V. THE SONG AND THE STRANGER

The trumpet-major now contrived to place himself near her, Anne's presence having evidently been a great pleasure to him since the moment of his first seeing her. She was quite at her ease with him, and asked him if he thought that Buonaparte would really come during the summer, and many other questions which the gallant dragoon could not answer, but which he nevertheless liked to be asked. William Tremlett, who had not enjoyed a sound night's rest since the First Consul's menace had become known, pricked up his ears at sound of this subject, and inquired if anybody had seen the terrible flat-bottomed boats that the enemy were to cross in.

'My brother Robert saw several of them paddling about the shore the last time he passed the Straits of Dover,' said the trumpet-major; and he further startled the company by informing them that there were supposed to be more than fifteen hundred of these boats, and that they would carry a hundred men apiece. So that a descent of one hundred and fifty thousand men might be expected any day as soon as Boney had brought his plans to bear.

'Lord ha' mercy upon us!' said William Tremlett.

'The night-time is when they will try it, if they try it at all,' said old Tullidge, in the tone of one whose watch at the beacon must, in the

nature of things, have given him comprehensive views of the situation. 'It is my belief that the point they will choose for making the shore is just over there,' and he nodded with indifference towards a section of the coast at a hideous nearness to the house in which they were assembled, whereupon Fencible Tremlett, and Cripplestraw of the Locals, tried to show no signs of trepidation.

'When d'ye think 'twill be?' said Volunteer Comfort, the blacksmith.

'I can't answer to a day,' said the corporal, 'but it will certainly be in a down-channel tide; and instead of pulling hard against it, he'll let his boats drift, and that will bring 'em right into Budmouth Bay. 'Twill be a beautiful stroke of war, if so be 'tis quietly done!'

'Beautiful,' said Cripplestraw, moving inside his clothes. 'But how if we should be all abed, corpel? You can't expect a man to be brave in his shirt, especially we Locals, that have only got so far as shoulder fire-locks.'

'He's not coming this summer. He'll never come at all,' said a tall sergeant-major decisively.

Loveday the soldier was too much engaged in attending upon Anne and her mother to join in these surmises, bestirring himself to get the ladies some of the best liquor the house afforded, which had, as a matter of fact, crossed the Channel as privately as Buonaparte wished his army to

do, and had been landed on a dark night over the cliff. After this he asked Anne to sing, but though she had a very pretty voice in private performances of that nature, she declined to oblige him; turning the subject by making a hesitating inquiry about his brother Robert, whom he had mentioned just before.

'Robert is as well as ever, thank you, Miss Garland,' he said. 'He is now mate of the brig Pewit--rather young for such a command; but the owner puts great trust in him.' The trumpet-major added, deepening his thoughts to a profounder view of the person discussed, 'Bob is in love.'

Anne looked conscious, and listened attentively; but Loveday did not go on.

'Much?' she asked.

'I can't exactly say. And the strange part of it is that he never tells us who the woman is. Nobody knows at all.'

'He will tell, of course?' said Anne, in the remote tone of a person with whose sex such matters had no connexion whatever.

Loveday shook his head, and the tete-a-tete was put an end to by a burst of singing from one of the sergeants, who was followed at the end of his song by others, each giving a ditty in his turn; the singer standing up in front of the table, stretching his chin well into the air, as though

to abstract every possible wrinkle from his throat, and then plunging into the melody. When this was over one of the foreign hussars--the genteel German of Miller Loveday's description, who called himself a Hungarian, and in reality belonged to no definite country--performed at Trumpet-major Loveday's request the series of wild motions that he denominated his national dance, that Anne might see what it was like. Miss Garland was the flower of the whole company; the soldiers one and all, foreign and English, seemed to be quite charmed by her presence, as indeed they well might be, considering how seldom they came into the society of such as she.

Anne and her mother were just thinking of retiring to their own dwelling when Sergeant Stanner of the --th Foot, who was recruiting at Budmouth, began a satirical song:--

When law'-yers strive' to heal' a breach',
And par-sons prac'-tise what' they preach';
Then lit'-tle Bo-ney he'll pounce down',
And march' his men' on Lon'-don town'!

Chorus.--Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lo'-rum,
Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lay.

When jus'-ti-ces' hold e'qual scales',
And rogues' are on'-ly found' in jails';
Then lit'tle Bo'-ney he'll pounce down',

And march' his men' on Lon'-don town'!

Chorus.--Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lo'-rum,
Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lay.

When rich' men find' their wealth' a curse',
And fill' there-with' the poor' man's purse';
Then lit'-tle Bo'-ney he'll pounce down',
And march' his men' on Lon'-don town'!

Chorus.--Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lo'-rum,
Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lay.

Poor Stanner! In spite of his satire, he fell at the bloody battle of Albuera a few years after this pleasantly spent summer at the Georgian watering-place, being mortally wounded and trampled down by a French hussar when the brigade was deploying into line under Beresford.

While Miller Loveday was saying 'Well done, Mr. Stanner!' at the close of the thirteenth stanza, which seemed to be the last, and Mr. Stanner was modestly expressing his regret that he could do no better, a stentorian voice was heard outside the window shutter repeating,

Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lo'-rum,
Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lay.

The company was silent in a moment at this reinforcement, and only the military tried not to look surprised. While all wondered who the singer could be somebody entered the porch; the door opened, and in came a young man, about the size and weight of the Farnese Hercules, in the uniform of the yeomanry cavalry.

''Tis young Squire Derriman, old Mr. Derriman's nephew,' murmured voices in the background.

Without waiting to address anybody, or apparently seeing who were gathered there, the colossal man waved his cap above his head and went on in tones that shook the window-panes:--

When hus'-bands with' their wives' agree'.
And maids' won't wed' from mod'-es-ty',
Then lit'-tle Bo'-ney he'll pounce down',
And march' his men' on Lon'-don town'!

Chorus.--Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lo'-rum,
Rol'-li-cum ro'-rum, tol'-lol-lay.

It was a verse which had been omitted by the gallant Stanner, out of respect to the ladies.

The new-comer was red-haired and of florid complexion, and seemed full of

a conviction that his whim of entering must be their pleasure, which for the moment it was.

'No ceremony, good men all,' he said; 'I was passing by, and my ear was caught by the singing. I like singing; 'tis warming and cheering, and shall not be put down. I should like to hear anybody say otherwise.'

'Welcome, Master Derriman,' said the miller, filling a glass and handing it to the yeoman. 'Come all the way from quarters, then? I hardly knowed ye in your soldier's clothes. You'd look more natural with a spud in your hand, sir. I shouldn't ha' known ye at all if I hadn't heard that you were called out.'

'More natural with a spud!--have a care, miller,' said the young giant, the fire of his complexion increasing to scarlet. 'I don't mean anger, but--but--a soldier's honour, you know!'

The military in the background laughed a little, and the yeoman then for the first time discovered that there were more regulars present than one. He looked momentarily disconcerted, but expanded again to full assurance.

'Right, right, Master Derriman, no offence--'twas only my joke,' said the genial miller. 'Everybody's a soldier nowadays. Drink a drap o' this cordial, and don't mind words.'

The young man drank without the least reluctance, and said, 'Yes, miller,

I am called out. 'Tis ticklish times for us soldiers now; we hold our lives in our hands--What are those fellows grinning at behind the table?--I say, we do!'

'Staying with your uncle at the farm for a day or two, Mr. Derriman?'

'No, no; as I told you, six mile off. Billeted at Casterbridge. But I have to call and see the old, old--'

'Gentleman?'

'Gentleman!--no, skinflint. He lives upon the sweepings of the barton; ha, ha!' And the speaker's regular white teeth showed themselves like snow in a Dutch cabbage. 'Well, well, the profession of arms makes a man proof against all that. I take things as I find 'em.'

'Quite right, Master Derriman. Another drop?'

'No, no. I'll take no more than is good for me--no man should; so don't tempt me.'

The yeoman then saw Anne, and by an unconscious gravitation went towards
her and the other women, flinging a remark to John Loveday in passing.
'Ah, Loveday! I heard you were come; in short, I come o' purpose to see you. Glad to see you enjoying yourself at home again.'

The trumpet-major replied civilly, though not without grimness, for he seemed hardly to like Derriman's motion towards Anne.

'Widow Garland's daughter!--yes, 'tis! surely. You remember me? I have been here before. Festus Derriman, Yeomanry Cavalry.'

Anne gave a little curtsey. 'I know your name is Festus--that's all.'

'Yes, 'tis well known--especially latterly.' He dropped his voice to confidence pitch. 'I suppose your friends here are disturbed by my coming in, as they don't seem to talk much? I don't mean to interrupt the party; but I often find that people are put out by my coming among 'em, especially when I've got my regimentals on.'

'La! and are they?'

'Yes; 'tis the way I have.' He further lowered his tone, as if they had been old friends, though in reality he had only seen her three or four times. 'And how did you come to be here? Dash my wig, I don't like to see a nice young lady like you in this company. You should come to some of our yeomanry sprees in Casterbridge or Shottsford-Forum. O, but the girls do come! The yeomanry are respected men, men of good substantial families, many farming their own land; and every one among us rides his own charger, which is more than these cussed fellows do.' He nodded towards the dragoons.

'Hush, hush! Why, these are friends and neighbours of Miller Loveday, and he is a great friend of ours--our best friend,' said Anne with great emphasis, and reddening at the sense of injustice to their host. 'What are you thinking of, talking like that? It is ungenerous in you.'

'Ha, ha! I've affronted you. Isn't that it, fair angel, fair--what do you call it?--fair vestal? Ah, well! would you was safe in my own house! But honour must be minded now, not courting. Rollicum-rorum, tol-lol-lorum. Pardon me, my sweet, I like ye! It may be a come down for me, owning land; but I do like ye.'

'Sir, please be quiet,' said Anne, distressed.

'I will, I will. Well, Corporal Tullidge, how's your head?' he said, going towards the other end of the room, and leaving Anne to herself.

The company had again recovered its liveliness, and it was a long time before the bouncing Rufus who had joined them could find heart to tear himself away from their society and good liquors, although he had had quite enough of the latter before he entered. The natives received him at his own valuation, and the soldiers of the camp, who sat beyond the table, smiled behind their pipes at his remarks, with a pleasant twinkle of the eye which approached the satirical, John Loveday being not the least conspicuous in this bearing. But he and his friends were too courteous on such an occasion as the present to challenge the young man's

large remarks, and readily permitted him to set them right on the details of camping and other military routine, about which the troopers seemed willing to let persons hold any opinion whatever, provided that they themselves were not obliged to give attention to it; showing, strangely enough, that if there was one subject more than another which never interested their minds, it was the art of war. To them the art of enjoying good company in Overcombe Mill, the details of the miller's household, the swarming of his bees, the number of his chickens, and the fatness of his pigs, were matters of infinitely greater concern.

The present writer, to whom this party has been described times out of number by members of the Loveday family and other aged people now passed away, can never enter the old living-room of Overcombe Mill without beholding the genial scene through the mists of the seventy or eighty years that intervene between then and now. First and brightest to the eye are the dozen candles, scattered about regardless of expense, and kept well snuffed by the miller, who walks round the room at intervals of five minutes, snuffers in hand, and nips each wick with great precision, and with something of an executioner's grim look upon his face as he closes the snuffers upon the neck of the candle. Next to the candle-light show the red and blue coats and white breeches of the soldiers--nearly twenty of them in all besides the ponderous Derriman--the head of the latter, and, indeed, the heads of all who are standing up, being in dangerous proximity to the black beams of the ceiling. There is not one among them who would attach any meaning to 'Vittoria,' or gather

from the syllables 'Waterloo' the remotest idea of his own glory or death. Next appears the correct and innocent Anne, little thinking what things Time has in store for her at no great distance off. She looks at Derriman with a half-uneasy smile as he clanks hither and thither, and hopes he will not single her out again to hold a private dialogue with--which, however, he does, irresistibly attracted by the white muslin figure. She must, of course, look a little gracious again now, lest his mood should turn from sentimental to quarrelsome--no impossible contingency with the yeoman-soldier, as her quick perception had noted.

'Well, well; this idling won't do for me, folks,' he at last said, to Anne's relief. 'I ought not to have come in, by rights; but I heard you enjoying yourselves, and thought it might be worth while to see what you were up to; I have several miles to go before bedtime;' and stretching his arms, lifting his chin, and shaking his head, to eradicate any unseemly curve or wrinkle from his person, the yeoman wished them an off-hand good-night, and departed.

'You should have teased him a little more, father,' said the trumpet-major drily. 'You could soon have made him as crabbed as a bear.'

'I didn't want to provoke the chap--'twasn't worth while. He came in friendly enough,' said the gentle miller without looking up.

'I don't think he was overmuch friendly,' said John.

''Tis as well to be neighbourly with folks, if they be not quite onbearable,' his father genially replied, as he took off his coat to go and draw more ale--this periodical stripping to the shirt-sleeves being necessitated by the narrowness of the cellar and the smeary effect of its numerous cobwebs upon best clothes.

Some of the guests then spoke of Fess Derriman as not such a bad young man if you took him right and humoured him; others said that he was nobody's enemy but his own; and the elder ladies mentioned in a tone of interest that he was likely to come into a deal of money at his uncle's death. The person who did not praise was the one who knew him best, who had known him as a boy years ago, when he had lived nearer to Overcombe than he did at present. This unappreciative person was the trumpet-major.