

Chapter XLIX

The mob had been divided from its first assemblage into four divisions; the London, the Westminster, the Southwark, and the Scotch. Each of these divisions being subdivided into various bodies, and these bodies being drawn up in various forms and figures, the general arrangement was, except to the few chiefs and leaders, as unintelligible as the plan of a great battle to the meanest soldier in the field. It was not without its method, however; for, in a very short space of time after being put in motion, the crowd had resolved itself into three great parties, and were prepared, as had been arranged, to cross the river by different bridges, and make for the House of Commons in separate detachments.

At the head of that division which had Westminster Bridge for its approach to the scene of action, Lord George Gordon took his post; with Gashford at his right hand, and sundry ruffians, of most unpromising appearance, forming a kind of staff about him. The conduct of a second party, whose route lay by Blackfriars, was entrusted to a committee of management, including perhaps a dozen men: while the third, which was to go by London Bridge, and through the main streets, in order that their numbers and their serious intentions might be the better known and appreciated by the citizens, were led by Simon Tappertit (assisted by a few subalterns, selected from the Brotherhood of United Bulldogs), Dennis the hangman, Hugh, and some others.

The word of command being given, each of these great bodies took the road assigned to it, and departed on its way, in perfect order and profound silence. That which went through the City greatly exceeded the others in number, and was of such prodigious extent that when the rear began to move, the front was nearly four miles in advance, notwithstanding that the men marched three abreast and followed very close upon each other.

At the head of this party, in the place where Hugh, in the madness of his humour, had stationed him, and walking between that dangerous companion and the hangman, went Barnaby; as many a man among the thousands who looked on that day afterwards remembered well. Forgetful of all other things in the ecstasy of the moment, his face flushed and his eyes sparkling with delight, heedless of the weight of the great banner he carried, and mindful only of its flashing in the sun and rustling in the summer breeze, on he went, proud, happy, elated past all telling: - the only light-hearted, undesigning creature, in the whole assembly.

'What do you think of this?' asked Hugh, as they passed through the crowded streets, and looked up at the windows which were thronged

with spectators. 'They have all turned out to see our flags and streamers? Eh, Barnaby? Why, Barnaby's the greatest man of all the pack! His flag's the largest of the lot, the brightest too. There's nothing in the show, like Barnaby. All eyes are turned on him. Ha ha ha!'

'Don't make that din, brother,' growled the hangman, glancing with no very approving eyes at Barnaby as he spoke: 'I hope he don't think there's nothing to be done, but carrying that there piece of blue rag, like a boy at a breaking up. You're ready for action I hope, eh? You, I mean,' he added, nudging Barnaby roughly with his elbow. 'What are you staring at? Why don't you speak?'

Barnaby had been gazing at his flag, and looked vacantly from his questioner to Hugh.

'He don't understand your way,' said the latter. 'Here, I'll explain it to him. Barnaby old boy, attend to me.'

'I'll attend,' said Barnaby, looking anxiously round; 'but I wish I could see her somewhere.'

'See who?' demanded Dennis in a gruff tone. 'You an't in love I hope, brother? That an't the sort of thing for us, you know. We mustn't have no love here.'

'She would be proud indeed to see me now, eh Hugh?' said Barnaby. 'Wouldn't it make her glad to see me at the head of this large show? She'd cry for joy, I know she would. Where CAN she be? She never sees me at my best, and what do I care to be gay and fine if SHE'S not by?'

'Why, what palaver's this?' asked Mr Dennis with supreme disdain. 'We an't got no sentimental members among us, I hope.'

'Don't be uneasy, brother,' cried Hugh, 'he's only talking of his mother.'

'Of his what?' said Mr Dennis with a strong oath.

'His mother.'

'And have I combined myself with this here section, and turned out on this here memorable day, to hear men talk about their mothers!' growled Mr Dennis with extreme disgust. 'The notion of a man's sweetheart's bad enough, but a man's mother!' - and here his disgust was so extreme that he spat upon the ground, and could say no more.

'Barnaby's right,' cried Hugh with a grin, 'and I say it. Lookee, bold lad. If she's not here to see, it's because I've provided for her, and sent half-a-dozen gentlemen, every one of 'em with a blue flag (but not half as fine as yours), to take her, in state, to a grand house all hung round with gold and silver banners, and everything else you please, where she'll wait till you come, and want for nothing.'

'Ay!' said Barnaby, his face beaming with delight: 'have you indeed? That's a good hearing. That's fine! Kind Hugh!'

'But nothing to what will come, bless you,' retorted Hugh, with a wink at Dennis, who regarded his new companion in arms with great astonishment.

'No, indeed?' cried Barnaby.

'Nothing at all,' said Hugh. 'Money, cocked hats and feathers, red coats and gold lace; all the fine things there are, ever were, or will be; will belong to us if we are true to that noble gentleman - the best man in the world - carry our flags for a few days, and keep 'em safe. That's all we've got to do.'

'Is that all?' cried Barnaby with glistening eyes, as he clutched his pole the tighter; 'I warrant you I keep this one safe, then. You have put it in good hands. You know me, Hugh. Nobody shall wrest this flag away.'

'Well said!' cried Hugh. 'Ha ha! Nobly said! That's the old stout Barnaby, that I have climbed and leaped with, many and many a day - I knew I was not mistaken in Barnaby. - Don't you see, man,' he added in a whisper, as he slipped to the other side of Dennis, 'that the lad's a natural, and can be got to do anything, if you take him the right way? Letting alone the fun he is, he's worth a dozen men, in earnest, as you'd find if you tried a fall with him. Leave him to me. You shall soon see whether he's of use or not.'

Mr Dennis received these explanatory remarks with many nods and winks, and softened his behaviour towards Barnaby from that moment. Hugh, laying his finger on his nose, stepped back into his former place, and they proceeded in silence.

It was between two and three o'clock in the afternoon when the three great parties met at Westminster, and, uniting into one huge mass, raised a tremendous shout. This was not only done in token of their presence, but as a signal to those on whom the task devolved, that it was time to take possession of the lobbies of both Houses, and of the various avenues of approach, and of the gallery stairs. To the last-named place, Hugh and Dennis, still with their pupil between them,

rushed straightway; Barnaby having given his flag into the hands of one of their own party, who kept them at the outer door. Their followers pressing on behind, they were borne as on a great wave to the very doors of the gallery, whence it was impossible to retreat, even if they had been so inclined, by reason of the throng which choked up the passages. It is a familiar expression in describing a great crowd, that a person might have walked upon the people's heads. In this case it was actually done; for a boy who had by some means got among the concourse, and was in imminent danger of suffocation, climbed to the shoulders of a man beside him and walked upon the people's hats and heads into the open street; traversing in his passage the whole length of two staircases and a long gallery. Nor was the swarm without less dense; for a basket which had been tossed into the crowd, was jerked from head to head, and shoulder to shoulder, and went spinning and whirling on above them, until it was lost to view, without ever once falling in among them or coming near the ground.

Through this vast throng, sprinkled doubtless here and there with honest zealots, but composed for the most part of the very scum and refuse of London, whose growth was fostered by bad criminal laws, bad prison regulations, and the worst conceivable police, such of the members of both Houses of Parliament as had not taken the precaution to be already at their posts, were compelled to fight and force their way. Their carriages were stopped and broken; the wheels wrenched off; the glasses shattered to atoms; the panels beaten in; drivers, footmen, and masters, pulled from their seats and rolled in the mud. Lords, commoners, and reverend bishops, with little distinction of person or party, were kicked and pinched and hustled; passed from hand to hand through various stages of ill-usage; and sent to their fellow-senators at last with their clothes hanging in ribands about them, their bagwigs torn off, themselves speechless and breathless, and their persons covered with the powder which had been cuffed and beaten out of their hair. One lord was so long in the hands of the populace, that the Peers as a body resolved to sally forth and rescue him, and were in the act of doing so, when he happily appeared among them covered with dirt and bruises, and hardly to be recognised by those who knew him best. The noise and uproar were on the increase every moment. The air was filled with execrations, hoots, and howlings. The mob raged and roared, like a mad monster as it was, unceasingly, and each new outrage served to swell its fury.

Within doors, matters were even yet more threatening. Lord George - preceded by a man who carried the immense petition on a porter's knot through the lobby to the door of the House of Commons, where it was received by two officers of the house who rolled it up to the table ready for presentation - had taken his seat at an early hour, before the Speaker went to prayers. His followers pouring in at the same time, the lobby and all the avenues were immediately filled, as we have

seen. Thus the members were not only attacked in their passage through the streets, but were set upon within the very walls of Parliament; while the tumult, both within and without, was so great, that those who attempted to speak could scarcely hear their own voices: far less, consult upon the course it would be wise to take in such extremity, or animate each other to dignified and firm resistance. So sure as any member, just arrived, with dress disordered and dishevelled hair, came struggling through the crowd in the lobby, it yelled and screamed in triumph; and when the door of the House, partially and cautiously opened by those within for his admission, gave them a momentary glimpse of the interior, they grew more wild and savage, like beasts at the sight of prey, and made a rush against the portal which strained its locks and bolts in their staples, and shook the very beams.

The strangers' gallery, which was immediately above the door of the House, had been ordered to be closed on the first rumour of disturbance, and was empty; save that now and then Lord George took his seat there, for the convenience of coming to the head of the stairs which led to it, and repeating to the people what had passed within. It was on these stairs that Barnaby, Hugh, and Dennis were posted. There were two flights, short, steep, and narrow, running parallel to each other, and leading to two little doors communicating with a low passage which opened on the gallery. Between them was a kind of well, or unglazed skylight, for the admission of light and air into the lobby, which might be some eighteen or twenty feet below.

Upon one of these little staircases - not that at the head of which Lord George appeared from time to time, but the other - Gashford stood with his elbow on the bannister, and his cheek resting on his hand, with his usual crafty aspect. Whenever he varied this attitude in the slightest degree - so much as by the gentlest motion of his arm - the uproar was certain to increase, not merely there, but in the lobby below; from which place no doubt, some man who acted as fugleman to the rest, was constantly looking up and watching him.

'Order!' cried Hugh, in a voice which made itself heard even above the roar and tumult, as Lord George appeared at the top of the staircase. 'News! News from my lord!'

The noise continued, notwithstanding his appearance, until Gashford looked round. There was silence immediately - even among the people in the passages without, and on the other staircases, who could neither see nor hear, but to whom, notwithstanding, the signal was conveyed with marvellous rapidity.

'Gentlemen,' said Lord George, who was very pale and agitated, we must be firm. They talk of delays, but we must have no delays. They

talk of taking your petition into consideration next Tuesday, but we must have it considered now. Present appearances look bad for our success, but we must succeed and will!

'We must succeed and will!' echoed the crowd. And so among their shouts and cheers and other cries, he bowed to them and retired, and presently came back again. There was another gesture from Gashford, and a dead silence directly.

'I am afraid,' he said, this time, 'that we have little reason, gentlemen, to hope for any redress from the proceedings of Parliament. But we must redress our own grievances, we must meet again, we must put our trust in Providence, and it will bless our endeavours.'

This speech being a little more temperate than the last, was not so favourably received. When the noise and exasperation were at their height, he came back once more, and told them that the alarm had gone forth for many miles round; that when the King heard of their assembling together in that great body, he had no doubt, His Majesty would send down private orders to have their wishes complied with; and - with the manner of his speech as childish, irresolute, and uncertain as his matter - was proceeding in this strain, when two gentlemen suddenly appeared at the door where he stood, and pressing past him and coming a step or two lower down upon the stairs, confronted the people.

The boldness of this action quite took them by surprise. They were not the less disconcerted, when one of the gentlemen, turning to Lord George, spoke thus - in a loud voice that they might hear him well, but quite coolly and collectedly:

'You may tell these people, if you please, my lord, that I am General Conway of whom they have heard; and that I oppose this petition, and all their proceedings, and yours. I am a soldier, you may tell them, and I will protect the freedom of this place with my sword. You see, my lord, that the members of this House are all in arms to-day; you know that the entrance to it is a narrow one; you cannot be ignorant that there are men within these walls who are determined to defend that pass to the last, and before whom many lives must fall if your adherents persevere. Have a care what you do.'

'And my Lord George,' said the other gentleman, addressing him in like manner, 'I desire them to hear this, from me - Colonel Gordon - your near relation. If a man among this crowd, whose uproar strikes us deaf, crosses the threshold of the House of Commons, I swear to run my sword that moment - not into his, but into your body!'

With that, they stepped back again, keeping their faces towards the crowd; took each an arm of the misguided nobleman; drew him into the passage, and shut the door; which they directly locked and fastened on the inside.

This was so quickly done, and the demeanour of both gentlemen - who were not young men either - was so gallant and resolute, that the crowd faltered and stared at each other with irresolute and timid looks. Many tried to turn towards the door; some of the faintest-hearted cried they had best go back, and called to those behind to give way; and the panic and confusion were increasing rapidly, when Gashford whispered Hugh.

'What now!' Hugh roared aloud, turning towards them. 'Why go back? Where can you do better than here, boys! One good rush against these doors and one below at the same time, will do the business. Rush on, then! As to the door below, let those stand back who are afraid. Let those who are not afraid, try who shall be the first to pass it. Here goes! Look out down there!'

Without the delay of an instant, he threw himself headlong over the bannisters into the lobby below. He had hardly touched the ground when Barnaby was at his side. The chaplain's assistant, and some members who were imploring the people to retire, immediately withdrew; and then, with a great shout, both crowds threw themselves against the doors pell-mell, and besieged the House in earnest.

At that moment, when a second onset must have brought them into collision with those who stood on the defensive within, in which case great loss of life and bloodshed would inevitably have ensued, - the hindmost portion of the crowd gave way, and the rumour spread from mouth to mouth that a messenger had been despatched by water for the military, who were forming in the street. Fearful of sustaining a charge in the narrow passages in which they were so closely wedged together, the throng poured out as impetuously as they had flocked in. As the whole stream turned at once, Barnaby and Hugh went with it: and so, fighting and struggling and trampling on fallen men and being trampled on in turn themselves, they and the whole mass floated by degrees into the open street, where a large detachment of the Guards, both horse and foot, came hurrying up; clearing the ground before them so rapidly that the people seemed to melt away as they advanced.

The word of command to halt being given, the soldiers formed across the street; the rioters, breathless and exhausted with their late exertions, formed likewise, though in a very irregular and disorderly manner. The commanding officer rode hastily into the open space between the two bodies, accompanied by a magistrate and an officer of

the House of Commons, for whose accommodation a couple of troopers had hastily dismounted. The Riot Act was read, but not a man stirred.

In the first rank of the insurgents, Barnaby and Hugh stood side by side. Somebody had thrust into Barnaby's hands when he came out into the street, his precious flag; which, being now rolled up and tied round the pole, looked like a giant quarter-staff as he grasped it firmly and stood upon his guard. If ever man believed with his whole heart and soul that he was engaged in a just cause, and that he was bound to stand by his leader to the last, poor Barnaby believed it of himself and Lord George Gordon.

After an ineffectual attempt to make himself heard, the magistrate gave the word and the Horse Guards came riding in among the crowd. But, even then, he galloped here and there, exhorting the people to disperse; and, although heavy stones were thrown at the men, and some were desperately cut and bruised, they had no orders but to make prisoners of such of the rioters as were the most active, and to drive the people back with the flat of their sabres. As the horses came in among them, the throng gave way at many points, and the Guards, following up their advantage, were rapidly clearing the ground, when two or three of the foremost, who were in a manner cut off from the rest by the people closing round them, made straight towards Barnaby and Hugh, who had no doubt been pointed out as the two men who dropped into the lobby: laying about them now with some effect, and inflicting on the more turbulent of their opponents, a few slight flesh wounds, under the influence of which a man dropped, here and there, into the arms of his fellows, amid much groaning and confusion.

At the sight of gashed and bloody faces, seen for a moment in the crowd, then hidden by the press around them, Barnaby turned pale and sick. But he stood his ground, and grasping his pole more firmly yet, kept his eye fixed upon the nearest soldier - nodding his head meanwhile, as Hugh, with a scowling visage, whispered in his ear.

The soldier came spurring on, making his horse rear as the people pressed about him, cutting at the hands of those who would have grasped his rein and forced his charger back, and waving to his comrades to follow - and still Barnaby, without retreating an inch, waited for his coming. Some called to him to fly, and some were in the very act of closing round him, to prevent his being taken, when the pole swept into the air above the people's heads, and the man's saddle was empty in an instant.

Then, he and Hugh turned and fled, the crowd opening to let them pass, and closing up again so quickly that there was no clue to the course they had taken. Panting for breath, hot, dusty, and exhausted

with fatigue, they reached the riverside in safety, and getting into a boat with all despatch were soon out of any immediate danger.

As they glided down the river, they plainly heard the people cheering; and supposing they might have forced the soldiers to retreat, lay upon their oars for a few minutes, uncertain whether to return or not. But the crowd passing along Westminster Bridge, soon assured them that the populace were dispersing; and Hugh rightly guessed from this, that they had cheered the magistrate for offering to dismiss the military on condition of their immediate departure to their several homes, and that he and Barnaby were better where they were. He advised, therefore, that they should proceed to Blackfriars, and, going ashore at the bridge, make the best of their way to The Boot; where there was not only good entertainment and safe lodging, but where they would certainly be joined by many of their late companions. Barnaby assenting, they decided on this course of action, and pulled for Blackfriars accordingly.

They landed at a critical time, and fortunately for themselves at the right moment. For, coming into Fleet Street, they found it in an unusual stir; and inquiring the cause, were told that a body of Horse Guards had just galloped past, and that they were escorting some rioters whom they had made prisoners, to Newgate for safety. Not at all ill-pleased to have so narrowly escaped the cavalcade, they lost no more time in asking questions, but hurried to The Boot with as much speed as Hugh considered it prudent to make, without appearing singular or attracting an inconvenient share of public notice.