

FALLEN
FORTUNES

[Illustrated]

FALLEN FORTUNES

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By



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CHAPTER I.

ON THE FIELD OF RAMILLIES.



"**B**y the beard of the Prophet, we are in luck's way at last, Dicon; for if that be not the armies of the French and the Allies drawn up in battle array, my name is not Grey Dumaresq!"

The speaker had just pushed his horse over the brow of a slope which he and his servant had for some time been mounting, through the steamy warmth of a foggy May morning. The thick haze which lay heavy in this region of marshy ground had hidden the surrounding country from them hitherto; but as they reached the summit of the gradual rise they had been ascending, the cloud wreaths suddenly drifted away, and the sun began to shine out upon the undulating plain stretched before their eyes; and lo, the plain was alive with squadrons of soldiers—infantry, cavalry, artillery—drawn up in battle array; and the note of the bugle rang through the air, whilst away in the distance, on the opposite side of the plain, there was a movement which told that already the battle had begun. A sullen roar from the guns boomed forth, and the whole plain shook with the reverberation. Great masses of smoke rolled along and slowly dispersed after each salvo; but it was upon the evolutions of the bodies of horsemen and footmen that the keen eyes of the youthful traveller were intently fixed.

"Dicon," he cried, "this is in all sooth a battle; and where the battle rages, there will the great victor of Blenheim be. We have not chanced upon this route in vain. Men warned us of the perils of seeking passage through a country which has become the theatre of war; but fortune's star has befriended us thus far, and now, if I mistake me not, we stand within sight of the greatest warrior of the age. For greatly shall I be astonished if

the Duke of Marlborough himself be not conducting the evolutions of yonder squadrons."

The brilliant dark eyes of the young man lighted with a great glow of excitement and admiration. He shaded them with his hand, and intently followed the evolutions of the moving masses in the plain stretched before his eyes. He was looking upon the village of Tavières and the mound of Ottomond, and the waters of the Me-haign rolled below at his feet. The right wing of the French army rested here, as he quickly saw; but for the moment the main activity lay over in the distance beyond Ramillies and Offuz, in the direction of Anderkirk. Yet as the traveller stood intently gazing, he saw a movement in the line of the allied army on this nearer side, and he exclaimed aloud in his excitement,—

"See, Dicon, see! That attack yonder is but a feint. The key of the position lies here beneath us at Tavières, with its Tomb of Ottomond. See yonder those regiments of marching soldiers creeping round beneath the shelter of that rising ground! They will fling themselves upon the enemy's right, whilst the French general is diverting his available forces to protect his left. Villeroy, my friend, you did not well to dispose your forces in concave lines. You lose time in passing from place to place; and with such a general as our English Duke pitted against you, you cannot afford to lose any point in the game. Ha! See that? The Dutch and English soldiers are charging down upon Tavières! Watch how they come on—a great resistless tide of well-drilled veterans. See

how they sweep all before them! See how the French fly forth! Ha, Villeroi, what think you now? Yes, you see your error; fain would you hurry back your reserves from left to right. But the time has gone by. They are miles away, and here are the Allies carrying all before them! Hurrah for old England! hurrah for the great Duke! Dicon, have you stomach for the fight? Do you remember Barcelona and Mountjuich? If we were men enough to help there, why not here too?"

The fellow thus addressed grinned from ear to ear, and looked to the pistols in his holsters and the sabre slung at his side. It would not have been easy to define by a glance the nationality of this pair, who evidently stood to each other in the relation of master and man. Their faces were tanned by sun and wind, their dress, which was somewhat travel-stained and worse for wear, had plainly been purchased as need suggested—a piece here, and a piece there, and not all in the same land.

The speaker wore upon his fair curling hair—which was his own, and not one of the immense periwigs then in vogue at home and abroad—a Spanish sombrero of picturesque shape. His faded doublet, with its gold lacings, might have been English made, and was well cut, showing off the graceful lines of the slender, well-proportioned figure; but he wore buskins of soft Spanish leather with gold eyelets, and the short cloak slung across the saddle-bow had been purchased in Italy. He rode a strong, mettlesome barb, whose glossy bay coat shone like satin in the sunlight. The horse of the servant

looked somewhat jaded, but that of the master might have just been taken from the stable. He was one of those splendid chargers, half Irish, half Spanish by blood, whose sureness of foot, untiring energy, and unquenchable spirit and mettle, made them at once the pride and joy of their owners. Young Dumaresq might have cut a finer figure in his own person, had he not elected to spend so large a portion of his remaining fortune upon the beast he now bestrode. But he had never for a moment regretted the purchase; and he boasted that Don Carlos had saved his life on more occasions than one.

The young man's eyes were full of fire; his hand was upon the hilt of his sword, which lay loose in its scabbard; the horse was pawing the ground and pulling on the rein, for the sound of battle was in his ears, and he was snorting with eagerness to hurl himself into the ranks of the combatants. The blare of the bugles, the roar of the guns, the shouts, screams, cheers of soldiers, the clash of sabres and the rattle of musketry, were as music to his ears. Suddenly flinging up his head, and uttering something between a snort and a neigh, the creature was off like an arrow from a bow, heading wildly, yet with a restraint and self-control which spoke worlds for his training, towards the hurly-burly raging through the battlefield below. Grey Dumaresq cast a half-laughing glance in the direction of his servant behind, who had set spurs to his steed and was following.

"Needs must, where the devil drives!" he said with a laugh. "Don Carlos will make soldiers of us, whether we will or no."

The battle of Ramillies was now raging. Marlborough's generalship had already made its mark. Tavières was in his hands; the right wing of the enemy was shaken, and the Dutch and English soldiers were preparing to charge the closely-serried lines of the French, even before the travellers had reached the scene of action. They heard whilst they were yet half a mile away the concussion of that charge, the yells of the soldiers, the cheers of the Allies as they felt the wavering of their foes. But the French, though the first line had been broken, were not vanquished yet. The second line was composed of the pick of the young nobility—men careless of personal peril, disdainful of death, desirous only of glory and of victory. Upon these picked troops the Allies flung themselves in fury; but they stood their ground and hurled back the attacking lines, as the rocks of an iron-bound coast fling back the oncoming waves of the ocean. It was now impossible for the traveller to gauge what was happening. He was too near the scene of the tumult; but he was in the very nick of time to bear a share in one of the minor incidents of the day, which might have proved one of infinite disaster to the cause of his country.

The Duke of Marlborough, who had been directing the attack upon the French right, saw that this second charge was less successful than the first, and giving or-

ders for reinforcements to be hurried up, he himself galloped in the direction of the fight, to encourage with his own presence the wavering soldiers, and direct the next critical operations in person. He was exceedingly well mounted, and his horse, wild with excitement, and feeling all that sympathy with his master's mood which is natural to these noble creatures, carried him so swiftly forward, that after he had galloped along the lines, giving orders here, there, and everywhere as he passed, he overshot his position, and without noting it in the confusion, was almost alone and at some small distance from his own lines. Before he could pull up his excited horse, there was a sudden rush from the French lines. Several young nobles and gentlemen had recognized the Duke, had taken in the accidental isolation of his position, and galloping forward with one consent, surrounded him before he was well aware what had happened.

It was just at this critical moment that the two travellers, half stunned by the noise of the battle, ignorant of what was happening, but eager for a share in the fray, topped a little rise in the ground which hid the plain from them, and came full upon the scene of the Duke's danger. The great General never lacked presence of mind, was never daunted by personal peril. He had realized his position, and setting his horse at a furious gallop, he had already broken through the ring of would-be captors, and was charging furiously for his own lines. At the very moment when Grey Dumaresq

and his servant took in the meaning of what they saw, he had put his horse at a wide ditch which lay across his path, and the animal was rising to the leap.

"Zounds! but the beast is down! They will have him again!"

This shout rose from Dicon's throat. Grey set his teeth hard.

"It is the Duke himself; they shall never take him. Don Carlos shall save him from that!"

The Duke's horse had fallen heavily, throwing his rider over his head. Others besides his foes were heading wildly for the spot. All who saw it knew how much hung upon the turn of the next few seconds. First of all came the young stranger, who flung himself from his splendid horse, just as Marlborough rose to his feet, bruised and shaken, but with every faculty alert.

"Mount, sire, mount!" cried the traveller, holding the horse by the head to still his excited plunging. "The enemy are closing round; but only mount, and he will carry you safely. I will stake my last ducat upon it!"

The Duke had hold of the saddle by now; one of his own officers sprang forward to hold the stirrup. Next instant the General was in the saddle; but the head of the Colonel who stood at the stirrup was rolling upon the ground. A cannon ball had carried it off. How the Duke had escaped was a marvel and a mystery.

Excitement and lust of battle had fast hold of Grey Dumaresq and his horse. The gallant animal carried the Duke safely back to his own lines, amid the cheers of his soldiers. The young man swung himself upon the back of the riderless horse belonging to the killed Colonel, and followed him, scarce thinking what he was doing. None forbade him. Many had seen his prompt and timely action; many watched him as the tide of battle raged this way and that, and saw that, whether a trained soldier or not, this young stranger was no novice in the art of war. The Duke himself turned more than once to watch him, as he joined in some headlong charge, and turned and wheeled, or gave thrust or parry with the ease of practice and the skill which only comes through experience. Once in a pause he beckoned the young man to his side, and said,—

"I would speak with you, sir, when I am at leisure. Come to my quarters, wherever they may be, when the battle is over. I have somewhat to say to you."

The young man bowed low, and promised compliance with this request; but it was many long hours before he and the victorious General stood face to face. The battle itself had been won in less than four hours, but the pursuit had been long, lasting far into the night; and the dawn was well-nigh breaking in the eastern sky when Grey received a message that the Duke desired speech of him in the house at Meklert, where he had stopped short, whilst his soldiers continued the pursuit of the flying foe almost up to the walls of Louvain.

Marlborough was sitting at a table, whereon stood the remains of a hasty meal; and from the writing materials before him, it was plain that he had been penning one of those dispatches to his wife without which he could never rest, even after the most arduous day's campaigning. He had changed some of his clothes, and though pale and somewhat jaded, preserved that air of elegance and distinction which was always one of his most marked characteristics. But even without spotless linen and fine array, there was something in the high-bred courtesy of Marlborough's manner, and in the singular beauty of his face and person, which always won the hearts of those about him, and particularly so during those years when the magnificence of his military genius was making him the man of greatest mark in Europe.

He rose as the young stranger was ushered in, and offered his hand with a frank and gracious courtesy free from any alloy of condescension or patronage.

"I wish to thank you in person, sir, for the great service you this day rendered me with such timely promptitude. I have never bestridden a better horse, and owe you much for the loan. I would fain learn the name of the gentleman to whom I am so deeply indebted."

"My name, your Grace, is Grey Dumaresq; and that of my horse, Don Carlos. I thank you for your gracious words. We shall feel honoured for all time in that kind Fortune gave us the chance of rendering you some small

aid in a moment of peril. The world would have been terribly the poorer by this day's work, had mischance touched the Duke of Marlborough!"

The General smiled, and motioned the young man to be seated. He himself took a seat opposite, and studied him with some attention.

"If you and your good horse are in any sort disposed to put your strength and skill at the service of your country, Mr. Dumaresq, I think I can promise you a position not far from my own person, which will not be without opportunities of profit, and will give scope to your prowess with sword and lance, which I have had the opportunity of observing more than once this day."

The young man's face flushed with pleasure. He looked eagerly into the face of the great man.

"Were I a free agent, your Grace, most gladly would I take advantage of your offer, asking nothing better at Fortune's hands than to serve you faithfully. But I am on my way to England to learn news of my father. For three years I have been absent from my native shores. For three years I have been a wanderer, and, I fear me, a spendthrift to boot. I have spent or squandered the fortune with which I started forth. Rumour has reached me that my father's health has given way, and that I am needed at home. I fear me I have not been a good son to him heretofore. I must therefore seek to be the solace of his declining years, if the reports I have heard concerning him be true."

Marlborough mused awhile with a slight smile upon his lips. He had a good memory for names, and had an idea that Sir Hugh Dumaresq, the probable father of the youth before him, had not been a man to inspire any very deep affection in the heart of his son. He bore the reputation of being a rake of the first order. It was said that he had broken his wife's heart, and cared nothing for the boy who would succeed him.

"That is a pious resolution on your part, my friend. I trust you may be rewarded, and I will not seek to stay you. Methinks your mother was a good and gentle woman. Her son will live to do her credit yet."

The young man's eyes lighted, and his face softened.

"My mother was an angel upon this earth. Would God I had not lost her so soon! Did you know her, my lord? She was kinswoman to the hapless Lord Grey, who took up the cause of the Duke of Monmouth twenty years since, and whom your Grace defeated and routed on the field of Sedgemoor, fatal to so many. She gave me her name, and she bequeathed to me the small fortune which passed into my keeping three years ago, when I came of age. Since then I have been a wanderer in many lands. I have seen hard blows given and taken; I have been in many perils and battles. I was with Lord Peterborough when he fell upon the fort of Mountjuich, and made himself master of Barcelona, just when all hope of taking it seemed at an end. I have fought in the ranks of the Duke of Savoy against the veterans of

France. I have been a soldier of fortune for this year or more, and though often in peril and hard pressed, have never received aught but a scratch now and again. I did hope that I should not travel northwards without seeing something of the campaign under the great Duke, whose name is in all men's mouths; but I did not dare to ask or hope for the honour which has been mine to-day."

Marlborough's eyes lighted as the young man spoke, and he asked many quick and pertinent questions of the traveller anent those lands of Spain and Italy, in whose politics and disposition of parties he was so keenly interested. He had desired above all things to prosecute this summer an Italian campaign. Difficulties with the Dutch field-deputies alone hindered the more dashing and offensive policy which he would so gladly have adopted. He listened with keen interest to Grey's account of his journey through Savoy, his interview with Victor Amadeus, and his successful feat of carrying important dispatches into Turin, though hemmed in by the French, and waiting sorrowfully for relief; and his escape thence, and journey to the camp of Prince Eugene, who was seeking to carry relief to the Duke of Savoy, and eventually to drive the French back over their own borders.

All this was intensely interesting to Marlborough, and he more than ever felt a desire to keep in his service a youth who seemed to possess so many of the qualifications which he most prized. But he was a man, too, who

never undervalued the domestic side of life, or willingly interfered with the duties engendered by filial or conjugal ties. So he checked the words which had well-nigh risen once again to his lips, and only said graciously,—

"You have indeed been smiled upon by Dame Fortune, Mr. Dumaresq. Many a young blood would give half his fortune for the chances you have had. Methinks the world will hear of you yet. The brow of a poet, the thews of a warrior, a head calm and well-balanced, and a soul that shrinks not in the hour of peril—"

He paused a moment, and the young man's cheek glowed.

"Your Grace thinks too highly of my poor merits, I fear me. I trust I have not spoken as a braggart; for, in sooth, it is little I have to boast me of. A good horse beneath me, a faithful comrade by my side, a keen Toledo blade in mine hand, and all else came of itself. I have been happy in my days of peril and adventure; but now I must lay aside my weapons and my roving habits, and strive to show myself a good son, and take up my duties as my father's right hand and helper, if it be true that he is laid aside from active life, and needs me with him henceforth."

Marlborough had taken up a pen, and was writing a few lines upon a sheet of paper which lay upon the table. When he had finished, he handed it open to the young man.

"A pass for yourself and your servant, Mr. Dumaresq; you may find it useful in passing through a disturbed country. But you will be wise to avoid the French frontier, and all cities where they have garrisons, and to confine yourself to the Dutch Netherlands, to make your way to the Hague, and thence to England. With this pass in your possession, you should then have small difficulty in travelling without molestation. And let me ask you if you have funds sufficient for your needs, since it is dear work at times travelling through a country devastated by war, and I would not have my benefactor crippled for lack of a few pieces of gold."

The young man's face flushed slightly, but his eyes were frank and smiling. He laid his hand upon an inner breast pocket, and tapped it significantly.

"I thank your Grace from my heart; but, albeit I have squandered my fortune something too lavishly, I have yet enough and to spare to take me home. Were it otherwise," he added, with a very engaging look upon his handsome features, "there is nobody to whom I would be more gladly indebted than to his Grace of Marlborough."

The Duke's face was pleasant to see. He had taken a great liking for this young man. He hesitated a moment, and said,—

"You would not care to sell your horse? I would give a goodly price for such a charger."

"My lord, if I loved him less, most gladly would I beg your Grace's acceptance of him, and would rejoice that Don Carlos should be thus honoured. As it is, he is the greatest friend and best comrade I possess in the world. I trow I must needs take him home with me."

"You are right, boy, you are right. And it is better so; for he might meet a bloody end any moment in these rough campaigning days. But you must not go hence without some token of the good will and gratitude John Churchill bears you. Take this ring, and wear it for my sake. And should ever trouble, or loss, or misfortune fall upon you, and you be in need, in my absence abroad, of a friend at home, take it and show it to my wife. I shall write to her of this day's peril, and how I was saved in the nick of time; and when she sees that ring in your hands, she will know who was her husband's deliverer, and will know, too, how to receive and reward him."

The ring held out was a large amethyst of great brilliance and beauty, with a curious oriental-looking head engraved upon it, with what might be a legend in some Eastern tongue. It was a trinket which, once seen, would not easily be forgotten, and Grey Dumaresq slipped it upon his finger with a smile of gratification. It was no small thing to feel himself thus honoured by Europe's greatest general.

He rose to his feet and bowed low; but Marlborough held out his hand and pressed his fingers warmly. "I shall not forget you, my friend. I trust that yours will be

one of the faces that will greet me first, when I shall return home to England after the close of the campaign."

The young man's face lighted with pleasure at these words.

"I think your Grace may rely upon that," he said. "I thank you with all my heart for this most gracious reception."

"The thanks are mine to give—yours to receive," spoke the Duke with his winning graciousness. "Farewell, my friend. May Dame Fortune continue to smile upon your career; and may you live to be prosperous and famous, and find one to love and be loved by faithfully—for, believe me, without true conjugal love, a man's life is desolate and empty, and nothing can fill the ache of a heart that has no loving ones at home to rejoice with him in his joy and weep at his misfortunes. Ambition may go far, success may be sweet; but it is love which is the true elixir of life. A man who loves and is loved can defy misfortune, poverty, even age and sickness and death; for love alone is eternal."

He spoke like one inspired, and his whole face kindled. Grey Dumaresq never forgot the smile upon the face of the great victorious General, as he saw it in that little room at Meldert on the morrow of the victory of Ramillies.

CHAPTER II.

HARTSBOURNE.



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"SIR GERVAISE SPRANG TOWARDS HIS ADVERSARY, THIRSTING
TO RETRIEVE HIS FALLEN FORTUNES"

The soft June dusk was falling with dewy freshness over smiling meadow and forest glade, and the long,

long shadows were melting away in the dimness of a night that would never be dark, when Grey Dumaresq halted upon the brow of a little hill, and gazed before and around him with eager pleasure, not untinged with wistfulness.

Somewhere amid those swelling woodlands lying to the south-west lay his childhood's home. He had hoped to make this spot ere the sun sank; and then he knew he could have traced the gleam of the shining streamlet, slipping like a silver streak between masses of sombre green. He might even, if the leaves had not made too thick a screen, have descried the twisted chimneys and timbered gables of the old house itself. His heart beat and his throat swelled as he gazed out over the darkening prospect. How he had loved that home of his so long as it had been blessed by his mother's presence there! With what proud delight had he sometimes pictured to himself the time when it might be his own, his very own! From childhood he had been called "the little master—the little heir." If his mother had not dubbed him so, the servants had. For Sir Hugh Dumaresq, alas, had not been a man to inspire either affection or respect in the hearts of servants or of son, and the child had dreamed dreams of the golden days which he and his mother might some day enjoy, when he should be lord of all, and live to wipe away tears from her eyes, and ensure that nothing should trouble or harass her again.

That fond dream had died its own death when the mother was laid to sleep beneath the churchyard sod,

and the boy, broken-hearted and indifferent to his fate, had gone forth first to school and then to college, and had known the sweet word "home" no longer.

It was years now since he had seen Hartsbourne. At first he could not bear the idea of revisiting it, to find it empty of the one loved presence which had made it what it was to him. Afterwards his father had ceased to dwell there, had lived more and more in London, had even let the old Manor, as Grey heard before he quitted England for the roving life of the past three years.

He had been somewhat hurt and angry when this was told him; for he had planned to go and bid the old place farewell, and he no longer cared to do so then. True, it was a kinsman who dwelt there now. His father had spoken of him with a cynical smile.

"He is next of kin, after you, my son; and he has a greater gift of thrift than will ever be mine or yours, I take it. If anything should befall you on these wanderings upon which your heart is set, he would be the one to come after me, and take title and estates in his own right. If he like now to pay me my price, he may share the old house with the rats and the bats, for all I care. I love not to spend good money upon leaking roofs and bowing walls. Give me the parks and the coffee-houses, the Mall and the play-house! The devil may fly away with that rotten old house, for all I care!"

This sentiment, rapped out with a good many of the fashionable oaths of the time, had been Grey's first in-

timation that his beloved old home was falling into decay. As a child it had seemed all the more perfect from that lack of newness or primness, the wildness of the garden, the encroachments of weed and woodland, which mark the first stages of decay. These words had opened his eyes to the fact that his father was letting the old place take care of itself, without regard to the future, and even then he had been conscious of the stirrings of a certain vague resentment. But he had been powerless to act; for although he had just received a small fortune which his mother had hoarded for him, and which had been nursed for him by a kinsman on the Grey side, he had no power to take over Hartsbourne and expend his wealth upon the old home; moreover, by that time the longing for travel and adventure was keen upon him, and he had made every arrangement for a tour of the then known world. His father rather encouraged than lamented his proposed absence; and the youth longed to be his own master, and to feel the strength of his wings.

Yet now, after three years' wandering about the world, Grey found himself gazing with a swelling heart upon the familiar outlines of the region of his childhood's home, and the voices of the past seemed calling him aloud—tender, sweet-toned voices, which had been silent for long, but which awoke now to cry aloud with strange insistence.

The solemn moon rose over the tree-tops as Grey gazed breathlessly upon the dim panorama before him,

and instantly the world became flooded with a mystic radiance. A church spire stood suddenly out like a silver beacon, and Grey caught his breath as he watched; for his mother's grave lay beneath the walls of that little church, and the cross upon its apex seemed like a finger beckoning to him to come.

"Yonder is our goal, Dicon," spoke the young man, as his servant, whom he had outridden in his eager haste, spurred up the ridge to his side. "You cannot see the house in this uncertain light; but it lies in yon deep hollow, away to the right from the church. The river winds about it, guarding it from ill, as I used to think in my boyish fantasy. I have seen the harts and does come down from the forest to drink at its waters. Hartsbourne was the name they gave the house, and methinks it was well named. Ah me!—to think how many years have passed since I beheld it all! Hark! Can you not hear the old familiar voices calling the wanderer home?"

The honest servant nodded his head with a smile upon his rugged features. He loved his young master devotedly, and was not unaccustomed to share his musings, whether they were dashed with poetic melancholy or were full of reckless daring. Whatever his master's mood, honest Dick admired him with equal fervour. As their horses picked a way down the descent in the darkness, he hazarded a question.

"You think you will find your noble father there, sir?"

"Why, surely yes, Dicon. Where should a man be when failing in health and strength, if not at his own home?"

"As for that, sir, I know nothing. But you have told me how that he loved not his own house, but gave it over into the hands of his kinsman, that he might take his pleasure elsewhere."

"Very true, Dicon; but that was when he was hale and strong. When ill-health and feebleness overtook him, I doubt not that all was changed. True, I have not heard from him these many months; but that is no marvel, since I myself have been a very wandering Jew. But the gentleman who brought me news of him unawares did say that he was about to quit London, for whose giddy round he had no longer strength or inclination. I have never doubted but that Hartsbourne would be the place of his choice; and hither have I come. I might have learned news of him by going straight to London; but why turn aside from our way for that, when I feel so sure that it is here we shall find him? Doth not nature call every man home to his bed at night, and to his own home at the close of his life? My father is not old—Heaven send he may live long yet; but if disease has crippled his powers and robbed him of his zest of life, I doubt not but that it is here we shall surely find him."

Two days previously the travellers had landed safely at the port of Harwich, having had a safe and speedy crossing from the Hague. The pass given them by the

Duke of Marlborough had rendered their journey from Louvain an easy one. From the seaport, Grey had taken the direct road into Hertfordshire, feeling certain that here, and not in London, would he now find his father. He had hoped to arrive ere set of sun; but a few mischances along the road, and the sultry heat of the mid-day hours, had delayed them. Nevertheless, being now so near, he pressed on steadily. He could not rest so near to home, save beneath the old roof-tree. As the windings of the path grew more familiar, his heart throbbed in his breast. Here they passed the boundary of his father's estate. That broken cross marked the spot. And yonder, sleeping in the moonlight, hoary and beautiful, lay the ruined fragments of what had once been an old priory. He could see that the walls had crumbled away during his years of absence; but one beautiful arch still stood as of old, the delicate tracery showing clear in the moonlight. White owls flitted from the thick wreaths of ivy, and hooted weirdly as they sailed by on noiseless wing. A wild cat leaped out with a menacing yell, and both horses snorted and plunged at the sight and sound. Dick's hand was on his pistol stock; but seeing what it was, he uttered a half uneasy laugh.

"A bad omen, my master," he spoke, as he quieted his horse. "That wild black thing was liker some witch or devil than aught I have clapped eyes on this many a day. Saints preserve us from spell or charm!"

For Dick, albeit a good Protestant by profession, had caught some of the phrases of the people in whose lands he had dwelt, and he was by no means free from superstition, though a bold enough rogue to meet any peril that he could combat with sword or bullet.

"Tush, Dicon! Dost fear a cat, man? For my part, I love all the wild things of the woods, and would be the friend of all. See yonder! There should be a tangled path leading down through the forest glade, and across the stream by a ford to the house itself. Methinks I cannot lose the way, though the path be overgrown, and the light treacherous.—Onward, good Carlos! Fodder and rest are nigh at hand. Within the space of half an hour you and I should both be installed safely at home."

Home! The word was as music to his ears. It seemed to set itself to the beat of the horses' hoofs along the tangled path, which Grey had some trouble in finding. But once found, he was able to trace it without difficulty; and soon the soft whisper of the water fell upon his ears, and the stream lay before him shining in the moonlight.

How beautiful it was upon this still June night! The young green of the trees could not shut out the silvery beams of the moon. The forest was full of whispering voices, and every voice seemed to be welcoming back the stranger-son. The warblers amid the sedges and the fringe of alders along the course of the winding stream filled the air with soft music, not less sweet, if less pow-

erful, than that of the nightingale pouring out his heart in song a little farther away. Sometimes a sleeping deer in some deep hollow sprang up almost from beneath their feet, and dashed, phantom-like, away into the dim aisles of the wood.

And now the wall loomed up before them which separated the house and its precincts from the wilderness of wood and water beyond. Grey well knew this mouldering wall, from which the coping had fallen in many places, and which showed more than one ill-repaired breach in the once sound masonry. The ivy had grown into a tangled mass upon it, and was helping to drag it down. Any active marauder could have scaled it easily. But Grey turned his horse, and skirted round it for some distance. For he knew that a door at the angle gave entrance into the stable-yard, and from thence to the courtyard and entrance-hall of the old house; and as it was already past midnight, he preferred to take this way rather than approach by the avenue to the front of the house.

He turned the angle of the wall, and there was the entrance he was making for. But how desolate it all looked! The double doors had rusted from off their hinges, and stood open, none seeming to care to close them at night. The courtyard was so grass-grown that the feet of the horses scarcely sounded as they entered. A range of stables stood half open, some mouldy straw rotting in the stalls, but no signs of life either in the stables below or the living-rooms above. Grey directed Di-

con to the forage store, and bade him look if there were not something to be found there for the horses; and whilst the man was thus engaged, finding enough odds and ends to serve for a meal for the beasts, the master passed through an inner door into a second courtyard, and gazed upward at a range of lancet windows which, in former days, had belonged to the rooms occupied by the servants.

Not a light glimmered in any casement; not a dog barked challenge or welcome. It was not wonderful that the house should be dark and silent at such an hour; but it was more than darkness which reigned here. There was a look of utter desolation and neglect brooding over the place. Broken casements hung crazily, and swung creaking in the night air. Tiles had slipped from the roof, chimney stacks seemed tottering to their fall. True, the great nail-studded oaken door, which Grey well remembered as leading through a long arched passage past the servants' quarters and into the front entrance-hall, was closed and locked; but rust had eaten deep into all the iron work, and cobwebs hung in festoons from the eaves of the dilapidated porch.

In vain Grey beat upon the door with the pommel of his sword. Not a sound from within betokened the presence of living creature. A sudden fear shook him lest he had come too late. This idea had never troubled him before. His father was still young in years. Dissipation might have weakened him, made him an easy prey to disease; but surely, surely had aught worse than that