

the first opportunity, that in this respect he was past praying for.

It occurred to me now that, finding him incorrigible as a courtier, but recognising his merits, and especially his fitness for the present enterprise, she had in her wisdom at a stroke rid herself of an uncomfortable, though respected, individuality about the Court, and made an appointment for which could scarcely have been found a more suitable agent.

Indeed, the same could have been said of Sir Jerome if it should have been found necessary to despatch an envoy to the infernal regions, in order to defy there Lucifer himself and all his angels; for assuredly the sturdy knight would have accepted the mission with as much readiness as he displayed in undertaking the present embassy, having no room in his heart for any fear whatever, whether of Cæsars or of devils.

CHAPTER VIII.

Two days later, and a week before the sailing date of our good ship, the *Bona Esperanza*, the Queen, with her company, paused a moment as she passed the door at which I stood upon guard. My heart sank and my foolish face flushed; but seeing in an instant that Amy was not among the attendants of her Grace, I quickly recovered some of the spirit which had escaped at the first shock of the Queen's approach.

"So," she said, frowning a little, "thou art not satisfied with the Queen's service, and would quit it within a month of appointment. Thou must needs be nurse to thy cousin, whether she will have thee or no."

"Madam," I faltered, "her mother has written that——"

"Oh, Lord!" her Grace laughed, "the chit has left her mother's nest; it is *I* that stand *in loco parentis*. Amy has assured me with tears that she needs no protector. Be sure you shall have many black looks."

"Madam," I said boldly, for her words indicated that my wish would be granted, even though unwillingly, "the child does not always love the nurse who accompanies and protects her; but how should she know wisdom? Though she scream and kick, it is not the less necessary that she be watched, and saved from harm. When her anger is over, even a child may learn to be glad of a nurse."

"Well, well," laughed her Grace, "I would not be in thy place. Even I have suffered black looks because of thee. This child will assuredly both scream and kick when she is in the humour. If she becomes the Cæsar's wife, I know not whether she will not declare war upon me. Upon thee she has declared it already. Thou shalt need all thy longness of leg for flight once she is Ivan's wife and carries like him an oaken staff. Run for thy life, man, when this happens; take ship with Sir Jerome and return."

Her Grace laughed aloud; she was in a merry mood, and I thanked God for it.

"Then I may go, madam," I blurted, wreathing my foolish countenance, I suppose, in an expression of joy and relief.

"Mercy of Heaven, look at the man! One

might suppose he was in love with Cæsar's wife! Yes, go, fool; go, if you will."

Her Grace laughed, passed her eye once over my two yards and eight inches of Devonshire bone and muscle, frowned, and departed.

Thus it happened that when the *Bona Esperanza* cast her moorings and floated down river upon the ebb, I, Herbert Shadwell, found myself aboard in company with Sir Jerome Bowes, in the capacity of Secretary of Embassy; with Muirhead; with the depressed-looking Muscovish envoy, whose name, let me here say, was Pitzemsky or Peesemsky, and his suite; and, lastly, with Amy Romalyn and her woman; and for the first few days we saw but little of one another, being prostrate, most of us, with the sea-sickness.

But within a week, the nausea conquered, passengers began to assemble once more upon deck, and now indeed I had my share of black looks, as her Majesty had forewarned me—ay, and of black words also.

Verily it would seem that in accompanying Amy upon her foolish journey into the little-known and certainly barbarous realms of this Tiger of Muscovy, into whose power she was determined to submit herself, I had performed

towards her the basest and most unpardonable of actions. It was in vain that I appealed to Muirhead for confirmation when I declared that she might find she would need a protector more than she now believed, for poor Muirhead gained nothing by his protestations that I spoke truth and had acted, indeed, partly upon his advice; nothing, that is, save a share of those black looks and frowns which hitherto had been my own portion.

"Leave her alone awhile," he said laughing, altogether undismayed. "It may be that she conceals a feeling of grateful relief under this veneer of apparent displeasure. Who can understand the mysterious ways of a woman?"

So, for a while, I left her alone and devoted all the attention that I could spare to the learning of the Muscovish tongue, in which I proved a promising pupil—so at least Muirhead assured me, who, as my teacher, gave me praise. And behold! Amy herself, observing what I did, was not too proud to do likewise, though she would have none of Muirhead for teacher—by reason of his offence, I suppose, in having taken my side in the matter of my coming. It was Peesemsky, the Muscovish envoy, who taught Amy; the poor old gentleman having fallen,

doubtless, under her spell, like others, and being glad of the opportunity of this much quiet intercourse with her.

Muirhead occasionally spoke with me of the Court at which he lived, and said many times that he thanked Heaven he had frightened Mary Hastings from offering herself a sacrifice to the terrible autocrat who ruled Muscovy with a rod of iron.

"What of this one, then?" I asked him, indicating Amy, who had just passed us, walking the deck, and had frowned blackly at each of us as she went.

"I think Cæsar would meet his match," he laughed, "if only she were armed, like himself, with an iron-pointed staff—without it she will be at a disadvantage. True, she has her eyes!"

"And her tongue," I added.

"The tongue is a dangerous weapon in his presence," said Muirhead. "On the whole I consider that though tenfold better equipped to go through that which awaits her than ever Lady Mary could have been, yet the hour will come when she will wish to Heaven she had listened to the counsel of the wise—meaning my own—and remained in England."

"Oh, be sure she will not marry the Tsar if she desires otherwise!" I laughed. Muirhead laughed also, but looked grave again as he spoke.

"I am sure she will not marry the Tsar; that is not what I fear: the danger for her will begin when the Tsar discovers—as he may—that she is desirable, and she at the same time learns that she will have none of him."

"I shall prefer that to the other," said I, "for at that moment my duties will begin in earnest."

"At that moment," laughed Muirhead, "beware of Cæsar's spiked staff, for be assured it will not be idle. The best would be if the Tsar in his rage refused to look at the maiden and sent her back with Sir Jerome. Why does her Grace wish to marry her cousins to a savage?"

"Heaven help us all," said I, so gravely that Muirhead laughed, "if Amy is thus sent back rejected by the Cæsar!"

Many a storm assailed us during that long voyage through the Northern seas, and right well, on the whole, did the good ship *Bona Esperanza* carry us. Nevertheless, we were more than once in danger of being overwhelmed

by the great waters. Once—I remember the occasion as a red-letter day—when it seemed that death awaited us all very near at hand, Amy clung to me.

"I think we are about to perish, Herbert," she said, and I nodded my head, too full of many thoughts to find words.

"I have not always been kind or even just to thee," Amy said; "you will forgive me this, Herbert, now that we part."

"Whether we live or die," I said, "I have always loved thee, Amy, and thee only, and so it must be in this or any other world, though well I know my love has no return."

"Love and I are strangers," she said, smiling a little. "When I speak of love I discuss that which I do not at all understand. Perhaps I could have loved if there were a man so masterful that—well, enough that I do not hate thee so much as might seem from my unkindness; it is my nature to seem unkind, more especially perhaps when——"

"Say no more of that, Amy, I am content," I said. "I would to God that any exertion of mine could save thee now from death, but I am as helpless as thou among these great waters."

Afterwards, when that terrible storm was

over and we were once more in unexpected safety, the remembrance of her kindness evidently weighed heavily upon Amy, for she bade me think nothing of what she had said in the fear of imminent death.

"I desired to make a good end," she said, "and therefore I would have made thee happier by—by showing thee favour which I do not really feel."

"To pretend kindness when the heart is full of the opposite sentiment, and thus to deceive another with one's last breath, is not to make a good end!" I said laughing.

"That may or may not be," she replied; "but at any rate I shall remember thy rebuke, and good end or no end there shall be an end of kindness for thee, my friend, since it is not appreciated."

"Why should I appreciate what is confessedly not intended?" I said.

But Amy would not continue the argument, and flounced away to join Peesemsky and to continue her practice in the Muscovish tongue.

It was nearly four months from the time of our departure from the Thames that we cast anchor before Archangel, glad indeed to have reached our destination in safety.

Here we found awaiting us a courtly deputation of the Cæsar's subjects, assembled to meet and escort us to Moscow. All these good folk bent the knee in homage to Amy Romalyn, as to the bride of Cæsar, and it must be said that Amy bore herself right nobly in her new dignity. Truly no queen could have received their homage more magnificently. My heart sank, for, thought I, she will be irresistible in the eyes of this Muscovish Cæsar, let him be ever so indignant that Mary Hastings should have sent him the *nolo episcopari*.