

## Chapter XXV. Hendon Hall.

As soon as Hendon and the King were out of sight of the constable, his Majesty was instructed to hurry to a certain place outside the town, and wait there, whilst Hendon should go to the inn and settle his account. Half an hour later the two friends were blithely jogging eastward on Hendon's sorry steeds. The King was warm and comfortable, now, for he had cast his rags and clothed himself in the second-hand suit which Hendon had bought on London Bridge.

Hendon wished to guard against over-fatiguing the boy; he judged that hard journeys, irregular meals, and illiberal measures of sleep would be bad for his crazed mind; whilst rest, regularity, and moderate exercise would be pretty sure to hasten its cure; he longed to see the stricken intellect made well again and its diseased visions driven out of the tormented little head; therefore he resolved to move by easy stages toward the home whence he had so long been banished, instead of obeying the impulse of his impatience and hurrying along night and day.

When he and the King had journeyed about ten miles, they reached a considerable village, and halted there for the night, at a good inn. The former relations were resumed; Hendon stood behind the King's chair, while he dined, and waited upon him; undressed him when he was ready for bed; then took the floor for his own quarters, and slept athwart the

door, rolled up in a blanket.

The next day, and the day after, they jogged lazily along talking over the adventures they had met since their separation, and mightily enjoying each other's narratives. Hendon detailed all his wide wanderings in search of the King, and described how the archangel had led him a fool's journey all over the forest, and taken him back to the hut, finally, when he found he could not get rid of him. Then--he said--the old man went into the bedchamber and came staggering back looking broken-hearted, and saying he had expected to find that the boy had returned and laid down in there to rest, but it was not so. Hendon had waited at the hut all day; hope of the King's return died out, then, and he departed upon the quest again.

"And old Sanctum Sanctorum WAS truly sorry your highness came not back," said Hendon; "I saw it in his face."

"Marry I will never doubt THAT!" said the King--and then told his own story; after which, Hendon was sorry he had not destroyed the archangel.

During the last day of the trip, Hendon's spirits were soaring. His tongue ran constantly. He talked about his old father, and his brother Arthur, and told of many things which illustrated their high and generous characters; he went into loving frenzies over his Edith, and was so

glad-hearted that he was even able to say some gentle and brotherly things about Hugh. He dwelt a deal on the coming meeting at Hendon Hall; what a surprise it would be to everybody, and what an outburst of thanksgiving and delight there would be.

It was a fair region, dotted with cottages and orchards, and the road led through broad pasture lands whose receding expanses, marked with gentle elevations and depressions, suggested the swelling and subsiding undulations of the sea. In the afternoon the returning prodigal made constant deflections from his course to see if by ascending some hillock he might not pierce the distance and catch a glimpse of his home. At last he was successful, and cried out excitedly--

"There is the village, my Prince, and there is the Hall close by! You may see the towers from here; and that wood there--that is my father's park. Ah, NOW thou'lt know what state and grandeur be! A house with seventy rooms--think of that!--and seven and twenty servants! A brave lodging for such as we, is it not so? Come, let us speed--my impatience will not brook further delay."

All possible hurry was made; still, it was after three o'clock before the village was reached. The travellers scampered through it, Hendon's tongue going all the time. "Here is the church--covered with the same ivy--none gone, none added." "Yonder is the inn, the old Red Lion,--and

yonder is the market-place." "Here is the Maypole, and here the pump --nothing is altered; nothing but the people, at any rate; ten years make a change in people; some of these I seem to know, but none know me." So his chat ran on. The end of the village was soon reached; then the travellers struck into a crooked, narrow road, walled in with tall hedges, and hurried briskly along it for half a mile, then passed into a vast flower garden through an imposing gateway, whose huge stone pillars bore sculptured armorial devices. A noble mansion was before them.

"Welcome to Hendon Hall, my King!" exclaimed Miles. "Ah, 'tis a great day! My father and my brother, and the Lady Edith will be so mad with joy that they will have eyes and tongue for none but me in the first transports of the meeting, and so thou'lt seem but coldly welcomed--but mind it not; 'twill soon seem otherwise; for when I say thou art my ward, and tell them how costly is my love for thee, thou'lt see them take thee to their breasts for Miles Hendon's sake, and make their house and hearts thy home for ever after!"

The next moment Hendon sprang to the ground before the great door, helped the King down, then took him by the hand and rushed within. A few steps brought him to a spacious apartment; he entered, seated the King with more hurry than ceremony, then ran toward a young man who sat at a writing-table in front of a generous fire of logs.

"Embrace me, Hugh," he cried, "and say thou'rt glad I am come again! and call our father, for home is not home till I shall touch his hand, and see his face, and hear his voice once more!"

But Hugh only drew back, after betraying a momentary surprise, and bent a grave stare upon the intruder--a stare which indicated somewhat of offended dignity, at first, then changed, in response to some inward thought or purpose, to an expression of marvelling curiosity, mixed with a real or assumed compassion. Presently he said, in a mild voice--

"Thy wits seem touched, poor stranger; doubtless thou hast suffered privations and rude buffetings at the world's hands; thy looks and dress betoken it. Whom dost thou take me to be?"

"Take thee? Prithee for whom else than whom thou art? I take thee to be Hugh Hendon," said Miles, sharply.

The other continued, in the same soft tone--

"And whom dost thou imagine thyself to be?"

"Imagination hath nought to do with it! Dost thou pretend thou knowest me not for thy brother Miles Hendon?"

An expression of pleased surprise flitted across Hugh's face, and he exclaimed--

"What! thou art not jesting? can the dead come to life? God be praised if it be so! Our poor lost boy restored to our arms after all these cruel years! Ah, it seems too good to be true, it IS too good to be true--I charge thee, have pity, do not trifle with me! Quick--come to the light--let me scan thee well!"

He seized Miles by the arm, dragged him to the window, and began to devour him from head to foot with his eyes, turning him this way and that, and stepping briskly around him and about him to prove him from all points of view; whilst the returned prodigal, all aglow with gladness, smiled, laughed, and kept nodding his head and saying--

"Go on, brother, go on, and fear not; thou'lt find nor limb nor feature that cannot bide the test. Scour and scan me to thy content, my good old Hugh--I am indeed thy old Miles, thy same old Miles, thy lost brother, is't not so? Ah, 'tis a great day--I SAID 'twas a great day! Give me thy hand, give me thy cheek--lord, I am like to die of very joy!"

He was about to throw himself upon his brother; but Hugh put up his hand in dissent, then dropped his chin mournfully upon his breast, saying with emotion--

"Ah, God of his mercy give me strength to bear this grievous disappointment!"

Miles, amazed, could not speak for a moment; then he found his tongue, and cried out--

"WHAT disappointment? Am I not thy brother?"

Hugh shook his head sadly, and said--

"I pray heaven it may prove so, and that other eyes may find the resemblances that are hid from mine. Alack, I fear me the letter spoke but too truly."

"What letter?"

"One that came from over sea, some six or seven years ago. It said my brother died in battle."

"It was a lie! Call thy father--he will know me."

"One may not call the dead."

"Dead?" Miles's voice was subdued, and his lips trembled. "My father dead!--oh, this is heavy news. Half my new joy is withered now. Prithee let me see my brother Arthur--he will know me; he will know me and console me."

"He, also, is dead."

"God be merciful to me, a stricken man! Gone,--both gone--the worthy taken and the worthless spared, in me! Ah! I crave your mercy!--do not say the Lady Edith--"

"Is dead? No, she lives."

"Then, God be praised, my joy is whole again! Speed thee, brother--let her come to me! An' SHE say I am not myself--but she will not; no, no, SHE will know me, I were a fool to doubt it. Bring her--bring the old servants; they, too, will know me."

"All are gone but five--Peter, Halsey, David, Bernard, and Margaret."

So saying, Hugh left the room. Miles stood musing a while, then began to walk the floor, muttering--

"The five arch-villains have survived the two-and-twenty leal and honest



--'tis an odd thing."

He continued walking back and forth, muttering to himself; he had forgotten the King entirely. By-and-by his Majesty said gravely, and with a touch of genuine compassion, though the words themselves were capable of being interpreted ironically--

"Mind not thy mischance, good man; there be others in the world whose identity is denied, and whose claims are derided. Thou hast company."

"Ah, my King," cried Hendon, colouring slightly, "do not thou condemn me--wait, and thou shalt see. I am no impostor--she will say it; you shall hear it from the sweetest lips in England. I an impostor? Why, I know this old hall, these pictures of my ancestors, and all these things that are about us, as a child knoweth its own nursery. Here was I born and bred, my lord; I speak the truth; I would not deceive thee; and should none else believe, I pray thee do not THOU doubt me--I could not bear it."

"I do not doubt thee," said the King, with a childlike simplicity and faith.

"I thank thee out of my heart!" exclaimed Hendon with a fervency which showed that he was touched. The King added, with the same gentle

simplicity--

"Dost thou doubt ME?"

A guilty confusion seized upon Hendon, and he was grateful that the door opened to admit Hugh, at that moment, and saved him the necessity of replying.

A beautiful lady, richly clothed, followed Hugh, and after her came several liveried servants. The lady walked slowly, with her head bowed and her eyes fixed upon the floor. The face was unspeakably sad. Miles Hendon sprang forward, crying out--

"Oh, my Edith, my darling--"

But Hugh waved him back, gravely, and said to the lady--

"Look upon him. Do you know him?"

At the sound of Miles's voice the woman had started slightly, and her cheeks had flushed; she was trembling now. She stood still, during an impressive pause of several moments; then slowly lifted up her head and looked into Hendon's eyes with a stony and frightened gaze; the blood sank out of her face, drop by drop, till nothing remained but the grey

pallor of death; then she said, in a voice as dead as the face, "I know him not!" and turned, with a moan and a stifled sob, and tottered out of the room.

Miles Hendon sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

After a pause, his brother said to the servants--

"You have observed him. Do you know him?"

They shook their heads; then the master said--

"The servants know you not, sir. I fear there is some mistake. You have seen that my wife knew you not."

"Thy WIFE!" In an instant Hugh was pinned to the wall, with an iron grip about his throat. "Oh, thou fox-hearted slave, I see it all! Thou'st writ the lying letter thyself, and my stolen bride and goods are its fruit. There--now get thee gone, lest I shame mine honourable soldiership with the slaying of so pitiful a mannikin!"

Hugh, red-faced, and almost suffocated, reeled to the nearest chair, and commanded the servants to seize and bind the murderous stranger. They hesitated, and one of them said--

"He is armed, Sir Hugh, and we are weaponless."

"Armed! What of it, and ye so many? Upon him, I say!"

But Miles warned them to be careful what they did, and added--

"Ye know me of old--I have not changed; come on, an' it like you."

This reminder did not hearten the servants much; they still held back.

"Then go, ye paltry cowards, and arm yourselves and guard the doors, whilst I send one to fetch the watch!" said Hugh. He turned at the threshold, and said to Miles, "You'll find it to your advantage to offend not with useless endeavours at escape."

"Escape? Spare thyself discomfort, an' that is all that troubles thee. For Miles Hendon is master of Hendon Hall and all its belongings. He will remain--doubt it not."