

## Chapter LVI

The Maypole cronies, little dreaming of the change so soon to come upon their favourite haunt, struck through the Forest path upon their way to London; and avoiding the main road, which was hot and dusty, kept to the by-paths and the fields. As they drew nearer to their destination, they began to make inquiries of the people whom they passed, concerning the riots, and the truth or falsehood of the stories they had heard. The answers went far beyond any intelligence that had spread to quiet Chigwell. One man told them that that afternoon the Guards, conveying to Newgate some rioters who had been re-examined, had been set upon by the mob and compelled to retreat; another, that the houses of two witnesses near Clare Market were about to be pulled down when he came away; another, that Sir George Saville's house in Leicester Fields was to be burned that night, and that it would go hard with Sir George if he fell into the people's hands, as it was he who had brought in the Catholic bill. All accounts agreed that the mob were out, in stronger numbers and more numerous parties than had yet appeared; that the streets were unsafe; that no man's house or life was worth an hour's purchase; that the public consternation was increasing every moment; and that many families had already fled the city. One fellow who wore the popular colour, damned them for not having cockades in their hats, and bade them set a good watch to-morrow night upon their prison doors, for the locks would have a straining; another asked if they were fire-proof, that they walked abroad without the distinguishing mark of all good and true men; - and a third who rode on horseback, and was quite alone, ordered them to throw each man a shilling, in his hat, towards the support of the rioters. Although they were afraid to refuse compliance with this demand, and were much alarmed by these reports, they agreed, having come so far, to go forward, and see the real state of things with their own eyes. So they pushed on quicker, as men do who are excited by portentous news; and ruminating on what they had heard, spoke little to each other.

It was now night, and as they came nearer to the city they had dismal confirmation of this intelligence in three great fires, all close together, which burnt fiercely and were gloomily reflected in the sky. Arriving in the immediate suburbs, they found that almost every house had chalked upon its door in large characters 'No Popery,' that the shops were shut, and that alarm and anxiety were depicted in every face they passed.

Noting these things with a degree of apprehension which neither of the three cared to impart, in its full extent, to his companions, they came to a turnpike-gate, which was shut. They were passing through the turnstile on the path, when a horseman rode up from London at a

hard gallop, and called to the toll-keeper in a voice of great agitation, to open quickly in the name of God.

The adjuration was so earnest and vehement, that the man, with a lantern in his hand, came running out - toll-keeper though he was - and was about to throw the gate open, when happening to look behind him, he exclaimed, 'Good Heaven, what's that! Another fire!'

At this, the three turned their heads, and saw in the distance - straight in the direction whence they had come - a broad sheet of flame, casting a threatening light upon the clouds, which glimmered as though the conflagration were behind them, and showed like a wrathful sunset.

'My mind misgives me,' said the horseman, 'or I know from what far building those flames come. Don't stand aghast, my good fellow. Open the gate!'

'Sir,' cried the man, laying his hand upon his horse's bridle as he let him through: 'I know you now, sir; be advised by me; do not go on. I saw them pass, and know what kind of men they are. You will be murdered.'

'So be it!' said the horseman, looking intently towards the fire, and not at him who spoke.

'But sir - sir,' cried the man, grasping at his rein more tightly yet, 'if you do go on, wear the blue riband. Here, sir,' he added, taking one from his own hat, 'it's necessity, not choice, that makes me wear it; it's love of life and home, sir. Wear it for this one night, sir; only for this one night.'

'Do!' cried the three friends, pressing round his horse. 'Mr Haredale - worthy sir - good gentleman - pray be persuaded.'

'Who's that?' cried Mr Haredale, stooping down to look. 'Did I hear Daisy's voice?'

'You did, sir,' cried the little man. 'Do be persuaded, sir. This gentleman says very true. Your life may hang upon it.'

'Are you,' said Mr Haredale abruptly, 'afraid to come with me?'

'I, sir? - N-n-no.'

'Put that riband in your hat. If we meet the rioters, swear that I took you prisoner for wearing it. I will tell them so with my own lips; for as I hope for mercy when I die, I will take no quarter from them, nor shall

they have quarter from me, if we come hand to hand to-night. Up here - behind me - quick! Clasp me tight round the body, and fear nothing.'

In an instant they were riding away, at full gallop, in a dense cloud of dust, and speeding on, like hunters in a dream.

It was well the good horse knew the road he traversed, for never once - no, never once in all the journey - did Mr Haredale cast his eyes upon the ground, or turn them, for an instant, from the light towards which they sped so madly. Once he said in a low voice, 'It is my house,' but that was the only time he spoke. When they came to dark and doubtful places, he never forgot to put his hand upon the little man to hold him more securely in his seat, but he kept his head erect and his eyes fixed on the fire, then, and always.

The road was dangerous enough, for they went the nearest way - headlong - far from the highway - by lonely lanes and paths, where waggon-wheels had worn deep ruts; where hedge and ditch hemmed in the narrow strip of ground; and tall trees, arching overhead, made it profoundly dark. But on, on, on, with neither stop nor stumble, till they reached the Maypole door, and could plainly see that the fire began to fade, as if for want of fuel.

'Down - for one moment - for but one moment,' said Mr Haredale, helping Daisy to the ground, and following himself. 'Willet - Willet - where are my niece and servants - Willet!'

Crying to him distractedly, he rushed into the bar. - The landlord bound and fastened to his chair; the place dismantled, stripped, and pulled about his ears; - nobody could have taken shelter here.

He was a strong man, accustomed to restrain himself, and suppress his strong emotions; but this preparation for what was to follow - though he had seen that fire burning, and knew that his house must be razed to the ground - was more than he could bear. He covered his face with his hands for a moment, and turned away his head.

'Johnny, Johnny,' said Solomon - and the simple-hearted fellow cried outright, and wrung his hands - 'Oh dear old Johnny, here's a change! That the Maypole bar should come to this, and we should live to see it! The old Warren too, Johnny - Mr Haredale - oh, Johnny, what a piteous sight this is!'

Pointing to Mr Haredale as he said these words, little Solomon Daisy put his elbows on the back of Mr Willet's chair, and fairly blubbered on his shoulder.

While Solomon was speaking, old John sat, mute as a stock-fish, staring at him with an unearthly glare, and displaying, by every possible symptom, entire and complete unconsciousness. But when Solomon was silent again, John followed with his great round eyes the direction of his looks, and did appear to have some dawning distant notion that somebody had come to see him.

'You know us, don't you, Johnny?' said the little clerk, rapping himself on the breast. 'Daisy, you know - Chigwell Church - bell-ringer - little desk on Sundays - eh, Johnny?'

Mr Willet reflected for a few moments, and then muttered, as it were mechanically: 'Let us sing to the praise and glory of - '

'Yes, to be sure,' cried the little man, hastily; 'that's it - that's me, Johnny. You're all right now, an't you? Say you're all right, Johnny.'

'All right?' pondered Mr Willet, as if that were a matter entirely between himself and his conscience. 'All right? Ah!'

'They haven't been misusing you with sticks, or pokers, or any other blunt instruments - have they, Johnny?' asked Solomon, with a very anxious glance at Mr Willet's head. 'They didn't beat you, did they?'

John knitted his brow; looked downwards, as if he were mentally engaged in some arithmetical calculation; then upwards, as if the total would not come at his call; then at Solomon Daisy, from his eyebrow to his shoe-buckle; then very slowly round the bar. And then a great, round, leaden-looking, and not at all transparent tear, came rolling out of each eye, and he said, as he shook his head:

'If they'd only had the goodness to murder me, I'd have thanked 'em kindly.'

'No, no, no, don't say that, Johnny,' whimpered his little friend. 'It's very, very bad, but not quite so bad as that. No, no!'

'Look'ee here, sir!' cried John, turning his rueful eyes on Mr Haredale, who had dropped on one knee, and was hastily beginning to untie his bonds. 'Look'ee here, sir! The very Maypole - the old dumb Maypole - stares in at the winder, as if it said, 'John Willet, John Willet, let's go and pitch ourselves in the nighest pool of water as is deep enough to hold us; for our day is over!'

'Don't, Johnny, don't,' cried his friend: no less affected with this mournful effort of Mr Willet's imagination, than by the sepulchral tone in which he had spoken of the Maypole. 'Please don't, Johnny!'

'Your loss is great, and your misfortune a heavy one,' said Mr Haredale, looking restlessly towards the door: 'and this is not a time to comfort you. If it were, I am in no condition to do so. Before I leave you, tell me one thing, and try to tell me plainly, I implore you. Have you seen, or heard of Emma?'

'No!' said Mr Willet.

'Nor any one but these bloodhounds?'

'No!'

'They rode away, I trust in Heaven, before these dreadful scenes began,' said Mr Haredale, who, between his agitation, his eagerness to mount his horse again, and the dexterity with which the cords were tied, had scarcely yet undone one knot. 'A knife, Daisy!'

'You didn't,' said John, looking about, as though he had lost his pocket-handkerchief, or some such slight article - 'either of you gentlemen - see a - a coffin anywheres, did you?'

'Willet!' cried Mr Haredale. Solomon dropped the knife, and instantly becoming limp from head to foot, exclaimed 'Good gracious!'

' - Because,' said John, not at all regarding them, 'a dead man called a little time ago, on his way yonder. I could have told you what name was on the plate, if he had brought his coffin with him, and left it behind. If he didn't, it don't signify.'

His landlord, who had listened to these words with breathless attention, started that moment to his feet; and, without a word, drew Solomon Daisy to the door, mounted his horse, took him up behind again, and flew rather than galloped towards the pile of ruins, which that day's sun had shone upon, a stately house. Mr Willet stared after them, listened, looked down upon himself to make quite sure that he was still unbound, and, without any manifestation of impatience, disappointment, or surprise, gently relapsed into the condition from which he had so imperfectly recovered.

Mr Haredale tied his horse to the trunk of a tree, and grasping his companion's arm, stole softly along the footpath, and into what had been the garden of his house. He stopped for an instant to look upon its smoking walls, and at the stars that shone through roof and floor upon the heap of crumbling ashes. Solomon glanced timidly in his face, but his lips were tightly pressed together, a resolute and stern expression sat upon his brow, and not a tear, a look, or gesture indicating grief, escaped him.

He drew his sword; felt for a moment in his breast, as though he carried other arms about him; then grasping Solomon by the wrist again, went with a cautious step all round the house. He looked into every doorway and gap in the wall; retraced his steps at every rustling of the air among the leaves; and searched in every shadowed nook with outstretched hands. Thus they made the circuit of the building: but they returned to the spot from which they had set out, without encountering any human being, or finding the least trace of any concealed straggler.

After a short pause, Mr Haredale shouted twice or thrice. Then cried aloud, 'Is there any one in hiding here, who knows my voice! There is nothing to fear now. If any of my people are near, I entreat them to answer!' He called them all by name; his voice was echoed in many mournful tones; then all was silent as before.

They were standing near the foot of the turret, where the alarm-bell hung. The fire had raged there, and the floors had been sawn, and hewn, and beaten down, besides. It was open to the night; but a part of the staircase still remained, winding upward from a great mound of dust and cinders. Fragments of the jagged and broken steps offered an insecure and giddy footing here and there, and then were lost again, behind protruding angles of the wall, or in the deep shadows cast upon it by other portions of the ruin; for by this time the moon had risen, and shone brightly.

As they stood here, listening to the echoes as they died away, and hoping in vain to hear a voice they knew, some of the ashes in this turret slipped and rolled down. Startled by the least noise in that melancholy place, Solomon looked up in his companion's face, and saw that he had turned towards the spot, and that he watched and listened keenly.

He covered the little man's mouth with his hand, and looked again. Instantly, with kindling eyes, he bade him on his life keep still, and neither speak nor move. Then holding his breath, and stooping down, he stole into the turret, with his drawn sword in his hand, and disappeared.

Terrified to be left there by himself, under such desolate circumstances, and after all he had seen and heard that night, Solomon would have followed, but there had been something in Mr Haredale's manner and his look, the recollection of which held him spellbound. He stood rooted to the spot; and scarcely venturing to breathe, looked up with mingled fear and wonder.

Again the ashes slipped and rolled - very, very softly - again - and then again, as though they crumbled underneath the tread of a

stealthy foot. And now a figure was dimly visible; climbing very softly; and often stopping to look down; now it pursued its difficult way; and now it was hidden from the view again.

It emerged once more, into the shadowy and uncertain light - higher now, but not much, for the way was steep and toilsome, and its progress very slow. What phantom of the brain did he pursue; and why did he look down so constantly? He knew he was alone. Surely his mind was not affected by that night's loss and agony. He was not about to throw himself headlong from the summit of the tottering wall. Solomon turned sick, and clasped his hands. His limbs trembled beneath him, and a cold sweat broke out upon his pallid face.

If he complied with Mr Haredale's last injunction now, it was because he had not the power to speak or move. He strained his gaze, and fixed it on a patch of moonlight, into which, if he continued to ascend, he must soon emerge. When he appeared there, he would try to call to him.

Again the ashes slipped and crumbled; some stones rolled down, and fell with a dull, heavy sound upon the ground below. He kept his eyes upon the piece of moonlight. The figure was coming on, for its shadow was already thrown upon the wall. Now it appeared - and now looked round at him - and now -

The horror-stricken clerk uttered a scream that pierced the air, and cried, 'The ghost! The ghost!'

Long before the echo of his cry had died away, another form rushed out into the light, flung itself upon the foremost one, knelt down upon its breast, and clutched its throat with both hands.

'Villain!' cried Mr Haredale, in a terrible voice - for it was he. 'Dead and buried, as all men supposed through your infernal arts, but reserved by Heaven for this - at last - at last I have you. You, whose hands are red with my brother's blood, and that of his faithful servant, shed to conceal your own atrocious guilt - You, Rudge, double murderer and monster, I arrest you in the name of God, who has delivered you into my hands. No. Though you had the strength of twenty men,' he added, as the murderer writhed and struggled, you could not escape me or loosen my grasp to-night!'