

## HAL O' THE DRAFT

A rainy afternoon drove Dan and Una over to play pirates in the Little Mill. If you don't mind rats on the rafters and oats in your shoes, the mill-attic, with its trap-doors and inscriptions on beams about floods and sweethearts, is a splendid place. It is lighted by a foot-square window, called Duck Window, that looks across to Little Lindens Farm, and the spot where Jack Cade was killed.

When they had climbed the attic ladder (they called it the 'mainmast tree' out of the ballad of Sir Andrew Barton, and Dan 'swarved it with might and main,' as the ballad says) they saw a man sitting on Duck window-sill. He was dressed in a plum-coloured doublet and tight plum-coloured hose, and he drew busily in a red-edged book.

'Sit ye! Sit ye!' Puck cried from a rafter overhead. 'See what it is to be beautiful! Sir Harry Dawe—pardon, Hal—says I am the very image of a head for a gargoyle.'

The man laughed and raised his dark velvet cap to the children, and his grizzled hair bristled out in a stormy fringe. He was old—forty at least—but his eyes were young, with funny little wrinkles all round them. A satchel of embroidered leather hung from his broad belt, which looked interesting.

‘May we see?’ said Una, coming forward.

‘Surely—sure-ly!’ he said, moving up on the window-seat, and returned to his work with a silver-pointed pencil. Puck sat as though the grin were fixed for ever on his broad face, while they watched the quick, certain fingers that copied it. Presently the man took a reed pen from his satchel, and trimmed it with a little ivory knife, carved in the semblance of a fish.

‘Oh, what a beauty!’ cried Dan.

‘Ware fingers! That blade is perilous sharp. I made it myself of the best Low Country cross-bow steel. And so, too, this fish. When his back-fin travels to his tail—so—he swallows up the blade, even as the whale swallowed Gaffer Jonah.... Yes, and that’s my ink-horn. I made the four silver saints round it. Press Barnabas’s head. It opens, and then——’ He dipped the trimmed pen, and with careful boldness began to put in the essential lines of Puck’s rugged face, that had been but faintly revealed by the silver-point.

The children gasped, for it fairly leaped from the page.

As he worked, and the rain fell on the tiles, he talked—now clearly, now muttering, now breaking off to frown or smile at his work. He told them he was born at Little Lindens Farms, and his father used to beat him for drawing things instead of doing things, till an old priest called Father

Roger, who drew illuminated letters in rich people's books, coaxed the parents to let him take the boy as a sort of painter's apprentice. Then he went with Father Roger to Oxford, where he cleaned plates and carried cloaks and shoes for the scholars of a College called Merton.

'Didn't you hate that?' said Dan after a great many other questions.

'I never thought on't. Half Oxford was building new colleges or beautifying the old, and she had called to her aid the master-craftsmen of all Christendie—kings in their trade and honoured of Kings. I knew them. I worked for them: that was enough. No wonder——' He stopped and laughed.

'You became a great man,' said Puck.

'They said so, Robin. Even Bramante said so.'

'Why? What did you do?' Dan asked.

The artist looked at him queerly. 'Things in stone and such, up and down England. You would not have heard of 'em. To come nearer home, I re-built this little St. Bartholomew's church of ours. It cost me more trouble and sorrow than aught I've touched in my life. But 'twas a sound lesson.'

'Um,' said Dan. 'We had lessons this morning.'

'I'll not afflict ye, lad,' said Hal, while Puck roared. 'Only 'tis strange to think how that little church was re-built, re-roofed, and made glorious, thanks to some few godly Sussex iron-masters, a Bristol sailor lad, a proud ass called Hal o' the Draft because, d'you see, he was always drawing and drafting; and'—he dragged the words slowly—'and a Scotch pirate.'

'Pirate?' said Dan. He wriggled like a hooked fish.

'Even that Andrew Barton you were singing of on the stair just now.' He dipped again in the ink-well, and held his breath over a sweeping line, as though he had forgotten everything else.

'Pirates don't build churches, do they?' said Dan. 'Or do they?'

'They help mightily,' Hal laughed. 'But you were at your lessons this morn, Jack Scholar?'

'Oh, pirates aren't lessons. It was only Bruce and his silly old spider,' said Una. 'Why did Sir Andrew Barton help you?'

'I question if he ever knew it,' said Hal, twinkling. 'Robin, how a-mischief's name am I to tell these innocents what comes of sinful pride?'

'Oh, we know all about that,' said Una pertly. 'If you get too

beany—that's cheeky—you get sat upon, of course.'

Hal considered a moment, pen in air, and Puck said some long words.

'Aha! That was my case too,' he cried. 'Beany—you say—but certainly I did not conduct myself well. I was proud of—of such things as porches—a Galilee porch at Lincoln for choice—proud of one Torrigiano's arm on my shoulder, proud of my knighthood when I made the gilt scroll-work for The Sovereign—our King's ship. But Father Roger sitting in Merton Library, he did not forget me. At the top of my pride, when I and no other should have builded the porch at Lincoln, he laid it on me with a terrible forefinger to go back to my Sussex clays and re-build, at my own charges, my own church, where we Dawes have been buried for six generations. "Out! Son of my Art!" said he. "Fight the Devil at home ere you call yourself a man and a craftsman." And I quaked, and I went.... How's yon, Robin?' He flourished the finished sketch before Puck.

'Me! Me past peradventure,' said Puck, smirking like a man at a mirror.

'Ah, see! The rain has took off! I hate housen in daylight.'

'Whoop! Holiday!' cried Hal, leaping up. 'Who's for my Little Lindens? We can talk there.'

They tumbled downstairs, and turned past the dripping willows by the sunny

mill dam.

‘Body o’ me,’ said Hal, staring at the hop-garden, where the hops were just ready to blossom. ‘What are these vines? No, not vines, and they twine the wrong way to beans.’ He began to draw in his ready book.

‘Hops. New since your day,’ said Puck. ‘They’re an herb of Mars, and their flowers dried flavour ale. We say:—

“‘Turkeys, Heresy, Hops, and Beer  
Came into England all in one year.’”

‘Heresy I know. I’ve seen Hops—God be praised for their beauty! What is your Turkis?’

The children laughed. They knew the Lindens turkeys, and as soon as they reached Lindens’ orchard on the hill the flock charged at them.

Out came Hal’s book at once. ‘Hoity-toity!’ he cried. ‘Here’s Pride in purple feathers! Here’s wrathful contempt and the Poms of the Flesh! How d’you call them?’

‘Turkeys! Turkeys!’ the children shouted, as the old gobbler raved and flamed against Hal’s plum-coloured hose.

‘Save Your Magnificence!’ he said. ‘I’ve drafted two good new things to-day.’ And he doffed his cap to the bubbling bird.

Then they walked through the grass to the knoll where Little Lindens stands. The old farm-house, weather-tiled to the ground, took almost the colour of a blood-ruby in the afternoon light. The pigeons pecked at the mortar in the chimney-stacks; the bees that had lived under the tiles since it was built filled the hot August air with their booming; and the smell of the box-tree by the dairy-window mixed with the smell of earth after rain, bread after baking, and a tickle of wood-smoke.

The farmer's wife came to the door, baby on arm, shaded her brows against the sun, stooped to pluck a sprig of rosemary, and turned down the orchard. The old spaniel in his barrel barked once or twice to show he was in charge of the empty house. Puck clicked back the garden-gate.

'D'you marvel that I love it?' said Hal, in a whisper. 'What can town folk know of the nature of housen—or land?'

They perched themselves arow on the old hacked oak bench in Lindens' garden, looking across the valley of the brook at the fern-covered dimples and hollows of the Forge behind Hobden's cottage. The old man was cutting a faggot in his garden by the hives. It was quite a second after his chopper fell that the chump of the blow reached their lazy ears.

'Eh—yeh!' said Hal. 'I mind when where that old gaffer stands was Nether Forge—Master John Collins's foundry. Many a night has his big trip-hammer

shook me in my bed here. Boom-bitty! Boom-bitty! If the wind was east, I could hear Master Tom Collins's forge at Stockens answering his brother, Boom-ooop! Boom-ooop! and midway between, Sir John Pelham's sledge-hammers at Brightling would strike in like a pack o'scholars, and "Hic-haec-hoc" they'd say, "Hic-haec-hoc," till I fell asleep. Yes. The valley was as full o' forges and fineries as a May shaw o' cuckoos. All gone to grass now!'

'What did they make?' said Dan.

'Guns for the King's ships—and for others. Serpentine and cannon mostly. When the guns were cast, down would come the King's Officers, and take our plough-oxen to haul them to the coast. Look! Here's one of the first and finest craftsmen of the Sea!'

He fluttered back a page of his book, and showed them a young man's head. Underneath was written: 'Sebastianus.'

'He came down with a King's Order on Master John Collins for twenty serpentine (wicked little cannon they be!) to furnish a venture of ships. I drafted him thus sitting by our fire telling Mother of the new lands he'd find the far side the world. And he found them, too! There's a nose to cleave through unknown seas! Cabot was his name—a Bristol lad—half a foreigner. I set a heap by him. He helped me to my church-building.'



'I thought that was Sir Andrew Barton,' said Dan.

'Ay, but foundations before roofs,' Hal answered. 'Sebastian first put me in the way of it. I had come down here, not to serve God as a craftsman should, but to show my people how great a craftsman I was. They cared not, and it served me right, one split straw for my craft or my greatness. What a murrain call had I, they said, to mell with old St. Barnabas's? Ruinous the church had been since the Black Death, and ruinous she should remain;

and I could hang myself in my new scaffold-ropes! Gentle and simple, high and low—the Hayes, the Fowles, the Fanners, the Collinses—they were all in a tale against me. Only Sir John Pelham up yonder to Brightling bade me heart-up and go on. Yet how could I? Did I ask Master Collins for his timber-tug to haul beams? The oxen had gone to Lewes after lime. Did he promise me a set of iron cramps or ties for the roof? They never came to hand, or else they were spaulty or cracked. So with everything. Nothing said, but naught done except I stood by them, and then done amiss. I thought the countryside was fair bewitched.'

'It was, sure-ly,' said Puck, knees under chin. 'Did you never suspect any one?'

'Not till Sebastian came for his guns, and John Collins played him the same dog's tricks as he'd played me with my ironwork. Week in, week out, two of three serpentines would be flawed in the casting, and only fit, they said, to be remelted. Then John Collins would shake his head, and vow

he could pass no cannon for the King's service that were not perfect. Saints! How Sebastian stormed! I know, for we sat on this bench sharing our sorrows inter-common.

'When Sebastian had fumed away six weeks at Lindens and gotten just six serpentines, Dirk Brenzett, Master of the Cygnet hoy, sends me word that the block of stone he was fetching me from France for our new font he'd hove overboard to lighten his ship, chased by Andrew Barton up to Rye Port.'

'Ah! The pirate!' said Dan.

'Yes. And while I am tearing my hair over this, Ticehurst Will, my best mason, comes to me shaking, and vowing that the Devil, horned, tailed, and chained, has run out on him from the church-tower, and the men would work there no more. So I took 'em off the foundations, which we were strengthening, and went into the Bell Tavern for a cup of ale. Says Master John Collins: "Have it your own way, lad; but if I was you, I'd take the sinnification o' the sign, and leave old Barnabas's Church alone!" And they all wagged their sinful heads, and agreed. Less afraid of the Devil than of me—as I saw later.

'When I brought my sweet news to Lindens, Sebastian was limewashing the kitchen-beams for Mother. He loved her like a son.

"Cheer up, lad," he says. "God's where He was. Only you and I chance to

be pure pute asses! We've been tricked, Hal, and more shame to me, a sailor, that I did not guess it before! You must leave your belfry alone, forsooth, because the Devil is adrift there; and I cannot get my serpentines because John Collins cannot cast them aright. Meantime Andrew Barton hawks off the Port of Rye. And why? To take those very serpentines which poor Cabot must whistle for; the said serpentines, I'll wager my share of new Continents, being now hid away in St. Barnabas church tower. Clear as the Irish coast at noonday!"

"They'd sure never dare to do it," I said; "and for another thing, selling cannon to the King's enemies is black treason—hanging and fine."

"It is sure large profit. Men'll dare any gallows for that. I have been a trader myself," says he. "We must be upsides with 'em for the honour of Bristol."

Then he hatched a plot, sitting on the lime-wash bucket. We gave out to ride o' Tuesday to London and made a show of making farewells of our friends—especially of Master John Collins. But at Wadhurst Woods we turned; rode by night to the watermeadows; hid our horses in a willow-tot at the foot of the glebe, and stole a-tiptoe up hill to Barnabas's church again. A thick mist, and a moon coming through.

I had no sooner locked the tower-door behind us than over goes Sebastian full length in the dark.

“Pest!” he says. “Step high and feel low, Hal. I’ve stumbled over guns before.”

I groped, and one by one—the tower was pitchy dark—I counted the lither barrels of twenty serpentines laid out on pease-straw. No conceal at all!

“There’s two demi-cannon my end,” says Sebastian, slapping metal.

“They’ll be for Andrew Barton’s lower deck. Honest—honest John Collins! So this is his warehouse, his arsenal, his armoury! Now, see you why your pokings and prying have raised the Devil in Sussex? You’ve hindered John’s lawful trade for months,” and he laughed where he lay.

‘A clay-cold tower is no fireside at midnight, so we climbed the belfry stairs, and there Sebastian trips over a cow-hide with its horns and tail.

“Aha! Your Devil has left his doublet! Does it become me, Hal?” He draws it on and capers in the slits of window-moonlight—won’erful devilish-like. Then he sits on the stair, rapping with his tail on a board, and his back-aspect was dreader than his front; and a howlet lit in, and screeched at the horns of him.

“If you’d keep out the Devil, shut the door,” he whispered. “And that’s another false proverb, Hal, for I can hear your tower-door opening.”

“I locked it. Who a-plague has another key, then?” I said.

“All the congregation, to judge by their feet,” he says, and peers into the blackness. “Still! Still, Hal! Hear ’em grunt! That’s more o’ my serpentines, I’ll be bound. One—two—three—four they bear in! Faith, Andrew equips himself like an admiral! Twenty-four serpentines in all!”

‘As if it had been an echo, we heard John Collins’s voice come up all hollow: “Twenty-four serpentines and two demi-cannon. That’s the full tally for Sir Andrew Barton.”

“Courtesy costs naught,” whispers Sebastian. “Shall I drop my dagger on his head?”

“They go over to Rye o’ Thursday in the wool-wains, hid under the wool packs. Dirk Brenzett meets them at Udimore, as before,” says John.

“Lord! What a worn, handsmooth trade it is!” says Sebastian. “I lay we are the sole two babes in the village that have not our lawful share in the venture.”

‘There was a full score folk below, talking like all Robertsbridge Market. We counted them by voice.

‘Master John Collins pipes: “The guns for the French carrack must lie here next month. Will, when does your young fool (me, so please you!) come back from Lunnon?”

“No odds,” I heard Ticehurst Will answer. “Lay ’em just where you’ve a mind, Mus’ Collins. We’re all too afraid o’ the Devil to mell with the tower now.” And the long knave laughed.

“Ah! ’tis easy enow for you to raise the Devil, Will,” says another—Ralph Hobden from the Forge.

“Aaa-men!” roars Sebastian, and ere I could hold him, he leaps down the stairs—won’erful devilish-like—howling no bounds. He had scarce time to lay out for the nearest than they ran. Saints, how they ran! We heard them pound on the door of the Bell Tavern, and then we ran too.

“What’s next?” says Sebastian, looping up his cow-tail as he leaped the briars. “I’ve broke honest John’s face.”

“Ride to Sir John Pelham’s,” I said. “He is the only one that ever stood by me.”

‘We rode to Brightling, and past Sir John’s lodges, where the keepers would have shot at us for deer-stealers, and we had Sir John down into his Justice’s chair, and when we had told him our tale and showed him the cow-hide which Sebastian wore still girt about him, he laughed till the tears ran.

“Wel-a-well!” he says. “I’ll see justice done before daylight. What’s your complaint? Master Collins is my old friend.”

“He’s none of mine,” I cried. “When I think how he and his likes have baulked and dozed and cozened me at every turn over the church”—and I choked at the thought.

“Ah, but ye see now they needed it for another use,” says he, smoothly.

“So they did my serpentines,” Sebastian cries. “I should be half across the Western Ocean by this if my guns had been ready. But they’re sold to a Scotch pirate by your old friend.”

“Where’s your proof?” says Sir John, stroking his beard.

“I broke my shins over them not an hour since, and I heard John give order where they were to be taken,” says Sebastian.

“Words! Words only,” says Sir John. “Master Collins is somewhat of a liar at best.”

‘He carried it so gravely, that for the moment, I thought he was dipped in this secret traffick too, and that there was not an honest ironmaster in Sussex.

“Name o’ Reason!” says Sebastian, and raps with his cow-tail on the table, “Whose guns are they, then?”

“Yours, manifestly,” says Sir John. “You come with the King’s Order for ’em, and Master Collins casts them in his foundry. If he chooses to bring them up from Nether Forge and lay ’em out in the church tower, why they are e’en so much the nearer to the main road and you are saved a day’s hauling. What a coil to make of a mere act of neighbourly kindness, lad!”

“I fear I have requited him very scurvily,” says Sebastian, looking at his knuckles. “But what of the demi-cannon? I could do with ’em well, but they are not in the King’s Order.”

“Kindness—loving-kindness,” says Sir John. “Questionless, in his zeal for the King and his love for you, John adds those two cannon as a gift. ’Tis plain as this coming daylight, ye stockfish!”

“So it is,” says Sebastian. “Oh, Sir John, Sir John, why did you never use the sea? You are lost ashore.” And he looked on him with great love.

“I do my best in my station.” Sir John strokes his beard again and rolls forth his deep drumming Justice’s voice thus:—“But—suffer me!—you two lads, on some midnight frolic into which I probe not, roystering around the taverns, surprise Master Collins at his”—he thinks a moment—“at his good deeds done by stealth. Ye surprise him, I say, cruelly.”

“Truth, Sir John. If you had seen him run!” says Sebastian.



“On this you ride breakneck to me with a tale of pirates, and wool-wains, and cow-hides, which, though it hath moved my mirth as a man, offendeth my reason as a magistrate. So I will e’en accompany you back to the tower with, perhaps, some few of my own people, and three to four wagons, and I’ll be your warrant that Master John Collins will freely give you your guns and your demi-cannon, Master Sebastian.” He breaks into his proper voice—“I warned the old tod and his neighbours long ago that they’d come to trouble with their side-sellings and bye-dealings; but we cannot have half Sussex hanged for a little gun-running. Are ye content, lads?”

“I’d commit any treason for two demi-cannon,” said Sebastian, and rubs his hands.

“Ye have just compounded with rank treason-felony for the same bribe,” says Sir John. “Wherefore to horse, and get the guns.”

‘But Master Collins meant the guns for Sir Andrew Barton all along, didn’t he?’ said Dan.

‘Questionless, that he did,’ said Hal. ‘But he lost them. We poured into the village on the red edge of dawn, Sir John horsed, in half-armor, his pennon flying; behind him thirty stout Brightling knaves, five abreast; behind them four wool-wains, and behind them four trumpets to triumph over the jest, blowing: Our King went forth to Normandie. When we halted and rolled the ringing guns out of the tower, ’twas for all the world like Friar Roger’s picture of the French siege in the Queen’s Missal-book.’

‘And what did we—I mean, what did our village do?’ said Dan.

‘Oh! Bore it nobly—nobly,’ cried Hal. ‘Though they had tricked me, I was proud of us. They came out of their housen, looked at that little army as though it had been a post, and went their shut-mouthed way. Never a sign! Never a word! They’d ha’ perished sooner than let Brightling overcrow us. Even that villain, Ticehurst Will, coming out of the Bell for his morning ale, he all but ran under Sir John’s horse.

“Ware, Sirrah Devil!” cries Sir John, reining back.

“Oh!” says Will. “Market day, is it? And all the bullocks from Brightling here?”

I spared him his belting for that—the brazen knave!

‘But John Collins was our masterpiece! He happened along-street (his jaw tied up where Sebastian had clouted him) when we were trundling the first demi-cannon through the lych-gate.

“I reckon you’ll find her middlin’ heavy,” he says. “If you’ve a mind to pay, I’ll loan ye my timber-tug. She won’t lie easy on ary wool-wain.”

That was the one time I ever saw Sebastian taken flat aback. He opened and shut his mouth, fishy-like.

“No offence,” says Master John. “You’ve got her reasonable good cheap. I thought ye might not grudge me a groat if I help move her.” Ah, he was a masterpiece! They say that morning’s work cost our John two hundred pounds, and he never winked an eyelid, not even when he saw the guns all carted off to Lewes.’

‘Neither then nor later?’ said Puck.

‘Once. ’Twas after he gave St. Barnabas the new chime of bells. (Oh, there was nothing the Collinses, or the Hayes, or the Fowles, or the Fanners would not do for the church then! “Ask and have” was their song.) We had rung ’em in, and he was in the tower with Black Nick Fowle, that gave us our rood-screen. The old man pinches the bell-rope one hand and scratches his neck with t’other. “Sooner she was pulling yon clapper than my neck,” he says. That was all! That was Sussex—seely Sussex for everlastin’!

‘And what happened after?’ said Una.

‘I went back into England,’ said Hal, slowly. ‘I’d had my lesson against pride. But they tell me I left St. Barnabas’s a jewel—just about a jewel! Wel-a-well! ’Twas done for and among my own people, and—Father Roger was right—I never knew such trouble or such triumph since. That’s the nature o’ things. A dear—dear land.’ He dropped his chin on his chest.

‘There’s your Father at the Forge. What’s he talking to old Hobden about?’  
said Puck, opening his hand with three leaves in it.

Dan looked towards the cottage.

‘Oh, I know. It’s that old oak lying across the brook. Pater always wants  
it grubbed.’

In the still valley they could hear old Hobden’s deep tones.

‘Have it as you’ve a mind to,’ he was saying. ‘But the vivers of her  
roots they hold the bank together. If you grub her out, the bank she’ll  
all come tearin’ down, an’ next floods the brook’ll swarve up. But have it  
as you’ve a mind. The mistuss she sets a heap by the ferns on her  
trunk.’

‘Oh! I’ll think it over,’ said the Pater.

Una laughed a little bubbling chuckle.

‘What Devil’s in that belfry?’ said Hal, with a lazy laugh. ‘That should  
be Hobden by his voice.’

‘Why, the oak is the regular bridge for all the rabbits between the Three  
Acre and our meadow. The best place for wires on the farm, Hobden says.  
He’s got two there now,’ Una answered. ‘He won’t ever let it be

grubbed!’

‘Ah, Sussex! Silly Sussex for everlastin’,’ murmured Hal; and the next moment their Father’s voice calling across to Little Lindens broke the spell as St. Barnabas’s clock struck five.