

## CHAPTER V

### WHAT PASSED AT CRANWELL

A week had gone by. For the first three days of that time little of note had happened at Cranwell Towers; that is, no assault was delivered. Only Christopher and his dozen or so of house-servants and small tenants discovered that they were quite surrounded. Once or twice some of them rode out a little way, to be hunted back again by a much superior force, which emerged from the copses near by or from cottages in the village, and even from the porch of the church. With these men they never came to close quarters, so that no lives were lost. In a fashion this was a disadvantage to them, since they lacked the excitement of actual fighting, the dread of which was ever present, but not its joy.

Meanwhile in other ways things went ill with them. Thus, first of all their beer gave out, and then such other cordials as they had, so that they were reduced to water to drink. Next their fuel became exhausted, for nearly all the stock of it was kept at the farmstead about a quarter of a mile away, and on the second day of the siege this stead was fired and burned with its contents, the cattle and horses being driven off, they knew not where.

So it came about at length they could keep only one fire, in the kitchen, and that but small, which in the end they were obliged to feed with the doors of the outhouses, and even with the floorings torn out of

the attics, in order that they might cook their food. Nor was there much of this; only a store of salt meat and some pickled pork and smoked bacon, together with a certain amount of oatmeal and flour, that they made into cakes and bread.

On the fourth day, however, these gave out, so that they were reduced to a scanty diet of hung flesh, with a few apples by way of vegetables, and hot water to drink to warm them. At length, too, there was nothing more to burn, and therefore they must eat their meat raw, and grew sick on it. Moreover, a cold thaw set in, and the house grew icy, so that they moved about it with chattering teeth, and at night, ill-nurtured as they were, could scarce keep the life in them beneath all the coverings which they had.

Ah! how long were those nights, with never a blaze upon the hearth or so much as a candle to light them. At four o'clock the darkness came down, which did not lessen, for the moon grew low and the mists were thick, until day broke about seven on the following morning. And all this time, fearing attack, they must keep watch and ward through the gloom, so that even sleep was denied them.

For a while they bore up bravely, even the tenants, though news was shouted to these that their steeds had been harried, and their wives and children hunted off to seek shelter where they might.

Cicely and Emlyn never murmured. Indeed, this new-made wife kept her

dreadful honeymoon with a cheerful face, trudging through the black hours around the circle of the moat at her husband's side, or from window-place to window-place in the empty rooms, till at length they cast themselves down upon some bed to sleep a while, giving over the watch to others. Only Emlyn never seemed to sleep. But at length their companions did begin to murmur.

One morning at the dawn, after a very bitter night, they waited upon Christopher and told him that they were willing to fight for his sake and his lady's, but that, as there was no hope of help, they could no longer freeze and starve; in short, that they must either escape from the house or surrender. He listened to them patiently, knowing that what they said was true, and then consulted for a while with Cicely and Emlyn.

"Our case is desperate, dear wife. Now what shall we do, who have no chance of succour, since none know of our plight? Yield, or strive to escape through the darkness?"

"Not yield, I think," answered Cicely, choking back a sob. "If we yield certainly they will separate us, and that merciless Abbot will bring you to your death and me to a nunnery."

"That may happen in any case," muttered Christopher, turning his head aside. "But what say you, Nurse?"

"I say fight for it," answered Emlyn boldly. "It is certain that we cannot stay here, for, to be plain, Sir Christopher, there are some among us whom I do not trust. What wonder? Their stomachs are empty, their hands are blue, their wives and children are they know not where, and the heavy curse of the Church hangs over them, all of which things may be mended if they play you false. Let us take what horses remain and slip away at dead of night if we can; or if we cannot, then let us die, as many better folk have done before."

So they agreed to try their fortune, thinking that it was so bad it could not be worse, and spent the rest of that day in getting ready as best they could. The seven horses still stood in the stable, and although they were stiff from want of exercise, had been hay-fed and watered. On these they proposed to ride, but first they must tell the truth to those who had stood by them. So about three o'clock of the afternoon Christopher called all the men together beneath the gateway and sorrowfully set out his tale. Here, he showed them, they could bide no longer, and to surrender meant that his new-wed wife would soon be made a widow. Therefore they must fly, taking with them as many as there were horses for them to ride, if they cared to risk such a journey. If not, he and the two women would go alone.

Now four of the stoutest-hearted of them, men who had served him and his father for many years, stepped forward, saying that, evil as these seemed to be, they would follow his fortunes to the last. He thanked them shortly, whereon one of the others asked what they were to do, and

if he proposed to desert them after leading them into this plight.

"God knows I would rather die," he replied, with a swelling heart; "but, my friends, consider the case. If I bide here, what of my wife? Alas! it has come to this: that you must choose whether you will slip out with us and scatter in the woods, where I think you will not be followed, since yonder Abbot has no quarrel against you; or whether you will wait here, and to-morrow at the dawn, surrender. In either event you can say that I compelled you to stand by us, and that you have shed no man's blood; also I will give you a writing."

So they talked together gloomily, and at last announced that when he and their lady went they would go also and get off as best they could. But there was a man among them, a small farmer named Jonathan Dicksey, who thought otherwise. This Jonathan, who held his land under Christopher, had been forced to this business of the defence of Cranwell Towers somewhat against his will, namely, by the pressure of Christopher's largest tenant, to whose daughter he was affianced. He was a sly young man, and even during the siege, by means that need not be described, he had contrived to convey a message to the Abbot of Blossholme, telling him that had it been in his power he would gladly be in any other place. Therefore, as he knew well, whatever had happened to others, his farm remained unharried. Now he determined to be out of a bad business as soon as he might, for Jonathan was one of those who liked to stand upon the winning side.

Therefore, although he said "Aye, aye," more loudly than his comrades, as soon as the dusk had fallen, while the others were making ready the horses and mounting guard, Jonathan thrust a ladder across the moat at the back of the stable, and clambered along its rungs into the shelter of a cattle-shed in the meadow, and so away.

Half-an-hour later he stood before the Abbot in the cottage where he had taken up his quarters, having contrived to blunder among his people and be captured. To him at first Jonathan would say nothing, but when at length they threatened to take him out and hang him, to save his life, as he said, he found his tongue and told all.

"So, so," said the Abbot when he had finished. "Now God is good to us. We have these birds in our net, and I shall keep St. Hilary's at Blossholme after all. For your services, Master Dicksey, you shall be my reeve at Cranwell Towers when they are in my hands."

But here it may be said that in the end things went otherwise, since, so far from getting the stewardship of Cranwell, when the truth came to be known, Jonathan's maiden would have no more to do with him, and the folk in those parts sacked his farm and hunted him out of the country, so that he was never heard of among them again.

Meanwhile, all being ready, Christopher at the Towers was closeted with Cicely, taking his farewell of her in the dark, for no light was left to them.

"This is a desperate venture," he said to her, "nor can I tell how it will end, or if ever I shall see your sweet face again. Yet, dearest, we have been happy together for some few hours, and if I fall and you live on I am sure that you will always remember me till, as we are taught, we meet again where no enemy has the power to torment us, and cold and hunger and darkness are not. Cicely, if that should be so and any child should come to you, teach it to love the father whom it never saw."

Now she threw her arms about him and wept, and wept, and wept.

"If you die," she sobbed, "surely I will do so also, for although I am but young I find this world a very evil place, and now that my father is gone, without you, husband, it would be a hell."

"Nay, nay," he answered; "live on while you may; for who knows? Often out of the worst comes the best. At least we have had our joy. Swear it now, sweet."

"Aye, if you will swear it also, for I may be taken and you left. In the dark swords do not choose. Let us promise that we will both endure our lives, together or separate, until God calls us."

So they swore there in the icy gloom, and sealed the oath with kisses.

Now the time was come at last, and they crept their way to the courtyard

hand in hand, taking some comfort because the night was very favourable to their project. The snow had melted, and a great gale blew from the sou'-west, boisterous but not cold, which caused the tall elms that stood about to screech and groan like things alive. In such a wind as this they were sure that they would not be heard, nor could they be seen beneath that murky, starless sky, while the rain which fell between the gusts would wash out the footprints of their horses.

They mounted silently, and with the four men--for by now all the rest had gone--rode across the drawbridge, which had been lowered in preparation for their flight. Three hundred yards or so away their road ran through an ancient marl-pit worked out generations before, in which self-sown trees grew on either side of the path. As they drew near this place suddenly, in the silence of the night, a horse neighed ahead of them, and one of their beasts answered to the neigh.

"Halt!" whispered Cicely, whose ears were made sharp by fear. "I hear men moving."

They pulled rein and listened. Yes; between the gusts of wind there was a faint sound as of the clanking of armour. They strained their eyes in the darkness, but could see nothing. Again the horse neighed and was answered. One of their servants cursed the beast beneath his breath and struck it savagely with the flat of his sword, whereon, being fresh, it took the bit between its teeth and bolted. Another minute and there arose a great clamour from the marl-pit in front of them--a noise of



shoutings, of sword-strokes, and then a heavy groan as from the lips of a dying man.

"An ambush!" exclaimed Christopher.

"Can we get round?" asked Cicely, and there was terror in her voice.

"Nay," he answered, "the stream is in flood; we should be bogged. Hark! they charge us. Back to the Towers--there is no other way."

So they turned and fled, followed by shouts and the thunder of many horses galloping. In two minutes they were there and across the bridge--the women, Christopher, and the three men who were left.

"Up with the bridge!" cried Christopher, and they leapt from their saddles and fumbled for the cranks; too late, for already the Abbot's horsemen pressed it down.

Then a fight began. The horses of the enemy shrank back from the trembling bridge, so their riders, dismounting, rushed forward, to be met by Christopher and his three remaining men, who in that narrow place were as good as a hundred. Wild, random blows were struck in the darkness, and, as it chanced, two of the Abbot's people fell, whereon a deep voice cried--

"Come back and wait for light."

When they had gone, dragging off their wounded with them, Christopher and his servants again strove to wind up the bridge, only to find that it would not stir.

"Some traitor has fouled the chains," he said in the quiet voice of despair. "Cicely and Emlyn, get you into the house. I, and any who will bide with me, stay here to see this business out. When I am down, yield yourself. Afterwards I think that the King will give you justice, if you can come to him."

"I'll not go," she wailed; "I'll die with you."

"Nay, you shall go," he said, stamping his foot, and, as he spoke, an arrow hissed between them. "Emlyn, drag her hence ere she is shot. Swift, I say, swift, or God's curse and mine rest on you. Unclasp your arms, wife; how can I fight while you hang about my neck? What! Must I strike you? Then, there and there!"

She loosed her grasp, and, groaning, fell back upon the breast of Emlyn, who half led, half carried her across the courtyard, where their scared horses galloped loose.

"Whither go we?" sobbed Cicely.

"To the central tower," answered Emlyn; "it seems safest there."

To this tower, whence the place took its name, they groped their way. Unlike the rest of the house, which for the most part was of wood, it was built of stone, being part of an older fabric dating from the Norman days. Slowly they stumbled up the steps till at length they reached the roof, for some instinct prompted them to find a spot whence they could see, should the stars break out. Here, on this lofty perch, they crouched them down and waited the end, whatever it might be--waited in silence.

A while passed--they never knew how long--till at length a sudden flame shot up above the roof of the kitchens at the rear, which the wind caught and blew on to the timbers of the main building, so that presently this began to blaze also. The house had been fired, by whom was never known, though it was said that the traitor, Jonathan Dicksey, had returned and done it, either for a bribe or that his own sin might be forgotten in this great catastrophe.

"The house burns," said Emlyn in her quiet voice. "Now, if you would save your life, follow me. Beneath this tower is a vault where no flame can touch us."

But Cicely would not stir, for by the fierce and ever-growing light she could see what passed beneath, and, as it chanced, the wind blew the smoke away from them. There, beyond the drawbridge, were gathered the Abbey guards, and there in the gateway stood Christopher and his three

men with drawn swords, while in the courtyard the horses galloped madly, screaming in their fear. A soldier looked up and saw the two women standing on the top of the tower, then called out something to the Abbot, who sat on horseback near to him. He looked and saw also.

"Yield, Sir Christopher," he shouted; "the Lady Cicely burns. Yield, that we may save her."

Christopher turned and saw also. For a moment he hesitated, then wheeled round to run across the courtyard. Too late, for as he came the flames burst through the main roof of the house, and the timber front of it, blazing furiously, fell outwards, blocking the doorway, so that the place became a furnace into which none might enter and live.

Now a madness seemed to take hold of him. For a moment he stared up at the figures of the two women standing high above the rolling smoke and wrapping flame. Then, with his three men, he charged with a roar into the crowd of soldiers who had followed him into the courtyard, striving, it would seem, to cut his way to the Abbot, who lurked behind. It was a dreadful sight, for he and those with him fought furiously, and many went down. Presently, of the four only Christopher was left upon his feet. Swords and spears smote upon his armour, but he did not fall; it was those in front of him who fell. A great fellow with an axe got behind him and struck with all his might upon his helm. The sword dropped from Harflete's hand; slowly he turned about, looked upward, then stretched out his arms and fell heavily to earth.

The Abbot leapt from his horse and ran to him, kneeling at his side.

"Dead!" he cried, and began to shrive his passing soul, or so it seemed.

"Dead," repeated Emlyn, "and a gallant death!"

"Dead!" wailed Cicely, in so terrible a voice that all below heard it.

"Dead, dead!" and sank senseless on Emlyn's breast.

At that moment the rest of the roof fell in, hiding the tower in spouts and veils of flame. Here they might not stay if they would live. Lifting her mistress in her strong arms, as she was wont to do when she was little, Emlyn found the head of the stair, so that when the wind blew the smoke aside for an instant, those below saw that both had vanished, as they thought withered in the fire.

"Now you can enter on the Shefton lands, Abbot," cried a voice from the darkness of the gateway, though in the turmoil none knew who spoke; "but not for all England would I bear that innocent blood!"

The Abbot's face turned ghastly, and though it was hot enough in that courtyard his teeth chattered.

"It is on the head of this woman-thief," he exclaimed with an effort, looking down on Christopher, who lay at his feet. "Take him up, that

inquest may be held on him, who died doing murder. Can none enter the house? His pocket full of gold to him who saves the Lady Cicely!"

"Can any enter hell and live?" answered the same voice out of the smoke and gloom. "Seek her sweet soul in heaven, if you may come there, Abbot."

Then, with scared faces, they lifted up Christopher and the other dead and wounded and carried them away, leaving Cranwell Towers to burn itself to ashes, for so fierce was the heat that none could bide there longer.

Two hours had gone by. The Abbot sat in the little room of a cottage at Cranwell that he had occupied during the siege of the Towers. It was near midnight, yet, weary as he was, he could not rest; indeed, had the night been less foul and dark he would have spent the time in riding back to Blossholme. His heart was ill at ease. Things had gone well with him, it is true. Sir John Foterell was dead--slain by "outlawed men;" Sir Christopher Harflete was dead--did not his body lie in the neat-house yonder? Cicely, daughter of the one and wife to the other, was dead also, burned in the fire at the Towers, so that doubtless the precious gems and the wide lands he coveted would fall into his lap without further trouble. For, Cromwell being bribed, who would try to snatch them from the powerful Abbot of Blossholme, and had he not a

title to them--of a sort?

And yet he was very ill at ease, for, as that voice had said--whose voice was it? he wondered, somehow it seemed familiar--the blood of these people lay on his head; and there came into his mind the text of Holy Writ which he had quoted to Christopher, that he who shed man's blood by man should his blood be shed. Also, although he had paid the Vicar-General to back him, monks were in no great favour at the English Court, and if this story travelled there, as it might, for even the strengthless dead find friends, it was possible that questions would be asked, questions hard to answer. Before Heaven he could justify himself for all that he had done, but before King Henry, who would usurp the powers of the very Pope, if the truth should chance to reach the royal ear--ah! that was another matter.

The room was cold after the heat of that great fire; his Southern blood, which had been warm enough, grew chill; loneliness and depression took hold of him; he began to wonder how far in the eyes of God above the end justifies the means. He opened the door of the place, and holding on to it lest the rough, wintry gale should tear it from its frail hinges, shouted aloud for Brother Martin, one of his chaplains.

Presently Martin arrived, emerging from the cattleshed, a lantern in his hand--a tall, thin man, with perplexed and melancholy eyes, long nose, and a clever face--and, bowing, asked his superior's pleasure.

"My pleasure, Brother," answered the Abbot, "is that you shut the door and keep out the wind, for this accursed climate is killing me. Yes, make up the fire if you can, but the wood is too wet to burn; also it smokes. There, what did I tell you? If this goes on we shall be hams by to-morrow morning. Let it be, for, after all, we have seen enough of fires to-night, and sit down to a cup of wine--nay, I forgot, you drink but water--well, then, to a bite of bread and meat."

"I thank you, my Lord Abbot," answered Martin, "but I may not touch flesh; this is Friday."

"Friday or no we have touched flesh--the flesh of men--up at the Towers yonder this night," answered the Abbot, with an uneasy laugh. "Still, obey your conscience, Brother, and eat bread. Soon it will be midnight, and the meat can follow."

The lean monk bowed, and, taking a hunch of bread, began to bite at it, for he was almost starving.

"Have you come from watching by the body of that bloody and rebellious man who has worked us so much harm and loss?" asked the Abbot presently.

The secretary nodded, then swallowing a crust, said--

"Aye, I have been praying over him and the others. At least he was brave, and it must be hard to see one's new-wed wife burn like a witch.



Also, now that I come to study the matter, I know not what his sin was who did but fight bravely when he was attacked. For without doubt the marriage is good, and whether he should have waited to ask your leave to make it is a point that might be debated through every court in Christendom."

The Abbot frowned, not appreciating this open and judicial tone in matters that touched him so nearly.

"You have honoured me of late by choosing me as one of your confessors, though I think you do not tell me everything, my Lord Abbot; therefore I bare my mind to you," continued Brother Martin apologetically.

"Speak on then, man. What do you mean?"

"I mean that I do not like this business," he answered slowly, in the intervals of munching at his bread. "You had a quarrel with Sir John Foterell about those lands which you say belong to the Abbey. God knows the right of it, for I understand no law; but he denied it, for did I not hear it yonder in your chamber at Blossholme? He denied it, and accused you of treason enough to hang all Blossholme, of which again God knows the truth. You threatened him in your anger, but he and his servant were armed and won out, and next day the two of them rode for London with certain papers. Well, that night Sir John Foterell was killed in the forest, though his servant Stokes escaped with the papers. Now, who killed him?"

The Abbot looked at him, then seemed to take a sudden resolution.

"Our people, those men-at-arms whom I have gathered for the defence of our House and the Church. My orders to them were to seize him living, but the old English bull would not yield, and fought so fiercely that it ended otherwise--to my sorrow."

The monk put down his bread, for which he seemed to have no further appetite.

"A dreadful deed," he said, "for which one day you must answer to God and man."

"For which we all must answer," corrected the Abbot, "down to the last lay-brother and soldier--you as much as any of us, Brother, for were you not present at our quarrel?"

"So be it, Abbot. Being innocent, I am ready. But that is not the end of it. The Lady Cicely, on hearing of this murder--nay, be not wrath, I know no other name for it--and learning that you claimed her as your ward, flies to her affianced lover, Sir Christopher Harflete, and that very day is married to him by the parish priest in yonder church."

"It was no marriage. Due notice had not been given. Moreover, how could my ward be wed without my leave?"

"She had not been served with notice of your wardship, if such exists, or so she declared," replied Martin in his quiet, obstinate voice.

"I think that there is no court in Europe which would void this open marriage when it learned that the parties lived a while as man and wife, and were so received by those about them--no, not the Pope himself."

"He who says that he is no lawyer still sets out the law," broke in Maldon sarcastically. "Well, what does it matter, seeing that death has voided it? Husband and wife, if such they were, are both dead; it is finished."

"No; for now they lay their appeal in the Court of Heaven, to which every one of us is summoned; and Heaven can stir up its ministers on earth. Oh! I like it not, I like it not; and I mourn for those two, so loving, brave, and young. Their blood and that of many more is on our hands--for what? A stretch of upland and of marsh which the King or others may seize to-morrow."

The Abbot seemed to cower beneath the weight of these sad, earnest words, and for a little while there was silence. Then he plucked up courage, and said--

"I am glad that you remember that their blood is on your hands as well as mine, since now, perhaps, you will keep them hidden."

He rose and walked to the door and the window to see that none were without, then returned and exclaimed fiercely--

"Fool, do you then think that these deeds were done to win a new estate? True it is that those lands are ours by right, and we need their revenues; but there is more behind. The whole Church of this realm is threatened by that accursed son of Belial who sits upon the throne. Why, what is it now, man?"

"Only that I am an Englishman, and love not to hear England's king called a son of Belial. His sins, I know, are many and black, like those of others--still, 'son of Belial!' Let his Highness hear it, and that name alone is enough to hang you!"

"Well, then, angel of grace, if it suits you better. At the least we are threatened. Against the law of God and man our blessed Queen, Catherine of Spain, is thrust away in favour of the slut who fills her place. Even now I have tidings from Kimbolton that she lies dying there of slow poison; so they say and I believe. Also I have other tidings. Fisher and More being murdered, Parliament next month will be moved to strike at the lesser monasteries and steal their goods, and after them our turn will come. But we will not bear it tamely, for ere this new year is out all England shall be ablaze, and I, Clement Maldon, I--I will light the fire. Now you have the truth, Martin. Will you betray me, as that dead knight would have done?"

"Nay, my Lord Abbot, your secrets are safe with me. Am I not your chaplain, and does not this wilful and rebellious King of ours work much mischief against God and His servants? Yet I tell you that I like it not, and cannot see the end. We English are a stiff-necked folk whom you of Spain do not understand and will never break, and Henry is strong and subtle; moreover, his people love him."

"I knew that I could trust you, Martin, and the proof of it is that I have spoken to you so openly," went on Maldon in a gentler voice. "Well, you shall hear all. The great Emperor of Germany and Spain is on our side, as, seeing his blood and faith, he must be. He will avenge the wrongs of the Church and of his royal aunt. I, who know him, am his agent here, and what I do is done at his bidding. But I must have more money than he finds me, and that is why I stirred in this matter of the Shefton lands. Also the Lady Cicely had jewels of vast price, though I fear greatly lest they should have been lost in the fire this night."

"Filthy lucre--the root of all evil," muttered Brother Martin.

"Aye, and of all good. Money, money--I must have more money to bribe men and buy arms, to defend that stronghold of Heaven, the Church. What matters it if lives are lost so that the immortal Church holds her own? Let them go. My friend, you are fearful; these deaths weigh upon your soul--aye, and on mine. I loved that girl, whom as a babe I held in my arms, and even her rough father, I loved him for his honest heart, although he always mistrusted me, the Spaniard--and rightly. The knight

Harflete, too, who lies yonder, he was of a brave breed, but not one who would have served our turn. Well, they are gone, and for these blood-sheddings we must find absolution."

"If we can."

"Oh! we can, we can. Already I have it in my pouch, under a seal you know. And for our bodies, fear not. There is such a gale rising in England as will blow out this petty breeze. A question of rights, some arrows shot, a fire and lives lost--what of that when it agitates betwixt powers temporal and spiritual, and which of them shall hold the sceptre in this mighty Britain? Martin, I have a mission for you that may lead you to a bishopric ere all is done, for that's your mind and aim, and if you would put off your doubts and moodiness you've got the brain to rule. That ship, the Great Yarmouth, which sailed for Spain some days ago, has been beat back into the river, and should weigh anchor again to-morrow morning. I have letters for the Spanish Court, and you shall take them with my verbal explanations, which I will give you presently, for they would hang us, and may not be trusted to writing. She is bound for Seville, but you will follow the Emperor wherever he may be. You will go, won't you?" and he glanced at him sideways.

"I obey orders," answered Martin, "though I know little of Spaniards or of Spanish."

"In every town the Benedictines have a monastery, and in every monastery interpreters, and you shall be accredited to them all who are of that great Brotherhood. Well, 'tis settled. Go, make ready as best you can; I must write. Stay; the sooner this Harflete is under ground the better. Bid that sturdy fellow, Bolle, find the sexton of the church and help dig his grave, for we will bury him at dawn. Now go, go, I tell you I must write. Come back in an hour, and I will give you money for your faring, also my secret messages."

Brother Martin bowed and went.

"A dangerous man," muttered the Abbot, as the door closed on him; "too honest for our game, and too much an Englishman. That native spirit peeps beneath his cowl; a monk should have no country and no kin. Well, he will learn a trick or two in Spain, and I'll make sure they keep him there a while. Now for my letters," and he sat down at the rude table and began to write.

Half-an-hour later the door opened and Martin entered.

"What is it now?" asked the Abbot testily. "I said, 'Come back in an hour.'"

"Aye, you said that, but I have good news for you that I thought you might like to hear."

"Out with it, then, man. It's scarce now-a-days. Have they found those jewels? No, how could they? the place still flares," and he glanced through the window-place. "What's the news?"

"Better than jewels. Christopher Harflete is not dead. While I was praying over him he turned his head and muttered. I think he is only stunned. You are skilled in medicine; come, look at him."

A minute later and the Abbot knelt over the senseless form of Christopher where it lay on the filthy floor of the neat-house. By the light of the lanterns with deft fingers he felt his wounded head, from which the shattered casque had been removed, and afterwards his heart and pulse.

"The skull is cut, but not broken," he said. "My judgment is that though he may lie unsensed for days, if fed and tended this man will live, being so young and strong. But if left alone in this cold place he will be dead by morning, and perhaps he is better dead," and he looked at Martin.

"That would be murder indeed," answered the secretary. "Come, let us bear him to the fire and pour milk down his throat. We may save him yet. Lift you his feet and I will take his head."

The Abbot did so, not very willingly, as it seemed to Martin, but rather as one who has no choice.



Half-an-hour later, when the hurts of Christopher had been dressed with ointment and bound up, and milk poured down his throat, which he swallowed although he was so senseless, the Abbot, looking at him, said to Martin--

"You gave orders for this Harflete's burial, did you not?"

The monk nodded.

"Then have you told any that he needs no grave at present?"

"No one except yourself."

The Abbot thought a while, rubbing his shaven chin.

"I think the funeral should go forward," he said presently. "Look not so frightened; I do not purpose to inter him living. But there is a dead man lying in that shed, Andrew Woods, my servant, the Scotch soldier whom Harflete slew. He has no friends here to claim him, and these two were of much the same height and breadth. Shrouded in a blanket, none would know one body from the other, and it will be thought that Andrew was buried with the rest. Let him be promoted in his death, and fill a knight's grave."

"To what purpose would you play so unholy a trick, which must, moreover,

be discovered in a day, seeing that Sir Christopher lives?" asked Martin, staring at him.

"For a very good purpose, my friend. It is well that Sir Christopher Harflete should seem to die, who, if he is known to be alive, has powerful kin in the south who will bring much trouble on us."

"Do you mean----? If so, before God I will have no hand in it."

"I said--seem to die. Where are your wits to-night?" answered the Abbot, with irritation. "Sir Christopher travels with you to Spain as our sick Brother Luiz, who, like myself, is of that country, and desires to return there, as we know, but is too ill to do so. You will nurse him, and on the ship he will die or recover, as God wills. If he recovers our Brotherhood will show him hospitality at Seville, notwithstanding his crimes, and by the time that he reaches England again, which may not be for a long while, men will have forgotten all this fray in a greater that draws on. Nor will he be harmed, seeing that the lady whom he pretends to have married is dead beyond a doubt, as you can tell him should he find his understanding."

"A strange game," muttered Martin.

"Strange or no, it is my game which I must play. Therefore question not, but be obedient, and silent also, on your oath," replied the Abbot in a cold, hard voice. "That covered litter which was brought here for the

wounded is in the next chamber. Wrap this man in blankets and a monk's robe, and we will place him in it. Then let him be borne to Blossholme as one of the dead by brethren who will ask no questions, and ere dawn on to the ship Great Yarmouth, if he still lives. It lies near the quay not half-a-mile from the Abbey gate. Be swift now, and help me. I will overtake you with the letters, and see that you are furnished with all things needful from our store. Also I must speak with the captain ere he weighs anchor. Waste no more time in talking, but obey and be secret."

"I obey, and I will be secret, as is my duty," answered Brother Martin, bowing his head humbly. "But what will be the end of all this business, God and His angels know alone. I say that I like it not."

"A very dangerous man," muttered the Abbot, as he watched Martin go.

"He also must bide a while in Spain; a long while. I'll see to it!"