said, "why this great grief?"

"The queen has ordered us to London," said Patience. "She must have divined our hiding-place, or someone must have told her, and she has bidden me take Agnes with me."

"Well, of course you must go," said the vicar; "what is there so very terrible in this, Agnes? I have heard you say you loved the queen well, and her daughter too."

"So I did," said Agnes, "but all that is past like a dream. I have been so happy here."

"And you were happy before you came here," said the vicar, smiling. "I thought you looked the happiest child I had ever seen when I first saw you. You will always find some joy in life, Agnes; it is in your nature. Come, cheer up!"

The vicar's power over Agnes had always been unquestioned. She stood up, wiped her eyes, and a poor little smile crept over her pretty face.

"There, that's all right," said the vicar, patting her on the shoulder. "Now, Mistress Patience, let me see your letter."

"Well," he said, laying it down, "much honour awaits you, Agnes, and you must try and do us all credit, and prove yourself worthy to be the representative of so good and so old a family as the De Lisles. You are your father's daughter, remember. You never knew him, but your Aunt Patience did, and she will tell you that he was a man of high honour and a good Christian soldier. He served God, he honoured his king, and he loved your mother. Is it not so, Patience?"

"Ah, it is indeed!" she said; "he worshipped his young wife. She was so young and fragile, it was something more than ordinary love which he bore her, and she could not live without him, that is why she died, Agnes. I see her now standing at his stirrup as he bade her farewell. She was brave as long as she saw him, but she fainted in my arms when he was out of sight. I tried hard to make her live for love of you, but she shook her head. 'I cannot', she said, and so she died."

Tears filled even the vicar's eyes as Patience told this story of true love.

Fortunately Martha broke in upon them.

"Peter Kemp says he must be off, that he must be at Skipton before nightfall. The queen was urgent that he should not tarry on the road. He waits your answer."

"He shall have it," said Patience, and going to an ancient cabinet she opened it, drew forth paper and pens, sat down and indited her letter, folded and sealed it, and then went herself into the kitchen and gave it to the man.

She knew him well, even as Rolfe, whom Martha had fetched, did. The men had been comrades together.

"You will come back to London, Rolfe," Peter said, as he took up his cap to go.

"Not I," answered Rolfe. "I never had much liking for court life; I shall abide here and keep the place together."

"Then you'll come, Martha," said Peter.

"I shall go where my mistress goes," answered the woman. "Good-day, and good luck go with you, Peter Kemp!"

They shook hands.

"I'll go down the hill with you," said Rolfe. "You left your horse at the vicarage?"

"Yes; he was well-nigh done, and it's a mighty steep climb up here," said Peter.

"We are near the top," answered Rolfe carelessly; "it's fine and airy."

They went down the hillside together. Before them, flitting like a fairy over the grass, they saw Agnes; she sped so quickly that they could not overtake her. She crossed the bridge and disappeared into the vicarage before they reached it.

"A bird of ill omen he is," said the vicar's Mary, standing by Rolfe at

the vicarage gate watching Peter ride away; then she added, in a low voice, "Those two young creatures are well-nigh breaking their hearts over the news he brought."

"They're young," answered Rolfe; "their hearts will mend, have no fear, Mary."

CHAPTER XVI
Under the Shadow of Newgate

"Let Mistress Patience know that I am waiting to receive her," said Queen Henrietta Maria, as she sat before her dressing-table, the barber being engaged in the dressing of her hair.

She was no longer the beautiful Henrietta Maria who had come to England as the bride of Charles I. Trouble had told upon her and aged her even before her time, and we find her spoken of in the chronicles as a "little old woman". And yet she was not more than fifty-six years of age; but she had grown crusty, and evil-tempered, jealous of those who were younger than herself, and nothing ages a woman like jealousy and spite. A kindly, loving heart softens away the hard lines and keeps the face young because of the love which dwells in the heart; but where there is no love, there is no youth.

She had hardly given the order when the door was thrown open and the usher announced: "Madam Patience Beaumont and the Lady Agnes De Lisle."

The queen turned sharply round, despite her barber's exclamation of despair, and the tired face brightened up. "At last, you truants!" she exclaimed, as Patience hurried forward, knelt, and kissed the extended hand. The queen's eyes passed over her and rested on Agnes: "Verily a beauty!" she whispered. "Well, ma mie," she said aloud, as Agnes approached her, "have you quite forgotten your queen-mother?"

"I have not forgotten her at all, your majesty," answered Agnes, as she followed her aunt's example, knelt, and kissed the royal hand; but Henrietta lifted her face between her hands and looked at her, tears filling her eyes.

"Patience," she said, "she is the most beautiful thing I have seen for many a day; she is father and mother welded together. Is she as good as she is beautiful?"

"Ah, Madam, who can tell?" answered Patience; "she is very young, and

has not been tempted."

The queen's brow darkened as she repeated the words. "Ah, that is it; she has not been tempted! You have kept her in cotton wool, Patience."

"Nay," answered Patience, "I have kept her beneath God's heaven in the world of nature, and I would have kept her there still had your majesty not sent for her."

Again the queen's brow darkened, but she answered quickly: "It was our duty to her father and mother. If I had not interfered you would have married her to some country bumpkin. Now we will see that she is restored to her rightful position; is it not so, Agnes?" And she tapped the girl on her cheek. Then she turned back again and the barber renewed his offices.

"Come, stand beside me, child, and tell me what you have been doing all these years, and why you did not write even to Henrietta? She is mightily angry with you!"

"I did not let her," answered Patience; "it would have only been a disturbing element in her life."

"I have not forgotten that she was my first friend," said Agnes. "I have prayed for her every day, and I should love to see her, only—-"

"Only what?" asked the queen sharply.

"I do not think I like court life."

"Ah, you will soon speak differently," said the queen, "when you are flattered and made much of! Have you brought the necessary papers, Patience, that I may show them to my son? I see she has taken her rightful name, Agnes De Lisle; the next thing will be to restore her estates. Do you know who holds them?"

"We know who did," answered Patience, "but they may have been dispossessed."

"Who may it be?" asked the queen.

"The De Lisle estates were given to Colonel Newbolt, who was imprisoned and died at Newgate," answered Patience. "His son Reginald was his heir."

"Has he not inherited?" asked the queen.

"He certainly has put in no claim," answered Patience, "for he went abroad soon after his father's death and has not returned."

"But someone has taken the rents," said the queen.

"That remains for your majesty to find out," said Patience. "I cannot tell."

"Well, we will enquire into the matter," said the queen, as, released from her barber, she stood up and faced Agnes. Again she smiled as she looked at the girl, who was simply charming, in a plain, white gown, unbedizened, with only a coil of pearls round her white throat, and her hair in natural curls. She was as fresh as a flower, and the queen, delighted, clapped her hands, and, turning to her friend, Lord Jermyn, said in a low voice, "She will make a sensation. Did you

ever see anything so fresh?"

"Not of late years, certainly," he answered. "But your majesty is forgetting your appointment with the king at Whitehall."

"Well, well, I must be gone," said the queen, "but I shall expect you to be here when I return, Patience; I have many things to ask you. Bring the child with you; mind you always bring the child."

"Your majesty does her great honour," said Patience. "I will not forget."

Then the queen nodded kindly to Agnes, and gave her hand to Lord Jermyn, who conducted her down the stairs and across the hall to her coach, which was in waiting.

Patience and Agnes returned to their own apartments, which were the same as they had occupied before; for, although Somerset House had been restored and a certain portion rebuilt, these rooms had been left almost as they were.

Agnes was very serious when they found themselves alone. "I wish we were home again, Patience!" she sighed. "Do you know, I am frightened–frightened of the queen, frightened of everything; and yet I used not to be. I did not care a bit for queens and princesses in olden days. I remember quite well sitting on the queen's lap and talking to her as I would to anyone else. I could not do that now. And then, again, I thought she was very beautiful; but she is not beautiful now, yet it is not so very long ago."

"It has been long enough to make a woman of you, Agnes, and therefore long enough to age the queen and mar her beauty."

"It has not marred yours, Patience," said the girl. "I never remember you any other than you are now; your face was always so sweet. It is like, well, it is like a madonna's face. It must be because you are so good."

"Hush, hush!" said Patience, her pale cheeks colouring. "I am not at all good, Agnes; I have been very wilful, as wilful as you could be if you were driven to it."

"I hope that will never be," said Agnes. "Do you know, Aunt Patience, I heard you tell the queen that I had never been tempted. Surely to be tempted is not a necessity. I always stop in my prayers and say twice over, 'Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil'."

"As long as you do that, you will never go far wrong," said Patience, stroking the fair face which she loved so well.

"Now, what shall we do this afternoon, little one? It is very hot."

"Yes, it is very hot," said Agnes; "this London is stifling." She went to the window and threw it wide open. "Ah, it is like a furnace outside!" she added, and quickly shut the window.

"I think we had best stay where we are," said Patience, "and later we will take a barge and go up or down the river; surely there will be some air there!"

Agnes did not answer, she seemed to be thinking.

"Does not what I propose suit you, child?" asked Patience.

The girl threw herself on her knees beside her aunt.

"Dear," she said, "I have a great wish. I don't seem to care for anything else in London, but I want to find Ann Newbolt! How can we do it? You remember we heard that Reginald had gone abroad, and that Ann was living somewhere with her mother not far from Newgate."

"That is no good," said Patience; "it would be like hunting for a needle in a haystack. Besides, I am not sure that it would be well for you to find those Newbolts again. You see, if the king is determined to restore you to your own they must be driven out."

"I should hate that; oh, I should hate it terribly!" cried Agnes.

"But it must be well," said Patience. "Cromwell had no right to give what was not his own."

There was a pause, then Agnes looked up and said quietly:

"Jessie and I were looking through an old book which treated of the estates and lands in Westmorland, and we found De Lisle Abbey. Henry VIII seized it, drove the monks out, and gave it to a Sir Gilbert de Lisle–not my father, but one long before him. So you see, Aunt Patience, it was stolen land, and, what is worse, there was a curse upon it; the De Lisles were to be driven out by fire and sword, and so we have been. Let things be as they are, Aunt Patience, and let us live at Holt Farm and be happy once again."

"Do not think I wish for anything better, Agnes. It is for you, my child," said Patience.

"I'm sure I don't want it," said Agnes. "Let us go back as soon as we can, Aunt. I have a sort of feeling that something dreadful is going to happen."

"That is because you are tired, and London is strange to you now," said Patience. "Lie down and rest, then we will go out, and, as your heart is set upon it, I will enquire about the Newbolts; they may be dead or gone away from London."

The knowledge they desired came to them quite unexpectedly. Martha was by no means sorry to find herself amongst old acquaintances. She had already been out and about, gossiping here and there. Amongst other scraps of knowledge, she had learnt much concerning the Newbolts. Dame Newbolt, she was told, always lived near Newgate. She was looked upon as a guardian angel. "She works there night and day," they told her, "preaching and teaching, and when the prisoners chance to come out she succours them. Men and women alike worship the ground she treads on."

"And Mistress Ann, her daughter, what has become of her?" Martha had asked.

"She lives in a mean lodging-house near the Old Bailey, over against New-

gate, and but for her, her mother would well-nigh starve. But Mistress Ann will not suffer it; she makes her take her food, she fetches her from the prison, and brings her home at night. They say her devotion knows no bounds. She is never weary, never goes abroad save once and again when my Lord Craven fetches her, and insists on taking them both in his barge for a breath of fresh air, or driving them out into the country beyond St. Giles'. My lord is as good to her as a father. Ah, there are queer people in the world," said the speaker, "but the queerest are sometimes the best, and my Lord Craven is one of them. He has seen many things in his time, and has succoured many people. I doubt much whether the Stuarts would have been able to hold their own but for his gold."

"Have you heard of Reginald, the colonel's son?" asked Martha.

"Oh, yes; he comes and goes. He has joined Prince Rupert, and is half the time at sea with the White Squadron."

Primed with all this news, Martha hastened back to Somerset House, and poured it all out afresh into the eager ears of Patience and Agnes.

"Then we will go this afternoon and find Ann," said Agnes; "shall we, Aunt Patience?"

"She lives in a bad part of the town," said Martha. "There are rumours that there have been some cases of the plague in the by-ways round Newgate. It would be well to be careful. I know not how it is," continued Martha, "but people seem anxious. There are men who go about preaching that the times are so evil, that the Lord will sweep London off the face of the earth because of its sins."

"As for the plague, I do not think we need be alarmed," said Patience; "there are always some cases in London, I am told. It only affects the very poor and the unclean. Last year I remember Mr. Ewan telling me that there were a few cases, just three, but it did not spread; the winter checked it. No, I do not think we need be anxious; besides, it would be of no use. What is to be will be. We shall not be long in London, I hope." And with that the subject dropped.

It was late in the afternoon when they sallied forth. Even then the heat was so intense, and the air so dry, that they decided they would take a barge and go down to Blackfriars, land there, and find their way to the Old Bailey. Martha went with them, because she knew the way better than they did. When they landed from the barge, it was but a little distance across the Fleet until they gained the narrow streets leading to the Old Bailey.

On the summer night, with all the refuse of the day lying about waiting for the night scavengers to pass their rounds, the stench which arose from many a foul heap was noisome.

Patience and Agnes held their kerchiefs to their faces. Fresh from the sweet moors and the scented flowers, they were the more susceptible.

"Fit for swine!" muttered Martha behind them. "Talk of the plague! The

dirt is enough to breed any amount of plagues." And she was right. It was the dirt and uncleanliness which was about to cost thousands of lives. For the last ten years the plague had been raging in Europe. In Genoa 60,000 persons died of it; in Holland, in the years 1663 and 1664, upwards of 50,000 people died of plague in Amsterdam alone; and yet during all these years London had been singularly free.

The origin of the plague has been much discussed. Some authorities imputed its arrival in London to have been caused by bales of merchandise from Holland which came originally from the Levant, where it was quite usual to sell the clothes of those who had died of plague at once, without disinfecting them; according to others, it was introduced by the Dutch prisoners of war. In any case, we may attribute its spread to the uncleanliness of London, which, we are told by contemporary writers, was comparable to that of Oriental cities at the present day. The disease gradually increased because there was everything to encourage it to do so, especially in a squalid neighbourhood and among the poor. For this reason it was called "the poor's plague".

Those who lived on the river in ships or barges were free of it; those in the houses on London Bridge were also little affected. Probably the slowness with which it gained ground in London was owing in a great measure to the beautiful streams of flowing water which intersected the city–the Fleet, the Walbrook, &c. At all events, it was not until the autumn of 1664 that a few isolated cases were observed in the neighbourhood of St. Martin's, St. Giles', and Charing Cross. The winter of that same year happened to be a very severe one, which checked it, and nothing more was heard of the plague until this month of May, 1665. Then one or two cases were reported, but so few that they excited but little attention; many, doubtless, of the inhabitants had not even heard of them.

Then, as now, such things were hushed up for fear of creating a scare, so that with perfect equanimity Patience and her companion walked along the very streets which were soon to be the centre of that terrible epidemic. They came at last to the house which had been described to Martha. It was at the top of the street, almost opposite Newgate, and was entered by a low oak door which gave into a passage, beyond which lay a court-yard, in which were outside staircases giving access to wooden balconies leading into the tenements. Martha had been told that Mistress Newbolt lived at the front, almost at the top of the house, and that her rooms were reached by an interior staircase. So they stumbled up in the dark, until at last they came to a landing in which was a small window, which Patience was thankful to see wide open, but which, on this hot evening, seemed, instead of cooling the air, rather to let in heat and bad odours.

The three stood wiping their faces, Martha panting. Suddenly a door opened, and a voice, which Agnes recognized at once, said:

"Who are you? What are you doing here? My mother is sleeping; you will waken her."

Agnes went forward instantly, threw her arms round the girl, saying:

"Ann, do you not know me?"

"Know you!" repeated Ann. "Is it Agnes or her spirit? Surely in her body she would not come here, and yet how I have longed for her!"

"Why should I not come, if you are here?" said Agnes.

"You must go," said Ann. "Go quickly! I cannot let you in; I dare not. My mother came home an hour ago. All day and all night she has been in the prison. Do you know what I have done? I have taken her clothes and burnt them, they were so foul. I stood for hours waiting for her outside the gates, and when she came forth she dropped down like one dead, and I carried her home in my arms. If you could see her, she is almost a skeleton! Ah me! what will the end be?" And, covering her face with her hands, she wept.

"I will see her," said Patience. "We have come here to help you, Ann, and we will help you, have no fear, child. Stay with Martha, Agnes. Now, Ann, show me the way."

Ann hesitated. "You do not understand," she said.

"Then it is time I did," answered Patience. "Take me to your mother."

As she spoke she looked at Ann. Could this be the same girl she had known so fresh and blooming? She seemed to have grown taller, and her face was sallow and thin; she might have been any age, she looked so worn and anxious. She was scrupulously neat in a linen gown, with a white apron and a muslin kerchief folded across her bosom; over her head she wore a sort of linen wrapper, which hid all her hair, leaving only a small band on either side of her forehead. She had adopted this dress because she was able thus to keep herself clean amidst so much foulness.

Agnes still held on to Ann, and pleaded!

"May I not go too, Aunt Patience?"

"No, my child, one of us is enough."

Still she would not let go of Ann's hand.

"Kiss me, dear," she said; and Ann stooped and kissed her.

It was so long since any lips had touched hers that it brought tears to her eyes.

"Wait here," she said, "I will come back." And she passed into the room with Patience.

It is curious how, in times of great excitement, we see everything so clearly; even the smallest details strike us. Patience noted that the first room they entered was comparatively well furnished and spotlessly clean. It was evidently the living room, with tables and chairs, a dresser, and a few articles of luxury which had

been brought from the old home. They passed through this into another room, which served as bed-room for Ann and her mother. There was a small fire in the hearth, notwithstanding the great heat. Ann pointed to it.

"The doctor told me to have it always, to purify the air," she said.

A great four-poster bed of carved oak occupied the middle of the room. It had once been curtained round, but the curtains were gone now, and Patience saw, lying upon the white pillows, a face which might well have been that of a dead woman.

"Can it be Dame Newbolt?" she thought. The closed eyes were sunk in the sockets; the features stood out sharp and hard, yellow as parchment; the hair, parted on the forehead, was thin and snowy white; and the hands, which rested on the coverlet, were like the hands of a skeleton.

"Oh, Ann," exclaimed Patience, "how could you let her get into this condition?"

"How could I help it?" said the girl, bursting into tears. "I have watched over her, I have fed her, I have stood outside the prison gates waiting, always waiting, but she has paid no heed to me. Had it not been for my Lord Craven I should have had no food to give her, for she would spare me no money. I have known her go for days, eating nothing but a crust of bread. More than once the jailers have brought her here, carrying her in their arms. It was of no use, on the morrow she was up and about, and with them again; even as you see her she has still great strength."

"It is wonderful," said Patience.

Though they were speaking loudly, Mistress Newbolt did not hear them. She did not move; indeed, one could hardly hear her breathe.

"She will sleep like that for twelve hours at least," said Ann, "longer perhaps; then she will wake up and eat what I shall have prepared for her; then she will go back to the prison, and I shall not see her again for perhaps twenty-four hours, when I shall bring her home, or one of the warders will. It is a terrible life, so terrible, I wonder how she lives at all."

"And you, you poor thing?" said Patience, taking Ann's hand in hers, then stooping over the sleeper she added, "She will die."

"No, she will not," answered Ann. "Good Doctor Bohurst, whom Lord Craven sent to visit her, says she will not die, that she has more vitality than many a younger woman, and that these long sleeps restore her completely, only I have to feed her. See," she continued, and going to a table she took up a bottle, poured a little of the contents into a spoon, and held it to her mother's lips.

Without waking, she just sucked it down like a child.

"There," said Ann, "in two hours I shall give it her again, and so on until she wakes. Then she will eat and drink. It is a wondrous life."

"How long has this been going on?" asked Patience.

"For many months," answered Ann; "but of late it has been much worse, for the prison is fuller than it ever was, and disease is rampant there. Then," lowering her voice, she added, "they say there has been a case of the plague. If it be so, and that foul disease break out within those walls, God only knows what will happen! The prisoners themselves are in terror of it. I think they will go mad with fright."

"And you?" said Patience.

"I try not to think of it," she answered quietly; "what is the use? Come, let us go into the other room; Agnes may come in there, may she not?"

"If you think there is no danger," said Patience.

"There is nothing infectious here," she said. "You see all the windows are open, and either I burn my mother's clothes, or old Doris takes them away and washes them."

"Very well," said Patience, and Agnes and Martha were admitted. They sat together round the tables and Ann learnt what had brought them to London.

"You would have done better to have stayed away," she said; "one never knows what may happen, and there are strange signs in the heavens. People say London is accursed, and will be destroyed because of its great sin. Have you seen the comet?"

"No, not yet," answered Patience; "I shall not linger long in London. I wish we could take you away with us, Ann!"

"How can I leave my mother?" she answered; "and Reginald is away."

Her head drooped on her hands as she spoke; her spirit seemed broken.

"Listen, Ann," said Patience, "I will come to-morrow with Martha and fetch you out; you shall spend the whole day with us. We will go down the river. You shall breathe sweet, country air; it will strengthen you."

"It will, indeed!" said Ann. "I think I am cowardly because I am so much alone. But now you must be gone. It is getting late, and this neighbourhood is not safe at night; indeed, you must not go back by the river. Go to Holborn and find a coach there, so that you can be driven back."

Alarmed, Patience rose quickly. "Yes, we will go, Ann," she said; and they made their way out, down the stairs into the street. They had not gone far when they were accosted by a gentleman.

"Madam," he said, looking at Patience, "this is no place for such as you at this time in the evening."

"I have just been told so, sir," said Patience, "but I am a stranger to London. Cannot I procure a coach?"

"No," he answered sharply. "Step this way; you shall have mine."

Patience looked at him.

"I thank you kindly, sir," she said, "but before I can accept your offer, I must know who you are."

"I am Lord Craven," he answered; "you can trust me."

Without another word he walked on in front of them to the top of the street, where a coach was waiting. He signed to the driver, who wore the Craven livery.

"My man will take you wherever you choose, madam," he said.

"I would be driven to Somerset House," said Patience.

He started and looked askance at her. She understood.

"You gave me your name, I must give you mine," she said. "I am Mistress Patience Beaumont and this young girl is Agnes De Lisle, my niece. We are the queen-dowager's guests."

Lord Craven uttered an exclamation of surprise and swept them a low bow.

"I have been fortunate in meeting you," he said; "but take my advice and do not wander out so late at night."

"We have been to see a protégé of yours," said Patience, "Ann Newbolt."

"Ah, I am glad!" he answered; "she needs friends, poor thing."

Then he signed to his valet to open the coach door, and helped Agnes and Patience to mount, for the step was high. Martha followed, and they were driven quickly in the direction of Somerset House.

CHAPTER XVII
The Great Plague

Again and again we read of miraculous signs in the heavens before some great disaster befalls a country. A fiery sword is said to have hung over the ill-fated city of Jerusalem for long months before its destruction. At the time of which we are writing a great blazing star, probably a comet, appeared in the heavens over the city of London, terrifying the inhabitants. Crowds of people would turn out at night into the open fields to see this wonderful thing, and would go back, with terror in their hearts, feeling assured that it was an omen of evil. Every night it appeared, a great, blazing star hanging in the firmament. Gradually, very gradually, the plague crept into the city; so slowly did it come, that only those whose business it was to note the mortality were aware of the gradual increase of deaths. It began first in the heart of the city, then it spread to the suburb of St.

Giles'. Just two or three isolated cases against which no precaution was taken; indeed, they caused but little alarm. There are always pessimists, and people do not heed them. A small evil, therefore, remains unchecked until it becomes a great evil; then, and then alone, when it is too late, men take note of it. Such was the case at the present time. At Whitehall feasting and revelling were the order of the day throughout this month of May. The king and his court were to be seen in St. James's Park, gilded coaches rolled through the narrow streets of the city, despite the overpowering heat. It was as if that blazing comet, unseen by day, burnt the land up. The animals suffered fearfully: horses fell down dead, dogs had to be killed because they went mad. Even before the month of June streams were running dry, there was no rain, no moisture in the air, and gradually, striking men down by ones and twos, the scourge crept on, until at last people awoke to the knowledge that the fell disease was in their midst.

One morning Queen Henrietta summoned Patience to her.

"I do not care for it to be generally known," she said, "but it is settled that the court is going to Oxford. You, of course, will follow; make your preparations as quickly as you can. We shall probably leave here the day after to-morrow; it is to be done quietly not to scare the people."

"Is it necessary we should accompany your majesty?" said Patience. "With your permission, I think we would rather go home."

The queen turned haughtily towards her.

"Why must you always oppose me, Patience?" she asked. "Why do you wish to bury the child alive in that out-of-the-way place? The king is well disposed towards her. The Marquis of Orford has spoken of her with admiration. I am set upon making a marriage between them. If you do not choose to come, at least give me the child."

"I promised her mother I would never part from her," said Patience, "and so far I have kept my word. If your majesty insists upon her going to Oxford, I will go also."

"Do you mean to say that you wish to keep her in this infectious atmosphere?" said the queen.

"Not longer than I can possibly help," answered Patience; "but your majesty must know that the plague is confined so far to certain quarters of the city. Here, on the river front, we run but little danger." Then, approaching nearer Henrietta, she said in a low voice:

"Will not his majesty's gay court at Oxford be worse for my child than the plague? Is not her soul more precious than her body? and that Marquis of Orford of whom you speak, is he worthy to touch the hem of her gown? Nay, let her be, your majesty; sooner let her live and die a maid than be coupled with such a man; and if she be doomed to die, then, at least, let me give her back to her

mother 'unspotted from the world'."

It was not often Patience let herself go, but at the present moment she spoke with intense earnestness, almost with exaltation, and she possessed more influence over Henrietta Maria than any other member of her household.

The queen kept silence, her head resting on her hands, and, to Patience's surprise, tears fell on the table. She knew that she had hit hard. The mother's heart was aching at the thought of her own daughter whom she had given up to that bad man, Philip, Duke of Orleans. She knew well what she suffered; could she condemn another girl to the same fate!

"Take her away, Patience," she said impetuously, "take her away, and may the Lord have you both in His keeping!"

Patience knelt at the queen's side.

"Forgive me," she said, "if I have hurt you."

The queen held out her hand.

"Go," she said, "whilst I am in the mood, and do not let me see the child again or I may repent giving her up to you."

"That you will surely never do," said Patience, and, rising, she curtsied and left the room.

In her own mind Patience was sorely troubled how to act. To go back at once to Westmorland would have been the most natural thing; but then there was Ann Newbolt, how could she leave that girl alone in the worst part of the city? She did not herself believe that there was much danger for any inhabitant of Somerset House, because it gave on to the river, and so far all the habitations near the river, even the houses on London Bridge, had remained unaffected; also, the dwellers in ships and barges had escaped infection.

"If the worst come to the worst," she thought, "we will take the barge and go down the river; but the great thing will be not to let the child get frightened."

Whilst she was still cogitating Martha came into the room.

"Madam," she said, "everybody is leaving the palace; what are we to do?"

"I have just come from the queen, Martha," said Patience. "She desired me to pack our belongings and follow her to Oxford, whither she is going with the court. What say you? Shall I do so? Shall I thrust Agnes into the midst of all the profligacy and all the evil which dwells in the king's house?"

"For God's sake, no!" said Martha. "It is the talk of the court that our young lady is to be wedded to the Marquis of Orford, but you will not let it be. We servants know more of what goes on in the great houses than you do, and he is not worthy of her; besides, she is only a child."

"You are right, Martha," said Patience; "I will not let her go. I have told the queen so, and she has consented that I shall keep her with me."

"That is well," said Martha, her face brightening up, "only we must guard

her, for I have heard that the Marquis of Orford has set his heart on wedding her, and the king has promised him the De Lisle estates, forfeited by Colonel Newbolt. They were to have been sold at once to the highest bidder to pay the fines and law expenses, &c., but the king has been so engrossed with his pleasures that he has let the matter slip. Now, however, he has made up his mind not to sell, but to dower our Lady Agnes with what is by right her own."

"How do you know all this?" asked Patience, surprised.

"I know it from Peter Kemp, who is at Whitehall, and hears all the gossip in the ante-chambers and in the servants' department; he also knows Jefferson, Lord Orford's first valet."

"Perhaps the king will change his mind now that I will not suffer Agnes to go to Oxford," said Patience.

Martha shrugged her shoulders.

"We shall have to be careful," she said, "for the marquis is not a man to be thwarted, and if he has set his heart on the Lady Agnes, he will surely win or take her."

"I think we had better start at once for Westmorland," said Patience; "it seems to me the only place where we can live in safety."

Martha shook her head.

"That's just what he will expect you to do," she said. "And as he has more horses than we have and more serving men, he will surely follow us, and who will protect us on the road? There are many desolate places between London and Westmorland."

"Surely he would not dare assault us?" said Patience.

"Ah, Madam!" said Martha, "he will stand at naught. If he has set his heart on the Lady Agnes, he will leave no stone unturned to possess her. You must devise some other plan for her safety."

"I am loath to believe all you say; but leave me, Martha, I must think it over."

The following day the court started on its way to Oxford, and the queen announced to the king that the Lady Agnes De Lisle would not accompany her.

"She is ailing," the queen said, "and she is rather young still for all the dissipations of court life. Let my Lord Orford wait till the scare of this plague is over. Patience Beaumont is going to take Agnes back to Westmorland to restore her health, which the heat of London has injured."

"I never saw a brighter face than the Lady Agnes's yesterday," said the king. "She was the star of your suite, ma mère. I do not think much ails her."

"Possibly she was flushed and excited," said the queen, "and Patience has my permission to take her away. I cannot go back upon my word."

"But I have not said the last word either," said Charles angrily, "and my Lord

Orford has had no say in the matter at all."

"He had better let his suit drop for the present," said Henrietta; "when we come back from Oxford it will be time enough." And with that she left the room.

Charles shrugged his shoulders; he never opposed his mother's will.

When Lord Orford was informed of Agnes's defection he was in a white rage, but he gave no outward sign of it, only that night he was closeted for a long time with his man, Jefferson, and the next day he himself followed the king to Oxford.

The palace was very silent; indeed, the whole city of London was beginning to be what we should call hushed. The plague was gaining rapidly. The citizens stopped their trading, and every man looked with fear at his fellow.

In the gardens belonging to noblemen's houses, which in many cases sloped down towards the river, the flowers were in full bloom. It was the season for roses, and they had never been so plentiful, but no one gathered them, for fear of infection, no one dared even to inhale their sweet perfume; people went about with a bunch of rue and wormwood in their hands, for these herbs were thought to ward off contagion; and yet this was only the beginning of what was to be.

There was a certain cruelty in the egoistical way in which men strove to protect themselves. For example, if it was known that someone had died in a certain house of the plague, no matter the number of the inhabitants who were still resident there, a red cross was painted over the door with these words in great letters over it, "Lord, have mercy upon us!" and watchmen with halberds stood on guard before it to prevent anyone either leaving the house or entering it.

All the inhabitants of that house were thus shut off from the outside world, lest they should carry infection; semi-starvation and death therefore stared them in the face. This was in the early days. It was a great mistake, for the houses were thus made the centres of disease; later it was found impossible to carry this plan into effect, and it was therefore openly ignored.

A few noblemen and gentlemen had the courage to remain in London and face the evil. Among these was Lord Craven. We are told that his servants packed his luggage and brought his coaches into the court-yard of his house; but to their dismay he told them they could go if they chose, every one of them, but he should remain and do what he could to stay the evil which surrounded them.

"A man can die but once," he said. He had faced death ofttimes on the battlefield, he was not going to turn his back on it now; and, brave man that he was, he set about his work with diligence. He founded a kind of cottage hospital for the plague-stricken in the Soho; he also gave a piece of land for burial purposes in the same neighbourhood. He himself remained at Craven House.

A day or two after the court left London, Patience sent for him and told him

of her decision.

"And now," she said, "I must get out of this place as quickly as possible, for if anything happens to the child I shall never forgive myself."

"And yet," said Lord Craven, "this is the only place in which you are free from the Marquis of Orford. I know the man. He is but watching his opportunity; if he see you start to go north he will follow."

"That is what old Martha said," answered Patience, "and she is a wise woman."

"She is right. Remain where you are for the present, keep the windows open on to the river side by night and by day, and do not let the Lady Agnes go abroad."

"But she is so anxious about Ann Newbolt!" said Patience. "I found her weeping yesterday because I would not let her go and would not go myself to the Old Bailey."

"You did well," said Lord Craven; "the disease is spreading from there right up to St. Giles'. Rest assured I will bring you news of Ann as often as I can. The authorities will not let her mother leave the prison now because of infection. She spends her days, ay, her nights, tending those wretched creatures, preaching to them of the world to come, closing their dying eyes amidst the most frightful agonies, and seeing to their burial."

"And she lives through it all!" said Patience.

"Yes, marvellous to tell, she lives through it all," he answered, "and is but little changed. She seems to have no material body, to live in and by the spirit. The poor creatures cling to her, and she has no fear of them."

"Is the plague very bad at Newgate?" asked Patience.

"Bad!" said Lord Craven. "They carry the bodies out at night that they may not be seen. What is worse, the poor creatures go mad with fear, and can hardly be restrained from killing one another."

"It is terrible," said Patience. "And Ann, what is she doing?"

"She is in her own two rooms with that old hag who waits upon her, and I have entreated her on no account to move out of it," said Lord Craven.

"But if she came to us," said Patience, "surely that were better for her!"

"She will not hear of it. She says she would be too far from her mother; now she can have news of her continuously. The old woman goes backwards and forwards, and I go to her. So long as the plague does not enter her dwelling-place, she will remain there."

"And when it does it will be too late," said Patience; "they will not let her out."

"We shall see," said Lord Craven.

At that moment Agnes came into the room. Except that she was very pale,

which might be attributed to the great heat, there was no change in her appearance. She wore a thin, white linen gown, with long, open sleeves; her beautiful golden hair was gathered up away from her neck because of the heat, and she had sandals on her feet.

"Oh, my lord," she exclaimed, "this is truly terrible! Why cannot we go back to Westmorland and take Ann with us?"

"Because, my child," said Lord Craven, "the roads just now are not safe." He had to make some such excuse because she had not been told anything concerning Lord Orford.

"I thought the plague was in London, not on the roads," she answered peevishly.

"But there are other things besides the plague, my child," said Lord Craven. "All sorts and kinds of people have left the city, bad as well as good. We must let this first rush go by, and then you shall go. In this heat you could not travel," he continued. "The horses could only carry you a few miles at a time, evening and morning. It would take you an infinitely long time to reach your haven of rest."

"You call it by its right name," said Agnes; "If is a haven of rest. I wish we were there, Aunt Patience." And she sat down on a stool beside her aunt, laid her head on her lap with the air of a spoilt child, and wept.

"We will go as soon as ever we can," said Patience, stroking her hair; "and now, see if you cannot find some of that fruit which we brought in yesterday from the country. Lord Craven will, I know, take it to Ann. It has been well covered up, so that no impure air can have reached it."

Agnes sprang up, ran across the room to a cupboard, and drew forth a basket in which there were some luscious strawberries, red currants, and wall peaches. She packed them carefully in a little basket, and took them to Lord Craven, with her pretty childish air, saying:

"Tell Ann, with my dear love, that they are the only things worth eating. I would she could come to me, as you will not let me go to her."

"She shall come to you as soon as possible," he answered, "but at present she cannot;" and with that he rose, bade both Patience and her farewell, and left them.

"Let us go on to the terrace, aunt," said Agnes; "maybe we shall get a breath of air from the river." So they went down the magnificent staircase, through the gorgeous banqueting-hall, on to the terrace.

Though the day was over and the sun had set, the heat was beyond description. The whole city seemed to glow with the after-math. The girl was tired, and quietly, without knowing it, she began again to weep.

"Oh Agnes, my child, what is it?" said Patience.

"I don't know," she answered; "my soul is heavy within me. I am afraid."

Patience did not ask her what she was afraid of; she knew only too well she was afraid of everything. She put her arm round her and talked to her quietly of life and death.

After a little time the child's soul was comforted, and Patience took her by the hand and led her to her own chamber; as she could not sleep, she sat with her far into the night, and only when the day was dawning did she leave her.

CHAPTER XVIII
Lost

Suddenly out of her sleep Agnes woke to full consciousness. She heard distinctly the cry of the watchman call out three o'clock in the morning as he passed his rounds.

She turned her face to the window and looked out–the sky was blood-red. A great horror seized her. She sprang out of bed and began putting on her clothes. She hardly knew what she was doing. One door in her room opened into Patience's, the other on to a landing leading to the grand staircase. She felt she must have air–she could not stay in that closed-up room; so, slipping her clothes on and wrapping a light cloak round her, she drew the hood over her head and left the room. She had not gone far when she was confronted by one of the watchers, men told off to guard the queen's house.

The sight of the girl walking about surprised him. He thought she must be one of the maids and spoke to her coarsely, laying his hand on her arm. Agnes wrenched herself free and ran, as she thought, in the direction from which she had come; but she had mistaken her bearings and found herself in a small turret-chamber at the farther end of the passage, in which there was a winding staircase.

At that moment the remembrance of Ann came to her.

"They will not let me go to her, but I will go. I cannot stay here," she thought; "I will go now at once. Surely this staircase must lead somewhere!" And, feeling in the darkness, she groped her way to the bottom, where a gleam of light came from a door which stood half-open. She remembered having noticed this turret from the terrace one day, when, to amuse herself, she had reconnoitred, and she had discovered that it led out into a small courtyard.

"I shall find means of getting out into the street," she thought, "and then I

can easily find my way to the Old Bailey."

She was not mistaken; the staircase gave into a court-yard, at the farther end of which was an iron gate. She had some difficulty in forcing the bolt back and in pulling the gate open, but it yielded at last, and, quick as lightning, she passed out into the street. She had a sort of hunted feeling; she did not know herself what drove her to act thus. She was as one walking in her sleep. She was not naturally a coward, nor even fearful, but at the present moment a feeling of terror dominated her whole being.

When she found herself alone in the deserted streets she did not hesitate; she went straight forward without reasoning, moved by some inexplicable impulse. Here and there she saw the houses marked with the red cross, with the words, "Lord, have mercy upon us!" written in red letters over the doors, and she shuddered.

"Supposing, when I reach Ann, I find her in such a house, and cannot get to her!" she thought.

She had gone some distance when she heard steps following her. She dared not look back, but, hastening her speed, turned up the street which led to the Old Bailey. The steps came nearer and nearer, and suddenly she was caught up, a cloth thrown over her face, a hand pressed over her mouth, and a voice said sharply:

"Lie quiet and you are safe; move and I will kill you!"

Instinctively she obeyed, and felt herself carried she knew not whither.

When Patience awoke a few hours later from a restless sleep, her first thought was naturally for Agnes. She rose, went into her room, and found it empty. To call Martha, to rouse the whole house, was the work of a few seconds. The house-watchman told how he had met a girl in the gallery, and how at sight of him she had fled; he could not tell where she had disappeared to, indeed, for aught he knew, it might have been a ghost. There were ghosts in Somerset House. It was said that the young Duke of Gloucester might be seen in the old building gliding along the passages, down to the terrace walk.

Patience had no such superstitions. If the man had seen a girl, that girl, to her mind, must have been Agnes. But how could she have got out of the house? Why should she go? In the search that followed, the door of the turret was found open, also the gate in the court-yard. That was sufficient proof that she must have gone out that way.

A messenger was immediately sent to Lord Craven, and throughout that day the search continued, but no Agnes was forthcoming. Through the deserted streets Patience wandered, indifferent to all danger, searching for the child. She went to Ann, and with tears told her what had happened; and Ann came down, and they wandered together till they reached St. Paul's. Then they entered the

church, knelt, and prayed, and wept, as did many others, for there was nothing but weeping and moaning throughout this afflicted city.

"She will come back, surely she will come back!" repeated Ann.

"If she had gone forth of her own free will, I should say yes," Patience answered; "but I am persuaded she has not done so. Someone was lying in wait for her."

Those who sought for Agnes were many, but it was all in vain. Martha wept and wrung her hands in wild despair, but neither weeping nor moaning nor prayers availed. Throughout that long summer day and the night which followed, they sought but did not find her. Hour after hour, day after day, the search was continued, but in vain. The plague was ever on the increase. At night long lines of coffins were carried hastily by men through the city out to some far-distant burial-place; even that did not long suffice, and carts, with tingling bells on the horses' heads, wound their way through the deserted streets, men calling out as they went:

"Bring forth your dead, bring forth your dead!" and the bodies, ofttimes in nothing but a winding sheet, were tossed into the cart and carried forth to the common pit.

Ann still refused to go to Somerset House. She would not leave the precincts of the prison, neither could Patience go to her. They waited for their loved ones in their homes, and Lord Craven went and came between them–he was their only comforter, their only guide. Never was a braver or more honourable man; he had no fear of infection. He was "in God's hands," he said, "to live or to die".

All those who possibly could left the city. The streets were deserted, but the churches were crowded. A few ministers remained faithful to their duty, but many, to their shame, fled. But there were found other devoted men from the country to replace these deserters, the churches were all thrown open, and within their precincts was weeping and wailing. "Surely the scourge was sent by God because of their sins," people said, and their ministers bade them repent, ay, in dust and ashes; therefore it came to pass that men and women alike fell upon their faces and made their humble confession to Almighty God, praying for pardon and deliverance.

Still the disease continued to spread. The lord mayor, the chief councillors, the physicians, all those in authority, made laws, saw to the cleansing of the city, and did their very utmost to check the frightful ravages of the plague, but throughout the month of August it raged unremittingly.

One morning a message came to Lord Craven from Newgate to say that Mistress Newbolt had departed that night, that her last hours had been most edifying, that she had sung and prayed, and glorified God even in the agony of

death. He it was who broke the news to Ann. In vain she asked for a sign by which she might know it was her mother who had died. The prison authorities answered it was impossible. All she had possessed was destroyed, and she was carried forth and buried in the common pit, amongst the malefactors, the thieves, the murderers, the cut-throats, whom she had tended.

Thus Ann found herself alone. Then she went to Patience and the two dwelt together.

"Why do you not both go north?" said Lord Craven. "I see no end to our afflictions."

"I cannot go," said Patience. "If Agnes were to come back and find me gone, what would she do?"

A message had been sent to the queen to tell her what had happened, and her anger was very great against Patience.

"If you had let me have the child, she would have been safe," she said; "now she is dead, or worse than dead."

Lord Orford, when he heard the news, appeared astounded. He would have gone up to London himself, but the king would not permit him.

"My Lord Craven will do all that there is to be done," he said.

* * * * *

"Well, sirrah, what have you done with her?"

"The only thing which in reason could be done, my lord," answered a small, insignificant man, almost a dwarf, who was known everywhere as the Marquis of Orford's factotum.

He was intensely ugly, with an extraordinary look of cunning in his eyes when you saw them, but that was not often–they were small, with heavy lids which were seldom raised, and if they were, it was with a sidelong glance. He was standing now before Lord Orford in a room which that nobleman had succeeded in hiring at Oxford, and for which he paid an enormous price, for the town was crowded to excess, and yet was kept so cleanly by the authorities that the plague had not come near it. The lovely city with its colleges and chapels, the walks in the surrounding country, the beautiful river upon which the boats went and came all day long in gay succession, made of it a most delightful resort, and but for the daily reports from London, the life led by the court would have been ideal.

"Give an account of yourself," said Lord Orford.

"I set Ben Davies to watch his opportunity," said the man, "bidding him never lose sight of the lady. Ben is a bargeman, and has a craft which he takes from London Bridge to Holland or to France as he chooses. His wife, two children, and a boy, live on board. It is by no means a bad craft, and Mistress Ben is an

uncommonly cleanly, thrifty woman, so I just told him that if ever he could catch the lady and take her on board, and then strike off to Holland with her, he might reckon on a hundred pounds."

"You did not mention my name?" said his lordship.

"I'm not quite such a fool, though I look it," answered the man, with a short laugh. "No; he thinks I am doing business on my own account. He took it in good part. 'It's a service you're doing the lady,' I explained; 'she has a whim for staying in London because of her lover, but it's a pest-hole, it will be a good deed if you can get her out.' And so he watched and watched, and one morning at dawn, as he was passing by Somerset House, he saw a girl come running out and making her way down the Strand. There was no one else to be seen, the streets were deserted, so he dodged her to find out who she was, and as good luck would have it, her hood fell back from her face, and he saw that it was none other than the Lady Agnes I had pointed out to him one day. Then it was all quickly done: he caught her up, took her in his arms, and, muffling her face, carried her down to the barge. It was in the Old Bailey he got her."

"And where is she now?" asked Lord Orford.

"Coasting about, maybe on her way to Holland," said the man. "At all events she is out of that pest-hole; you ought to be satisfied, my lord."

Lord Orford walked up and down the room.

"Have you any further orders, sir?" asked the man.

"Only that I have been a fool. I should have done better to have left her alone," said the marquis; "the queen's moving heaven and earth to find her."

"Ah well, sir!" said the man, "when the plague's over we can drop her at Somerset House again–she will be none the wiser. And Ben Davies's wife will keep her comfortable; she'll take no harm."

"But that does not answer my purpose," said Lord Orford. "I wanted to marry her, and I see very little likelihood of doing so under present circumstances."

"Oh, you can marry her right enough!" said his factotum. "You just tell her you did it for love, to save her life. Girls are soft. Now will you pay me the money? These sort of folk won't wait, you know."

"I suppose not," said the marquis, "but I have precious little coin; however, what I have you shall have." And, putting his hand in his pocket, he took out a bag of money and threw it on the table.

"Count and see how much there is," he said.

The dwarf emptied the bag on the table, and with his long thin fingers counted the gold.

"There are ten pieces missing," he said.

"Then you must find them," answered the marquis, "for I am sucked dry."

"I suppose I must put it down to your account," said the man; "it's already a pretty long one."

"I was reckoning on the girl's dower to pay it up," answered Lord Orford, "so you see it's as much to your interest as mine that I should have her. You know she is sole heiress of the De Lisles, and the king dowers her."

The dwarf stuck his tongue into his cheek and muttered, "That's not much of a recommendation."

"Well, you run a risk and so do I; it is for you to make the matter sure," said Lord Orford.

"I can't make her say 'Yes' if she says 'No'," grumbled the dwarf.

"I'm of opinion you have done wrong in carrying her off to Holland. I never bade you do so. I told you to hide her away," said Lord Orford.

"Sure she'd have got the plague if I had not sent her to sea," answered the dwarf.

"I only wish we could get her into the queen's hands," said Lord Orford, "that would settle the matter."

"If that's all you want, it can be easily managed," answered the dwarf; "leave it to me."

"I must, for I can't help myself," muttered Lord Orford. "Now get you gone; I'm sick of you."

The man shuffled the gold into his pockets, and with a "Good-day, sir!" went his way.

When the dwarf was gone, Lord Orford paced up and down the room, muttering between his teeth:

"Gone to Holland! How am I to get at her there? The fool was mad to imagine such a thing. If it leaks out that I have had a hand in this business, it will be to my discredit, unless, as the fool advises, I say I did it out of my great love for her, to save her from the plague; but it will cost me a hundred pounds and more, perhaps, for hush-money. However, matters must take their course now. They'll not land in Holland at present, for no barge from London will be allowed to put into port; in the meantime I can consider what is to be done." And with the natural carelessness which belonged to the habitués of Charles II's court, he strove to forget the matter altogether.

Weeks went by and he was surprised at having no news from his factotum.

It was not until his return to London with the court that he learnt that the man had died of the plague.

So as far as he was concerned the matter ended. Later, seeing the course events took, he was too wise a man to rake up ugly stories. The dwarf dead, there was only the bargeman to reckon with, and he was ignorant even of the existence of my Lord Orford. So the bubble burst, and he had to look about for another bride

to pay his debts! Besides, Reginald Newbolt was now Prince Rupert's friend, and it was therefore unlikely he would be dispossessed of his estates even for Lady Agnes De Lisle. The wheel of fortune had turned.

CHAPTER XIX
On the Track

Pestilence on land, battle on the seas! The jealousy between the English merchants and the Dutch was a matter of long standing, and on both sides there had been a clamouring for war. It came in due time.

On the third of June, just when the plague was at its height, the Duke of York encountered the Dutch fleet off Lowestoft. A terrible battle took place. It is said that eight or ten thousand men were killed and eighteen ships blown up–this was on the Dutch side; but on the English side also there were many disabled ships and many wounded men cast ashore. Had the English admiral chosen, he might have followed the Dutch up in their flight, and the war would have come to a speedy end, but instead an order came from the Duke of York to slacken sail, and so the Dutch escaped to Texel. The neglect and misery of the seamen of the royal navy, who were cast ashore to go where they would, without money, food, or clothing, was piteous. A great number found their way to London, thinking that there, at least, they would get their pay from the admiralty, but there was no money to be had for the arrears of payment. The Commons had voted the king a large sum for war expenses, and he had squandered the whole of it on his own pleasures.

The result was that these men, to whom England owed her safety, lay about the streets and in hovels, and many of them died of the plague.

Reginald Newbolt had enlisted under Prince Rupert. He was not in this fray because Rupert's squadron had sailed to the West Indies. When the news of the plague reached Reginald, he had written entreating his mother to go to Newbolt Manor for her own safety and for Ann's, but naturally he received no answer, and knew little or nothing of the events which were taking place. He had risen to high favour with the prince, for on many occasions he had distinguished himself, and was always at hand when there was any deed of daring to be accomplished. Indeed, he and Prince Rupert agreed in many ways, and Regi-

nald's natural good sense served as a check on the hastiness of the almost pirate prince. Rupert had found there was little doing save pleasure at King Charles's court, and for that reason he entered the navy, and made for himself a name as the admiral of the White Squadron. Every man in those days was a lord himself on the high seas, and any ship which did not hoist the English colours was a legitimate prey to the numberless pirate vessels which floated here, there, and everywhere. Many merchant vessels disappeared with their cargoes of wealth, and no questions were asked.

It was a wild life and a daring one; but when Rupert heard of the war with the Dutch, and a possible war with the French, he set sail for the west. Neither he nor Reginald had any idea of the ravages the plague was making until they neared England, and then the accounts were so horrible that Rupert refused to allow any man to land.

It was in vain that Reginald, as they sailed along the coast, entreated to have a small boat and be allowed to go ashore by himself. The prince was firm, and all knew his discipline was severe.

"If you attempt to go I will have you put into irons," he said to Reginald; and he was certain the Prince would be as good as his word, so he was obliged to be satisfied with writing to Lord Craven and to Ann. But his letters never reached their destination.

Before he left England Agnes had gone north, he knew not whither; the secret had not been told him, and he had been greatly hurt, but now he was glad, for he was assured of her safety. So the days went by, and throughout the months of July and August the terrible scourge laid thousands low; but in the beginning of September it began to lessen. Many people had left the city and were encamped outside it, but Patience and Ann had remained in Somerset House, and had even gone forth amongst the sufferers and tended them. Their good works, their many deeds of charity, had made them well known. Without ceasing, using every means in their power, they had sought to trace Agnes, but in vain.

They were assisted in this by young Delarry, who, when he had heard of Agnes's disappearance and Mrs. Newbolt's death, had returned to London and sought Ann and Patience.

"You cannot remain here," he said. "Let me take you away out of London, if it be but to a village in the suburbs." But Patience had refused to go, and Ann remained with her.

"If the child be still living," said Patience, "it is here she will come to find us. I am persuaded Lord Orford is at the bottom of this thing. He knows who Agnes is; he knows that the De Lisle property will be hers, and he himself is a beggar. The queen told me as much."

"But he has gained nothing by her disappearance, and I know for sure he has not heard of her whereabouts," said Delarry.

"I think you are wrong there," said Patience; "he knows where she is."

"We must find that out," said Delarry. "Now I have come to London I cannot go back to Oxford; I am in quarantine! As for the Lady Agnes, I fully believe she has been taken out of the city and is in safety. No one has any interest in her death; on the contrary, her life is valuable, and, believe me, she will not be attacked."

With this Patience had to be satisfied. The devotion and the bravery which Ann showed under these trying circumstances excited not only Delarry's admiration, but increased the feeling of devotion which had long existed in his heart for her.

She was so simple and so brave, so devoutly religious. Morning and evening, and ofttimes at mid-day, he would meet her on her way to St. Paul's, and they would go together and pray for the deliverance of the nation, and listen to the preachers, who upbraided men for their sins and besought them to repent. It is not surprising if the link between them grew to be strong, and so one day, finding himself alone with her on the terrace, he asked her to be his wife.

"Then I shall have a right to do what I will for you," he said, "in life or in death."

"This is no time for marrying or giving in marriage," answered Ann.

"Why not," he asked, "if it unites two souls in good works? You are so utterly alone, having neither father, nor mother, nor brother, no kith or kin. I ask your leave to be all things to you. I have no need to tell you that I love you; I prove it by my desire to serve you."

The tears gathered in Ann's eyes.

"Truly you have given me the best proof of love a man can give," she answered.

Her hand was resting on the stone parapet; he laid his on it.

"Well," he said, "which is it to be? yea or nay?"

Ann looked up at him; a glint of Irish mirth, which she had not seen for many a day, lighted up his eyes, She was tempted to say "Yea", but she still hesitated.

"I will give you your answer to-night," she said, "after vespers. Now let us go and find Patience."

[image]

"I WILL GIVE YOU YOUR ANSWER TO-NIGHT," SHE SAID

"As you will," he answered; but he took her hand, placed it on his arm, and they went together to Patience's room.

At the door Delarry left her.

"Till to-night," he said.

Ann went in to Patience, and, standing at the open window looking over the deserted city, she told her what Delarry had said.

"What think you?" asked Ann.

"I think," said Patience, "that life is so short, that if something comes to gladden our hearts we do well to accept it. This thing is a joy to you, is it not, Ann?"

"To be George Delarry's wife? Oh, yes!" answered Ann, and her face flushed.

"Then take him," said Patience, "and thank God."

So that same evening, as she came down the steps of St. Paul's, her hand sought Delarry's, and he knew what his answer was.

To find a minister, to go in the early morning to plight their troth one to another, with only Patience and Lord Craven as witnesses, was an easy matter, and did not interfere with the work of the day which followed after; only, as Patience had said, some of the sadness passed out of their hearts, and joy crept in. The knowledge of the tie which bound them, the union of two in one, seemed to strengthen both their hands and hearts for the work they had to accomplish.

It was decided that they should stay at Somerset House with Patience because of that hope, which was nevertheless growing vaguer and vaguer each day, that Agnes would come home.

A few days later Delarry came in quite excited. He found Patience and his young wife picking lint, making bandages, and doing other things which were necessary for their vast hospital. They never stopped their labours, those two women, but when Ann looked up with a smile to greet her husband, she saw something in his face which startled her.

"What has happened?" she asked.

He came and sat down beside her.

"I have found a clue," he said. "It is only a little one, but it may lead to something bigger."

"About Agnes?" asked Patience.

"Well, I suppose it is connected with her," he answered. "I have followed up your idea of Lord Orford being at the bottom of this affair, and just now I met a creature I loathe sauntering down the Fleet."

"Who?" asked Ann.

"The Marquis of Orford's factotum," he answered, "a scurvy little rascal, with a mind as crooked as his body. He is not full-grown, a dwarf, or very nigh

one, with a growing hump and an evil countenance. I accosted him and asked him where his master was.

"'Where should he be,' he answered, 'save in his master's company at Oxford?'

"'And why are you not with him?' I asked.

"'Since when, Mr. Delarry, are you my master's keeper?' he answered. 'I am Lord Orford's servant, not yours.'

"'I'll keep my eye upon you until I find you out in some dark deed,' I answered, 'and then I'll get you hanged.' The man turned white to his lips, and even as I spoke to him there came up another man from behind, a bargeman. I know him, because he happens to have taken me up to Gravesend more than once. When he saw me talking to that little imp, he turned suddenly and went back the way he had come.

"'I wish you good morning,' said the dwarf, 'there's Ben Davies waiting for me.'

"I fired a shot at random: 'Is he in the plot?' I asked.

"'What plot?' he shrieked.

"'I'll leave you to tell me that,' I answered, 'only I warn you, if you brew evil you shall swing for it.' Therewith I went off and left him to digest my words, the real meaning of which I do not myself know." And he laughed.

"Oh, George," said Ann, "you may be all wrong! How could they know anything about Agnes?"

"How can I tell? The clue is faint, but there is a connection."

"You are right," said Patience. "I shall always believe Lord Orford is at the bottom of it."

"So shall I," answered Delarry; "at all events, we will follow that track."

Towards the middle of August Patience received by special messenger a letter from the queen.

"I am deeply grieved ", she wrote, "at having no news from you. My own health is failing, my life here does not please me. I am of no account at my son's court, therefore I have decided that I will go back once more to France, where I may possibly be of some use to my daughter, and where the climate at least suits me. If all things go well, I shall return to England in the spring. In the meantime, send me news of yourself and Agnes, but not while you are in London, lest your letter should carry contagion. I cannot understand why you remain in the city. I much fear me the child is dead, and probably cast, as so many others I hear are, into the common pit. I have wept many tears over her; but then this world is a world of sorrow, at least it has proved itself so to me. England is a dreary place; I would I could persuade you to join me and spend the rest of your life at my side, for I have loved you and your sister better than any other of my English so-called

friends. I had a letter from the little duchess a short time since. She is well, and her child is well. She does not speak of her husband–it is not worth while, we know what he is–but she takes life philosophically, and the King of France makes much of her. She wrote very sadly concerning Agnes, blamed both you and me for letting her remain in London; but, as you know, it was not my fault, but your will.

"I trust you will come safely out of the great dangers which surround you, and that we may yet meet under happier circumstances. Commend me to my Lord Craven and to George Delarry. I am glad they are with you, for I am sure they will be helpful. My Lord Orford is still here, but his humour is not of the best. He feels he has been cheated of his bride, and I think he is in money difficulties; he reckoned on Agnes's dower to set him straight.

"Now farewell, my good Patience. I shall keep you in my remembrance. Your ever faithful friend and mistress, HENRIETTA MARIA, R."

In a postscript the queen had added:

"I have spoken to the king concerning you, and he has decided that you are to continue to occupy, as long as you choose, your present apartment in Somerset House."

Patience read the letter sadly. She had never been blind to the queen's faults, but she had both loved and pitied her, and this farewell letter was the breaking of another link.

She folded the letter and put it with her private papers, among the things of the past.

* * * * *

Throughout the months of August and September the plague raged in London, then it gradually died out, and the court ventured to return to Hampton Court, until, in the month of December, there was so little fear of contagion that the king took up his residence again at Whitehall; and indeed all those who had left the city crowded back as thick as they had fled. The empty houses were thrown open, the grass which had grown in the streets was once more trodden under foot, and to all intents and purposes the ordinary life of the city was renewed.

It is wonderful how soon people forget, how ready everyone is to fall back into the old routine. Such was the case now. There were many empty houses. Some families had been swept clean away, and in others there were vacant chairs; but those who remained had still to live, and though hearts were sore and many longed "for the touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that is still", they had to gather up the threads of life and live their new lives, bare and empty though they seemed to them at first, until, from beneath the deep clouds which

overhung them, they caught the glimpse of a silver lining.

CHAPTER XX
A Great Sea-Fight

As the plague died out in England, and life resumed its ordinary course, the war with the Dutch threatened to be more formidable than ever, for the French king made common cause with the Dutch. The great Admiral de Ruyter came out of the Texel and made straight for England with a splendid fleet of eighty-four ships. They were to be joined by the French fleet from the Mediterranean, consisting of thirty more ships.

Wholly unsuspicious of what was taking place, the English admiral, Monk, now his Grace of Albemarle, awoke one summer's morning to find to his great surprise that the Dutch fleet was lying at anchor half the channel over. Prince Rupert should have been with him, but with his usual impatience of inaction, he had steered westward with his White Squadron, therefore Albemarle had but sixty vessels, great and small, with which to face the enemy, but nevertheless, with English pluck, he gave the signal to attack.

"He would neither wait for the weather nor Prince Rupert," he said.

There was a great south-west wind, which blew the English ships straight upon the Dutch, who were surprised at the suddenness of the attack, and had not so much as time to weigh anchor, but cut their cables and made their way back to their own shore.

Everything was against the English. Their ships were so laid down by the gale that they could not open their lower port-holes to leeward, whereas the Dutch, facing them with their broadsides to windward, had the free use of all their tiers of guns. A terrible fight ensued. Monk had followed the Dutch to Dunkirk, but being forced suddenly to tack, his topmast came to grief, and he was obliged to lie to.

It were in vain to tell here of the gallant deeds done alike by Dutch and English. It was a fight for the supremacy of the seas. Many of the English officers had protested against the unequal attack made upon them by the Dutch. "A mad fight" it is called in history. The English suffered severely; many of their ships were sunk, some were taken, and nearly all those which came into action were

ruined in their masts and rigging by the chain-shot, a new invention.

So night fell; but on the morrow Monk resumed the conflict, and all day long the English fought against a far superior force. Another night fell and another day dawned–the third day of carnage–and the fight was renewed; but now Monk fought retreating, and after removing the men from some of the disabled ships, he caused them to be burnt.

Where was the White Squadron? Where was Prince Rupert and his brave men? On the first day of the battle the prince had stopped on his westward course, intelligence having reached him that the Dutch were at sea.

To put back, to make for Dover, was speedily done; but when he reached the Downs he heard no sound of battle, nor could he obtain any information concerning the enemy. Reginald was beside him, and together they strained their ears to catch the least sound. At last, on the 3rd of June, heavy cannonading was heard. Instantly the prince spread his flying canvas to the wind.

He came up just in time to save Monk. All day they fought, and all the following day also. How any man survived to tell the tale is marvellous. In the beginning of their second day the *Prince Royal*, esteemed the best man-of-war in the world, struck on a sand-bank, and was taken by the Dutch. It seemed as if nothing human would stop the fighting and the carnage; only God's hand could stay it.

Suddenly there arose and enveloped both fleets a thick and impenetrable fog. The guns were silenced and the slaughter ceased. When it lifted, the Dutch fleet was in full retreat, and the English were too disabled to follow them. Victory or no victory, it had been a cruel experience. It was called an English victory, and thanksgivings were ordered.

Truly we had reason to thank God that we had not lost our whole fleet.

Monk and Prince Rupert from henceforth remained close together, and when De Ruyter again put to sea with a stronger force than ever, they went out together to meet him, and drove him back in rage and despair to the Texel. Then the English scoured the Dutch coast, burned and destroyed two ships of war and one hundred and fifty merchantmen, and laid two defenceless villages in ruins.

It was in vain that some brave English officers tried to prevent this last deed of savage warfare. They could not do so; the anger of their men, their thirst for blood, was in the ascendant.

In the hope of stopping the carnage, Reginald, now commander, besought Rupert to let him land, believing that by his presence he might bring a certain amount of discipline to bear upon the excited sailors, but he accomplished little. He was standing in the midst of a group of men when he caught sight of two women, one with a child in her arms, trying to make their way along the bank of the canal towards a barge which was floating still uninjured on the water. Two

half-drunken sailors were pursuing them.

To shout to them to desist Reginald knew would have been useless, so with quick strides he caught them up, seized one man by the neck and threw him to the ground, threatening the other with his sword. The men recognized their officer, and muttering an excuse kept quiet. The two women, exhausted, had sunk on the ground, unable to go a step farther. Reginald went up to encourage them; the youngest woman, a mere girl, sprang to her feet.

"Save us," she cried, "save us!"

Then she stopped short, for, notwithstanding his changed appearance, she recognized their deliverer and cried out:

"Reginald Newbolt!"

"My Lady Agnes!" he answered, and, kneeling before her, he seized her hand.

The sense of safety relaxed the tension on her nerves, and she would have fallen had he not caught her in his arms.

"How on earth did she come here?" he exclaimed, addressing himself to the woman who was with her.

"No time to ask that now," was the answer; "for God's sake, carry her to yonder barge!"

Without hesitation Reginald proceeded to obey. He noticed how light she was and how thin too the face was which rested on his shoulder. For a second he almost doubted whether it could be Agnes, the girl who had skated so merrily with him on the lake at Hampton Court.

It was a good ten minutes before they reached the barge. The woman had run on in front, slipped down the bank, and, notwithstanding the weight of the child in her arms, had leapt into the barge. Reginald followed her example.

"We must put off," she said, "or the soldiers will be after us."

"There is no fear whilst I am with you," said Reginald, as he laid Agnes down on a wooden bench. "Get some water." But it was not needed, for of herself Agnes opened her eyes, and, seeing Reginald stooping over her, a smile of wonderful sweetness lighted up her face, and, holding out her hands to him, she said:

"I am so glad, so glad!"

He could not answer her, but, taking both her hands in his, he kissed them, not once but thrice. She blushed rosy red and sat up.

"Is it not wonderful," she said, "wonderful that you should save me?"

"Yes, it is wonderful–God's will," said Reginald; "but how on earth are you here? I thought you were in England, up north somewhere."

"I wish I could get there now," said Agnes, tears filling her eyes, "But you will take me, take me now at once!"

"How can I?" he said. "There is war on land, and war on sea, and I am not

my own master. But tell me quickly how you came here at all."

"Jeanne, tell him; I do not remember," said Agnes.

"My lord," said the woman, "I cannot tell you much. My husband brought her to me one night. He told me to keep her safely, for she was worth much money to him. He had been paid to find her and bring her out of London from the midst of the plague by a person he knew of, a dwarf, the servant of some great lord. We presumed he was her lover."

"I had no lover," said Agnes indignantly; "I do not know who the man could be. This is all I can remember: I was very miserable; Ann had gone into a poor house, and I was alone with Patience in Somerset House. The plague was getting worse each day, and I was frightened. One night I went to sleep and woke up, and the whole place was red as if in flames. Patience had been sitting beside me when I fell asleep, but she was gone, and I was frightened. I got up, and somehow I found myself in the streets. They were quite empty, I saw nobody. I will go to Ann, I thought; she will take me in, and I ran as fast as I could. It seemed to me that I heard steps behind me, but I dared not look round. Suddenly I felt myself caught up, my breathing stopped, and I remember nothing more until I found myself alone with this good woman on this very barge."

"And she was like mad," said Jeanne. "I could not quiet her, I could not keep her still; my husband had to threaten her. 'You are quite safe,' he said, 'if you will keep quiet.' But she cried so bitterly and called out so loudly that he was fearful others would hear her, so he shoved out into the middle of the river; we kept afloat for several days up and down; but she knew nothing of what went on, for she never recovered her senses. She was stricken with a terrible fever of the brain, which lasted well-nigh two months. At first she made much noise, but at last she was quite still. Once only my husband landed and got to London. He came back with much money; he told me it was his reward for saving the girl. I took all the care I could of her. We put out to sea and came over to Holland, hoping to do some business, as we always did–the shipping of wood and various other sorts of merchandise–but we did nothing because of the plague and the war which followed, so he put us ashore in this little village, and he went to and fro picking up what odd jobs he could. Happily we had that money, and my husband told me that if he could get to England he would have much more, for he had received only half what had been promised to him. But we managed to live, and I did what I could for her."

"Ay, indeed she did; she has been very good to me," said Agnes. "I was ill a long, long time, and she nursed me well and kindly, and always promised, 'as soon as we can we will go back to England', for I told her who I was, and that I felt sure a mistake must have been made, that no one wanted me, that I had been safe with Patience. Both she and her husband think also there must have been a

mistake, only, the man who gave him the business to do took him several times to Somerset House and pointed me out to him. Is it not strange, Reginald?"

"Very," he answered; "I do not understand it at all."

"Do you know what Ben Davies was told the last time he saw his employer?" said Agnes. "That it was not only because of the plague that I was removed, but because I was a great heiress, and that my estates had been stolen from me, that the people who now held them wanted to get rid of me, but that there was a man who loved me, and wished to save me."

"And you believed him?" said Reginald.

"No, I did not," she answered, "because you see I am Agnes De Lisle and you are Reginald Newbolt, and Newbolt Manor is De Lisle Abbey, and I knew you would not hurt me."

"If I had only known it!" he said. "I would to God I had!"

"Well, you know it now," she answered, "and you can take me home."

"I wish I could," he answered, "but I am not going home myself. To whom can I trust you?"

"I have waited so long," said Agnes, "I can wait a little longer, and until you are ready I can stay with Jeanne. I am not afraid of her."

She had risen and was standing before him. He almost laughed as he looked at her in her quaint Dutch dress, short petticoats and sabots, and on her head a little tight cap which could not hide the golden hair curling about her face. Ah! she was very pretty and very young, a pale white shadow of the Agnes of olden days; but to him the very sadness of her sweet face added to its beauty. She had been all smiles and dimples; now one had to watch, for the smiles and the dimples were gone.

He left her standing, and walked twice round the deck of the little barge; then he came back to her.

"I think you are wise," he said; "remain with Jeanne; only you must go farther up the canal. It is not safe for you to stay here. Where is the woman's husband?"

"We do not know; we thought he would have come back before this," said Agnes. "Perhaps he is killed!"

Jeanne, hearing this, began to weep.

"Oh no, the good God would not afflict me so!" she said. "If we did wrong in taking the money our eyes were blinded, and we did not know. Surely we shall not be punished!"

"Your husband did wrong," said Reginald severely. "It is quite certain no man has a right to kidnap a girl; but you have been kind to her, and that will stand you in good stead. Tell me how I can find your husband."

"If I only knew!" said Jeanne.

Even as she uttered the words, a man came running along the side of the canal.

"Ah, there he is!" said Jeanne, clapping her hands; "thank God!" And she took the kerchief off her neck and waved it to him.

When he came near, and was about to leap into the barge, he saw the English officer and hesitated.

"Come on!" said Reginald.

The man obeyed, and in a minute more stood in front of him frowning deeply.

"What does he here?" he whispered to his wife.

"He has saved our lives, and he is the little lady's friend," she said.

"I have heard your story," said Reginald, looking at him severely, "and it is by no means a creditable one. For a sum of money you could kidnap a girl and carry her away. Do you know it is a punishable offence?"

"I know it," answered Ben Davies, "and I ran the risk. There was no work going, and we were reduced to our last coin. I never meant any harm should happen to her. I was told it was to save her from the plague and from a bad man who would despoil her."

"She is the queen's ward," said Reginald, "and I am the man who would despoil her."

The bargeman doffed his hat. "I am in your hands, sir," he said, "to do as you will with me, but I pray you to remember that we have given her the best we could, and my wife has nursed her by night and by day."

"That shall go to your account," said Reginald severely; "in the meantime, what are we to do now?"

"I would have taken her to England long ago if I could," said Ben, "but you know the high seas have been impossible for little crafts like mine. We should have been made prisoners, and goodness knows what might have befallen us."

"There you're right," said Reginald; "but is there no place of safety farther inland where you can go for the present until I can arrange to take my Lady Agnes home?"

"Yes, higher up away from the sea; we were going there," answered Ben Davies.

"Then I think you had better go," said Reginald. "I am on Prince Rupert's ship, and I will tell his highness what has happened."

Agnes clapped her hands. "Ah, Prince Rupert will remember me!" she said. "He has known me always. I saw him last at my Lord Craven's. He is a great friend of mine."

"Rest assured he will see you righted," said Reginald. "What is the name of the village you propose taking her to?" said Reginald, turning to the barge-man.

"It is off the great canal," he said, "and therefore safe;" and he named a little village unknown to Reginald. "It is not far. I can take them there to-night and be back here to-morrow for you, sir, if you choose to visit it."

"Are you sure they will be quite safe there?" he asked.

"Quite safe," he answered. "My father was an Englishman, my mother is a Dutch woman. She lives there; I will take them to her."

"Will this suit you, Lady Agnes?" asked Reginald.

"Quite well," she answered, "if you think it right; but why do you call me my Lady Agnes? I am not so; I am simply Agnes Beaumont De Lisle;" and there was just a touch of pride as she spoke the last name.

Reginald smiled. "Then I will leave you," he said, "until to-morrow, when I hope we shall be able to manage something for your return home; but it will be difficult. We cannot take you on our battleships," he said, smiling.

"Why not?" she asked. "I should not be afraid. I can never understand why I was so frightened the night I was lost; I must have been ill. Have you heard anything of Aunt Patience or of Ann?"

"Nothing," answered Reginald. "You know I left home immediately after my father's death, and I have not been back since. I have been wandering half over the earth, or rather the seas, and communication is not easy. But we shall hear soon now," he said.

"Alas, if they have died of the plague!" said Agnes; "what shall I do? It was awful when I was there!"

"We will hope not; we must not look on the black side of things. Let us trust we shall find them safe and well," answered the young man.

"Patience will have grieved sorely for the loss of me," said Agnes.

"Well," said Reginald, "'joy cometh in the morning', and now I must leave you, or I shall be reported missing. Farewell; may God be with you!"

She smiled up at him, holding out her hand.

"Everything is coming all right," she said. "I am well content."

"So am I," said Reginald, "but I am loath to lose sight of you even for a time."

"Sir, I will answer for it, no harm shall come to her," said Jeanne.

"Thank you, my good woman!" said Reginald; and he would have put a piece of money in her hand, but she would not touch it.

"I will not barter a human life again," she answered.

"You're right there," said Reginald, and he sprang ashore, waving his hat as he walked rapidly back towards the village.

"How brave and handsome he looks!" thought Agnes to herself. "I did not know he was so fine a man." And certainly the last two years had worked a wonderful difference on Reginald.

He had changed from a youth to a man. His seafaring life had bronzed his

fair complexion; the habit of command, the discipline (though it was somewhat lax in those days), had given him a more manly deportment. Altogether the alteration in his appearance was wholly to his advantage, and it was even surprising that Agnes had recognized him.

As soon as he had disappeared, Ben Davies began loosening his little craft.

"We must be quick," he said, "or night will overtake us before we reach Broek, and there are so many adventurers about, one is not safe even on the canal." Turning quickly to Agnes, he said:

"I understand you are a great lady; I always thought you were. I earnestly beg your pardon if I have injured you, and I entreat you to plead my cause with your friends."

"Indeed I will," she answered. "Of course you were very wrong to carry me away; but you have been so good to me, and Jeanne, dear Jeanne, and my little Lisette, I love you all." She picked the child up from the deck and hugged and kissed her.

"I have been very happy with you sometimes, since I got well," she said.

"Oh, no harm shall come to you, I promise!" he answered; and she smiled again in answer that wonderful bright smile of hers, which brought a look of gladness to the two other faces.

Thank God that there are in the world some who have this gift of joy giving! They are like angels dropped down upon the earth to scatter little grains of gladness in sad places.

CHAPTER XXI
London on Fire

The summer of 1665 had been hot, but the summer of 1666, if possible, was hotter. In the month of August there had been a long drought, and many people wondered that the plague did not reappear; but there had been no signs of it.

The Dutch War was the principal topic of conversation and excitement. The court and home affairs were gradually settling down; the evil days seemed well-nigh forgotten.

So it came to pass that on the first of September a group of men and women was assembled on the leads of the roof of Somerset House, to breathe the air

which came up from the river; indeed, an east wind was blowing, but the day had been so excessively hot that it hardly seemed to bring freshness with it.

Patience was there, looking so fragile that the very sight of her made Parson Ewan's heart ache. He and Jessie had come down from the north to see if they could persuade her to return with them. They had heard of Agnes's disappearance, and it was so long ago that they had ceased to entertain anything but a shadowy hope of her return. Mr. Ewan could therefore see no reason why Patience should remain alone in London. Indeed, looking at her as she lay on a couch which had been brought up on to the leads for her especial use, it seemed to him that she would not be long with them. The patient face was so white and still, the eyes had that strange, far-away look in them which we see in the eyes of the dying.

Jessie was sitting beside her holding her thin, white hand, and talking to her of that home among the hills which they both loved so well, telling her all the little village gossip, which brought a smile to Patience's sad face. Ann and George Delarry were there also; but for them, indeed, Patience's life would have been unbearable. They had done all they could to comfort her.

To Parson Ewan especially the sight of London, as viewed from the roof of Somerset House that night, was wonderful. Indeed, they were all destined never to forget it. The sky was absolutely clear and cloudless, of that pure blue peculiar to it when an east wind is blowing. Every bit of colour stood out distinctly. The grey of the stone of Somerset House, and of other buildings looked white from the dry heat; the river below shone like silver. Looking towards the city they could see the spires and turrets of a hundred churches rising in the clear air. St. Paul's seemed very near to them. It was now under repair and surrounded by a network of scaffold poles, all exceedingly dry, almost as if dried in an oven, so hot had the summer been. In the city of London itself there were many picturesque wooden houses, so close one to another in the narrow streets that they almost touched. They were very dry, except here and there, where the tar with which some were covered was oozing down because of the heat.

In these narrow streets there was much buying and selling, eating, drinking, and making "mighty merry". A few hackney-coaches were returning with family parties who had been out on excursions refreshing themselves at Islington or some other suburb, from the heat of the city. Many people were singing, girls were playing on virginals. There was much laughter and merriment, and even dancing in the streets. No one seemed to think of going to bed, the night air was so refreshing.

To those on the leads of Somerset House the scene was inexpressibly fascinating. The sun had long set; there hung over the city the strange beauty and mystery of what is called the 'raven's twilight'. They did not speak much, but

stood or sat and watched the city until night fell. Then the moon rose and once more lit up that marvellous vision. It was so lovely no one desired to leave it. There was not a trace of any mist. The moon mounted to her highest noon, in cloudless majesty, while the city was hushed to sleep. Midnight chimed from St. Clement's, and the bells of a hundred other churches rang out. The watchman's call was heard:

"Past twelve o'clock and a windy morning. All's well. It is the Lord's day."

Stooping over the parapet, Delarry said carelessly, addressing himself to Mr. Ewan:

"Do you see, sir, down yonder by the river, near London Bridge, that light? It is not the light of the moon. It is a fire. Well, we need not be anxious, fires are frequent; it will be nothing. My Lord Craven will be at his best, he never misses a fire. It is said his horse is so used to take him to fires that he knows the smell of it a long distance off, and will gallop to it as soon as he feels his master's foot in the stirrup."

"I have heard that a fire is a very fascinating sight," said Mr. Ewan. "After all, it is a battle with the elements. But it would not be a good thing to-night, with this east wind blowing."

As they watched that little light they saw that by degrees the sky grew red and strong flames came driving westward. The east wind blew a fierce gale; cries rose up from the streets; there was much rushing about and confusion even in their neighbourhood, though the fire was certainly at a great distance.

"I think we had best go down and see what is happening," said Delarry. "Shall we take you ladies into the house? We shall not be long absent."

"No; we will abide here," said Patience. "It would be intolerable to be below and see nothing."

Indeed, even as she spoke many of the servants came up, anxious also to witness the conflagration.

"You need have no fear," said Delarry, "I am going to the king."

"I wish you would not go," said Ann. "See how the flames are riding, and how quickly they spread!"

"It is my duty to go to the king, Ann," he said, "but I will be back as quickly as possible. In the meantime, Mr. Ewan," he continued, "if the ladies are fearful it would be well to put them into a barge and send them out into the river. You had better see if the barges are in order," he added to the chief steward of the household, "and Peter Kemp, you will help Parson Ewan with the ladies; but there can be no haste, the fire will be cut off in no time."

Even as he spoke these words he looked anxiously at the great flames which kept rising from amidst volumes of smoke.

"Courage, dearest," he said, kissing Ann, "I shall be back immediately." And

without more ado he left her.

Martha was in tears. Patience had risen and was standing leaning upon Jessie, looking at the wonderful sight. By this time the whole centre of the city seemed to be one mass of flames, driven in long tongues of fire westward, spreading quickly along the water side.

"Do you think it will come this way?" asked Mr. Ewan of Peter Kemp, who stood beside him.

"Lor' no, sir," answered the man; "it's a pretty long way off yet, but the houses be so dry and so near together, and many of them are tarred, so that they set one another on fire."

Peter Kemp was right. The chronicles of the time tell us that the fire broke out in the house of one Farryner, the king's baker, in Pudding Lane, where the Monument now stands, and that it spread so quickly that before three o'clock in the morning three hundred houses were down. St. Magnus, by the bridge foot, was alight, and the houses near it in flames; the wind was so strong it seemed to sweep everything before it.

Unfortunately no one knew what to do, and the first few hours were lost. The lord mayor was at his wits' end, and when he received the command from the king to spare no houses, but pull them down before the fire, he exclaimed:

"Lord! what can I do? I am spent; people will not obey me. I have been pulling down houses, but the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it."

People were wandering about the streets distracted, and there was no efficient means of quenching the fire.[#]

[#] Pepys's account.

Delarry found the king leaving Whitehall in his barge with the Duke of York.

"You had better come with us, Delarry," he said; "you have a steady head, and we may need your services." And so Delarry went down on the king's barge to Thames Street, where they landed. And the king and the Duke of York behaved splendidly, encouraging the men, speaking cheerfully and with authority to the distracted people; their presence did much to control the populace.

Almost as soon as they had landed, the king had said to Delarry, "Go back and bring soldiers and gunpowder; we must stop it even if we blow up half the town." And Delarry had gone.

He came back with a score of men, and it was done as the king desired.

Suddenly there came running into the very midst of this scene of destruction a tall, fair man in the dress of a naval officer, and with him a dozen or more

blue-jackets with axes in their hands; they looked like men who had both the will and the power to do good work. A cry went up from the crowd:

"Hurrah for the 'blue-jackets'!" And the men answered the greeting with a shout and a wild hurrah. The Duke of York, who had taken his part in the Dutch wars, left the king's side, and, riding forward, greeted the young officer, who paused in his running, and by a word of command drew up his men in front of the duke.

"You've come in the very nick of time, Commander Newbolt," he said; "I wish we had more men like you."

"Others are following, your highness," answered Newbolt. "My ship, the *Orient*, anchored in Harwich this morning, and the news reached us that London was burning, so I got permission from Prince Rupert to come on and see if we could help, if help were needed."

"It is needed," said the duke, "and badly; go to work. Do not spare the houses; it is the king's order. The fire must be cut off, but above all things save as many lives as you can. Away with you!"

No second bidding was needed; from that moment Reginald Newbolt and his blue-jackets did such strenuous work that he and Delarry together were the heroes of the day. Many were the women and the children whom they carried out of danger; many were the poor wretches, sick, and halt, and maimed, whom they took to places of refuge.

It is impossible to relate here the agony of that first day of the fire, a Sabbath day never to be forgotten, the Lord's day as it was called then. The river was crowded to excess with lighters and boats taking in goods of every description. The water itself was thick with baskets, boxes, anything that would float, and above in the air there was the screaming of birds, of pigeons which would not leave their houses, and which hovered about the windows and balconies licked by the flames, until they burnt their wings and fell down.

Black with smoke and grime, almost beyond recognition, Lord Craven and Reginald Newbolt came face to face, and, strange to tell, recognized each other. It was no time for ceremony, they clasped hands.

"You here!" said Lord Craven; "it is well, for we need brave men, and I have been hearing all day long of the blue-jackets and their commander."

They had no time to say more, for even as they spoke there was a great crash, and a block of houses fell as in a burning pit, and such a cloud of smoke and dust arose that for a few seconds they were in darkness, half smothered in the suffocating furnace of heat and dust. When they recovered themselves, they found that they were still together.

"Can you tell me anything of Ann?" asked Reginald quickly.

"She is safe with Patience Beaumont at Somerset House," said Lord Craven.

"You know she is Delarry's wife; he will see after her."

"I know nothing," said Reginald, "but I have one bit of news–Mistress Agnes De Lisle is, or rather was, safe a week ago. She was to start for England; let us hope she has not done so. You can carry the news to Patience; she must have had a hard time of it."

"She is dying of it," said Lord Craven. "Who knows, this may make her live!" But another burst of flames, another rush of half-distracted men and women separated them, and each went his way, brave men and true, ready to face every danger, not thinking of themselves, doing their duty to God and man as Christian knights and English gentlemen.

At Somerset House, as the danger increased, Mr. Ewan and Peter Kemp decided that as the rapidity of the fire was so great that at any time it might sweep up westward and render even Somerset House untenable, they had better get the women on to a barge and go out into the river. It was difficult to steer, as there were so many other vessels filling the river. The heat was intolerable, and they were almost burnt by the shower of fire-drops which fell continuously. It was by these fire-drops that the fire spread. They fell into the barges, beyond the range of the actual fire. It was as if the heavens showered down burning coals. Many persons threw themselves on the ground or into the river itself, saying it was the last day, and that the judgment of God had fallen upon the city.

The sky was a lurid sheet, like the top of a burning oven. The fall of houses, the sudden collapse of the churches, was hideous to hear and see.

The air was so hot and inflamed, that at last no one was able to approach the radius where the fire raged fiercest. This circle of fire was nearly two miles in length and one in breadth, and because of the long trail of smoke the whole town and country for six miles round was in total darkness, so that at noonday travellers could not see each other, though there was no cloud in the sky! The Guildhall was a fearful spectacle. It stood in view for several hours after the fire had taken hold of it, a great lurid body without any flames, because the timber with which it was built was of solid oak. It shone forth a bright mass, as if it had been a palace of gold.

St. Paul's was under repair as has been said, and the scaffolding helped to set the cathedral on fire. The great stones of which it was built were calcined.

Patience, Jessie, and Ann watched the scene with terror. They had only Mr. Ewan, Peter, and the house steward with them, along with one bargeman. Martha and one or two maid-servants had followed them.

We have already said that the heat was so fierce, the shower of fire-drops so continuous, that but for the water which surrounded the barge they would of necessity have been burnt up. The water in the river was almost boiling, and hissed and bubbled as the red-hot drops fell into it. At last, overcome with fa-

tigue and fear, Patience became unconscious. Heavy drops of perspiration were pouring down the faces of all; it was intolerable.

"Cannot you steer the barge across to the other side?" asked Mr. Ewan of the bargeman.

It was late in the afternoon when he made this proposition.

"I will try," he answered, "but you can see for yourself, sir, the river is covered with craft and with floating bales; it is not easy."

Mr. Ewan had been an oarsman when he was a student at Oxford, and with his assistance at steering they succeeded in crossing the river and reaching the Surrey side, which put them comparatively out of danger. It was called "the Bank side" in those days.

"I know of a little ale-house where, if not overcrowded, they would take us in," said Peter.

"Then for God's sake guide us there," said Mr. Ewan, as he lifted Patience in his arms and carried her out of the barge on to land.

The refugees swarmed along the river front, but, guided by Peter, the little party found its way at last to the ale-house, which stood back in a garden of its own.

As good fortune would have it, there was one room still unoccupied. Of this the women took immediate possession, and where Patience could be tended. Late in the afternoon they were able to join the men in the little garden, and witnessed the fire growing ever more and more vivid, creeping up the steeples, appearing between the churches and the houses, as far as they could see up the hill on which the city stands, a most horrid, malicious, bloody flame, not like the fine flame of a fire, but in fashion like a bow–a dreadful bow it was, a bow which had God's arrow in it with a flaming point.[#]

[#] Vincent.

It was an awful sight, and throughout Monday and Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, the fire continued, at times seeming to die down, and then bursting forth again with redoubled fury. Up and down the city the Duke of York rode. Lord Craven, Delarry, Reginald Newbolt, and many other brave men fought the fire as they had never fought a living enemy. There was no thought of rest, no thought of staying their hand–desolation, ruin, surrounded them on every side. The town itself was in those days hardly more than a mile wide at any point; open country was all around, and the people who had made their escape camped out on Moorfields and in the meadows of the hillside slopes.

Fortunately the weather continued warm and dry, and there was bright moonlight. By mid-day on Friday all danger was past; but what had been the most picturesque city in Europe, was now a heap of ruins and ashes. Few lives had been lost, but old London had ceased to exist.

CHAPTER XXII
Found

It was Sunday morning, just a week since the fire had broken out and consumed the city. The bells of the churches that remained uninjured were ringing out, and crowds were passing over the ruins to reach the churches, there to confess their sins and their misdoings, and to pray the Lord to stay His wrath, and not utterly destroy His people.

No such scene of desolation was ever witnessed before, and let us pray it may never be witnessed again in the capital of the English nation. She had fallen very low, and now her people humbled themselves, acknowledging the hand of God which had chastised and yet had not slain them.

A man, a woman, and a girl were making their way from the crowded banks of the river up the Strand towards Somerset House. When they reached it they found the gates closed and guarded by soldiers, for the people who remained in the city were afraid of the many marauders and thieves who had escaped from the prisons and places of detention during the last few days. Newgate had been burnt down, and it had been impossible to keep a close watch over the prisoners, so that, now the danger of fire was over, a great fear of rapine, theft, and murder fell upon the honest inhabitants.

Those who could afford it, themselves set watchmen before their houses, and barred and bolted their doors. In the court-yard of Somerset House there were both soldiers and sailors mingled together. There was also a watch-box, used at night by the watchman, but at present a soldier stood in it with fixed bayonet. Seeing all this array, the three strangers slunk back and began conversing together.

"What shall we do?" asked Ben Davies. "To whom shall we address ourselves to gain admittance?"

"Oh, it will be quite easy!" said Agnes, who was still in her peasant's dress. "I must know if Patience is here. If she is not, then perhaps Martha will be."

Even as she spoke, Martha's portly figure came through the gate out into the street. She was accompanied by Peter Kemp, to whom she was saying in a loud voice, hugging a book of prayers in her arms:

"Indeed, if ye have never prayed before, it would be well if ye did so now. Come along with me."

Peter looked somewhat sheepish, but he had no time to answer, for Agnes sprang forward, exclaiming:

"Martha, Martha, take me to Aunt Patience!"

"Ah, my lamb!" said Martha, "where have you sprung from?"

"Oh, never mind that, never mind anything!" said Agnes; "only take me to Aunt Patience." And she clung to the woman.

"I'll take you fast enough," said Martha, tears rolling down her face. "Maybe it will be the saving of her." And she turned back, holding Agnes's hand tightly in hers.

They heard a scuffling behind them, and, looking round, they saw the guards driving back Ben Davies and his wife.

"Oh, let them come!" Agnes said, "they are my friends. Go and fetch them, Peter; I must go to Aunt Patience." And she ran across the court-yard, not heeding the groups of sailors who instinctively moved on one side to let her pass. Old Martha followed her as fast as she could, but Agnes ran on through the great vestibule. Her foot was on the first step of the stairs when a hand was laid on her shoulder, and looking up she saw Parson Ewan.

"Agnes!" he exclaimed.

"Aunt Patience–take me to Aunt Patience!" she cried, not heeding him.

"Come!" said Parson Ewan; and they went quickly on together, without speaking.

They paused at the door of Patience's sitting-room.

"Agnes," said the parson, "your aunt has been ill–very ill, indeed; and the last few days have tried her beyond measure. We must be careful. Jessie is with her. I will call her out, and I will go into your aunt and tell her you are here."

"Be quick, then," said Agnes. "Joy does not kill; she will get well now I am here."

She had raised her voice a little, and as the door of the room opened, a voice they both knew called out:

"Agnes, Agnes!"

"She has heard me," said the girl, and, running forward, she found herself in Patience's arms.

"My darling, my well-beloved!" said the elder woman, sinking into a chair and drawing Agnes on to her knees; and the two loved each other with kisses and with tears, in silence, because their hearts were overflowing.

Parson Ewan closed the door and left them alone.

Ben Davies and his wife were conducted by Peter Kemp to the servants' hall, and were being questioned, but they were very reticent. Ben Davies simply said that the Lady Agnes had been given into their charge, he did not even know by whom. Her very name had been hidden from them for many months. When they did know it, but for the war they would have brought her to England at once. Then a young commander, who knew the lady, had found them in Holland, and bidden them keep her quiet until the war should be over; but she was so impatient to come home, that she had persuaded Ben to hire a larger barge and to put out to sea.

They came up by the Medway and had expected to be in London in a day or so, when the fire broke out, and they had had to lay to. As soon as it was possible, the Lady Agnes had insisted on pushing forward. She would not let them rest. Her one cry was:

"Aunt Patience, Aunt Patience!"

Presently Parson Ewan came in, accompanied by Reginald Newbolt, who said sharply:

"Well, Ben, you haven't obeyed orders."

"I couldn't, sir," answered Ben; "the young lady would not let me. When I told her I had no money to charter a ship, she said it did not matter, that I could promise the owner what I chose; she was sure she was rich, she was sure the money would be found, and my wife took sides with her. What could I do? So I chartered a boat, and we crossed over; but when we came within reach of London, and saw the fire raging, still she would not go back. So we waited in the river until we could move on, which we did as soon as possible. She seemed to have no fear, and but one thought–to get home."

"Well, you had better remain here for the present," said Reginald. "Martha will take care of your wife."

"Please, your honour, I must go back to my ship to-night," said Ben Davies, "and my wife cannot leave the little one. Fortunately my mother came with us, and took charge of the child; but my wife must be back before night."

"Very well," said Reginald; "tell me in what dock your ship is lying and I will go to you. You must not go without seeing the Lady Agnes. Stay here and take proper refreshment. I will see to your getting back the quickest way possible."

"Thank you, sir!" said Ben Davies; then, speaking in a low voice so that no one else could hear, he said:

"You will not betray me, sir? You will not let evil happen to me because I listened to that wicked man?"

"No, I will not," said Reginald, "I promise you. You have redeemed yourself. You shall go scot-free. Indeed, I expect you will be rewarded for your care of the

Lady Agnes."

"Thank you kindly, sir!" said the man. And then Reginald and Mr. Ewan left the hall.

That same evening there was a great consultation, and it was agreed that the very next day Mr. Ewan, Patience, and the two girls, with their men and women servants, should start north. They would have to go very slowly because of Patience. It was impossible for her to travel on horseback, so a carriage had to be hired, and everything done to ensure the least possible fatigue for her.

Patience wrote to the king, telling him how Agnes had been found. She dwelt but slightly on her disappearance. All she said was: "She was carried away from us by some misadventure or by some evil design, which the Lord has frustrated, and she has mercifully been given back to my arms. Surely her angels have watched over her that her foot should not slip. With your majesty's leave I am taking her back to Westmorland to my home, seeing she has none of her own– De Lisle Abbey, her ancestral home, having passed into the hands of strangers. I would entreat your majesty to inform the queen-dowager of these facts; and also I would remind your majesty that her father died serving that saint and martyr, your most gracious majesty's father, and of your promise to befriend the child, who is fatherless and motherless, with nothing she can call her own. As regards myself, I shall not be here long to protect her. The late events have shattered my health, and I am going home to die; then she will be alone. Praying your majesty's goodness for the orphan, I kiss your majesty's hand, and leave her to your tender mercy.

"PATIENCE BEAUMONT."

"I will take the letter," said Reginald, "and you, Delarry, shall accompany me."

"Willingly," said the young Irish officer; and the two went off together.

The conduct of the young men had been so remarkable during the late events of the fire that they were in high favour with both the king and the Duke of York, to whom they had access at any hour of the day or night.

When the king had read the letter, he looked at Reginald with that peculiar expression of bonhomie which was so familiar to his courtiers.

"Are not you the present possessor of the De Lisle estates?" he asked.

"Yes, sire," answered Reginald boldly; "they were given my father in return for his services in the Parliamentary army. But let not that trouble your majesty; I am ready to restore them to their rightful owner."

"And their rightful owner is this Lady Agnes Beaumont De Lisle," said the king. "Well, Captain Newbolt, I have a bit of advice to give you, and at the same

time a tangible recognition of your services during the Dutch War, of which my cousin, Prince Rupert," and he turned to the prince, who was standing by him, and smiled, "has given me full account. Go courting this lady; make her your wife. It will not be very difficult, seeing she is the fairest maiden at our court, and my mother has kept her hidden as a pearl in an oyster shell. It is for you to bring her forth, and when you present her at our court as your wife, I will create you Sir Reginald De Lisle, and ratify to you and to her conjointly the estates of which you have defrauded her; so shall we do away with all difficulties. What say you to this, my cousin?" And he turned once more to Prince Rupert.

"That your majesty has as usual solved the question with your happy wit. What can be better than love, and marriage, and wedding-bells?"

But Reginald answered:

"I am only too willing, your majesty; but there is one thing I would beseech of you, namely, to restore the estate to Lady Agnes without delay, and with no regard as to whether I win her hand or not."

"But unless you wed her you cannot be Sir Reginald De Lisle," said the king.

"Then, with your permission, I will be Sir Reginald something else," said the young man boldly; "but I would have the Lady Agnes left free, quite free, to wed me or not as it seems best to her."

"But you will go a-courting her?" said Charles, laughing.

"Ah, verily I will!" answered Reginald, drawing himself up, "and I hope to win her."

"Have it your own way," said the king. "Send us the parchments concerning the De Lisle estate and we will make them over to the young lady, and you, you will be penniless and a soldier of fortune. Now, begone, and do not tarry on the road, but win your spurs and a wife."

Reginald bent his knee before the king and kissed his hand; then rose and went his way.

CHAPTER XXIII
Home at Last

It was a long journey north, and a wearisome one. They had to make many halts on the road because of Patience's weakness. She was as a queen amongst

them; they loved and tended her, each one in his or her own way. Jessie fairly worshipped her, and was almost jealous of Agnes. How was it possible that, thus cradled in love, she should not live! and it was evident to them all that as she approached north there seemed to dawn upon her face a look of happiness, and in her voice there was a note of gladness. So they were content and ceased to fear for her.

"You are getting well so quickly, Aunt Patience!" said Agnes. But Patience shook her head; she could not think so herself, for she could not shake off the horror of the past months–the plague, the fire, and the loss of Agnes–she could not believe it possible that she should live, she who had ceased to desire life. Again and again she said to Parson Ewan, "If only I could see Agnes married and settled with a good man, I should be content to go."

"Have you not learnt through all this time of trial," said Parson Ewan reproachfully, "to leave things in God's hands? Each day you say 'Thy Will be done', and yet you make plans for the future. You say you do not care to live, but if it be His will that you should live, surely you will be content. You are still a young woman, and there may be work for you to do–others to comfort and care for. Who can tell what God requires of us?"

"When Agnes is married I shall be alone," said Patience, "and I do not like the thought of being alone. I would sooner go home to my dear ones."

"Loneliness is a thing we have all to face," said Parson Ewan sadly; "but there is no need to trouble about it until it comes. Rest assured that when it does, with God's grace you will bear it. The vicarage is not far from Holt Farm, and there is Jessie."

"You are right," said Patience, and a slight colour crept over her face; "besides, we are talking as if Agnes were married and gone, and we do not even know that she thinks of either love or marriage."

"Just so," said the parson; "as I told you, you were taking trouble by the forelock."

Their last halting-place was at Appleby, which was but a short distance from De Lisle Abbey.

"Would you like me to take Agnes over to see the old home?" asked Mr. Ewan the following morning.

"No," said Patience; "she shall not go there until it is her own, and that may never be. I have had no answer from the king."

"All in good time," said Mr. Ewan, and he smiled, for he had had a conversation with Reginald and Delarry the morning before they started, when he had learnt the king's pleasure, "that De Lisle Abbey was to be restored to Agnes, and that Reginald was to go a-courting."

"I don't think he will need to do that long," Delarry had said. "Agnes has

always been his sweetheart."

"Ah, but I was a rich man in those days, now I possess nothing! You know this full well, Delarry, seeing you have had no dower with Ann, and I can give you none."

"I am quite content," said Delarry.

"But I, 'a soldier of fortune', shall have to woo an heiress," said Reginald, "so I am not content."

"What matters it; what matters anything," said Mr. Ewan, "if she loves you?"

"True," said Reginald, "if she loves me." And then they parted company, for Reginald and Delarry were much in request at court, and could not even wait to see them off; but, as Reginald bade Agnes farewell, he said:

"As soon as I can get leave of absence, may I come north and visit you?"

"If you will," said Agnes; "but we are poor folk now. We live at Holt Farm, and you are master of Newbolt Abbey."

"I shall not be master there long," he answered; and so he bade her farewell.

At every cottage door in the little hamlet of St. Mary's, women and children, even the men in the fields, stopped now and again, and, shading their eyes with their hands, looked up over the hills in the direction of Appleby. There was an air of expectancy and gladness on every face, for the news had reached them through Rolfe that the parson, Mistress Patience Beaumont, and the two young maidens were coming home that day.

"It's a wonder they're alive," one woman said to another; "to think they've been through the plague and the fire!"

"But it seems that Mistress Patience is terribly ill," answered her companion.

"So I heard," said the first speaker, "but she'll soon get hale and hearty when she is home again. There they be;" and she pointed down the valley to where a coach was just visible, accompanied by horses and riders. A general movement took place among the villagers, as if they would have all gone forward to meet the travellers.

Suddenly there arose a cry of pleasure, for they saw two youthful figures come running on in front.

"Ah, it's the maidens!" said an old man, leaning on his stick. "I thank the Lord my eyes will see them once again!" and then there was no holding back. Children and women and men left their cottages to take care of themselves, and went on their way cheering and waving their kerchiefs until Agnes and Jessie were in their midst, shaking hands with one and all, half-laughing and half-crying.

”Follow us,” said Jessie. ”Father says we must thank God first of all for His great mercies vouchsafed to us;” and she and Agnes led the way to the little parish church, and the old sexton threw the door open, and they entered. Patience, very pale and very feeble, but with a glint of life and gladness in her eyes, walked between the two girls, leaning on them both, and Mr. Ewan went first, entered the church and stood on the altar steps, whilst the people crowded in. Then he spoke to them and told them something of the danger through which Patience and Agnes had passed, of that terrible plague, of the fire, and the long separation, for which no one could account. Tears poured down his hearers’ faces, and the women sobbed.

”But it is over,” he said, ”and God has been very merciful, for He has brought them home again; therefore, let us kneel and give thanks to Him Who is the Lord of life and death.”

They knelt for a time in silence, which spoke more eloquently than words, and then there broke upon the stillness the first words of that great song of triumph:

”We praise Thee, O Lord, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.
All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father Everlasting.”

It poured forth from every heart and every tongue, the sound rolled out through the open door into the sweet country beyond; and it seemed to Patience, as she listened, as if healing were coming to her, the love of life, the gladness which belongs to the true believer. As the last words, ”O Lord, in Thee have I trusted, let me never be confounded”, died out, with one accord they knelt again; every head was bowed, as the pastor raised his hands and blessed them.

Then they went forth. Patience was lifted on to a horse, and it was, ”Who should lead it?” And so they trooped up to Holt Farm. Doors and windows were wide open, and the scent of the summer flowers, roses and sweet lavender, filled the air.

Oh, the joy of that home-coming, the sweet peace which crept over them as they crossed the threshold and stood for a second waving their thanks and their good-byes to those who had followed them!

Mr. Ewan stepped into the midst of his flock.

”You will go now,” he said, ”all of you, because the Mistress must have rest and peace to recover her strength.” So they went, and Patience was taken upstairs and put to bed in the sweet lavender-scented sheets, with open windows looking out over the moors; and as she lay there it seemed to her as if the past were an ugly dream from which she had just awakened. As she listened to the birds singing, and the voices of Agnes and Jessie as they went and came, she

buried her face in the pillow and wept tears of gladness and thanksgiving. All the bitterness of her soul for those dark years of mourning passed away. Her youth had departed from her, but it seemed to her almost as if there were a resurrection within her, a new life dawning, a life which did not belong to others, as all her past had done, but to herself. A strange gladness, a sense of peace, crept over her, and she fell asleep.

What would her awakening be? None but God knew. Surely she was one of God's elect; she had possessed her soul in patience.

In a different way Agnes realized the same feeling. It was not likely she would ever forget what she had gone through or what she had seen and heard, but it grew to be almost like a dream from which she had awakened. She had been away from home and she had come back again, and as she linked her arm in Jessie's, and with Mr. Ewan walked back to the vicarage, she said as much.

"I hope I may never go back to London," she said. "I will stay here all my life. Could anything be more lovely?"

"Make no rash promises," said Mr. Ewan, laughing. "You are too young to do that. What if someone fetches you away?"

Agnes coloured. "I cannot leave Aunt Patience," she answered. "Think what she has done and suffered for me. Can I ever repay her?"

"We can never repay love; we can but give it in return," answered Mr. Ewan.

After the first two or three days life resumed its even course for them all.

If the Ewans and Patience and Agnes had been friends before, they were more than friends now. It seemed as if they could not bear to be parted.

"If we could only live all together, Aunt Patience," Agnes said one morning.

Patience laughed, for she did laugh now, with a certain ring of gladness which had never been there before. "That we cannot do," she answered. "I cannot leave the farm, and Mr. Ewan cannot leave the vicarage."

As she said these words Mr. Ewan entered the sitting-room, smiled at Aunt Patience, who coloured deeply, for she knew he must have heard Agnes's last words, but he gave no sign, only laid a voluminous packet of papers in front of her.

"These are for you, Agnes," he said. "I met a king's messenger bringing them, and he entrusted them to me." Both Patience and Mr. Ewan exchanged glances, while Agnes fingered the parchment and slowly broke the seal.

"What is it?" she said. "I cannot read this cramped writing. What have I to do with the king?"

"Give it to me; let me read it to you," said Mr. Ewan.

"Oh no, not all these long pages!" said Agnes, "just tell me what it means. What does the king want with me?"

"Nothing," answered Mr. Ewan, "except to give back to you what by right

is yours, the lands and estates of De Lisle Abbey."

"There is no De Lisle Abbey; it is Newbolt Manor," said Agnes sharply, "and I won't have it."

"You cannot help yourself. I think you must," said Patience.

"No, Aunt Patience, you may say what you will, but I will never go there. It would never be to me like home; I would sooner remain with you always. I will write and tell the king as much; I do not want to be Lady of De Lisle Abbey."

"It would be of no use your sending to the king; there are your title-deeds," said Patience.

"Then I will throw them into the fire; I will have none of it," she said, and she caught at them. But Parson Ewan put his hand on hers.

"Let be, Agnes," he said.

She burst into tears.

"I will not; I tell you I will not!" and she stamped her foot.

A step had come up the gravel path which she had not heard, neither had she seen the figure of a man standing in the doorway; but Patience and Mr. Ewan had both heard and seen, and quietly they turned and left the room.

Agnes, her arms crossed on the table, sobbed with childish anger, repeating: "I will not; I will not!"

"What will you not do, you naughty child?" said a man's voice, and a somewhat heavy hand was laid on her shoulder.

She started, looked up, and saw Reginald standing over her. "I will not be Lady De Lisle," she said.

"Very well," answered Reginald seriously; "I am very sorry if that be your last word, Agnes."

"What can it matter to you?" she said passionately. "I will not take your lands; I will not rob you."

She looked so pretty in her anger, with her tear-stained face and ruffled hair, still such a child.

"Nevertheless I am sorry," he said, "for I have come to ask you to be my wife; and the king has promised to knight me Sir Reginald De Lisle if I win you."

"I cannot be your wife," she answered slowly. "I am too young; and then there is Aunt Patience. You must be Sir Reginald something else."

"I will not be Sir anything, unless I am Sir Reginald De Lisle, and you knight me," he answered.

She shook her head. "I tell you, you can't. I will not have the land."

He put his arm round her, turned her face up to his, and looked into her eyes. "Now, tell me you do not love me, my little sweetheart," he said.

Evidently she could not so answer him, for a smile broke over her face.

"Yes or no, Agnes?" he asked softly.

A short gasp and then a timid "Yes", and he would have kissed her, but she slipped away from him and stood at the farther end of the room.

"I cannot; you know I cannot. What will become of Aunt Patience?" she said.

He laughed. "I think that will settle itself, Agnes," he answered. "Don't run away, little one." And he took both her hands in his.

"Have you seen nothing?"

"Seen! What should I have seen?" said Agnes.

"Well, then, wait awhile and you will see," said Reginald. "In the meantime, you love me and I love you; so you must be my wife, and the king will knight me, and we will go and live in the place I love best in the world, De Lisle Abbey."

"Then Aunt Patience must come too," she said. "She cannot stay here alone."

She did not know that Aunt Patience had come back until she felt her arms round her, and heard the voice she loved so well say:

"I shall not hinder you, my darling. Did you not yourself say it would be a good thing if the vicarage and the farm were one dwelling-place?"

"Yes, I did," answered Agnes, "because we are all such good friends."

"Just so," said Patience. "But as the vicarage is too small for us all, Mr. Ewan and myself have settled that he and Jessie shall live up here with me after you are married."

"Oh," answered Agnes, "then you will not want me!" And her face fell.

"We shall always want you, dear. Only, I think someone else wants you more, and someone wants me too, and we shall never be quite happy without our lovers. Am I not right?" She drew Agnes into her arms, and they kissed tenderly, in remembrance of the past, and for joy in the future.

And so it came to pass that a few weeks later Sir Reginald De Lisle and Agnes were married in the little church where her mother lay sleeping; and they rode away together, she on her white palfrey, he on his black charger, and he took her to her old home, the home of her race, now his and hers.

They left no sadness behind, for Mr. Ewan and Patience were also married a few days later in the same village church, and Jessie's heart was glad because she had a mother. And so, for one and all, the evil days were over.

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