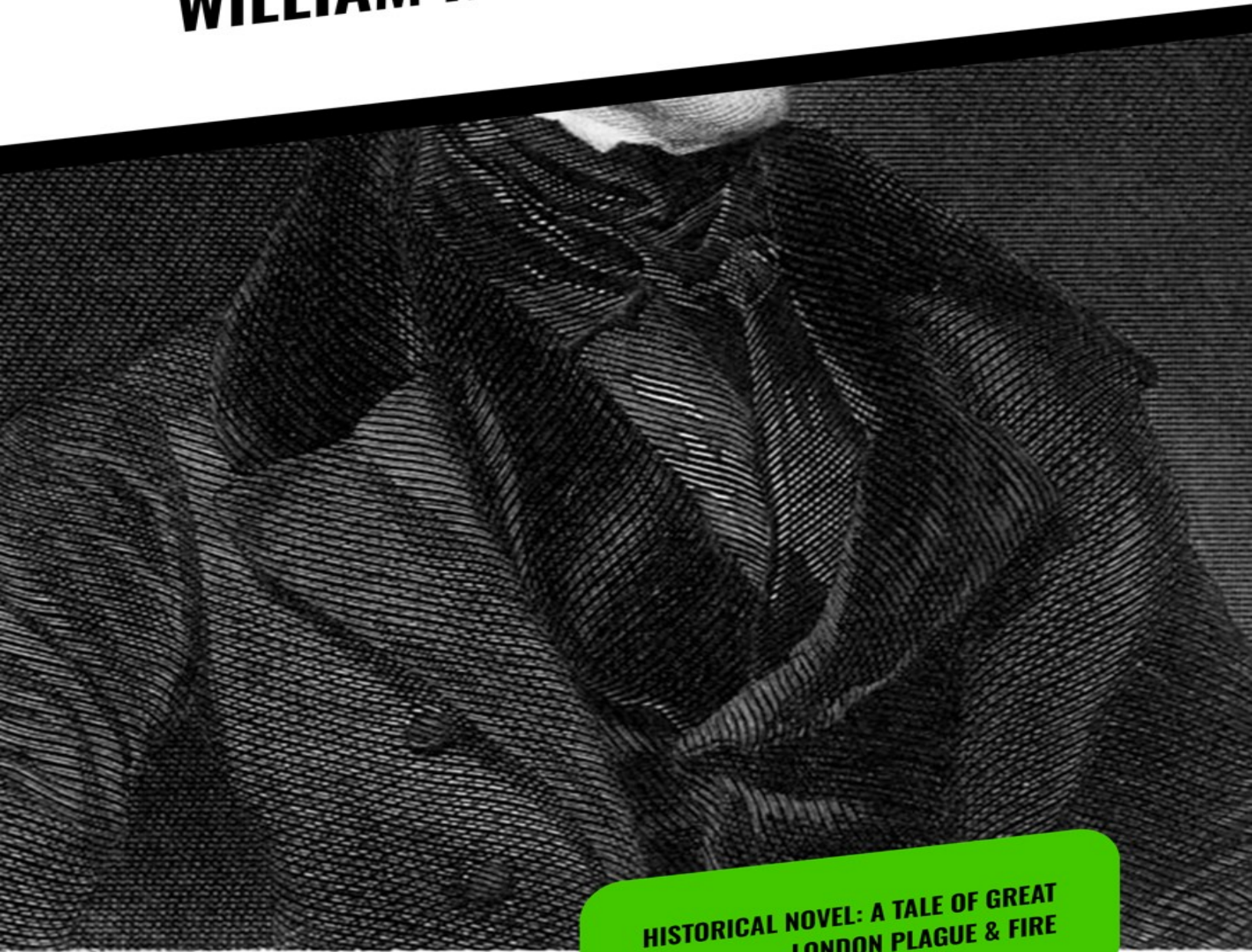




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WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH



**HISTORICAL NOVEL: A TALE OF GREAT
LONDON PLAGUE & FIRE**

OLD ST. PAUL'S

William Harrison Ainsworth

Old St Paul's

**Historical Novel: A Tale of Great London Plague
& Fire**

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The portion of the ensuing Tale relating to the Grocer of Wood-street, and his manner of victualling his house, and shutting up himself and his family within it during the worst part of the Plague of 1665, is founded on a narrative, which I have followed pretty closely in most of its details, contained in a very rare little volume, entitled, "*Preparations against the Plague, both of Soul and Body*," the authorship of which I have no hesitation in assigning to Defoe. Indeed, I venture to pronounce it his masterpiece. It is strange that this matchless performance should have hitherto escaped attention, and that it should not have been reprinted with some one of the countless impressions of the "*History of the Plague of London*," to which it forms an almost necessary accompaniment. The omission, I trust, will be repaired by Mr. Hazlitt the younger, Defoe's last and best editor, in his valuable edition of the works of that great novelist and political writer, now in the course of publication. It may be added, that a case precisely similar to that of the Grocer, and attended with the same happy results, occurred during the Plague of Marseilles, in 1720.

For my acquaintance with this narrative, as well as for the suggestion of its application to the present purpose, I am indebted to my friend, Mr. James Crossley, of Manchester.

Kensal Manor House, Harrow Road,
November 30, 1841.

BOOK THE FIRST.

APRIL, 1665.

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I. THE GROCER OF WOOD-STREET AND HIS FAMILY.

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One night, at the latter end of April, 1665, the family of a citizen of London carrying on an extensive business as a grocer in Wood-street, Cheapside, were assembled, according to custom, at prayer. The grocer's name was Stephen Bloundel. His family consisted of his wife, three sons, and two daughters. He had, moreover, an apprentice; an elderly female serving as cook; her son, a young man about five-and-twenty, filling the place of porter to the shop and general assistant; and a kitchen-maid. The whole household attended; for the worthy grocer, being a strict observer of his religious duties, as well as a rigid disciplinarian in other respects, suffered no one to be absent, on any plea whatever, except indisposition, from morning and evening devotions; and these were always performed at stated times. In fact, the establishment was conducted with the regularity of clockwork, it being the aim of its master not to pass a single hour of the day unprofitably.

The ordinary prayers gone through, Stephen Bloundel offered up along and fervent supplication to the Most High for protection against the devouring pestilence with which the city was then scourged. He acknowledged that this terrible visitation had been justly brought upon it by the wickedness of its inhabitants; that they deserved their doom, dreadful though it was; that, like the dwellers in Jerusalem before it was given up to ruin and desolation, they "had mocked the messengers of God and despised His word;" that in the language of the prophet, "they had refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and

stopped their ears that they should not hear; yea, had made their heart like an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law and the words which the Lord of Hosts had sent in his spirit by the former prophets." He admitted that great sins require great chastisement, and that the sins of London were enormous; that it was filled with strifes, seditions, heresies, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and every kind of abomination; that the ordinances of God were neglected, and all manner of vice openly practised; that, despite repeated warnings and afflictions less grievous than the present, these vicious practices had been persisted in. All this he humbly acknowledged. But he implored a gracious Providence, in consideration of his few faithful servants, to spare the others yet a little longer, and give them a last chance of repentance and amendment; or, if this could not be, and their utter extirpation was inevitable, that the habitations of the devout might be exempted from the general destruction—might be places of refuge, as Zoar was to Lot. He concluded by earnestly exhorting those around him to keep constant watch upon themselves; not to murmur at God's dealings and dispensations; but so to comport themselves, that "they might be able to stand in the day of wrath, in the day of death, and in the day of judgment." The exhortation produced a powerful effect upon its hearers, and they arose, some with serious, others with terrified looks.

Before proceeding further, it may be desirable to show in what manner the dreadful pestilence referred to by the grocer commenced, and how far its ravages had already extended. Two years before, namely, in 1663, more than a third of the population of Amsterdam was carried off by a desolating plague. Hamburgh was also grievously afflicted about the same time, and in the same manner. Notwithstanding every effort to cut off communication with these states, the insidious disease found its way into England by means of some bales of merchandise, as it was

suspected, at the latter end of the year 1664, when two persons died suddenly, with undoubted symptoms of the distemper, in Westminster. Its next appearance was at a house in Long Acre, and its victims two Frenchmen, who had brought goods from the Levant. Smothered for a short time, like a fire upon which coals had been heaped, it broke out with fresh fury in several places.

The consternation now began. The whole city was panic-stricken: nothing was talked of but the plague—nothing planned but means of arresting its progress—one grim and ghastly idea possessed the minds of all. Like a hideous phantom stalking the streets at noon-day, and scaring all in its path, Death took his course through London, and selected his prey at pleasure. The alarm was further increased by the predictions confidently made as to the vast numbers who would be swept away by the visitation; by the prognostications of astrologers; by the prophesyings of enthusiasts; by the denunciations of preachers, and by the portents and prodigies reported to have occurred. During the long and frosty winter preceding this fatal year, a comet appeared in the heavens, the sickly colour of which was supposed to forebode the judgment about to follow. Blazing stars and other meteors, of a lurid hue and strange and preternatural shape, were likewise seen. The sun was said to have set in streams of blood, and the moon to have shown without reflecting a shadow; grisly shapes appeared at night—strange clamours and groans were heard in the air—hearses, coffins, and heaps of unburied dead were discovered in the sky, and great cakes and clots of blood were found in the Tower moat; while a marvellous double tide occurred at London Bridge. All these prodigies were currently reported, and in most cases believed.

The severe frost, before noticed, did not break up till the end of February, and with the thaw the plague frightfully increased in violence. From Drury-lane it spread along Holborn, eastward as far as Great Turnstile, and westward to

Saint Giles's Pound, and so along the Tyburn-road. Saint Andrew's, Holborn, was next infected; and as this was a much more populous parish than the former, the deaths were more numerous within it. For a while, the disease was checked by Fleet Ditch; it then leaped this narrow boundary, and ascending the opposite hill, carried fearful devastation into Saint James's, Clerkenwell. At the same time, it attacked Saint Bride's; thinned the ranks of the thievish horde haunting Whitefriars, and proceeding in a westerly course, decimated Saint Clement Danes.

Hitherto, the city had escaped. The destroyer had not passed Ludgate or Newgate, but environed the walls like a besieging enemy. A few days, however, before the opening of this history, fine weather having commenced, the horrible disease began to grow more rife, and laughing all precautions and impediments to scorn, broke out in the very heart of the stronghold—namely, in Bearbinder-lane, near Stock's Market, where nine persons died.

At a season so awful, it may be imagined how an impressive address, like that delivered by the grocer, would be received by those who saw in the pestilence, not merely an overwhelming scourge from which few could escape, but a direct manifestation of the Divine displeasure. Not a word was said. Blaize Shotterel, the porter, and old Josyna, his mother, together with Patience, the other woman-servant, betook themselves silently, and with troubled countenances, to the kitchen. Leonard Holt, the apprentice, lingered for a moment to catch a glance from the soft blue eyes of Amabel, the grocer's eldest daughter (for even the plague was a secondary consideration with him when she was present), and failing in the attempt, he heaved a deep sigh, which was luckily laid to the account of the discourse he had just listened to by his sharp-sighted master, and proceeded to the shop, where he busied himself in arranging matters for the night.

Having just completed his twenty-first year, and his apprenticeship being within a few months of its expiration, Leonard Holt began to think of returning to his native town of Manchester, where he intended to settle, and where he had once fondly hoped the fair Amabel would accompany him, in the character of his bride. Not that he had ever ventured to declare his passion, nor that he had received sufficient encouragement to make it matter of certainty that if he did so declare himself, he should be accepted; but being both "proper and tall," and having tolerable confidence in his good looks, he had made himself, up to a short time prior to his introduction to the reader, quite easy on the point.

His present misgivings were occasioned by Amabel's altered manner towards him, and by a rival who, he had reason to fear, had completely superseded him in her good graces. Brought up together from an early age, the grocer's daughter and the young apprentice had at first regarded each other as brother and sister. By degrees, the feeling changed; Amabel became more reserved, and held little intercourse with Leonard, who, busied with his own concerns, thought little about her. But, as he grew towards manhood, he could not remain insensible to her extraordinary beauty—for extraordinary it was, and such as to attract admiration wherever she went, so that the "Grocer's Daughter" became the toast among the ruffling gallants of the town, many of whom sought to obtain speech with her. Her parents, however, were far too careful to permit any such approach. Amabel's stature was lofty; her limbs slight, but exquisitely symmetrical; her features small, and cast in the most delicate mould; her eyes of the softest blue; and her hair luxuriant, and of the finest texture and richest brown. Her other beauties must be left to the imagination; but it ought not to be omitted that she was barely eighteen, and had all the freshness, the innocence, and vivacity of that most charming period of woman's

existence. No wonder she ravished every heart. No wonder, in an age when love-making was more general even than now, that she was beset by admirers. No wonder her father's apprentice became desperately enamoured of her, and proportionately jealous.

And this brings us to his rival. On the 10th of April, two gallants, both richly attired, and both young and handsome, dismounted before the grocer's door, and, leaving their steeds to the care of their attendants, entered the shop. They made sundry purchases of preserves, figs, and other dried fruit, chatted familiarly with the grocer, and tarried so long, that at last he began to suspect they must have some motive. All at once, however, they disagreed on some slight matter—Bloundel could not tell what, nor, perhaps, could the disputants, even if their quarrel was not preconcerted—high words arose, and in another moment, swords were drawn, and furious passes exchanged. The grocer called to his eldest son, a stout youth of nineteen, and to Leonard Holt, to separate them. The apprentice seized his cudgel—no apprentice in those days was without one—and rushed towards the combatants, but before he could interfere, the fray was ended. One of them had received a thrust through the sword arm, and his blade dropping, his antagonist declared himself satisfied, and with a grave salute walked off. The wounded man wrapped a lace handkerchief round his arm, but immediately afterwards complained of great faintness. Pitying his condition, and suspecting no harm, the grocer led him into an inner room, where restoratives were offered by Mrs. Bloundel and her daughter Amabel, both of whom had been alarmed by the noise of the conflict. In a short time, the wounded man was so far recovered as to be able to converse with his assistants, especially the younger one; and the grocer having returned to the shop, his discourse became so very animated and tender, that Mrs. Bloundel deemed it prudent to give her daughter a hint to retire. Amabel reluctantly obeyed, for the young stranger

was so handsome, so richly dressed, had such a captivating manner, and so distinguished an air, that she was strongly prepossessed in his favour. A second look from her mother, however, caused her to disappear, nor did she return. After waiting with suppressed anxiety for some time, the young gallant departed, overwhelming the good dame with his thanks, and entreating permission to call again. This was peremptorily refused, but, notwithstanding the interdiction, he came on the following day. The grocer chanced to be out at the time, and the gallant, who had probably watched him go forth, deriding the remonstrances of the younger Bloundel and Leonard, marched straight to the inner room, where he found the dame and her daughter. They were much disconcerted at his appearance, and the latter instantly rose with the intention of retiring, but the gallant caught her arm and detained her.

"Do not fly me, Amabel," he cried, in an impassioned tone, "but suffer me to declare the love I have for you. I cannot live without you."

Amabel, whose neck and cheeks were crimsoned with blushes, cast down her eyes before the ardent regards of the gallant, and endeavoured to withdraw her hand.

"One word only," he continued, "and I release you. Am I wholly indifferent to you! Answer me—yes or no!"

"Do *not* answer him, Amabel," interposed her mother. "He is deceiving you. He loves you not. He would ruin you. This is the way with all these court butterflies. Tell him you hate him, child, and bid him begone."

"But I cannot tell him an untruth, mother," returned Amabel, artlessly, "for I do *not* hate him."

"Then you love me," cried the young man, falling on his knees, and pressing her hand to his lips. "Tell me so, and make me the happiest of men."

But Amabel had now recovered from the confusion into which she had been thrown, and, alarmed at her own indiscretion, forcibly withdrew her hand, exclaiming in a cold

tone, and with much natural dignity, "Arise, sir. I will not tolerate these freedoms. My mother is right—you have some ill design."

"By my soul, no!" cried the gallant, passionately. "I love you, and would make you mine."

"No doubt," remarked Mrs. Bloundel, contemptuously, "but not by marriage."

"Yes, by marriage," rejoined the gallant, rising. "If she will consent, I will wed her forthwith."

Both Amabel and her mother looked surprised at the young man's declaration, which was uttered with a fervour that seemed to leave no doubt of its sincerity; but the latter, fearing some artifice, replied, "If what you say is true, and you really love my daughter as much as you pretend, this is not the way to win her; for though she can have no pretension to wed with one of your seeming degree, nor is it for her happiness that she should, yet, were she sought by the proudest noble in the land, she shall never, if I can help it, be lightly won. If your intentions are honourable, you must address yourself, in the first place, to her father, and if he agrees (which I much doubt) that you shall become her suitor, I can make no objection. Till this is settled, I must pray you to desist from further importunity."

"And so must I," added Amabel. "I cannot give you a hope till you have spoken to my father."

"Be it so," replied the gallant. "I will tarry here till his return."

So saying, he was about to seat himself, but Mrs. Bloundel prevented him.

"I cannot permit this, sir," she cried. "Your tarrying here may, for aught I know, bring scandal upon my house;—I am sure it will be disagreeable to my husband. I am unacquainted with your name and condition. You may be a man of rank. You may be one of the profligate and profane crew who haunt the court. You may be the worst of them all, my Lord Rochester himself. He is about your age, I have

heard, and though a mere boy in years, is a veteran in libertinism. But, whoever you are, and whatever your rank and station may be, unless your character will bear the strictest scrutiny, I am certain Stephen Bloundel will never consent to your union with his daughter."

"Nay, mother," observed Amabel, "you judge the gentleman unjustly. I am sure he is neither a profligate gallant himself, nor a companion of such—especially of the wicked Earl of Rochester."

"I pretend to be no better than I am," replied the young man, repressing a smile that rose to his lips at Mrs. Bloundel's address; "but I shall reform when I am married. It would be impossible to be inconstant to so fair a creature as Amabel. For my rank, I have none. My condition is that of a private gentleman,—my name, Maurice Wyvil."

"What you say of yourself, Mr. Maurice Wyvil, convinces me you will meet with a decided refusal from my husband," returned Mrs. Bloundel.

"I trust not," replied Wyvil, glancing tenderly at Amabel. "If I should be so fortunate as to gain *his* consent, have I *yours*?"

"It is too soon to ask that question," she rejoined, blushing deeply. "And now, sir, you must go, indeed, you must. You distress my mother."

"If I do not distress *you*, I will stay," resumed Wyvil, with an imploring look.

"You *do* distress me," she answered, averting her gaze.

"Nay, then, I must tear myself away," he rejoined. "I shall return shortly, and trust to find your father less flinty-hearted than he is represented."

He would have clasped Amabel in his arms, and perhaps snatched a kiss, if her mother had not rushed between them.

"No more familiarities, sir," she cried angrily; "no court manners here. If you look to wed my daughter, you must

conduct yourself more decorously; but I can tell you, you have no chance—none whatever."

"Time will show," replied Wyvil, audaciously. "You had better give her to me quietly, and save me the trouble of carrying her off,—for have her I will."

"Mercy on us!" cried Mrs. Bloundel, in accents of alarm; "now his wicked intentions are out."

"Fear nothing, mother," observed Amabel, coldly. "He will scarcely carry me off without my own consent; and I am not likely to sacrifice myself for one who holds me in such light esteem."

"Forgive me, Amabel," rejoined Wyvil, in a voice so penitent that it instantly effaced her displeasure; "I meant not to offend. I spoke only the language of distraction. Do not dismiss me thus, or my death will lie at your door."

"I should be sorry for that," she replied; "but, inexperienced as I am, I feel this is not the language of real regard, but of furious passion."

A dark shade passed over Wyvil's handsome features, and the almost feminine beauty by which they were characterized gave place to a fierce and forbidding expression. Controlling himself by a powerful effort, he replied, with forced calmness, "Amabel, you know not what it is to love. I will not stir hence till I have seen your father."

"We will see that, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Bloundel, angrily. "What, ho! son Stephen! Leonard Holt! I say. This gentleman *will* stay here, whether I like or not. Show him forth."

"That I will, right willingly," replied the apprentice, rushing before the younger Bloundel, and flourishing his formidable cudgel. "Out with you, sir! Out with you!"

"Not at your bidding you, saucy knave," rejoined Wyvil, laying his hand upon his sword: "and if it were not for the presence of your mistress and her lovely daughter, I would crop your ears for your insolence."

"Their presence shall not prevent me from making my cudgel and your shoulders acquainted, if you do not budge,"

replied the apprentice, sturdily.

Enraged by the retort, Wyvil would have drawn his sword, but a blow on the arm disabled him.

"Plague on you, fellow!" he exclaimed; "you shall rue this to the last day of your existence."

"Threaten those who heed you," replied Leonard, about to repeat the blow.

"Do him no further injury!" cried Amabel, arresting his hand, and looking with the greatest commiseration at Wyvil. "You have dealt with him far too rudely already."

"Since I have your sympathy, sweet Amabel," rejoined Wyvil, "I care not what rude treatment I experience from this churl. We shall soon meet again." And bowing to her, he strode out of the room.

Leonard followed him to the shop-door, hoping some further pretext for quarrel would arise, but he was disappointed. Wyvil took no notice of him, and proceeded at a slow pace towards Cheapside.

Half an hour afterwards, Stephen Bloundel came home. On being informed of what had occurred, he was greatly annoyed, though he concealed his vexation, and highly applauded his daughter's conduct. Without further comment, he proceeded about his business, and remained in the shop till it was closed. Wyvil did not return, and the grocer tried to persuade himself they should see nothing more of him. Before Amabel retired to rest, he imprinted a kiss on her snowy brow, and said, in a tone of the utmost kindness, "You have never yet deceived me, child, and I hope never will. Tell me truly, do you take any interest in this young gallant?"

Amabel blushed deeply.

"I should not speak the truth, father," she rejoined, after a pause, "if I were to say I do not."

"I am sorry for it," replied Bloundel, gravely. "But you would not be happy with him. I am sure he is unprincipled and profligate:—you must forget him."

"I will try to do so," sighed Amabel. And the conversation dropped.

On the following day, Maurice Wyvil entered the grocer's shop. He was more richly attired than before, and there was a haughtiness in his manner which he had not hitherto assumed. What passed between him and Bloundel was not known, for the latter never spoke of it; but the result may be gathered from the fact that the young gallant was not allowed an interview with the grocer's daughter.

From this moment the change previously noticed took place in Amabel's demeanour towards Leonard. She seemed scarcely able to endure his presence, and sedulously avoided his regards. From being habitually gay and cheerful, she became pensive and reserved. Her mother more than once caught her in tears; and it was evident, from many other signs, that Wyvil completely engrossed her thoughts. Fully aware of this, Mrs. Bloundel said nothing of it to her husband, because the subject was painful to him; and not supposing the passion deeply rooted, she hoped it would speedily wear away. But she was mistaken—the flame was kept alive in Amabel's breast in a manner of which she was totally ignorant. Wyvil found means to deceive the vigilance of the grocer and his wife, but he could not deceive the vigilance of a jealous lover. Leonard discovered that his mistress had received a letter. He would not betray her, but he determined to watch her narrowly.

Accordingly, when she went forth one morning in company with her younger sister (a little girl of some five years old), he made an excuse to follow them, and, keeping within sight, perceived them enter Saint Paul's Cathedral, the mid aisle of which was then converted into a public walk, and generally thronged with town gallants, bullies, bona-robas, cut-purses, and rogues of every description. In short, it was the haunt of the worst of characters of the metropolis. When, therefore, Amabel entered this structure, Leonard felt certain it was to meet her lover. Rushing

forward, he saw her take her course through the crowd, and attract general attention from her loveliness—but he nowhere discerned Maurice Wyvil.

Suddenly, however, she struck off to the right, and halted near one of the pillars, and the apprentice, advancing, detected his rival behind it. He was whispering a few words in her ear, unperceived by her sister. Maddened by the sight, Leonard hurried towards them, but before he could reach the spot Wyvil was gone, and Amabel, though greatly confused, looked at the same time so indignant, that he almost regretted his precipitation.

"You will, of course, make known to my father what you have just seen?" she said in a low tone.

"If you will promise not to meet that gallant again without my knowledge, I will not," replied Leonard.

After a moment's reflection, Amabel gave the required promise, and they returned to Wood-street together. Satisfied she would not break her word, the apprentice became more easy, and as a week elapsed, and nothing was said to him on the subject, he persuaded himself she would not attempt to meet her lover again.

Things were in this state at the opening of our tale, but upon the night in question, Leonard fancied he discerned some agitation in Amabel's manner towards him, and in consequence of this notion, he sought to meet her gaze, as before related, after prayers. While trying to distract his thoughts by arranging sundry firkins of butter, and putting other things in order, he heard a light footstep behind him, and turning at the sound, beheld Amabel.

"Leonard," she whispered, "I promised to tell you when I should next meet Maurice Wyvil. He will be here to-night." And without giving him time to answer, she retired.

For awhile, Leonard remained in a state almost of stupefaction, repeating to himself, as if unwilling to believe them, the words he had just heard. He had not recovered when the grocer entered the shop, and noticing his haggard

looks, kindly inquired if he felt unwell. The apprentice returned an evasive answer, and half determined to relate all he knew to his master, but the next moment he changed his intention, and, influenced by that chivalric feeling which always governs those, of whatever condition, who love profoundly, resolved not to betray the thoughtless girl, but to trust to his own ingenuity to thwart the designs of his rival, and preserve her. Acting upon this resolution, he said he had a slight headache, and instantly resumed his occupation.

At nine o'clock, the whole family assembled at supper. The board was plentifully though plainly spread, but the grocer observed, with some uneasiness, that his apprentice, who had a good appetite in ordinary, ate little or nothing. He kept his eye constantly upon him, and became convinced from his manner that something ailed him. Not having any notion of the truth, and being filled with apprehensions of the plague, his dread was that Leonard was infected by the disease. Supper was generally the pleasantest meal of the day at the grocer's house, but on this occasion it passed off cheerlessly enough, and a circumstance occurred at its close which threw all into confusion and distress. Before relating this, however, we must complete our description of the family under their present aspect.

Tall, and of a spare frame, with good features, somewhat austere in their expression, and of the cast which we are apt to term precise and puritanical, but tempered with great benevolence, Stephen Bloundel had a keen, deep-seated eye, overshadowed by thick brows, and suffered his long-flowing grey hair to descend over his shoulders. His forehead was high and ample, his chin square and well defined, and his general appearance exceedingly striking. In age he was about fifty. His integrity and fairness of dealing, never once called in question for a period of thirty years, had won him the esteem of all who knew him; while his prudence and economy had enabled him, during that time,

to amass a tolerable fortune. His methodical habits, and strong religious principles, have been already mentioned. His eldest son was named after him, and resembled him both in person and character, promising to tread in his footsteps. The younger sons require little notice at present. One was twelve, and the other only half that age; but both appeared to inherit many of their father's good qualities. Basil, the elder, was a stout, well-grown lad, and had never known a day's ill-health; while Hubert, the younger, was thin, delicate, and constantly ailing.

Mrs. Bloundel was a specimen of a city dame of the best kind. She had a few pardonable vanities, which no arguments could overcome—such as a little ostentation in dress—a little pride in the neatness of her house—and a good deal in the beauty of her children, especially in that of Amabel—as well as in the wealth and high character of her husband, whom she regarded as the most perfect of human beings. These slight failings allowed for, nothing but good remained. Her conduct was exemplary in all the relations of life. The tenderest of mothers, and the most affectionate of wives, she had as much genuine piety and strictness of moral principles as her husband. Short, plump, and well-proportioned, though somewhat, perhaps, exceeding the rules of symmetry—she had a rich olive complexion, fine black eyes, beaming with good nature, and an ever-laughing mouth, ornamented by a beautiful set of teeth. To wind up all, she was a few years younger than her husband.

Amabel has already been described. The youngest girl, Christiana, was a pretty little dove-eyed, flaxen-haired child, between four and five years old, and shared the fate of most younger children, being very much caressed, and not a little spoiled by her parents.

The foregoing description of the grocer's family would be incomplete without some mention of his household. Old Josyna Shotterel, the cook, who had lived with her master ever since his marriage, and had the strongest attachment

for him, was a hale, stout dame, of about sixty, with few infirmities for her years, and with less asperity of temper than generally belongs to servants of her class. She was a native of Holland, and came to England early in life, where she married Blaize's father, who died soon after their union. An excellent cook in a plain way—indeed, she had no practice in any other—she would brew strong ale and mead, or mix a sack-posset with, any innkeeper in the city. Moreover, she was a careful and tender nurse, if her services were ever required in that capacity. The children looked upon her as a second mother; and her affection for them, which was unbounded, deserved their regard. She was a perfect storehouse of what are termed "old women's receipts;" and there were few complaints (except the plague) for which she did not think herself qualified to prescribe and able to cure. Her skill in the healing art was often tested by her charitable mistress, who required her to prepare remedies, as well as nourishing broths, for such of the poor of the parish as applied to her for relief at times of sickness.

Her son, Blaize, was a stout, stumpy fellow, about four feet ten, with a head somewhat too large for his body, and extremely long arms. Ever since the plague had broken out in Drury-lane, it haunted him like a spectre, and scattered the few faculties he possessed. In vain he tried to combat his alarm—in vain his mother endeavoured to laugh him out of it. Nothing would do. He read the bills of mortality daily; ascertained the particulars of every case; dilated upon the agonies of the sufferers; watched the progress of the infection, and calculated the time it would take to reach Wood-street. He talked of the pestilence by day, and dreamed of it at night; and more than once alarmed the house by roaring for assistance, under the idea that he was suddenly attacked. By his mother's advice, he steeped rue, wormwood, and sage in his drink, till it was so abominably nauseous that he could scarcely swallow it, and carried a

small ball in the hollow of his hand, compounded of wax, angelica, camphor, and other drugs. He likewise chewed a small piece of Virginian snake-root, or zedoary, if he approached any place supposed to be infected. A dried toad was suspended round his neck, as an amulet of sovereign virtue. Every nostrum sold by the quacks in the streets tempted him; and a few days before, he had expended his last crown in the purchase of a bottle of plague-water. Being of a superstitious nature, he placed full faith in all the predictions of the astrologers, who foretold that London should be utterly laid waste, that grass should grow in the streets, and that the living should not be able to bury the dead. He quaked at the terrible denunciations of the preachers, who exhorted their hearers to repentance, telling them a judgment was at hand, and shuddered at the wild and fearful prophesying of the insane enthusiasts who roamed the streets. His nativity having been cast, and it appearing that he would be in great danger on the 20th of June, he made up his mind that he should die of the plague on that day. Before he was assailed by these terrors, he had entertained a sneaking attachment for Patience, the kitchen-maid, a young and buxom damsel, who had no especial objection to him. But of late, his love had given way to apprehension, and his whole thoughts were centred in one idea, namely, self-preservation.

By this time supper was over, and the family were about to separate for the night, when Stephen, the grocer's eldest son, having risen to quit the room, staggered and complained of a strange dizziness and headache, which almost deprived him of sight, while his heart palpitated frightfully. A dreadful suspicion seized his father. He ran towards him, and assisted him to a seat. Scarcely had the young man reached it, when a violent sickness seized him; a greenish-coloured froth appeared at the mouth, and he began to grow delirious. Guided by the convulsive efforts of the sufferer, Bloundel tore off his clothes, and after a

moment's search, perceived under the left arm a livid pustule. He uttered a cry of anguish. His son was plague-stricken.

II. THE COFFIN-MAKER.

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The first shock over, the grocer bore the affliction manfully, and like one prepared for it. Exhibiting little outward emotion, though his heart was torn with anguish, and acting with the utmost calmness, he forbade his wife to approach the sufferer, and desired her instantly to retire to her own room with her daughters; and not to leave it on any consideration whatever, without his permission.

Accustomed to regard her husband's word as law, Mrs. Bloundel, for the first time in her life, disputed his authority, and, falling on her knees, besought him, with tears in her eyes, to allow her to nurse her son. But he remained inflexible, and she was forced to comply.

He next gave similar directions to old Josyna respecting his two younger sons, with this difference only, that when they were put to rest, and the door was locked upon them, she was to return to the kitchen and prepare a posset-drink of canary and spirits of sulphur, together with a poultice of mallows, lily-roots, figs, linseed, and palm-oil, for the patient.

These orders given and obeyed, with Leonard Holt's assistance-for Blaize, who had crept into a corner, in extremity of terror, was wholly incapable of rendering any help-he conveyed his son to the adjoining room, on the ground floor, where there was a bed, and placing him within it, heaped blankets upon him to promote profuse perspiration, while the apprentice lighted a fire.

Provided with the most efficacious remedies for the distemper, and acquainted with the mode of treating it prescribed by the College of Physicians, Bloundel was at no loss how to act, but, rubbing the part affected with a stimulating ointment, he administered at the same time

doses of mithridate, Venice treacle, and other potent alexipharmics.

He had soon the satisfaction of perceiving that his son became somewhat easier; and after swallowing the posset-drink prepared by old Josyna, who used all the expedition she could, a moisture broke out upon the youth's skin, and appeared to relieve him so much, that, but for the ghastly paleness of his countenance, and the muddy look of his eye, his father would have indulged a hope of his recovery.

Up to this time, the grocer had acted for himself, and felt confident he had acted rightly; but he now deemed it expedient to call in advice, and, accordingly, commissioned his apprentice to fetch Doctor Hodges, a physician, residing in Great Knightrider-street, Doctors' Commons, who had recently acquired considerable reputation for his skilful treatment of those attacked by the plague, and who (it may be incidentally mentioned) afterwards gave to the medical world a curious account of the ravages of the disorder, as well as of his own professional experiences during this terrible period. He likewise told him—and he could not repress a sigh as he did so—to give notice to the Examiner of Health (there were one or two officers, so designated, appointed to every parish, at this awful season, by the city authorities) that his house was infected.

While preparing to set out, Leonard again debated with himself whether he should acquaint his master with Maurice Wyvil's meditated visit. But conceiving it wholly impossible that Amabel could leave her mother's room, even if she were disposed to do so, he determined to let the affair take its course. On his way to the shop, he entered a small room occupied by Blaize, and found him seated near a table, with his hands upon his knees, and his eyes fixed upon the ground, looking the very image of despair. The atmosphere smelt like that of an apothecary's shop, and was so overpowering, that Leonard could scarcely breathe. The table was covered with pill-boxes and phials, most of which

were emptied, and a dim light was afforded by a candle with a most portentous crest of snuff.

"So you have been poisoning yourself, I perceive," observed Leonard, approaching him.

"Keep off!" cried the porter, springing suddenly to his feet. "Don't touch me, I say. Poisoning myself! I have taken three rufuses, or pestilential pills; two spoonfuls of alexiteral water; the same quantity of anti-pestilential decoction; half as much of Sir Theodore Mayerne's electuary; and a large dose of orvietan. Do you call that poisoning myself? I call it taking proper precaution, and would recommend you to do the same. Beside this, I have sprinkled myself with vinegar, fumigated my clothes, and rubbed my nose, inside and out, till it smarted so intolerably, I was obliged to desist, with balsam of sulphur."

"Well, well, if you don't escape the plague, it won't be your fault," returned Leonard, scarcely able to refrain from laughing. "But I have something to tell you before I go."

"What is the matter?" demanded Blaize, in alarm. "Where—where are you going?"

"To fetch the doctor," replied Leonard.

"Is Master Stephen worse?" rejoined the porter.

"On the contrary, I hope he is better," replied Leonard "I shall be back directly, but as I have to give notice to the Examiner of Health that the house is infected, I may be detained a few minutes longer than I anticipate. Keep the street-door locked; I will fasten the yard-gate, and do not for your life let any one in, except Doctor Hodges, till I return. Do you hear?—do you understand what I say?"

"Yes, I hear plain enough," growled Blaize. "You say that the house is infected, and that we shall all be locked up."

"Dolt!" exclaimed the apprentice, "I said no such thing." And he repeated his injunctions, but Blaize was too much terrified to comprehend them. At last, losing all patience, Leonard cried in a menacing tone, "If you do not attend to me, I will cudgel you within an inch of your life, and you will

find the thrashing harder to bear even than the plague itself. Rouse yourself, fool, and follow me."

Accompanied by the porter, he hurried to the yard-gate, saw it bolted within-side, and then returned to the shop, where, having found his cap and cudgel, he directed Blaize to lock the door after him, cautioning him, for the third time, not to admit any one except the doctor. "If I find, on my return, that you have neglected my injunctions," he concluded, "as sure as I now stand before you, I'll break every bone in your body."

Blaize promised obedience, adding in a supplicating tone, "Leonard, if I were you, I would not go to the Examiner of Health. Poor Stephen may not have the plague, after all. It's a dreadful thing to be imprisoned for a month, for that's the time appointed by the Lord Mayor. Only a week ago I passed several houses in Holborn, shut up on account of the plague, with a watchman at the door, and I never shall forget the melancholy faces I saw at the windows. It was a dreadful spectacle, and has haunted me ever since."

"It cannot be helped," rejoined Leonard, with a sigh. "If we disobey the Lord Mayor's orders, and neglect giving information, we shall all be sent to Newgate, while poor Stephen will be taken to the pest-house. Besides, the searchers will be here before morning. They are sure to learn what has happened from Doctor Hodges."

"True, true," replied Blaize; "I had forgotten that. Let me go with you, dear Leonard. I dare not remain here longer."

"What! would you leave your kind good master, at a time like this, when he most needs your services?" rejoined Leonard, reproachfully. "Out, cowardly hound! I am ashamed of you. Shake off your fears, and be a man. You can but die once; and what matters it whether you die of the plague or the cholic?"

"It matters a great deal," replied Blaize. "I am afraid of nothing but the plague. I am sure I shall be its next victim in this house. But you are right—I cannot desert my kind

master, nor my old mother. Farewell, Leonard. Perhaps we may never meet again. I may be dead before you come back. I feel very ill already."

"No wonder, after all the stuff you have swallowed," returned Leonard. "But pluck up your courage, or you will bring on the very thing you are anxious to avoid. As many people have died from fear as from any other cause. One word before I go. If any one should get into the house by scaling the yard-wall, or through the window, instantly alarm our master."

"Certainly," returned Blaize, with a look of surprise, "But do you expect any one to enter the house in that way?"

"Ask no questions, but do as I bid you," rejoined Leonard, opening the door, and about to go forth.

"Stop a moment," cried Blaize, detaining him, and drawing from his pocket a handful of simples. "Won't you take some of them with you to guard against infection? There's wormwood, woodsorrel, masterwort, zedoary, and angelica; and lastly, there is a little bottle of the sovereign preservative against the plague, as prepared by the great Lord Bacon, and approved by Queen Elizabeth. Won't you take *that*?"

"I have no fear," replied Leonard, shutting the door in his face. And as he lingered for a moment while it was locked, he heard Blaize say to himself, "I must go and take three more refuses and a large dose of diascordium."

It was a bright moonlight night, and as the apprentice turned to depart, he perceived a figure hastily retreating on the other side of the way. Making sure it was Maurice Wyvil, though he could not distinguish the garb of the person—that side of the street being in the shade—and stung by jealousy, he immediately started in pursuit. The fugitive struck down Lad-lane, and run on till he came to the end of Lawrence-lane, where, finding himself closely pressed, he suddenly halted, and pulling his hat over his brows to conceal his features, fiercely confronted his pursuer.