

Chapter LXIII

During the whole of this day, every regiment in or near the metropolis was on duty in one or other part of the town; and the regulars and militia, in obedience to the orders which were sent to every barrack and station within twenty-four hours' journey, began to pour in by all the roads. But the disturbance had attained to such a formidable height, and the rioters had grown, with impunity, to be so audacious, that the sight of this great force, continually augmented by new arrivals, instead of operating as a check, stimulated them to outrages of greater hardihood than any they had yet committed; and helped to kindle a flame in London, the like of which had never been beheld, even in its ancient and rebellious times.

All yesterday, and on this day likewise, the commander-in-chief endeavoured to arouse the magistrates to a sense of their duty, and in particular the Lord Mayor, who was the faintest-hearted and most timid of them all. With this object, large bodies of the soldiery were several times despatched to the Mansion House to await his orders: but as he could, by no threats or persuasions, be induced to give any, and as the men remained in the open street, fruitlessly for any good purpose, and thrivingly for a very bad one; these laudable attempts did harm rather than good. For the crowd, becoming speedily acquainted with the Lord Mayor's temper, did not fail to take advantage of it by boasting that even the civil authorities were opposed to the Papists, and could not find it in their hearts to molest those who were guilty of no other offence. These vaunts they took care to make within the hearing of the soldiers; and they, being naturally loth to quarrel with the people, received their advances kindly enough: answering, when they were asked if they desired to fire upon their countrymen, 'No, they would be damned if they did;' and showing much honest simplicity and good nature. The feeling that the military were No-Popery men, and were ripe for disobeying orders and joining the mob, soon became very prevalent in consequence. Rumours of their disaffection, and of their leaning towards the popular cause, spread from mouth to mouth with astonishing rapidity; and whenever they were drawn up idly in the streets or squares, there was sure to be a crowd about them, cheering and shaking hands, and treating them with a great show of confidence and affection.

By this time, the crowd was everywhere; all concealment and disguise were laid aside, and they pervaded the whole town. If any man among them wanted money, he had but to knock at the door of a dwelling-house, or walk into a shop, and demand it in the rioters name; and his demand was instantly complied with. The peaceable citizens being afraid to lay hands upon them, singly and alone, it may be easily supposed that when gathered together in bodies, they were perfectly secure from interruption. They assembled in the streets, traversed

them at their will and pleasure, and publicly concerted their plans. Business was quite suspended; the greater part of the shops were closed; most of the houses displayed a blue flag in token of their adherence to the popular side; and even the Jews in Houndsditch, Whitechapel, and those quarters, wrote upon their doors or window-shutters, 'This House is a True Protestant.' The crowd was the law, and never was the law held in greater dread, or more implicitly obeyed.

It was about six o'clock in the evening, when a vast mob poured into Lincoln's Inn Fields by every avenue, and divided - evidently in pursuance of a previous design - into several parties. It must not be understood that this arrangement was known to the whole crowd, but that it was the work of a few leaders; who, mingling with the men as they came upon the ground, and calling to them to fall into this or that parry, effected it as rapidly as if it had been determined on by a council of the whole number, and every man had known his place.

It was perfectly notorious to the assemblage that the largest body, which comprehended about two-thirds of the whole, was designed for the attack on Newgate. It comprehended all the rioters who had been conspicuous in any of their former proceedings; all those whom they recommended as daring hands and fit for the work; all those whose companions had been taken in the riots; and a great number of people who were relatives or friends of felons in the jail. This last class included, not only the most desperate and utterly abandoned villains in London, but some who were comparatively innocent. There was more than one woman there, disguised in man's attire, and bent upon the rescue of a child or brother. There were the two sons of a man who lay under sentence of death, and who was to be executed along with three others, on the next day but one. There was a great parry of boys whose fellow-pickpockets were in the prison; and at the skirts of all, a score of miserable women, outcasts from the world, seeking to release some other fallen creature as miserable as themselves, or moved by a general sympathy perhaps - God knows - with all who were without hope, and wretched.

Old swords, and pistols without ball or powder; sledge-hammers, knives, axes, saws, and weapons pillaged from the butchers' shops; a forest of iron bars and wooden clubs; long ladders for scaling the walls, each carried on the shoulders of a dozen men; lighted torches; tow smeared with pitch, and tar, and brimstone; staves roughly plucked from fence and paling; and even crutches taken from crippled beggars in the streets; composed their arms. When all was ready, Hugh and Dennis, with Simon Tappertit between them, led the way. Roaring and chafing like an angry sea, the crowd pressed after them.

Instead of going straight down Holborn to the jail, as all expected, their leaders took the way to Clerkenwell, and pouring down a quiet street, halted before a locksmith's house - the Golden Key.

'Beat at the door,' cried Hugh to the men about him. 'We want one of his craft to-night. Beat it in, if no one answers.'

The shop was shut. Both door and shutters were of a strong and sturdy kind, and they knocked without effect. But the impatient crowd raising a cry of 'Set fire to the house!' and torches being passed to the front, an upper window was thrown open, and the stout old locksmith stood before them.

'What now, you villains!' he demanded. 'Where is my daughter?'

'Ask no questions of us, old man,' retorted Hugh, waving his comrades to be silent, 'but come down, and bring the tools of your trade. We want you.'

'Want me!' cried the locksmith, glancing at the regimental dress he wore: 'Ay, and if some that I could name possessed the hearts of mice, ye should have had me long ago. Mark me, my lad - and you about him do the same. There are a score among ye whom I see now and know, who are dead men from this hour. Begone! and rob an undertaker's while you can! You'll want some coffins before long.'

'Will you come down?' cried Hugh.

'Will you give me my daughter, ruffian?' cried the locksmith.

'I know nothing of her,' Hugh rejoined. 'Burn the door!'

'Stop!' cried the locksmith, in a voice that made them falter - presenting, as he spoke, a gun. 'Let an old man do that. You can spare him better.'

The young fellow who held the light, and who was stooping down before the door, rose hastily at these words, and fell back. The locksmith ran his eye along the upturned faces, and kept the weapon levelled at the threshold of his house. It had no other rest than his shoulder, but was as steady as the house itself.

'Let the man who does it, take heed to his prayers,' he said firmly; 'I warn him.'

Snatching a torch from one who stood near him, Hugh was stepping forward with an oath, when he was arrested by a shrill and piercing

shriek, and, looking upward, saw a fluttering garment on the house-top.

There was another shriek, and another, and then a shrill voice cried, 'Is Simmun below!' At the same moment a lean neck was stretched over the parapet, and Miss Miggs, indistinctly seen in the gathering gloom of evening, screeched in a frenzied manner, 'Oh! dear gentlemen, let me hear Simmun's answer from his own lips. Speak to me, Simmun. Speak to me!'

Mr Tappertit, who was not at all flattered by this compliment, looked up, and bidding her hold her peace, ordered her to come down and open the door, for they wanted her master, and would take no denial.

'Oh good gentlemen!' cried Miss Miggs. 'Oh my own precious, precious Simmun - '

'Hold your nonsense, will you!' retorted Mr Tappertit; 'and come down and open the door. - G. Varden, drop that gun, or it will be worse for you.'

'Don't mind his gun,' screamed Miggs. 'Simmun and gentlemen, I poured a mug of table-beer right down the barrel.'

The crowd gave a loud shout, which was followed by a roar of laughter.

'It wouldn't go off, not if you was to load it up to the muzzle,' screamed Miggs. 'Simmun and gentlemen, I'm locked up in the front attic, through the little door on the right hand when you think you've got to the very top of the stairs - and up the flight of corner steps, being careful not to knock your heads against the rafters, and not to tread on one side in case you should fall into the two-pair bedroom through the lath and plature, which do not bear, but the contrary. Simmun and gentlemen, I've been locked up here for safety, but my endeavours has always been, and always will be, to be on the right side - the blessed side and to pre-nounce the Pope of Babylon, and all her inward and her outward workings, which is Pagin. My sentiments is of little consequences, I know,' cried Miggs, with additional shrillness, 'for my positions is but a servant, and as sich, of humilities, still I gives expressions to my feelings, and places my reliances on them which entertains my own opinions!'

Without taking much notice of these outpourings of Miss Miggs after she had made her first announcement in relation to the gun, the crowd raised a ladder against the window where the locksmith stood, and notwithstanding that he closed, and fastened, and defended it manfully, soon forced an entrance by shivering the glass and breaking

in the frames. After dealing a few stout blows about him, he found himself defenceless, in the midst of a furious crowd, which overflowed the room and softened off in a confused heap of faces at the door and window.

They were very wrathful with him (for he had wounded two men), and even called out to those in front, to bring him forth and hang him on a lamp-post. But Gabriel was quite undaunted, and looked from Hugh and Dennis, who held him by either arm, to Simon Tappertit, who confronted him.

'You have robbed me of my daughter,' said the locksmith, 'who is far dearer to me than my life; and you may take my life, if you will. I bless God that I have been enabled to keep my wife free of this scene; and that He has made me a man who will not ask mercy at such hands as yours.'

'And a wery game old gentleman you are,' said Mr Dennis, approvingly; 'and you express yourself like a man. What's the odds, brother, whether it's a lamp-post to-night, or a feather-bed ten year to come, eh?'

The locksmith glanced at him disdainfully, but returned no other answer.

'For my part,' said the hangman, who particularly favoured the lamp-post suggestion, 'I honour your principles. They're mine exactly. In such sentiments as them,' and here he emphasised his discourse with an oath, 'I'm ready to meet you or any man halfway. - Have you got a bit of cord anywheres handy? Don't put yourself out of the way, if you haven't. A handkecher will do.'

'Don't be a fool, master,' whispered Hugh, seizing Varden roughly by the shoulder; 'but do as you're bid. You'll soon hear what you're wanted for. Do it!'

'I'll do nothing at your request, or that of any scoundrel here,' returned the locksmith. 'If you want any service from me, you may spare yourselves the pains of telling me what it is. I tell you, beforehand, I'll do nothing for you.'

Mr Dennis was so affected by this constancy on the part of the staunch old man, that he protested - almost with tears in his eyes - that to baulk his inclinations would be an act of cruelty and hard dealing to which he, for one, never could reconcile his conscience. The gentleman, he said, had avowed in so many words that he was ready for working off; such being the case, he considered it their duty, as a civilised and enlightened crowd, to work him off. It was not often, he

observed, that they had it in their power to accommodate themselves to the wishes of those from whom they had the misfortune to differ. Having now found an individual who expressed a desire which they could reasonably indulge (and for himself he was free to confess that in his opinion that desire did honour to his feelings), he hoped they would decide to accede to his proposition before going any further. It was an experiment which, skilfully and dexterously performed, would be over in five minutes, with great comfort and satisfaction to all parties; and though it did not become him (Mr Dennis) to speak well of himself he trusted he might be allowed to say that he had practical knowledge of the subject, and, being naturally of an obliging and friendly disposition, would work the gentleman off with a deal of pleasure.

These remarks, which were addressed in the midst of a frightful din and turmoil to those immediately about him, were received with great favour; not so much, perhaps, because of the hangman's eloquence, as on account of the locksmith's obstinacy. Gabriel was in imminent peril, and he knew it; but he preserved a steady silence; and would have done so, if they had been debating whether they should roast him at a slow fire.

As the hangman spoke, there was some stir and confusion on the ladder; and directly he was silent - so immediately upon his holding his peace, that the crowd below had no time to learn what he had been saying, or to shout in response - some one at the window cried:

'He has a grey head. He is an old man: Don't hurt him!'

The locksmith turned, with a start, towards the place from which the words had come, and looked hurriedly at the people who were hanging on the ladder and clinging to each other.

'Pay no respect to my grey hair, young man,' he said, answering the voice and not any one he saw. 'I don't ask it. My heart is green enough to scorn and despise every man among you, band of robbers that you are!'

This incautious speech by no means tended to appease the ferocity of the crowd. They cried again to have him brought out; and it would have gone hard with the honest locksmith, but that Hugh reminded them, in answer, that they wanted his services, and must have them.

'So, tell him what we want,' he said to Simon Tappertit, 'and quickly. And open your ears, master, if you would ever use them after to-night.'

Gabriel folded his arms, which were now at liberty, and eyed his old 'prentice in silence.

'Lookye, Varden,' said Sim, 'we're bound for Newgate.'

'I know you are,' returned the locksmith. 'You never said a truer word than that.'

'To burn it down, I mean,' said Simon, 'and force the gates, and set the prisoners at liberty. You helped to make the lock of the great door.'

'I did,' said the locksmith. 'You owe me no thanks for that - as you'll find before long.'

'Maybe,' returned his journeyman, 'but you must show us how to force it.'

'Must I!'

'Yes; for you know, and I don't. You must come along with us, and pick it with your own hands.'

'When I do,' said the locksmith quietly, 'my hands shall drop off at the wrists, and you shall wear them, Simon Tappertit, on your shoulders for epaulettes.'

'We'll see that,' cried Hugh, interposing, as the indignation of the crowd again burst forth. 'You fill a basket with the tools he'll want, while I bring him downstairs. Open the doors below, some of you. And light the great captain, others! Is there no business afoot, my lads, that you can do nothing but stand and grumble?'

They looked at one another, and quickly dispersing, swarmed over the house, plundering and breaking, according to their custom, and carrying off such articles of value as happened to please their fancy. They had no great length of time for these proceedings, for the basket of tools was soon prepared and slung over a man's shoulders. The preparations being now completed, and everything ready for the attack, those who were pillaging and destroying in the other rooms were called down to the workshop. They were about to issue forth, when the man who had been last upstairs, stepped forward, and asked if the young woman in the garret (who was making a terrible noise, he said, and kept on screaming without the least cessation) was to be released?

For his own part, Simon Tappertit would certainly have replied in the negative, but the mass of his companions, mindful of the good service she had done in the matter of the gun, being of a different opinion, he

had nothing for it but to answer, Yes. The man, accordingly, went back again to the rescue, and presently returned with Miss Miggs, limp and doubled up, and very damp from much weeping.

As the young lady had given no tokens of consciousness on their way downstairs, the bearer reported her either dead or dying; and being at some loss what to do with her, was looking round for a convenient bench or heap of ashes on which to place her senseless form, when she suddenly came upon her feet by some mysterious means, thrust back her hair, stared wildly at Mr Tappertit, cried, 'My Simmun's life is not a wictim!' and dropped into his arms with such promptitude that he staggered and reeled some paces back, beneath his lovely burden.

'Oh bother!' said Mr Tappertit. 'Here. Catch hold of her, somebody. Lock her up again; she never ought to have been let out.'

'My Simmun!' cried Miss Miggs, in tears, and faintly. 'My for ever, ever blessed Simmun!'

'Hold up, will you,' said Mr Tappertit, in a very unresponsive tone, 'I'll let you fall if you don't. What are you sliding your feet off the ground for?'

'My angel Simmun!' murmured Miggs - 'he promised - '

'Promised! Well, and I'll keep my promise,' answered Simon, testily. 'I mean to provide for you, don't I? Stand up!'

'Where am I to go? What is to become of me after my actions of this night!' cried Miggs. 'What resting-places now remains but in the silent tombses!'

'I wish you was in the silent tombses, I do,' cried Mr Tappertit, 'and boxed up tight, in a good strong one. Here,' he cried to one of the bystanders, in whose ear he whispered for a moment: 'Take her off, will you. You understand where?'

The fellow nodded; and taking her in his arms, notwithstanding her broken protestations, and her struggles (which latter species of opposition, involving scratches, was much more difficult of resistance), carried her away. They who were in the house poured out into the street; the locksmith was taken to the head of the crowd, and required to walk between his two conductors; the whole body was put in rapid motion; and without any shouts or noise they bore down straight on Newgate, and halted in a dense mass before the prison-gate.