

TWO SCENES FROM THE CIVIL WAR.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "RICHELIEU."

It was late on the night of an early day in spring—perhaps about two hours past midnight—and yet the inhabitants of a small lonely dwelling on the edge of a large piece of common-ground, laying about ten miles from Faringdon House, were all awake and up, and, with anxious eyes, gazing from the small long windows upon the blank darkness that hung over the world. A single candle stood upon a plain oaken table in the midst of the room, by the light of which might be seen, at one of the windows, a small finely-formed female figure, which still preserved all the lines of exquisite beauty, though a certain degree of stiffness, corresponding well with some deep wrinkles on the cheek, and the white hair that was braided from the forehead, spoke the passing of many

years under the petrifying power of time since that form had been in its prime, and that beauty, which still lingered, had known its first expansion. Leaning over her shoulder was another figure so like the first, but with every grace which time had nipped in it just blown—with the cheek unwithered and the brow unseared—that it seemed a living picture of what the other had been some twenty years before—a portrait in a family picture-gallery, where human loveliness may see and moralize on all the graces that the eternal reaper has gathered as he flew.

At the second window was a somewhat untidy maid-servant, contrasting strongly, in her slatternly disarray, with the plain neatness which decked the two other figures, whose garb I shall not pause to describe; let it suffice that it was of white, and fashioned in the mode of the time, A. D. 164—, though either poverty, simplicity of taste, or deference to the puritanical mania of the day, had deprived it of every extraneous ornament.

The night upon which the whole party looked out was dark and sad; for the moon had gone down, and the clouds over head, though not particularly heavy, were quite sufficiently so to hide every star, and cast a deep grey shadow over the wide extent of undulating moorland which stretched away for many a mile within view in the day-time. A few faint streaks of pale light upon the sky separated the darkness of

the heavens from the darkness of the earth, and marked where the prospect ended; and thitherward were turned the eyes of all, watching, with straining and anxious gaze, a particular point on the dim horizon, where, every now and then, bright red flashes, sudden and sharp, but circumscribed and momentary, broke upon the night, followed by a distant report as quick and transitory.

No one spoke while those flashes continued; but the silence itself seemed to show the intense anxiety which was felt, by the tenants of that chamber, in regard to the events of which they obtained so dim and unsatisfactory a view. At the end of five minutes, however, the sudden bursts of light entirely ceased; the reports were no longer heard; and the elder of the two ladies, turning away from the window, said, in a low voice, "It is over: God's will is wrought by this time!"

The younger said nothing; but, clasping her fair hands together, raised her eyes towards the dark heavens, while her full sweet lips moved silently, offering up a petition to that never-closed ear which hears the still voice of the heart's thoughts as plainly as the loudest-tongued appeal.

In a moment after, the clattering sound of horses' feet was heard coming quickly down the road. At first it was faint and distant—the dull heavy tramp of several fleet steeds galloping over moist ground; but

soon it came nearer and nearer—left the turf of the common—clanged over the firm and stony road—came close to the house—passed it—and died away in the distance.

“They are flying!” said the younger lady, “Oh, my mother, they are flying! Surely some of the dark powers of the air must assist those blood-thirsty fanatics. They are flying; do you not hear the horses galloping on!”

“Nay, nay, Margaret,” replied the other, “it may be the roundheads who fly. Though Goring and his cavaliers marched by here, we cannot tell what way the struggle may have turned, or on what side he attacked the rebels. So it may well be the traitors that fly themselves. But look out, look out; your eyes are younger than mine, and less dimmed with tears; perchance you may catch a passing glimpse that will give us glad news.”

The younger lady pressed her eyes close to the window; and though, by this time, the first party of fugitives had passed the house, yet the distant sound of others coming nigh met her ear; and she continued to gaze upon the faint line of the road to the spot where the yellow glare of the gravel, which distinguished it from the ground about it, was lost in the general darkness of the common. At length three dark figures came forward with tremendous speed; at first so near together, and so hidden by

the night, that she could hardly distinguish them from each other; but gradually the forms became more and more clear; and, as they darted past the house, she exclaimed in a glad tone, "They are the rebels, they are the rebels flying for life! I see their great boots, and their morions without crest or plume!"

"But they may be pursuing those who went before," said her mother, with a less elated tone, "they may be the followers and not the flyers, Margaret."

"No, no, they are flying, in good sooth!" replied the young lady, "for ever and anon they turn their heads to look behind, and still urge their horses faster at each look. But they are gone! And now pray God that victory may not cost us dear! I would that my brother were come back, and Henry Lisle."

"Fie, Margaret, fie!" said her mother, "give God undivided thanks; for if my son and your lover be both left upon the field of battle, we ought still to feel that their lives were well bestowed to win a victory for their royal master."

Margaret covered her eyes with her hands, but made no answer; and, in a moment after, fresh coming sounds called her again to the window. It was a single horseman who now approached; and though he rode at full speed, with his head somewhat bent over the saddle, yet he continued his course steadily, and

neither turned his look to the right or left. As he approached the house his horse started suddenly from some object left by the road-side, plunged, and fell; and the rider, cast with frightful violence from his seat, was thrown on his head upon the ground. A deep groan was, at first, the only sound; but, the moment after, the horse, which had borne him, starting up, approached close to the body of its master, and, putting its head to where he lay, by a long wild neigh, seemed, at once, to express its sorrow and to claim assistance.

“If it be Essex or Manchester, Fairfax or Cromwell, we must render him aid, Margaret,” said the mother; “never must it be said that friend or enemy needed help at my door and did not meet it. Call up the hind’s-boy, Bridget; open the door, and bring in yon fallen man.”

Her commands were speedily fulfilled; for, though brought low in her estate, the Lady Herrick was not one to suffer herself to be disobeyed. The stranger was lifted from the ground, placed in a chair, and carried into the house. His eyes were closed; and it was evident to the elder lady, as she held the candle to his face, that, if not killed, he was completely stunned by his fall. He was a hard-featured man, with short grizzled hair, and a heavy determined brow, on which the lines of habitual thought remained, even in the state of stupor into which he had fallen. He

was broadly made and muscular, though not corpulent, and was above the middle size without being tall. His dress consisted of a dark grey coat, which clove to him with the familiar ease of an old servant, and a brown cloak, which, in truth, had lost much of its freshness in his service. Above his coat had been placed a complete cuirass, the adjustment of which betrayed great symptoms of haste; and by his side he wore one of those long heavy blades of plain steel which had often been the jest of the cavaliers.

His head was uncovered either by hat or morion, and the expanse of his forehead, the only redeeming point in his countenance, was thus fully displayed. The rest of his face was not only coarse in itself, but bad in its expression; and when, after some cold water had been thrown over it, he revived in a degree and looked around, the large, shrewd, unsatisfactory eyes, which he turned upon those about him, had nothing in them to prepossess the mind in his favour.

The moment that consciousness had fully returned he made an effort to start upon his feet, but instantly sunk back again into the chair, exclaiming, "The Lord has smitten me, yet must I gird up my loins and go, lest I fall into captivity."

"Fear not, fear not!" replied Lady Herrick, whose humanity was somewhat chivalrous, "you are in safety here; wait for a while till you are better

able to mount, and then get you gone, in God's name, for I seek not to foster roundheads more than may be. Yet stay till you can ride," she added, seeing his hand again grasp the chair as if to rise, "women should know no enemies in the hurt and wounded."

"Nay, but, worthy lady," replied the Parliamentarian, "should the crew of the Moabitish General Goring follow me even here to smite me hip and thigh, as they have vowed to do to all who bear arms for godliness' sake, or to bear me away captive—"

"Fear not, fear not!" answered the lady, "none should dare, by my hearth's side, to lay hands on one that common mercy bade me take in and shelter—fear not, I say. That is right, Margaret," she added, seeing her daughter pour some wine into a glass for the use of the stranger, "take that; it will revive you, and give you strength to speed on."

"Hast thou caught the stranger's horse, Dickson?" she demanded, turning to the boy who had aided in bringing in the Commonwealth-man, and who now re-entered the room after a momentary absence.

"He is caught and made fast below," replied the lad, "and here are my young master and Master Henry Lisle coming up from the court. They have beaten the roundheads, and killed Colonel Cromwell, and taken his whole army prisoners!"

Scarcely had he time to pour forth this rapid tide

of news when the door was thrown open, and two young cavaliers, in broad hats and plumes, followed one another rapidly in, each taking with the lips of the two ladies that dear liberty consecrated to intimacy and affection. "Welcome, welcome, my gallant son!" cried the mother, as she held the first to her bosom.

"My own dear Margaret!" whispered the young gentleman who had followed, as he took the unresisted kiss which welcomed him back from danger and strife: but further gratulations of all kinds were suddenly stopped, as the eyes of the two cavaliers fell upon the stranger, who had now recovered strength to rise from his seat, and was anxiously looking towards the door beyond them.

"Who in the devil's name have we here?" cried Sir George Herrick, "what crop-eared villain is this?"

In vain his mother explained, and strove to pacify him. The sight of one of the rebels raised again in his bosom all the agitating fury of the fight in which he had been just engaged; and neither the prayers of his mother or his sister, the promises they had made to the stranger, or their remonstrances to himself, had any effect. "Ho! boy!" he exclaimed, "bid your father bring a rope. By the Lord of heaven, I will hang this roundhead cur to the oak before the door! Bring a rope, I say!" and, unsheathing his sword, he

advanced upon the Parliamentarian, calling upon his companion to prevent his escape by the door.

The stranger said not a word; but bit his nether lip, and calmly drawing his tuck retreated into one corner of the room, keeping a keen fixed eye upon the young cavalier who strode on towards him. Margaret, seeing that all persuasion was vain with her brother, turned her imploring eyes to Henry Lisle, who instantly laid his hand upon his companion's cloak. "What now?" exclaimed the other, turning sharp upon him.

"This must not be, George," replied the other cavalier.

"Must not be!" thundered Sir George Herrick, "but it shall be! Who shall stay me?"

"Your own better reason and honour, I trust," replied the other, "hear me—but hear me, Herrick! Your lady mother promised this fellow safety to stay and to go; and upon her promise alone—she says—he staid. Had that promise not been given we should not have found him here. Will you slay a man by your own hearth, who put confidence in your mother's word! Fie, fie! let him go! We have slain enough this night to let one rebel escape, were he the devil himself!"

Sir George Herrick glared round, for a moment, in moody silence, and then put up his sword. "Well," said he, at length, "if he staid but on her promise,

let him take himself away. He will grace the gibbet some other day. But do not let me see him move across the room," he added, with a look of disgust, "or I shall run my blade through him whether I will or not."

"Come, fellow, get thee gone!" said Henry Lisle, "I will see thee depart:" and while his companion fixed his eyes with stern intensity upon the fire-place, as if not to witness the escape of the roundhead, he led him out of the chamber to the outer door.

The stranger moved forward with a firm calm step, keeping his naked sword still in his hand, and making no comment on the scene in which he had been so principal a performer. As he passed through the room, however, he kept a wary glance upon Sir George Herrick; but the moment he quitted it he seemed more at ease, and paused quietly at the door while the boy brought forward his charger. During that pause he turned no unfriendly look upon Henry Lisle; and seemed as if about to speak more than once. At length, he said, in a low voice, "Something I would fain say—though, God knows, we are poor blinded creatures, and see not what is best for us—of thanks concerning that carnal safety which it may be doubted whether——"

"No thanks are needed," interrupted Henry Lisle, cutting across what promised to be one of the long harangues habitual with the fanatics of that day, "no

thanks are needed for safety that is grudgingly awarded. I tell thee plainly, that, had it not been for the lady's promise, I would willingly have aided in hanging thee with my own hands; and, when next we two meet face to face, we shall not part till the life-blood of one or other mark our meeting-place!"

"It may be so, if such be God's will," replied the Parliamentarian, "and I pray the Lord to give me strength that I may never be found slack to do the work appointed me!"

"Thou hast never been so yet, though it be the work of the evil one," answered Henry Lisle, and then added, "I know thee, though none else here does, or it had fared harder with thee in despite of all promises."

"Thou knowest me!" said the stranger, without testifying any great surprise, "then thou doest the better deed in Israel; and I will trust, notwithstanding thy present malignancy, that the day of grace may yet come to thee. Farewell!"

Thus saying, he put his foot in the stirrup, and mounting somewhat heavily the horse which was now brought up for him, rode away across the common.

* * * * *

Time flew—years passed—the temporary success obtained by General Goring over the forces of Oliver

Cromwell was swept away and forgotten in a tide of brilliant triumphs won by the Parliamentary general, who trod upon steps of victory to the government of an empire. He had conquered his opponents by the sword; he had conquered his partisans by hypocrisy; he had subdued all to his will, and, under the name of Lord General, ruled with more power than a king. In the meanwhile, Sir George Herrick and Henry Lisle had fought to the last in the cause of their ancient monarchs; and their zeal—like that noblest of human energies, hope—had grown but the stronger under the pressure of misfortune and distress. Amongst the various chances of the civil war, five times had the day been appointed for the union of Henry Lisle with Margaret Herrick, and five times had some unforeseen mishap intervened to delay what all so much desired. Each day that went by, Lady Herrick, with means quite exhausted and hopes quite depressed, longed more and more to see her child united to a man of talent, and firmness, and resource; and each battle that passed by, Sir George Herrick, struck with a presentiment of approaching fate, thanked God that he had lived to place his sister's hand in that of his friend.

The last time the marriage was suspended was on the fatal call to Worcester field, where Sir George Herrick fell; and Henry Lisle only escaped to bear

his companion's last request to Margaret, that without further pause or delay—without vain ceremonies or useless tears—she would give herself, at once, to her promised protector. Their wedding was a sad one—no glad peal, no laughing train, announced the union of the two lovers; and, ere the day of their bridal was spent, Henry Lisle was a prisoner, journeying towards the tower of London. His trial was delayed some time; but when it took place it was soon decided. No evidence was wanting to his full conviction of loyalty to his king; and the block and axe was the doom pronounced upon him. A brief three days lay between him and death; and Margaret, who was permitted to see him, clung in agony to her husband's bosom. Lady Herrick, to whom he had been more than a son, gazed, for some time, with equal agony, upon his fine but faded countenance, which, worn by toil, and anxiety, and long imprisonment, was still more clouded by the hopeless despair of her he loved. But suddenly, without a word, the mother turned away and left the prison.

* * * * *

It was in that great and unequalled hall, whose magnificent vault has overhung so many strange and mighty scenes in English history, and whose record of brief and gorgeous pageants reads as sad a homily

on human littleness as even the dark memorials of the tomb. It was in Westminster Hall, on the 16th day of December, that, with the clangour of trumpets and all the pomp and splendour both of military and civil state, a splendid procession moved forward to a chair or throne, raised on some ornamented steps at the further extremity of the building. Judges, in those solemn robes intended to give dignity to the judgments they pronounce; and officers, dressed in all that glittering panoply destined to deck and hide the rugged form of war, moved over the echoing pavement between two long ranks of soldiers, who kept the space clear from the gazing and admiring multitude. But the principal figure of the whole procession, on which all eyes were turned, was that of a stout broad-built man with a dingy weather-beaten countenance, shaggy eyebrows, and a large red nose. His countenance was as unprepossessing as can be conceived; nor was his dress, which consisted of plain black velvet, at all equal to those which surrounded him. But there was something in his carriage and his glance not to be mistaken. It was the confidence of power—not the extraneous power of circumstance and situation, but of that concentrated internal strength which guides and rules the things around it. Each step, as he planted it upon the pavement, seemed destined to be rooted there for ever; and his eye, as it encountered the glances of those around, fell upon

them with a calm power which beat them to the dust before its gaze. Passing onward, through the hall, he ascended the steps which raised the chair of state; and, turning round, stood uncovered before the people. The two keepers of the great seal, standing on his right and left, read a long paper called the Institute of Government, by which, amongst other things, the Lord General, Oliver Cromwell, was named Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England. The paper was then signed, an oath was administered, and, putting on his hat, the figure which had advanced to the chair sat down, amidst the acclamations of the people, while all the rest continued to stand around uncovered.

Various other ceremonies were performed; and then the Great Usurper, rising from his seat, led back the procession towards the door of the hall: but scarcely had he traversed one half of its extent, when a woman, who had been whispering to one of the soldiers who lined the way, pushed suddenly past and cast herself at Cromwell's feet. "An act of grace, Lord Protector!" she exclaimed, "an act of grace, to bring a much-needed blessing on the power you have assumed!"

"What wouldest thou, woman?" demanded Cromwell; "somewhere I have seen thy face before: what wouldest thou? If thy petition be conceived in godliness, and such as may be granted with safety to these

poor disturbed realms, it shall not be refused on such a day as this."

"When Colonel Cromwell failed in his attack on Faringdon House," said Lady Herrick—for it was she who knelt before him, "and when General Goring surprised and cut to pieces his troops at night near Warnham Common"—Cromwell's brow darkened, but still she went on—"he fled from a disaster he could not prevent; and was cast from his horse, stunned, at the door of a widow woman, who gave him shelter. He was the enemy of her and hers, and flying from a battle in which her own son had fought; and yet she gave him rest and comfort, and opposed that very son, who would have shed his blood by her hearth. There, too, Henry Lisle interposed to save his life and was successful; otherwise, Lord Protector, I tell thee, thou wouldest never have sat in that seat which thou hast taken this day. Condemned by your judges for acting according to his conscience, I now ask the life of Henry Lisle, in return for the life he saved. Grant it—oh, grant it, as you are a man and a Christian!"

Cromwell's brow was as dark as thunder; and, after gazing on her for a moment in silence, his only reply was, "Take her away; the woman is mad—take her away and put her forth; but gently—gently—bruise not the bruised—so—now let us pass on, for, in truth, we have been delayed too long."

Put out of the hall by the soldiers; her last hope gone; her heart nearly broken for her child and her child's husband, Lady Herrick wandered slowly on towards that sad place where she had left all that was dear to her. The gay and mighty cavalcade, which conveyed the usurper back to his palace, passed her by like one of those painful dreams which mock us with sights of splendour in the midst of some heavy woe; and before she had threaded many more of the solitary streets, robbed of their population by the attractive ceremony of the day, a single trooper galloped up, gazed on her a moment, and rode on. At the Tower no formalities were opposed to her immediate entrance of the prisoner's chamber—she was led to it at once; the door itself was open; an unsealed paper lay upon the table; Henry held Margaret in his arms; and tears, which she never before had seen in his eyes, now rolled plentifully down his cheeks, and mingled with those of his bride; but, strange to say, smiles were shining through those tears, and happiness, like the rainbow-sun, beamed through the drops of sorrow!

“Joy, mother, joy!” were the first and only words: “joy, mother, joy!—Henry is pardoned!”