

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHILE the scenes we have described were passing in other parts of the castle, the Jewess Rebecca awaited her fate in a distant and sequestered turret. Hither she had been led by two of her disguised captors, and, on being thrust into the little cell, she found herself in the presence of an old sibyl,¹ who kept murmuring to herself a Saxon rhyme, as if to beat time to the revolving dance which her spindle² was performing upon the floor. The hag raised her head as Rebecca entered, and scowled at the fair Jewess with the malignant envy with which old age and ugliness, when united with evil conditions, are apt to look upon youth and beauty.

"Thou must up and away, old house-cricket," said one of the men: "our noble master commands it. Thou must leave this chamber to a fairer guest."

"Ay," grumbled the hag, "even thus is service requited. I have known when my bare word would have cast the best man-at-arms among ye out of saddle and out of service; and now must I up and away at the command of every groom such as thou."

"Good Dame Urfried," said the other man, "stand not to reason on it, but up and away! Lord's hests³ must be listened to with a quick ear. Thou hast had thy day, old dame, but thy sun has long been set. Thou art now the very emblem of an old war-horse turned out on the barren heath: thou hast had thy paces in thy time, but now a broken amble is the best of them. Come, amble off with thee!"

"Ill omens dog ye both," said the old woman, "and a kennel be your burying-place! May the evil demon Zerneck⁴ tear

¹ Latin, *sibylla* ("a prophetess").

² One of the parts of a spinning-wheel, which twists and winds the thread.

³ Behests; commands.

⁴ A Scandinavian god.

me limb from limb if I leave my own cell ere I have spun out the hemp on my distaff!"¹

"Answer it to our lord, then," said the man, and retired, leaving Rebecca in company with the old woman, upon whose presence she had been thus unwillingly forced.

"What have they now in the wind?" said the old hag, murmuring to herself, yet from time to time casting a sidelong and malignant glance at Rebecca. "Bright eyes, black locks. Outlandish, too," she said, marking the dress and turban of Rebecca. "What country art thou of,—a Saracen, or an Egyptian? Why dost not answer? Thou canst weep, canst thou not speak?"

"Be not angry, good mother," said Rebecca.

"Thou needst say no more," replied Urfried. "Men know a fox by the train, and a Jewess by her tongue."

"For the sake of mercy," said Rebecca, "tell me what I am to expect."

"Jew or Gentile, thou hast to do with them that have neither scruple nor pity. Fare thee well, I say! My thread is spun out," answered the old woman.

She left the room as she spoke, her features writhed into a sort of sneering laugh, which made them seem even more hideous than their habitual frown. She locked the door behind her, and Rebecca might hear her curse every step for its steepness, as slowly and with difficulty she descended the turret stair.

Rebecca's first care was to inspect the apartment; but it afforded few hopes either of escape or protection. It contained neither secret passage nor trap-door, and, unless where the door by which she had entered joined the main building, seemed to be circumscribed by the round exterior wall of the turret. The door had no inside bolt or bar. The single window opened upon an embattled space surmounting the turret, which gave Rebecca, at first sight, some hopes of escaping; but she soon found it had no communication with any other part of the battlements, being

¹ The staff that holds the flax, etc., from which the thread is pulled out in hand-spinning.

an isolated bartisan,¹ or balcony, secured as usual by a parapet² with embrasures, at which a few archers might be stationed for defending the turret, and flanking with their shot the wall of the castle on that side.

There was therefore no hope but in passive fortitude, and in that strong reliance on Heaven natural to great and generous characters.

The prisoner trembled, however, and changed color, when a step was heard on the stair, and the door of the turret-chamber slowly opened, and a tall man, dressed as one of those banditti to whom they owed their misfortune, slowly entered, and shut the door behind him. His cap, pulled down upon his brows, concealed the upper part of his face, and he held his mantle in such a manner as to muffle the rest. In this guise he stood before the prisoner; yet, ruffian as his dress bespoke him, he seemed at a loss to express what purpose had brought him thither, so that Rebecca, making an effort upon herself, had time to anticipate his explanation. She had already unclasped two costly bracelets and a collar, which she hastened to proffer to the supposed outlaw, concluding naturally that to gratify his avarice was to bespeak his favor.

"Take these," she said, "good friend, and for God's sake be merciful to me and my aged father!"

"It is well spoken," replied the outlaw in French, finding it difficult probably to sustain in Saxon a conversation which Rebecca had opened in that language; "but know, bright lily of the vale of Baca,³ that thy father is already in the hands of a powerful alchemist,⁴ who knows how to convert into gold and

¹ A small turret so placed at the angle of a tower or parapet, that, protruding and overhanging, it serves as a place of outlook or defense, having loopholes or embrasures, or both.

² A protecting wall, about breast-high, surmounting the edge of a roof or platform.

³ See Psalm lxxxiv. 6.

⁴ A person who sought to change baser metals into gold. The practice was called "alchemy," and from the general search made by its devotees to discover some such talisman sprang the science of modern chemistry.

silver even the rusty bars of a dungeon grate. The venerable Isaac is subjected to an alembic¹ which will distill² from him all he holds dear, without any assistance from my requests or thy entreaty."

"Thou art no outlaw," said Rebecca in the same language in which he addressed her. "No outlaw in this land uses the dialect in which thou hast spoken. Thou art no outlaw, but a Norman,—a Norman, noble perhaps in birth. Oh, be so in thy actions, and cast off this fearful mask!"

"And thou, who canst guess so truly," said Brian de Bois-Guilbert, dropping the mantle from his face, "art no true daughter of Israel, but in all, save youth and beauty, a very Witch of Endor.³ I am not an outlaw, then, fair rose of Sharon. I am a Templar. Behold the cross of my holy order."

"Darest thou appeal to it," said Rebecca, "on an occasion like the present?"

The eyes of the Templar flashed fire at this reproof. "Hearken," he said, "Rebecca! I have hitherto spoken mildly to thee, but now my language shall be that of a conqueror. Thou art the captive of my bow and spear, subject to my will by the laws of all nations; nor will I abate an inch of my right."

"Stand back," said Rebecca—"stand back, and hear me! My strength thou mayst indeed overpower, for God made women weak, and trusted their defense to man's generosity. But I will proclaim thy villainy, Templar, from one end of Europe to the other."

"Thou art keen-witted, Jewess," replied the Templar, "thou art sharp-witted, but one thing only can save thee, Rebecca. Submit to embrace our religion, and thou shalt go forth in such state that many a Norman lady shall yield as well in pomp as in

¹ Apparatus used for distilling.

² Dissolve; get from.

³ The witch consulted by Saul when Samuel was dead. She evoked the ghost of the prophet, and Saul was foretold of his death (see 1 Sam. xxviii. 7-20). Endor is a town of Manasseh in the territory of Issachar, south of Mount Tabor.

beauty to the favorite of the best lance among the defenders of the Temple."

"Submit," said Rebecca, "to embrace thy religion! And what religion can it be that harbors such a villain? *Thou* the best lance of the Templars, craven knight, forsworn priest, I defy thee. The God of Abraham's promise hath opened an escape to his daughter, even from this abyss of infamy."

As she spoke she threw open the latticed window which led to the bartizan, and in an instant after stood on the very verge of the parapet, with not the slightest screen between her and the tremendous depth below. Unprepared for such a desperate effort, for she had hitherto stood perfectly motionless, Bois-Guilbert had neither time to intercept nor to stop her. As he offered to advance, she exclaimed, "Remain where thou art, proud Templar, or at thy choice advance! One foot nearer, and I plunge myself from the precipice."

As she spoke this, she clasped her hands and extended them towards Heaven, as if imploring mercy on her soul before she made the final plunge. The Templar hesitated, and a resolution which had never yielded to pity or distress gave way to his admiration of her fortitude. "Come down," he said, "rash girl!"

"I will not trust thee, Templar," said Rebecca.

"You do me injustice," exclaimed the Templar fervently. "I swear to you by the name which I bear, by the cross on my bosom, by the sword on my side—by the ancient crest¹ of my fathers do I swear, I will do thee no injury. For thy father's sake forbear! I will be his friend, and in this castle he will need a powerful one."

"Alas!" said Rebecca, "I know it but too well. Dare I trust thee?"

"May my arms be reversed, and my name dishonored," said Brian de Bois-Guilbert, "if thou shalt have reason to complain of me! Many a law, many a commandment, have I broken, but my word never."

¹ An heraldic bearing above a coat of arms.

"I will, then, trust thee," said Rebecca, "thus far;" and she descended from the verge of the battlement, but remained standing close by one of the embrasures, or *maifricolles*, as they were then called. "Here," she said, "I take my stand. Remain where thou art."

While Rebecca spoke thus, her high and firm resolve, which corresponded so well with the expressive beauty of her countenance, gave to her looks, air, and manner a dignity that seemed more than mortal. Her glance quailed not, her cheek blanched not. Bois-Guilbert, proud himself and high-spirited, thought he had never beheld beauty so commanding.

"Thou dost me injustice," said the Templar—"by earth, sea, and sky, thou dost me injustice! I am not naturally that which you have seen me,—hard, selfish, and relentless. It was woman that taught me cruelty. Hear me, Rebecca. Never did knight take lance in his hand with a heart more devoted to the lady of his love than Brian de Bois-Guilbert. Yes," he continued, pacing up and down the little platform with an animation in which he seemed to lose all consciousness of Rebecca's presence—"yes, my deeds, my danger, my blood, made the name of Adelaide de Montemare known from the court of Castile to that of Byzantium.¹ And how was I requited! When I returned with my dear-bought honors, purchased by toil and blood, I found her wedded to a Gascon squire, whose name was never heard beyond the limits of his own paltry domain. Truly did I love her, and bitterly did I revenge me of her broken faith; but my vengeance has recoiled on myself. Since that day I have separated myself from life and its ties.—Mine thou must be! Nay, start not," he added, "it must be with thine own consent, and on thine own terms. Thou must consent to share with me hopes more extended than can be viewed from the throne of a monarch. Hear me ere you answer, and judge ere you refuse. That bugle-sound announces something which may require my

¹ A city of ancient times, situated on the site of the modern Constantinople.

presence. Think on what I have said. Farewell! I will soon return, and hold further conference with thee."

He reëntered the turret-chamber, and descended the stair, leaving Rebecca. When she entered the turret-chamber, her first duty was to return thanks to the God of Jacob for the protection which he had afforded her, and to implore its continuance for her and for her father. Another name glided into her petition: it was that of the wounded Christian whom fate had placed in the hands of bloodthirsty men, his avowed enemies. Her heart indeed checked her, as if, even in communing with the Deity in prayer, she mingled in her devotions the recollection of one with whose fate hers could have no alliance,—a Nazarene, and an enemy to her faith. But the petition was already breathed; nor could all the narrow prejudices of her sect induce Rebecca to wish it recalled.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHEN the Templar reached the hall of the castle, he found De Bracy already there. "Your suit," said De Bracy, "hath, I suppose, been disturbed, like mine, by this obstreperous summons. But you have come later and more reluctantly, and therefore I presume your interview has proved more agreeable than mine."

"Has your suit, then, been unsuccessfully paid to the Saxon heiress?" said the Templar.

"By the bones of Thomas à Becket," answered De Bracy, "the Lady Rowena must have heard that I cannot endure the sight of women's tears."

"Away!" said the Templar; "thou a leader of a Free Company, and regard a woman's tears! But where is Front-de-Bœuf? That horn is sounded more and more clamorously."

"He is negotiating with the Jew, I suppose," replied De Bracy coolly. "Probably the howls of Isaac have drowned the blast of

the bugle. Thou mayest know by experience, Sir Brian, that a Jew parting with his treasures on such terms as our friend Front-de-Bœuf is like to offer will raise a clamor loud enough to be heard over twenty horns and trumpets to boot. But we will make the vassals call him."

They were soon after joined by Front-de-Bœuf, who had been disturbed in his tyrannic cruelty in the manner with which the reader is acquainted, and had only tarried to give some necessary directions.

"Let us see the cause of this cursed clamor," said Front-de-Bœuf. "Here is a letter, and, if I mistake not, it is in Saxon."

He looked at it, turning it round and round as if he had had really some hopes of coming at the meaning by inverting the position of the paper, and then handed it to De Bracy.

"It may be magic spells, for aught I know," said De Bracy, who possessed his full proportion of the ignorance which characterized the chivalry of the period. "Our chaplain attempted to teach me to write; but all my letters were formed like spear-heads and sword-blades, and so the old shaveling¹ gave up the task."

"Give it me," said the Templar. "We have that of the priestly character that we have some knowledge to enlighten our valor."

"Let us profit by your most reverend knowledge, then," said De Bracy. "What says the scroll?"²

"It is a formal letter of defiance," answered the Templar; "but, by Our Lady of Bethlehem,³ if it be not a foolish jest, it is the most extraordinary cartel⁴ that ever was sent across the drawbridge of a baronial castle."

"Jest!" said Front-de-Bœuf. "I would gladly know who dares jest with me in such a matter!—Read it, Sir Brian."

¹ A contemptuous expression for a monk, the name alluding to the shaven top of his head.

² Writing.

³ The Virgin Mary.

⁴ A letter expressing a challenge or defiance.

The Templar accordingly read it, as follows:—

"I, Wamba, the son of Witless, jester to a noble and freeborn man, Cedric of Rotherwood, called the Saxon; and I, Gurth, the son of Beowulph, the swineherd"—

"Thou art mad," said Front-de-Bœuf, interrupting the reader.

"By St. Luke, it is so set down," answered the Templar. Then, resuming his task, he went on: "I, Gurth, the son of Beowulph, swineherd unto the said Cedric, with the assistance of our allies and confederates, who make common cause with us in this our feud, namely, the good knight, called, for the present, *Le Noir Faineant*, and the stout yeoman, Robert Locksley, called Cleave-the-wand, Do you, Reginald Front-de-Bœuf, and your allies and accomplices whomsoever, to wit, that whereas you have, without cause given or feud declared, wrongfully and by mastery seized upon the person of our lord and master the said Cedric; also upon the person of a noble and freeborn damsel, the Lady Rowena of Hargottstandstede; also upon the person of a noble and freeborn man, Athelstane of Coningsburgh; also upon the persons of certain freeborn men, their *cnichts*;¹ also upon certain serfs, their born bondsmen; also upon a certain Jew, named Isaac of York, together with his daughter, a Jewess, and certain horses and mules: Which noble persons, with their *cnichts* and slaves, and also with the horses and mules, Jew and Jewess beforesaid, were all in peace with his Majesty, and traveling as liege² subjects upon the King's highway; therefore we require and demand that the said noble persons, namely, Cedric of Rotherwood, Rowena of Hargottstandstede, Athelstane of Coningsburgh, with their servants, *cnichts*, and followers, also the horses and mules, Jew and Jewess aforesaid, together with all goods and chattels to them pertaining, be, within an hour after the delivery hereof, delivered to us, or to those whom we shall appoint to receive the same, and that untouched and unharmed

¹ Military attendants, sometimes free, sometimes bondsmen, but always ranking above an ordinary domestic; now spelled "knight."

² Free.

in body and goods. Failing of which, we do pronounce to you, that we hold ye as robbers and traitors, and will wager our bodies against ye in battle, siege, or otherwise, and do our utmost to your annoyance and destruction. Wherefore may God have you in his keeping. Signed by us upon the eve of St. Withold's day, under the great trysting oak in the Harthill Walk, the above being written by a holy man, Clerk to God, Our Lady, and St. Dunstan, in the Chapel of Copmanhurst."

At the bottom of this document was scrawled, in the first place, a rude sketch of a cock's head and comb, with a legend expressing this hieroglyphic¹ to be the sign-manual of Wamba, son of Witless. Under this respectable emblem stood a cross, stated to be the mark of Gurth, the son of Beowulph. Then were written, in rough, bold characters, the words *Le Noir Faineant*; and to conclude the whole, an arrow, neatly enough drawn, was described as the mark of the yeoman Locksley.

The knights heard this uncommon document read from end to end, and then gazed upon each other in silent amazement, as being utterly at a loss to know what it could portend. De Bracy was the first to break silence by an uncontrollable fit of laughter, wherein he was joined, though with more moderation, by the Templar. Front-de-Bœuf, on the contrary, seemed impatient of their ill-timed jocularities.

"I give you plain warning," he said, "fair sirs, that you had better consult how to bear yourselves under these circumstances than give way to such misplaced merriment."

"Front-de-Bœuf has not recovered his temper since his late overthrow," said De Bracy to the Templar: "he is cowed at the very idea of a cartel, though it come but from a fool and a swineherd."

"By St. Michael,"² answered Front-de-Bœuf, "I would thou

¹ From the Greek, *hieros* ("sacred") and *gluphein* ("to carve"), sacred carvings or characters.

² The archangel Michael, who with his angels warred with Satan and his rebellious angels in heaven (see Rev. xii. 7-9; also Milton's *Paradise Lost*).

couldst stand the whole brunt of this adventure thyself, De Bracy. These fellows dared not have acted with such inconceivable impudence had they not been supported by some strong bands. There are enough of outlaws in this forest to resent my protecting the deer. I did but tie one fellow, who was taken red-handed and in the fact,¹ to the horns of a wild stag, which gored him to death in five minutes, and I had as many arrows shot at me as there were launched against yonder target at Ashby. — Here, fellow," he added to one of his attendants, "hast thou sent out to see by what force this precious challenge is to be supported?"

"There are at least two hundred men assembled in the woods," answered a squire who was in attendance.

"Here is a proper matter!"² said Front-de-Bœuf. "This comes of lending you the use of my castle, that cannot manage your undertaking quietly, but you must bring this nest of hornets about my ears!"

"Of hornets?" said De Bracy. "Of stingless drones, rather, — a band of lazy knaves, who take to the wood and destroy the venison rather than labor for their maintenance."

"Stingless!" replied Front-de-Bœuf. "Fork-headed shafts of a cloth-yard in length, and these shot within the breadth of a French crown, are sting enough."

"For shame, Sir Knight!" said the Templar. "Let us summon our people, and sally forth upon them. One knight, ay, one man-at-arms, were enough for twenty such peasants."

"Enough, and too much," said De Bracy. "I should only be ashamed to couch lance against them."

"True," answered Front-de-Bœuf, "were they black Turks or Moors,³ Sir Templar, or the craven peasants of France, most valiant De Bracy; but these are English yeomen, over whom we shall have no advantage save what we may derive from our arms and horses, which will avail us little in the glades of the forest. Sally, saidst thou? We have scarce men enough to defend the

¹ In the act.

² "A fine state of affairs!"

³ Here referring to Arabs or Saracens generally.

castle. The best of mine are at York; so is all your band, De Bracy; and we have scarcely twenty, besides the handful that were engaged in this mad business."

"Thou dost not fear," said the Templar, "that they can assemble in force sufficient to attempt the castle?"

"Not so, Sir Brian," answered Front-de-Bœuf. "These outlaws have indeed a daring captain; but without machines, scaling-ladders, and experienced leaders, my castle may defy them."

"Send to thy neighbors," said the Templar. "Let them assemble their people, and come to the rescue of three knights besieged by a jester and a swineherd in the baronial castle of Reginald Front-de-Bœuf."

"You jest, Sir Knight," answered the baron, "but to whom should I send? Malvoisin is by this time at York with his retainers, and so are my other allies; and so should I have been but for this enterprise."

"Then send to York and recall our people," said De Bracy. "If they abide the shaking of my standard¹ or the sight of my Free Companions, I will give them credit for the boldest outlaws ever bent bow in greenwood."

"And who shall bear such a message?" said Front-de-Bœuf. "They will beset every path, and rip the errand out of his bosom. I have it," he added, after pausing for a moment — "Sir Templar, thou canst write as well as read, and if we can but find the writing materials of my chaplain, who died a twelvemonth since" —

"So please ye," said the squire, who was still in attendance, "I think old Urfried has them somewhere in keeping."

"Go, search them out, Engelred," said Front-de-Bœuf; "and then, Sir Templar, thou shalt return an answer to this bold challenge."

"I would rather do it at the sword's point than at that of the pen," said Bois-Guilbert; "but be it as you will."

He sat down, accordingly, and indited in the French language an epistle of the following tenor.

¹ That is, await his onset.

"Sir Reginald Front-de-Bœuf, with his noble and knightly allies and confederates, receive no defiances at the hands of slaves, bondsmen, or fugitives. If the person calling himself the Black Knight have indeed a claim to the honors of chivalry, he ought to know that he stands degraded by his present association, and has no right to ask reckoning at the hands of good men of noble blood. Touching the prisoners we have made, we do in Christian charity require you to send a man of religion to receive their confession and reconcile them with God, since it is our fixed intention to execute them this morning before noon, so that their heads, being placed on the battlement, shall show to all men how lightly we esteem those who have bestirred themselves in their rescue. Wherefore, as above, we require you to send a priest to reconcile them to God, in doing which you shall render them the last earthly service."

This letter, being folded, was delivered to the squire, and by him to the messenger who waited without, as the answer to that which he had brought.

The yeoman, having thus accomplished his mission, returned to the headquarters of the allies, which were for the present established under a venerable oak-tree about three arrow-flights distant from the castle. Here Wamba and Gurth, with their allies the Black Knight and Locksley, and the jovial hermit, awaited with impatience an answer to their summons. Around, and at a distance from them, were seen many a bold yeoman, whose silvan dress and weather-beaten countenances showed the ordinary nature of their occupation. More than two hundred had already assembled, and others were fast coming in. Those whom they obeyed as leaders were only distinguished from the others by a feather in the cap; their dress, arms, and equipments being in all other respects the same.

Besides these bands, a less orderly and a worse armed force, consisting of the Saxon inhabitants of the neighboring township, as well as many bondsmen and servants from Cedric's extensive estate had already arrived for the purpose of assisting in his res-

cue. Few of these were armed otherwise than with such rustic weapons as necessity sometimes converts to military purposes. Boar-spears, scythes, flails, and the like, were their chief arms; for the Normans, with the usual policy of conquerors, were jealous of permitting to the vanquished Saxons the possession or the use of swords and spears. These circumstances rendered the assistance of the Saxons far from being so formidable to the besieged as the strength of the men themselves, their superior numbers, and the animation inspired by a just cause, might otherwise well have made them. It was to the leaders of this motley army that the letter of the Templar was now delivered.

Reference was at first made to the chaplain for an exposition of its contents.

"By the crook¹ of St. Dunstan," said that worthy ecclesiastic, "which hath brought more sheep within the sheepfold than the crook of e'er another saint in Paradise, I swear that I cannot expound unto you this jargon, which, whether it be French or Arabic, is beyond my guess."

He then gave the letter to Gurth, who shook his head gruffly, and passed it to Wamba. The jester looked at each of the four corners of the paper with such a grin of affected intelligence as a monkey is apt to assume upon similar occasions, then cut a caper and gave the letter to Locksley.

"If the long letters were bows, and the short letters broad arrows, I might know something of the matter," said the honest yeoman; "but as the matter stands, the meaning is as safe for me as the stag that's at twelve miles' distance."

"I must be clerk, then," said the Black Knight; and, taking the letter from Locksley, he first read it over to himself, and then explained the meaning in Saxon to his confederates.

"Execute the noble Cedric!" exclaimed Wamba. "By the rood, thou must be mistaken, Sir Knight."

"Not I, my worthy friend," replied the knight: "I have explained the words as they are here set down."

¹ The staff of office of a bishop (see note, p. 11).

"Then, by St. Thomas of Canterbury," replied Gurth, "we will have the castle, should we tear it down with our hands!"

"We have nothing else to tear it with," replied Wamba; "but mine are scarce fit to make mammoths¹ of freestone and mortar."

"'Tis but a contrivance to gain time," said Locksley. "They dare not do a deed for which I could exact a fearful penalty."

"I would," said the Black Knight, "there were some one among us who could obtain admission into the castle, and discover how the case stands with the besieged. Methinks, as they require a confessor to be sent, this holy hermit might at once exercise his pious vocation, and procure us the information we desire."

"A plague on thee and thy advice!" said the good hermit. "I tell thee, Sir Slothful Knight, that when I doff my friar's frock, my priesthood, my sanctity, my very Latin, are put off along with it; and when in my green jerkin, I can better kill twenty deer than confess one Christian."

"I fear," said the Black Knight — "I fear greatly, there is no one here that is qualified to take upon him, for the nonce,² this same character of father confessor."³

All looked on each other, and were silent.

"I see," said Wamba after a short pause, "that the fool must be still the fool, and put his neck in the venture which wise men shrink from. You must know, my dear cousins and countrymen, that I wore russet⁴ before I wore motley, and was bred to be a friar, until a brain-fever came upon me, and left me just wit enough to be a fool. I trust, with the assistance of the good hermit's frock, together with the priesthood, sanctity, and learning which are stitched into the cowl of it, I shall be found qualified to administer both worldly and ghostly⁵ comfort to our worthy master Cedric and his companions in adversity."

¹ Fragments. ² Present.

³ A priest who listens to confessions from others, and grants absolution.

⁴ Homespun. ⁵ Spiritual.

"Hath he sense enough, thinkst thou?" said the Black Knight, addressing Gurth.

"I know not," said Gurth; "but if he hath not, it will be the first time he hath wanted wit to turn his folly to account."

"On with the frock, then, good fellow," quoth the knight, "and let the master send us an account of their situation within the castle. Their numbers must be few, and it is five to one they may be accessible by a sudden and bold attack. Time wears. Away with thee!"

"And in the mean time," said Locksley, "we will beset the place so closely that not so much as a fly shall carry news from thence. — So that, my good friend," he continued, addressing Wamba, "thou mayest assure these tyrants that whatever violence they exercise on the persons of their prisoners shall be most severely repaid upon their own."

"*Pax vobiscum!*"¹ said Wamba, who was now muffled in his religious disguise.

And so saying, he imitated the solemn and stately deportment of a friar, and departed to execute his mission.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN the Jester, arrayed in the cowl and frock of the hermit, and having his knotted cord twisted around his middle, stood before the portal of the castle of Front-de-Bœuf, the warder² demanded of him his name and errand.

"*Pax vobiscum!*" answered the Jester, "I am a poor brother of the Order of St. Francis, who come hither to do my office to certain unhappy prisoners now secured within this castle."

"Thou art a bold friar," said the warder, "to come hither, where, saving our own confessor, a cock of thy feather hath not crowed these twenty years."

¹ "Peace be with you!"

² The gate-keeper.

"Yet, I pray thee, do mine errand to the lord of the castle," answered the pretended friar. "Trust me, it will find good acceptance with him; and the cock shall crow, that the whole castle shall hear him."

"Gramercy," said the warder; "but if I come to shame for leaving my post upon thine errand, I will try whether a friar's gray gown be proof against a gray-goose shaft."¹

With this threat he left his turret, and carried to the hall of the castle his unwonted intelligence that a holy friar stood before the gate and demanded instant admission. With no small wonder he received his master's commands to admit the holy man immediately; and, having previously manned the entrance to guard against surprise, he obeyed, without further scruple, the commands which he had received. The harebrained self-conceit which had emboldened Wamba to undertake this dangerous office was scarce sufficient to support him when he found himself in the presence of a man so dreadful and so much dreaded as Reginald Front-de-Bœuf; and he brought out his *pax vobiscum*, to which he in a good measure trusted for supporting his character, with more anxiety and hesitation than had hitherto accompanied it. But Front-de-Bœuf was accustomed to see men of all ranks tremble in his presence, so that the timidity of the supposed father did not give him any cause of suspicion. "Who and whence art thou, priest?" said he.

"*Pax vobiscum!*" reiterated the Jester, "I am a poor servant of St. Francis, who, traveling through this wilderness, have fallen among thieves (as Scripture hath it), *quidam viator incidit in latrones*, which thieves have sent me unto this castle in order to do my ghostly office on two persons condemned by your honorable justice."

"Ay, right," answered Front-de-Bœuf; "and canst thou tell me, holy father, the number of those banditti?"

"Gallant sir," answered the Jester, "*nomen illis legio*, their name is legion."

¹ An arrow for a longbow.

"Tell me in plain terms what numbers there are, or, priest, thy cloak and cord will ill protect thee."

"Alas!" said the supposed friar, "*cor meum eructavit*, that is to say, I was like to burst with fear; but I conceive they may be, what of yeomen, what of commons, at least five hundred men."

"What!" said the Templar, who came into the hall that moment, "muster the wasps so thick here? It is time to stifle such a mischievous brood." Then, taking Front-de-Bœuf aside, "Knowest thou the priest?"

"He is a stranger from a distant convent," said Front-de-Bœuf. "I know him not."

"Then trust him not with thy purpose in words," answered the Templar. "Let him carry a written order to De Bracy's company of Free Companions to repair instantly to their master's aid. In the mean time, and that the shaveling may suspect nothing, permit him to go freely about his task of preparing these Saxon hogs for the slaughter-house."

"It shall be so," said Front-de-Bœuf; and he forthwith appointed a domestic to conduct Wamba to the apartment where Cedric and Athelstane were confined.

The impatience of Cedric had been rather enhanced than diminished by his confinement. He walked from one end of the hall to the other with the attitude of one who advances to charge an enemy or to storm the breach of a beleaguered place, sometimes ejaculating to himself, sometimes addressing Athelstane, who stoutly and stoically awaited the issue of the adventure, digesting, in the mean time, with great composure, the liberal meal which he had made at noon, and not greatly interesting himself about the duration of his captivity, which he concluded would, like all earthly evils, find an end in Heaven's good time.

"*Pax vobiscum!*" said the Jester, entering the apartment, "the blessing of St. Dunstan, St. Dennis,¹ St. Duthoc, and all other saints whatsoever, be upon ye and about ye!"

¹ Patron saint of France, and first bishop of Paris; martyred in the third century.

"Enter freely," answered Cedric to the supposed friar. "With what intent art thou come hither?"

"To bid you prepare yourselves for death," answered the Jester.

"It is impossible!" replied Cedric, starting. "Fearless and wicked as they are, they dare not attempt such open and gratuitous cruelty!"

"Alas!" said the Jester, "to restrain them by their sense of humanity is the same as to stop a runaway horse with a bridle of silk thread. Bethink thee, therefore, noble Cedric, — and you also, gallant Athelstane, — what crimes you have committed in the flesh; for this very day will ye be called to answer at a higher tribunal."

"Hearest thou this, Athelstane?" said Cedric. "We must rouse up our hearts to this last action, since better it is we should die like men than live like slaves."

"I am ready," answered Athelstane, "to stand the worst of their malice, and shall walk to my death with as much composure as ever I did to my dinner."

"Let us, then, unto our holy gear,¹ father," said Cedric.

"Wait yet a moment, good uncle," said the Jester in his natural tone. "Better look long, before you leap in the dark."

"By my faith," said Cedric, "I should know that voice."

"It is that of your trusty slave and jester," answered Wamba, throwing back his cowl. "Had you taken a fool's advice formerly, you would not have been here at all. Take a fool's advice now, and you will not be here long."

"How meanest thou, knave?" answered the Saxon.

"Even thus," replied Wamba: "take thou this frock and cord, which are all the orders² I ever had, and march quietly out of the castle, leaving me your cloak and girdle to take the long leap³ in thy stead."

¹ Holy matters.

² Ordination; admission into the ministry.

³ The leap into eternity; death.

"Leave thee in my stead!" said Cedric, astonished at the proposal. "Why, they would hang thee, my poor knave."

"E'en let them do as they are permitted," said Wamba. "I trust — no disparagement to your birth — that the son of Witless may hang in a chain with as much gravity as the chain¹ hung upon his ancestor the alderman."

"Well, Wamba," answered Cedric, "for one thing will I grant thy request; and that is, if thou wilt make the exchange of garments with Lord Athelstane instead of me."

"No, by St. Dunstan," answered Wamba, "there were little reason in that. Good right there is that the son of Witless should suffer to save the son of Hereward, but little wisdom there were in his dying for the benefit of one whose fathers were strangers to his."

"Villain," said Cedric, "the fathers of Athelstane were monarchs of England!"

"They might be whomsoever they pleased," replied Wamba; "but my neck stands too straight upon my shoulders to have it twisted for their sake. Wherefore, good my master, either take my proffer yourself, or suffer me to leave this dungeon as free as I entered."

"Let the old tree wither," continued Cedric, "so the stately hope of the forest be preserved. Save the noble Athelstane, my trusty Wamba! It is the duty of each who has Saxon blood in his veins. Thou and I will abide together the utmost rage of our injurious oppressors, while he, free and safe, shall arouse the awakened spirits of our countrymen to avenge us."

"Not so, father Cedric," said Athelstane, grasping his hand, for, when roused to think or act, his deeds and sentiments were not unbecoming his high race. "Not so," he continued. "I would rather remain in this hall a week without food save the prisoner's stinted loaf, or drink save the prisoner's measure of water, than embrace the opportunity to escape which the slave's untaught kindness has purveyed for his master."

¹ The gold chain was the alderman's mark of office.

"You are called wise men, sirs," said the Jester, "and I a crazed fool; but, uncle Cedric and cousin Athelstane, the fool shall decide this controversy for ye, and save ye the trouble of straining courtesies any further. I am like John-a-Duck's mare, that will let no man mount her but John-a-Duck. I came to save my master, and if he will not consent—basta¹—I can but go away home again. Kind service cannot be chucked from hand to hand like a shuttlecock or stoolball.² I'll hang for no man but my own born master."

"Go, then, noble Cedric," said Athelstane. "Neglect not this opportunity. Your presence without may encourage friends to our rescue: your remaining here would ruin us all."

"And is there any prospect, then, of rescue from without?" said Cedric, looking at the Jester.

"Prospect, indeed!" echoed Wamba. "Let me tell you. When you fill my cloak, you are wrapped in a general's cassock. Five hundred men are there without, and I was this morning one of their chief leaders. My fool's cap was a casque, and my bauble, a truncheon. Well, we shall see what good they will make by exchanging a fool for a wise man. Truly, I fear they will lose in valor what they may gain in discretion. And so farewell, master! and be kind to poor Gurth and his dog Fangs; and let my coxcomb³ hang in the hall at Rotherwood, in memory that I flung away my life for my master, like a faithful—fool."

The last word came out with a sort of double expression, betwixt jest and earnest. The tears stood in Cedric's eyes.

"Thy memory shall be preserved," he said, "while fidelity and affection have honor upon earth. But that I trust I shall find the means of saving Rowena,—and thee, Athelstane,—and

¹ Stop.

² A ball used in playing the game of stoolball,—a game usually played by women alone, and much resembling cricket.

³ The short stick customarily carried by fools or jesters: it bore a fool's head carved upon it.

thee, also, my poor Wamba,—thou shouldst not overbear me in this matter."

The exchange of dress was now accomplished, when a sudden doubt struck Cedric.

"I know no language," he said, "but my own, and a few words of their mincing¹ Norman. How shall I bear myself like a reverend brother?"

"The spell lies in two words," replied Wamba: "*Pax vobiscum* will answer all queries. If you go or come, eat or drink, bless or ban, *Pax vobiscum* carries you through it all. It is as useful to a friar as a broomstick to a witch, or a wand to a conjurer. Speak it but thus, in a deep, grave tone,—*Pax vobiscum!*—it is irresistible. Watch and ward, knight and squire, foot and horse, it acts as a charm upon them all. I think, if they bring me out to be hanged to-morrow, as is much to be doubted they may, I will try its weight upon the finisher of the sentence."

"If such prove the case," said his master, "my religious orders are soon taken, *Pax vobiscum*. I trust I shall remember the password. Noble Athelstane, farewell!—And farewell, my poor boy, whose heart might make amends for a weaker head! I will save you, or return and die with you. The royal blood of our Saxon kings shall not be spilt while mine beats in my veins; nor shall one hair fall from the head of the kind knave who risked himself for his master, if Cedric's peril can prevent it. Farewell!"

"Farewell, noble Cedric," said Athelstane. "Remember, it is the true part of a friar to accept refreshment, if you are offered any."

"Farewell, uncle," added Wamba; "and remember *Pax vobiscum*."

Thus exhorted, Cedric sallied forth upon his expedition; and it was not long ere he had occasion to try the force of that spell which his Jester had recommended as omnipotent. In a low-arched and dusky passage, by which he endeavored to work his way to the hall of the castle, he was interrupted by a female form.

¹ Fine-cut; that is, prim, affected.

"*Pax vobiscum!*" said the pseudo¹ friar, and was endeavoring to hurry past, when a soft voice replied, "*Et vobis²—quæso, domine reverendissime, pro misericordia vestra.*"³

"I am somewhat deaf," replied Cedric in good Saxon, and at the same time muttered to himself, "A curse on the fool and his *Pax vobiscum!* I have lost my javelin at the first cast."

It was, however, no unusual thing for a priest of those days to be deaf of his Latin ear, and this the person who now addressed Cedric knew full well.

"I pray you of dear love, reverend father," she replied in his own language, "that you will deign to visit with your ghostly comfort a wounded prisoner of this castle, and have such compassion upon him and us as thy holy office teaches. Never shall good deed so highly advantage thy convent."

"Daughter," answered Cedric, much embarrassed, "my time in this castle will not permit me to exercise the duties of mine office. I must presently forth. There is life and death upon my speed."

"Yet, father, let me entreat you by the vow you have taken on you," replied the suppliant, "not to leave the oppressed and endangered without counsel or succor."

"May the Fiend fly away with me, and leave me in Ifrin with the souls of Odin and of Thor!"⁴ answered Cedric impatiently, and would probably have proceeded in the same tone of total departure from his spiritual character, when the colloquy was interrupted by the harsh voice of Urfried, the old crone of the turret.

"How, minion," said she to the female speaker, "is this the manner in which you requite the kindness which permitted thee to leave thy prison-cell yonder? Puttest thou the reverend man to use ungracious language to free himself from a Jewess?"

¹ Counterfeit.

² "And with you;" that is, "Peace be with you also."

³ "I pray, O most holy father! for thy mercy."

⁴ In the Scandinavian mythology, the god of war, and the defender of the gods against the giants.

"A Jewess!" said Cedric, availing himself of the information to get clear of their interruption.—"Let me pass, woman! Stop me not, at your peril. I am fresh from my holy office, and would avoid pollution."

"Come this way, father," said the old hag. "Thou art a stranger in this castle, and canst not leave it without a guide. Come hither, for I would speak with thee.—And you, daughter of an accursed race, go to the sick man's chamber, and tend him until my return; and woe betide you if you again quit it without my permission!"

Rebecca retreated. Her importunities had prevailed upon Urfried to suffer her to quit the turret, and Urfried had employed her services where she herself would most gladly have paid them, by the bedside of the wounded Ivanhoe. With an understanding awake to their dangerous situation, and prompt to avail herself of each means of safety which occurred, Rebecca had hoped something from the presence of a man of religion, who, she learned from Urfried, had penetrated into this godless castle. She watched the return of the supposed ecclesiastic with the purpose of addressing him and interesting him in favor of the prisoners; with what imperfect success, the reader has been just acquainted.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHEN Urfried had with clamors and menaces driven Rebecca back to the apartment from which she had sallied, she proceeded to conduct the unwilling Cedric into a small apartment, the door of which she heedfully secured. Then, fetching from a cupboard a stoup of wine and two flagons, she placed them on the table, and said, in a tone rather asserting a fact than asking a question, "Thou art Saxon, father. Deny it not," she continued, observing that Cedric hastened not to reply. "The sounds of my native language are sweet to mine ears, though