

'Surely,' she said to herself, 'my kindness deserves to be repaid with some measure at least of confidence.' But tact and delicacy alike forbade her from making any effort to penetrate the mystery, of the existence of which she was persuaded.

At length the day arrived when, his hand being thoroughly cured, the stranger paid his last visit to the cottage. The thanks he tendered to Lady Margaret were warm and cordial, but the veil that shrouded him remained impervious as ever. 'Whence has he come? Whither is he going?' she kept asking herself. Her baffled curiosity made her less reticent than she might otherwise have been, and she discussed him with Sally, as mistress and maid wended their way home together.

'Tis my belief, madam,' said the shrewd old woman, 'that he is some one in disguise. A peddler, forsooth! I never saw such a one in all my days. Have patience, my lady: you may find all out before long.'

Had he told her his secret, Lady Amhurst would have kept it at any cost to herself, and the sequel of this story would, alas! have been very different.

That same day, at table, while Sir Percival was carving a huge round of beef on the board before him, he asked his wife how her poor clients were getting on.

'Has your wonderful ointment wrought any more cures?' he said. 'The Papists will put you into their calendar and honor you as a saint, if you continue to work miracles.'

'Laugh at me if you will, Percival,' Lady Margaret replied good-humoredly. 'For all you say, I must confess it has been most efficacious, of late in several instances.'

'It has done nothing apparently for Granny Fairbrother's little grandchild,' continued Sir Percival. 'It is sad to see the poor little fellow's head bowed down on his neck in that terrible way.'

'That is beyond the power of medicaments to cure,' rejoined his wife, gravely. 'It is the "king's evil." I wish, the next time you go to London, you would speak to some one at court, and get King James to touch the child for it.'

Sir Percival shook his head.

'That is not an easy matter,' he said. 'I fancy the canny Scotsman only half believes in his own power of healing. However, I shall bear it in mind. But now tell me some of your successes.'

'Well, the burns on Jack's arm are quite healed now. You remember how the little fellow fell into the fire? He will bear the scars until his death, but the wounds are all cicatrised now.' Then, after a momentary hesitation, Lady Margaret went on: 'I have had one very interesting patient lately. I may well call him a "patient," for I never saw any one suffer so cheerfully. He had torn the skin off his hand, he said; and, through some irritant having been applied to it, or perhaps through poverty of blood, it had festered badly, causing him, I am sure, much suffering. I really was afraid at first that he would lose his hand; but I dressed the wounds to the best of my power, and this morning he declared himself cured. I am sorry to lose sight of him; he was so gentle and refined, and grateful.'

'What was his calling?' inquired Sir Percival. 'Was he from these parts? What made him come to you?'

'He said he was a peddler, and had heard of my skill in curing wounds. He asked me most courteously to take pity on one who was poor and had seen great trouble.'

'Did he tell you his name and where he came from?' asked Sir Percival, whose interest was now fully awakened.

'He said his name was Jones,' Lady Margaret replied. 'I fancy, though I am not sure, that he came from The Grange.'

No sooner had these words escaped her lips than she would gladly have recalled them. An angry frown contracted Sir Percival's brow.

'Probably a cursed recusant,' he muttered. 'Did the man deign to tell you how he came by his hurt?' he added thoughtfully, setting down a goblet of wine which he was about to raise to his lips.

'No. He only said it was done with a rope, and of course I could not question him further.'

'Done with a rope, do you say?' Sir Percival almost shouted. 'I have it! Margaret, you are not half awake. Why, that must be the knave we have been hunting for high and low for days past—a Mass-priest who escaped from Oxford just about a fortnight ago! We could find no trace of him; only a rope hanging from the window of his cell showed how he had got away. He is in hiding at The Grange, you say? I ransacked that house from garret to cellar last week without finding him, but he shall not elude me now.'

'O, Percival!' exclaimed Lady Margaret in consternation, 'you will not arrest him! Pray do not! He cannot do any harm; he is so gentle and good! Oh, how I wish I had not told you about him!'

'Not told me? You ought to have told me long ago. There is a price on his head. If we take him, it will be yours as informer. Quite a windfall for your charities.'

'Do you suppose I would accept blood-money?' rejoined Lady Margaret, indignantly. Then, changing her tone, she added: 'I implore you, Percival, by all you hold dear, do not try to capture this man. You have searched for him. And, besides, you may be mistaken.'

But while Lady Margaret uttered these words, her conviction belied them: she felt an inward certitude that her patient was the escaped prisoner; in fact, while dressing his wounds, she had seen the marks of the irons on his wrists, though he had hastily pulled down his sleeves to conceal them.

'I should be false to the commission I hold from his Majesty if I let a traitor escape my hands,' Sir Percival coldly replied. 'Your entreaties are of no use. You know very well there will be no peace in the realm while these men are sneaking about. Remember the Spanish Invasion. Remember the Gunpowder Plot in our own day. Remember Babington's conspiracy. The country was continually in a ferment until Mary Stuart was put out of the way.'

'It will make me wretched for my whole life if I have been the means of betraying that unfortunate stranger,' said Lady Margaret, her eyes filling with tears. 'O, Percival, do not cause me this grief! I shall never forgive myself. I never thought that you would take up my words in this way—my foolish, heedless words! For my sake, let the man go, even though he be a Papist and a priest.'

'Nonsense, Margaret!' her husband retorted angrily, unmoved for the first time by the sight of her tears. 'I cannot be false to my trust. What should I be worth—forsooth!—if I neglected my duty for a woman's foolish fancy, and let a traitor go scot-free? No, indeed; and there is no time to be lost. The men-at-arms shall be called out, and I will make another visit to The Grange before sundown. I will do my work thoroughly this time. Please say no more about it.'

So saying, Sir Percival rose and left the room, leaving Lady Margaret in despair. She saw all further pleading would be of no avail. What could she do? If her friend were really concealed at The Grange, could she not apprise its inmates of his danger? She would attempt this, at any rate. But who was to be sent? She could not go so great a distance herself; she dared not sally forth to find a trusty messenger in the village; one of the servants must be entrusted with the errand. She hastily penned a few words of warning addressed to the mistress of The Grange, sealed it and tied it with a silken cord, and calling one of her maids, bade her dispatch it with all speed.

Her missive never reached its destination, although Margaret was not aware of this. Sir Percival, crossing the courtyard after giving orders to summon the bailiff's and sheriff's officers, observed one of his grooms leading a horse out of the stables, and inquired whither he was going. The man, after some equivocation (for he had been pledged to secrecy), acknowledged that he was about to carry a billet from her ladyship to madam at The Grange.

'Give it to me,' Sir Percival observed peremptorily. 'I am going thither myself, and will take charge of it. If your mistress questions you about it, say it was delivered.'

(To be continued.)

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The miner at the battery

Was suffering from a cold!

As mad as any hatter, he

Was pocketing the gold!

'Good gracious!' said the manager,

'But this is pretty pure.'

The miner said: 'Excuse me, I

Took just a little bit to buy

Some Woods' Great Peppermint Cure.'