

'Not far now, Father,' replied the girl. 'Pray, take Simon's arm, and we shall get along easier and faster. Your arm, Simon, Heaven grant we reach her before she dies.'

'They go to a dying bed,' thought the buccaneer; but with the callousness begotten of ten years' sanguinary war and rapine, he almost immediately forgot the incident. It was smothered under the press of his own mental troubles, under an oppressive feeling of uneasiness, remorse and fear that had strangely come upon him like evil spirits on this the occasion of his return after long years to his native city.

'My parents, my little sister—shall I be able to find them? Are they living or dead?' were the questions that kept restlessly singing and stinging in his mind. Was this the triumphant homecoming of his dreams, the sequel of long years of adventure, hardship, imprisonment, deeds of recklessness and bloodshed? The winter wind howled as in mockery, the snow spat coldly in his face. He drew his sea cloak close around him and hastened his pace, bitter, piercing, foreign seemed the climate of London after his prolonged sojourn in warmer climes.

A sudden shriek for help brought him to a halt; then he turned back on the run. A scuffle was going on in the street. The girl that Langhorne had just passed was struggling in the grasp of a cutpurse, one of the numerous human wolves with which the city by the Thames was cursed. The grey-haired man was already prostrate at the mercy of another. As for the stout apprentice with the stolid face and the cudgel, he had taken to his heels.

'Clear the decks, lubbers!' cried Lieutenant Langhorne. With a powerful buffet he sent one footpad tumbling heels over head in the snow. He swiftly drew his Spanish bilbo and thrust it into the fleshy part of the other. The pair of ruffians floundered and limped away, snarling like wounded beasts of prey.

'Thank you, sir, oh, a thousand thanks for saving us!' exclaimed the girl. 'How fortunate that a brave and true man was so near!'

'Oh, that miserable poltroon, Simon Stokes, to abandon us so!' she continued. 'The fellow has not the courage of a mouse.'

'And who is Simon?' amusedly inquired the rescuer.

'My father's apprentice,' was the reply. 'Silly, indeed, to have trusted to the gallantry of such a creature, but no other choice had I. Out upon him for a runaway!'

'Then, mistress, pray trust in me for a change of convoy.'

'Sir, we will gladly and thankfully accept your escort. We have not far to go, and our way seems to lie in your direction.'

'Important must be the business that takes you out so late and makes you run a night gauntlet of thieves and murderers,' remarked Langhorne, in perfunctory effort at conversation.

'Of extreme importance, my good friend,' said the elderly man, still panting from the effects of his fall; business of sad yet extreme and sovereign importance. And now go in peace, brave young sailor man, and God-bless you.'

Our buccaneer bade them good-bye at one of the low-browed houses, in the diamond-paned windows of whose projecting upper story there was a faint glimmer of light. There was no attempt at further acquaintance or introduction, no offer, beyond a few sincere words of gratitude on the part of the rescued, to dispel a marked sense of reserve and secrecy, but to this the rover of a thousand adventures paid small regard. To him the incident had closed with the closing of the house door, when, on turning away to resume his journey, his foot struck against a hard, metallic object. Groping in the snow, he picked up what the dim light from the window showed to be a golden crucifix.

'It belongs to either the old man or the girl,' he thought. His first impulse was to knock on the closed portal; his second that he should come next day and return the emblem to whom it might belong, and to this end he took sharp mental note of the house and its neighborhood; his third, and most natural, acquired after long practice, to adopt for the occasion the buccaneering motto: 'To strive, to seek to find, and not to yield.' The article was of gold, and therefore valuable. Crucifixes? He had seen scores of them taken with other loot from churches and convents sacked and burnt along the coast from St. Augustine to the Orinoco mouth, and sent to the melting pot to increase the reward of the plunderers. A crucifix more or less would not make much difference, no matter how obtained. So he dropped this one into his wallet.

'At night, let the wind blow high or low, it is the same merry old London,' he thought, as he approached the lighted

windows of his inn and entered beneath the swinging sign of the Mermaid; when he was greeted by a scene of lively course and carouse.

Despite the lateness, or rather earliness, of the hour, there was still a noisy gathering of gossips, revellers, and roysterers in the tap-room; dissipated young scions of nobility and their hangers-on; carousing army and naval officers; swaggering braves from Alsatia, with swords and souls for sale; witty but licentious playwrights, discussing the latest drama at the Globe or Blackfriars; players in the scarlet doublets and hose which the law compelled them to wear—even reckless and depraved apprentices who had stolen out of their masters' homes, with, perhaps, some of their masters' hoardings, to plunge in what they considered manly wickedness.

Guy Langhorne found himself a seat at a small table, and gave order for a quart of burnt sack. Celebrities, or those whom the future would make celebrities, were nigh him. There, exchanging quips and jokes, sat shrewd Will Shakespeare—or 'Shakescene,' as some of his drama producers sarcastically dubbed him—prosperous joint owner in two theatres, with his boon companions, 'rare Ben Johnson,' poet Michael Drayton, author of 'The Shepherd's Garland,' and the great actor, Richard Burbage, the original Macbeth and Romeo, Lear, Shylock, and Othello. Yonder, indulging in his characteristic satire and blasphemy, was the playwright, Kit Marlowe, doomed to draw his last breath in some such scene as this, slain in loathsome quarters by a vulgar groom. Here, whispering and nodding, were a knot of the spies and informers of Lord Treasurer Burleigh, at whose beck they had helped to consign many of the best and noblest of the land to torture and the scaffold. And there, relating with gloat and swagger the ghastly doings of the day at Tyburn or in the Tower dungeons, was the notorious priest hunter, torturer and executioner, Richard Topcliffe, who had made many a victim of religious persecution at many a horrible scene of hanging, drawing and quartering.

But of all or any of these noted personages the returned buccaneer knew or cared but little. His prevailing obsessing thoughts were ten years old and more, dwelling on the days ere a hot and final quarrel with his father caused him to flee in anger from home, when his young blood fired by thrilling tales of glorious fame and fortune won on the Spanish Main, he sought and found service on a departing privateer, and with defiant heart faced the mysterious ocean. In the old home life he had been a Catholic, his parents being devout and staunch adherents of the proscribed and persecuted faith of the olden times, of the England of Alfred and the Crusaders and William of Wykeham. The Catholic priests and laymen whom he had seen drawn on hurdles or sledges through the mud of the streets to execution he had piously regarded as martyrs. It had been a dear and coveted privilege of his to assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, secretly celebrated, when the merest incautious word or deed or treacherous whisper might have brought ruin and woe to the priest and congregation. Ay, in those dear and often dreadful days he had been a Catholic, and since then he had been nothing—nothing but a buccaneer, pursuing fickle fortune, facing for the sake of plunder death by sea or sword, a being without God to love or soul to save.

'By the doom of Robin Rover and all the brave fellows that ever swung at yard-arm or walked the plank, it was all hardly worth while,' he muttered, and with a draught of the hot sack he sought to drown the queerly awakened voice of a long-dormant conscience.

'Save you, sir captain, and what cheer from the high seas?'

Rousing from his maze, Langhorne wearily turned his eyes on the speaker and saw a stout apprentice.

'Brave and good cheer, my good prentice, for all true hearts that love the blue water. Ho, tapster, fetch this lad a goblet.'

'And, tapster, prithee, put no lime in it to give thy wine a false sparkle,' enjoined the youth, proud to display his tavern knowledge. 'And, tapster, pray tell me if good Master Topcliffe, that true friend of the Queen and of the Queen's religion, and chief terror of her enemies the Papists, has as yet departed to his home?'

'Master Topcliffe has but just set out for his quarters in the gatehouse of the Tower,' replied the aproned knight of the spigot, after a glance towards where late had sat the man of rack, cord and gibbet.

'Too bad, too bad,' commented the apprentice. 'Now I shall have to follow him in haste. Your health, my brave captain.' In further proof of his experience the apprentice drained his goblet to the dregs. 'Drat the long journey through