

## Chapter XVII. Foo-foo the First.

Miles Hendon hurried along toward the Southwark end of the bridge, keeping a sharp look-out for the persons he sought, and hoping and expecting to overtake them presently. He was disappointed in this, however. By asking questions, he was enabled to track them part of the way through Southwark; then all traces ceased, and he was perplexed as to how to proceed. Still, he continued his efforts as best he could during the rest of the day. Nightfall found him leg-weary, half-famished, and his desire as far from accomplishment as ever; so he supped at the Tabard Inn and went to bed, resolved to make an early start in the morning, and give the town an exhaustive search. As he lay thinking and planning, he presently began to reason thus: The boy would escape from the ruffian, his reputed father, if possible; would he go back to London and seek his former haunts? No, he would not do that, he would avoid recapture. What, then, would he do? Never having had a friend in the world, or a protector, until he met Miles Hendon, he would naturally try to find that friend again, provided the effort did not require him to go toward London and danger. He would strike for Hendon Hall, that is what he would do, for he knew Hendon was homeward bound and there he might expect to find him. Yes, the case was plain to Hendon--he must lose no more time in Southwark, but move at once through Kent, toward Monk's Holm, searching the wood and inquiring as he went. Let us return to the vanished little King now.

The ruffian whom the waiter at the inn on the bridge saw 'about to join' the youth and the King did not exactly join them, but fell in close behind them and followed their steps. He said nothing. His left arm was in a sling, and he wore a large green patch over his left eye; he limped slightly, and used an oaken staff as a support. The youth led the King a crooked course through Southwark, and by-and-by struck into the high road

beyond. The King was irritated, now, and said he would stop here--it was Hendon's place to come to him, not his to go to Hendon. He would not endure such insolence; he would stop where he was. The youth said--

"Thou'lt tarry here, and thy friend lying wounded in the wood yonder? So be it, then."

The King's manner changed at once. He cried out--

"Wounded? And who hath dared to do it? But that is apart; lead on, lead on! Faster, sirrah! Art shod with lead? Wounded, is he? Now though the doer of it be a duke's son he shall rue it!"

It was some distance to the wood, but the space was speedily traversed. The youth looked about him, discovered a bough sticking in the ground, with a small bit of rag tied to it, then led the way into the forest,

watching for similar boughs and finding them at intervals; they were evidently guides to the point he was aiming at. By-and-by an open place was reached, where were the charred remains of a farm-house, and near them a barn which was falling to ruin and decay. There was no sign of life anywhere, and utter silence prevailed. The youth entered the barn, the King following eagerly upon his heels. No one there! The King shot a surprised and suspicious glance at the youth, and asked--

"Where is he?"

A mocking laugh was his answer. The King was in a rage in a moment; he seized a billet of wood and was in the act of charging upon the youth when another mocking laugh fell upon his ear. It was from the lame ruffian who had been following at a distance. The King turned and said angrily--

"Who art thou? What is thy business here?"

"Leave thy foolery," said the man, "and quiet thyself. My disguise is none so good that thou canst pretend thou knowest not thy father through it."

"Thou art not my father. I know thee not. I am the King. If thou hast hid my servant, find him for me, or thou shalt sup sorrow for what thou

hast done."

John Canty replied, in a stern and measured voice--

"It is plain thou art mad, and I am loath to punish thee; but if thou provoke me, I must. Thy prating doth no harm here, where there are no ears that need to mind thy follies; yet it is well to practise thy tongue to wary speech, that it may do no hurt when our quarters change. I have done a murder, and may not tarry at home--neither shalt thou, seeing I need thy service. My name is changed, for wise reasons; it is Hobbs --John Hobbs; thine is Jack--charge thy memory accordingly. Now, then, speak. Where is thy mother? Where are thy sisters? They came not to the place appointed--knowest thou whither they went?"

The King answered sullenly--

"Trouble me not with these riddles. My mother is dead; my sisters are in the palace."

The youth near by burst into a derisive laugh, and the King would have assaulted him, but Canty--or Hobbs, as he now called himself--prevented him, and said--

"Peace, Hugo, vex him not; his mind is astray, and thy ways fret him.

Sit thee down, Jack, and quiet thyself; thou shalt have a morsel to eat, anon."

Hobbs and Hugo fell to talking together, in low voices, and the King removed himself as far as he could from their disagreeable company. He withdrew into the twilight of the farther end of the barn, where he found the earthen floor bedded a foot deep with straw. He lay down here, drew straw over himself in lieu of blankets, and was soon absorbed in thinking. He had many griefs, but the minor ones were swept almost into forgetfulness by the supreme one, the loss of his father. To the rest of the world the name of Henry VIII. brought a shiver, and suggested an ogre whose nostrils breathed destruction and whose hand dealt scourgings and death; but to this boy the name brought only sensations of pleasure; the figure it invoked wore a countenance that was all gentleness and affection. He called to mind a long succession of loving passages between his father and himself, and dwelt fondly upon them, his unstinted tears attesting how deep and real was the grief that possessed his heart. As the afternoon wasted away, the lad, wearied with his troubles, sank gradually into a tranquil and healing slumber.

After a considerable time--he could not tell how long--his senses struggled to a half-consciousness, and as he lay with closed eyes vaguely wondering where he was and what had been happening, he noted a murmurous

sound, the sullen beating of rain upon the roof. A snug sense of comfort stole over him, which was rudely broken, the next moment, by a chorus of piping cackles and coarse laughter. It startled him disagreeably, and he unmuffled his head to see whence this interruption proceeded. A grim and unsightly picture met his eye. A bright fire was burning in the middle of the floor, at the other end of the barn; and around it, and lit weirdly up by the red glare, lolled and sprawled the motliest company of tattered gutter-scum and ruffians, of both sexes, he had ever read or dreamed of. There were huge stalwart men, brown with exposure, long-haired, and clothed in fantastic rags; there were middle-sized youths, of truculent countenance, and similarly clad; there were blind mendicants, with patched or bandaged eyes; crippled ones, with wooden legs and crutches; diseased ones, with running sores peeping from ineffectual wrappings; there was a villain-looking pedlar with his pack; a knife-grinder, a tinker, and a barber-surgeon, with the implements of their trades; some of the females were hardly-grown girls, some were at prime, some were old and wrinkled hags, and all were loud, brazen, foul-mouthed; and all soiled and slatternly; there were three sore-faced babies; there were a couple of starveling curs, with strings about their necks, whose office was to lead the blind.

The night was come, the gang had just finished feasting, an orgy was beginning; the can of liquor was passing from mouth to mouth. A general cry broke forth--

"A song! a song from the Bat and Dick and Dot-and-go-One!"

One of the blind men got up, and made ready by casting aside the patches that sheltered his excellent eyes, and the pathetic placard which recited the cause of his calamity. Dot-and-go-One disencumbered himself of his timber leg and took his place, upon sound and healthy limbs, beside his fellow-rascal; then they roared out a rollicking ditty, and were reinforced by the whole crew, at the end of each stanza, in a rousing chorus. By the time the last stanza was reached, the half-drunken enthusiasm had risen to such a pitch, that everybody joined in and sang it clear through from the beginning, producing a volume of villainous sound that made the rafters quake. These were the inspiring words:--

'Bien Darkman's then, Bouse Mort and Ken, The bien Coves bings awast, On Chates to trine by Rome Coves dine For his long lib at last. Bing'd out bien Morts and toure, and toure, Bing out of the Rome vile bine, And toure the Cove that cloy'd your duds, Upon the Chates to trine.' (From 'The English Rogue.' London, 1665.)

Conversation followed; not in the thieves' dialect of the song, for that was only used in talk when unfriendly ears might be listening. In the course of it, it appeared that 'John Hobbs' was not altogether a new recruit, but had trained in the gang at some former time. His later

history was called for, and when he said he had 'accidentally' killed a man, considerable satisfaction was expressed; when he added that the man was a priest, he was roundly applauded, and had to take a drink with everybody. Old acquaintances welcomed him joyously, and new ones were proud to shake him by the hand. He was asked why he had 'tarried away so many months.' He answered--

"London is better than the country, and safer, these late years, the laws be so bitter and so diligently enforced. An' I had not had that accident, I had stayed there. I had resolved to stay, and never more venture country-wards--but the accident has ended that."

He inquired how many persons the gang numbered now. The 'ruffler,' or chief, answered--

"Five and twenty sturdy budes, bulks, files, clapperdungeons and maunders, counting the dells and doxies and other morts. {7} Most are here, the rest are wandering eastward, along the winter lay. We follow at dawn."

"I do not see the Wen among the honest folk about me. Where may he be?"

"Poor lad, his diet is brimstone, now, and over hot for a delicate taste.

He was killed in a brawl, somewhere about midsummer."



"I sorrow to hear that; the Wen was a capable man, and brave."

"That was he, truly. Black Bess, his dell, is of us yet, but absent on the eastward tramp; a fine lass, of nice ways and orderly conduct, none ever seeing her drunk above four days in the seven."

"She was ever strict--I remember it well--a goodly wench and worthy all commendation. Her mother was more free and less particular; a troublesome and ugly-tempered beldame, but furnished with a wit above the common."

"We lost her through it. Her gift of palmistry and other sorts of fortune-telling begot for her at last a witch's name and fame. The law roasted her to death at a slow fire. It did touch me to a sort of tenderness to see the gallant way she met her lot--cursing and reviling all the crowd that gaped and gazed around her, whilst the flames licked upward toward her face and caught her thin locks and crackled about her old gray head--cursing them! why an' thou should'st live a thousand years thoud'st never hear so masterful a cursing. Alack, her art died with her. There be base and weakling imitations left, but no true blasphemy."

The Ruffler sighed; the listeners sighed in sympathy; a general depression fell upon the company for a moment, for even hardened outcasts

like these are not wholly dead to sentiment, but are able to feel a fleeting sense of loss and affliction at wide intervals and under peculiarly favouring circumstances--as in cases like to this, for instance, when genius and culture depart and leave no heir. However, a deep drink all round soon restored the spirits of the mourners.

"Have any others of our friends fared hardly?" asked Hobbs.

"Some--yes. Particularly new comers--such as small husbandmen turned shiftless and hungry upon the world because their farms were taken from them to be changed to sheep ranges. They begged, and were whipped at the cart's tail, naked from the girdle up, till the blood ran; then set in the stocks to be pelted; they begged again, were whipped again, and deprived of an ear; they begged a third time--poor devils, what else could they do?--and were branded on the cheek with a red-hot iron, then sold for slaves; they ran away, were hunted down, and hanged. 'Tis a brief tale, and quickly told. Others of us have fared less hardly. Stand forth, Yokel, Burns, and Hodge--show your adornments!"

These stood up and stripped away some of their rags, exposing their backs, criss-crossed with ropy old welts left by the lash; one turned up his hair and showed the place where a left ear had once been; another showed a brand upon his shoulder--the letter V--and a mutilated ear; the third said--

"I am Yokel, once a farmer and prosperous, with loving wife and kids--now am I somewhat different in estate and calling; and the wife and kids are gone; mayhap they are in heaven, mayhap in--in the other place--but the kindly God be thanked, they bide no more in ENGLAND! My good old blameless mother strove to earn bread by nursing the sick; one of these died, the doctors knew not how, so my mother was burnt for a witch, whilst my babes looked on and wailed. English law!--up, all, with your cups!--now all together and with a cheer!--drink to the merciful English law that delivered HER from the English hell! Thank you, mates, one and all. I begged, from house to house--I and the wife--bearing with us the hungry kids--but it was crime to be hungry in England--so they stripped us and lashed us through three towns. Drink ye all again to the merciful English law!--for its lash drank deep of my Mary's blood and its blessed deliverance came quick. She lies there, in the potter's field, safe from all harms. And the kids--well, whilst the law lashed me from town to town, they starved. Drink, lads--only a drop--a drop to the poor kids, that never did any creature harm. I begged again--begged, for a crust, and got the stocks and lost an ear--see, here bides the stump; I begged again, and here is the stump of the other to keep me minded of it. And still I begged again, and was sold for a slave--here on my cheek under this stain, if I washed it off, ye might see the red S the branding-iron left there! A SLAVE! Do you understand that word? An English SLAVE! --that is he that stands before ye. I have run from my master, and when I

am found--the heavy curse of heaven fall on the law of the land that hath  
commanded it!--I shall hang!" {1}

A ringing voice came through the murky air--

"Thou shalt NOT!--and this day the end of that law is come!"

All turned, and saw the fantastic figure of the little King approaching  
hurriedly; as it emerged into the light and was clearly revealed, a  
general explosion of inquiries broke out--

"Who is it? WHAT is it? Who art thou, manikin?"

The boy stood unconfused in the midst of all those surprised and  
questioning eyes, and answered with princely dignity--

"I am Edward, King of England."

A wild burst of laughter followed, partly of derision and partly of  
delight in the excellence of the joke. The King was stung. He said  
sharply--

"Ye mannerless vagrants, is this your recognition of the royal boon I  
have promised?"

He said more, with angry voice and excited gesture, but it was lost in a whirlwind of laughter and mocking exclamations. 'John Hobbs' made several attempts to make himself heard above the din, and at last succeeded--saying--

"Mates, he is my son, a dreamer, a fool, and stark mad--mind him not--he thinketh he IS the King."

"I AM the King," said Edward, turning toward him, "as thou shalt know to thy cost, in good time. Thou hast confessed a murder--thou shalt swing for it."

"THOU'LT betray me?--THOU? An' I get my hands upon thee--"

"Tut-tut!" said the burley Ruffler, interposing in time to save the King, and emphasising this service by knocking Hobbs down with his fist, "hast respect for neither Kings NOR Rufflers? An' thou insult my presence so again, I'll hang thee up myself." Then he said to his Majesty, "Thou must make no threats against thy mates, lad; and thou must guard thy tongue from saying evil of them elsewhere. BE King, if it please thy mad humour, but be not harmful in it. Sink the title thou hast uttered--'tis treason; we be bad men in some few trifling ways, but none among us is so base as to be traitor to his King; we be loving and loyal hearts, in that

regard. Note if I speak truth. Now--all together: 'Long live Edward, King of England!'"

"LONG LIVE EDWARD, KING OF ENGLAND!"

The response came with such a thundergust from the motley crew that the crazy building vibrated to the sound. The little King's face lighted with pleasure for an instant, and he slightly inclined his head, and said with grave simplicity--

"I thank you, my good people."

This unexpected result threw the company into convulsions of merriment. When something like quiet was presently come again, the Ruffler said, firmly, but with an accent of good nature--

"Drop it, boy, 'tis not wise, nor well. Humour thy fancy, if thou must, but choose some other title."

A tinker shrieked out a suggestion--

"Foo-foo the First, King of the Mooncalves!"

The title 'took,' at once, every throat responded, and a roaring shout

went up, of--

"Long live Foo-foo the First, King of the Mooncalves!" followed by hootings, cat-calls, and peals of laughter.

"Hale him forth, and crown him!"

"Robe him!"

"Sceptre him!"

"Throne him!"

These and twenty other cries broke out at once! and almost before the poor little victim could draw a breath he was crowned with a tin basin, robed in a tattered blanket, throned upon a barrel, and sceptred with the tinker's soldering-iron. Then all flung themselves upon their knees about him and sent up a chorus of ironical wailings, and mocking supplications, whilst they swabbed their eyes with their soiled and ragged sleeves and aprons--

"Be gracious to us, O sweet King!"

"Trample not upon thy beseeching worms, O noble Majesty!"

"Pity thy slaves, and comfort them with a royal kick!"

"Cheer us and warm us with thy gracious rays, O flaming sun of sovereignty!"

"Sanctify the ground with the touch of thy foot, that we may eat the dirt and be ennobled!"

"Deign to spit upon us, O Sire, that our children's children may tell of thy princely condescension, and be proud and happy for ever!"

But the humorous tinker made the 'hit' of the evening and carried off the honours. Kneeling, he pretended to kiss the King's foot, and was indignantly spurned; whereupon he went about begging for a rag to paste over the place upon his face which had been touched by the foot, saying it must be preserved from contact with the vulgar air, and that he should make his fortune by going on the highway and exposing it to view at the rate of a hundred shillings a sight. He made himself so killingly funny that he was the envy and admiration of the whole mangy rabble.

Tears of shame and indignation stood in the little monarch's eyes; and the thought in his heart was, "Had I offered them a deep wrong they could not be more cruel--yet have I proffered nought but to do them a kindness



--and it is thus they use me for it!"