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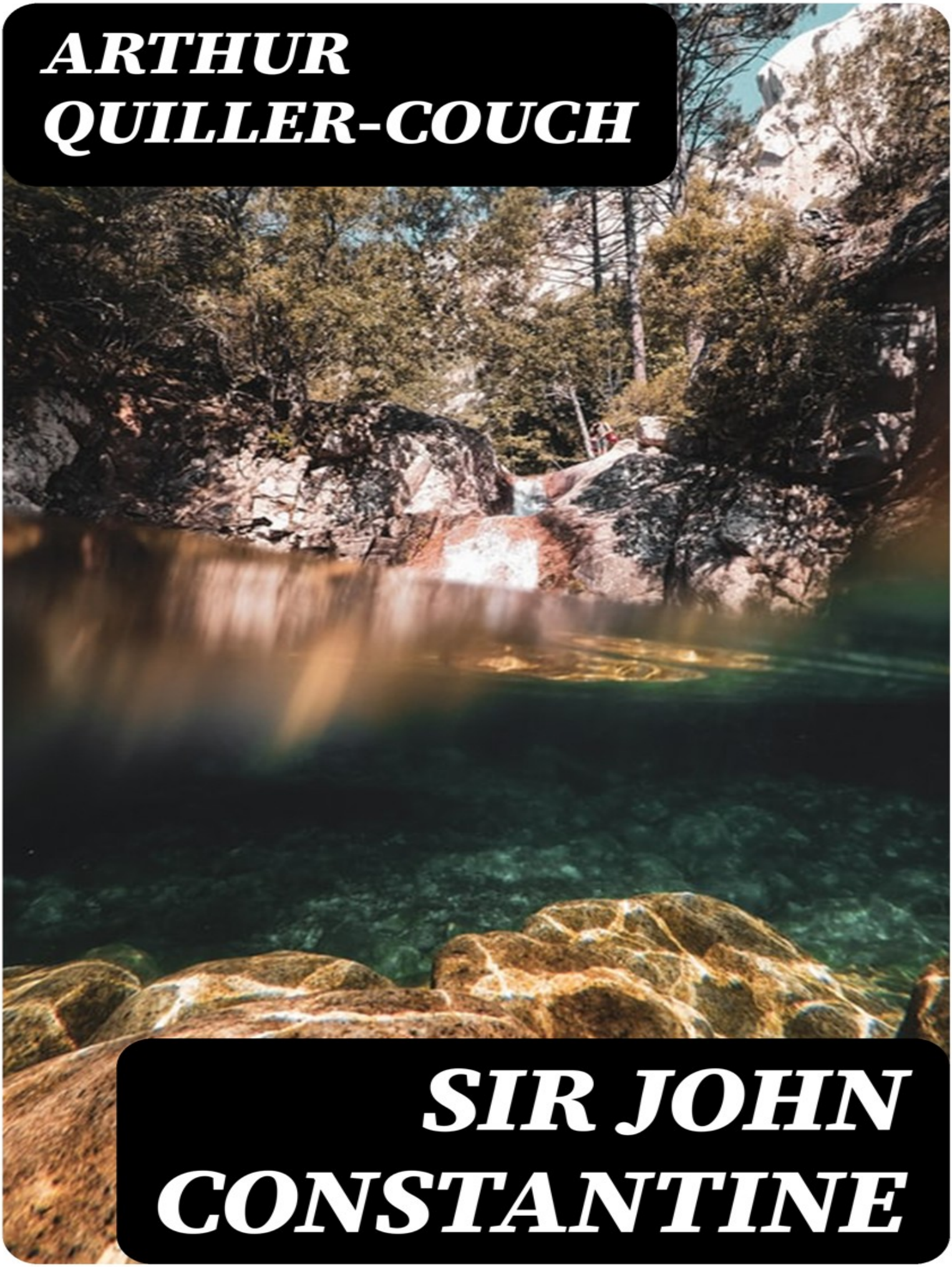

SIR JOHN CONSTANTINE

Arthur Quiller-Couch

Sir John Constantine

Memoirs of His Adventures At Home and Abroad and Particularly in the Island of Corsica: Beginning with the Year 1756

EAN 8596547383192

DigiCat, 2022
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CHAPTER I.

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OF THE LINEAGE AND CONDITION OF SIR JOHN CONSTANTINE.

> "I have laboured to make a covenant with myself, that affection may not press upon judgment: for I suppose there is no man, that hath any apprehension of gentry or nobleness, but his affection stands to a continuance of a noble name and house, and would take hold of a twig or twine-thread to uphold it: and yet time hath his revolution, there must be a period and an end of all temporal things, *finis rerum*, an end of names and dignities and whatsoever is terrene. . . . For where is Bohun? Where is Mowbray? Where is Mortimer? Nay, which is more and most of all, where is Plantagenet? They are intombed in the urns and sepulchres of mortality."—*Lord Chief Justice Crewe*.

My father, Sir John Constantine of Constantine, in the county of Cornwall, was a gentleman of ample but impoverished estates, who by renouncing the world had come to be pretty generally reputed a madman. This did not

affect him one jot, since he held precisely the same opinion of his neighbours—with whom, moreover, he continued on excellent terms. He kept six saddle horses in a stable large enough for a regiment of cavalry; a brace of setters and an infirm spaniel in kennels which had sometime held twenty couples of hounds; and himself and his household in a wing of his great mansion, locking off the rest, with its portraits and tapestries, cases of books, and stands of antique arms, to be a barrack for the mice. This household consisted of his brother-in-law, Gervase (a bachelor of punctual habits but a rambling head); a butler, Billy Priske; a cook, Mrs. Nance, who also looked after the housekeeping; two serving-maids; and, during his holidays, the present writer. My mother (an Arundell of Trerice) had died within a year after giving me birth; and after a childhood which lacked playmates, indeed, but was by no means neglected or unhappy, my father took me to Winchester College, his old school, to be improved in those classical studies which I had hitherto followed desultorily under our vicar, Mr. Grylls, and there entered me as a Commoner in the house of Dr. Burton, Head-master. I had spent almost four years at Winchester at the date (Midsummer, 1756) when this story begins.

To return to my father. He was, as the world goes, a mass of contrarieties. A thorough Englishman in the virtues for which foreigners admire us, and in the extravagance at which they smile, he had never even affected an interest in the politics over which Englishmen grow red in the face; and this in his youth had commended him to Walpole, who had taken him up and advanced him as well for his abilities, address, and singularly fine presence as because his estate

then seemed adequate to maintain him in any preferment. Again Walpole's policy abroad—which really treated warfare as the evil it appears in other men's professions—condemned my father, a born soldier, to seek his line in diplomacy; wherein he had no sooner built a reputation by services at two or three of the Italian courts than, with a knighthood in hand and an ambassadorship in prospect, he suddenly abandoned all, cast off the world, and retired into Cornwall, to make a humdrum marriage and practise fishing for trout.

The reason of it none knew, or how his estate had come to be impoverished, as beyond doubt it was. Here again he showed himself unlike the rest of men, in that he let the stress of poverty fall first upon himself, next upon his household, last of all upon his tenants and other dependants. After my mother's death he cut down his own charges (the cellar only excepted) to the last penny, shut himself off in a couple of rooms, slept in a camp bed, wore an old velveteen coat in winter and in summer a fisherman's smock, ate frugally, and would have drunk beer or even water had not his stomach abhorred them both. Of wine he drank in moderation—that is to say, for him, since his temperance would have sent nine men out of ten under the table—and of the best. He had indeed a large and obstinate dignity in his drinking. It betrayed, even as his carriage betrayed beneath his old coat, a king in exile.

Yet while he pinched himself with these economies, he drew no strings—or drew them tenderly—upon the expenses and charities of a good landlord. The fences rotted around his own park and pleasure-grounds, but his tenants' fences,

walls, roofs stood in more than moderate repair, nor (although my uncle Gervase groaned over the accounts) would an abatement of rent be denied, the appeal having been weighed and found to be reasonable. The rain—which falls alike upon the just and the unjust—beat through his own roof, but never through the labourer's thatch; and Mrs. Nance, the cook, who hated beggars, might not without art and secrecy dismiss a single beggar unfed. His religion he told to no man, but believed the practice of worship to be good for all men, and regularly encouraged it by attending church on Sundays and festivals. He and the vicar ruled our parish together in amity, as fellow-Christians and rival anglers.

Now, all these apparent contrarieties in my father flowed in fact from a very rare simplicity, and this simplicity again had its origin in his lineage, which was something more than royal.

On the Cornish shore of the Tamar River, which divides Cornwall from Devon, and a little above Saltash, stands the country church of Landulph, so close by the water that the high tides wash by its graveyard wall. Within the church you will find a mural tablet of brass thus inscribed—

> "Here lyeth the body of Theodoro Paleologvs of Pesaro in Italye, descended from ye Imperyall lyne of ye last Christian Emperors of Greece being the sonne of Camilio ye sonne of Prosper the sonne of Theodoro the sonne of John ye sonne of Thomas second brother to Constantine Paleologvs, the 8th of that name and last of yt lyne yt raygned in

> Constantinople vntill svbdewed by the Tvrks who married with Mary ye davghter of William Balls of Hadlye in Svffolke gent & had issve 5 children Theodoro John Ferdinando Maria & Dorothy & dep'ted this life at Clyfton ye 21th of Ianvary 1636"

Above these words the tablet bears an eagle engraved with two heads, and its talons resting upon two gates of Rome and Constantinople, with (for difference) a crescent between the gates, and over all an imperial crown. In truth this exile buried by Tamar drew his blood direct from the loins of the great Byzantine emperors, through that Thomas of whom Mahomet II. said, "I have found many slaves in Peloponnesus, but this man only:" and from Theodore, through his second son John, came the Constantines of Constantine—albeit with a bar sinister, of which my father made small account. I believe he held privately that a Constantine, *de stirpe imperatorum*, had no call to concern himself with petty ceremonies of this or that of the Church's offshoots to legitimize his blood. At any rate no bar sinister appeared on the imperial escutcheon repeated, with quarterings of Arundel, Mohun, Grenville, Nevile, Archdeckne, Courtney, and, again, Arundel, on the wainscots and in the windows of Constantine, usually with the legend *Dabit Devs His Qvoqve Finem*, but twice or thrice with a hopefuller one, *Generis revocemvs honores*.

Knowing him to be thus descended, you could recognize in all my father said or did a large simplicity as of the earlier gods, and a dignity proper to a king as to a beggar, but to no third and mean state. A child might beard him, but no man might venture a liberty with him or abide the rare

explosions of his anger. You might even, upon long acquaintance, take him for a great, though mad, Englishman, and trust him as an Englishman to the end; but the soil of his nature was that which grows the vine—volcanic, breathing through its pores a hidden heat to answer the sun's. Whether or no there be in man a faith to remove mountains, there is in him (and it may come to the same thing) a fire to split them, and anon to clothe the bare rock with tendrils and soft-scented blooms.

In person my father stood six feet five inches tall, and his shoulders filled a doorway. His head was large and shapely, and he carried it with a very noble poise; his face a fine oval, broad across the brow and ending in a chin at once delicate and masterful; his nose slightly aquiline; his hair—and he wore his own, tied with a ribbon—of a shining white. His cheeks were hollow and would have been cadaverous but for their hue, a sanguine brown, well tanned by out-of-door living. His eyes, of an iron-grey colour, were fierce or gentle as you took him, but as a rule extraordinarily gentle. He would walk you thirty miles any day without fatigue, and shoot you a woodcock against any man; but as an angler my uncle Gervase beat him.

He spoke Italian as readily as English; French and the modern Greek with a little more difficulty; and could read in Greek, Latin, and Spanish. His books were the "Meditations" of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, and Dante's "Divine Comedy," with the "Aeneis," Ariosto, and some old Spanish romances next in order. I do not think he cared greatly for any English writers but Donne and Izaak Walton, of whose "Angler" and "Life of Sir Henry Wotton" he was inordinately

fond. In particular he admired the character of this Sir Henry Wotton, singling him out among "the famous nations of the dead" (as Sir Thomas Browne calls them) for a kind of posthumous friendship—nay, almost a passion of memory. To be sure, though with more than a hundred years between them, both had been bred at Winchester, and both had known courts and embassies and retired from them upon private life. . . . But who can explain friendship, even after all the essays written upon it? Certainly to be friends with a dead man was to my father a feat neither impossible nor absurd.

Yet he possessed two dear living friends at least in my Uncle Gervase and Mr. Grylls, and had even dedicated a temple to their friendship. It stood about half a mile away from the house, at the foot of the old deer-park: a small Ionic summer-house set on a turfed slope facing down a dell upon the Helford River. A spring of water, very cold and pure, rose bubbling a few paces from the porch and tumbled down the dell with a pretty chatter. Tradition said that it had once been visited and blessed by St. Swithun, for which cause my father called his summer-house by the saint's name, and annually on his festival (which falls on the 15th of July) caused wine and dessert to be carried out thither, where the three drank to their common pastime and discoursed of it in the cool of the evening within earshot of the lapsing water. On many other evenings they met to smoke their pipes here, my father and Mr. Grylls playing at chequers sometimes, while my uncle wrapped and bent, till the light failed him, new trout flies for the next day's sport; but to keep St. Swithun's feast they never omitted, which

my father commemorated with a tablet set against the back wall and bearing these lines—

"Peace to this house within this little wood,
Named of St. Swithun and his brotherhood
That here would meet and punctual on his day
Their heads and hands and hearts together lay.
Nor may no years the mem'ries three untwine
Of Grylls W.G.
And Arundell G.A.
And Constantine J.C. Anno 1752
Flvmina amem silvasqve inglorivs."

Of these two friends of my father I shall speak in their proper place, but have given up this first chapter to him alone. My readers maybe will grumble that it omits to tell what they would first choose to learn: the reason why he had exchanged fame and the world for a Cornish exile. But as yet he only—and perhaps my uncle Gervase, who kept the accounts—held the key to that secret.

CHAPTER II.

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I RIDE ON A PILGRIMAGE.

"_Heus Rogere! fer caballos; Eja, nunc eamus!"
Domum.

At Winchester, which we boys (though we fared hardly) never doubted to be the first school in the world, as it was the most ancient in England, we had a song we called *Domum*: and because our common pride in her—as the best pride will—belittled itself in speech, I trust that our song honoured Saint Mary of Winton the more in that it celebrated only the joys of leaving her.

The tale went, it had been composed (in Latin, too) by a boy detained at school for a punishment during the summer holidays. Another fable improved on this by chaining him to a tree. A third imprisoned him in cloisters whence, through the arcades and from the ossuaries of dead fellows and scholars, he poured out his soul to the swallows haunting the green garth—

"Jam repetit domum
Daulias advena,
Nosque domum repetamus."

Whatever its origin, our custom was to sing it as the holidays— especially the summer holidays—drew near, and to repeat it as they drew nearer, until every voice was hoarse. As I remember, we kept up this custom with no decrease of fervour through the heats of June 1756, though they were such that our *hostiarius* Dr. Warton, then a new broom, swept us out of school and for a fortnight heard our books (as the old practice had been) in cloisters, where we sat upon cool stone and in the cool airs, and between our tasks watched the swallows at play. Nevertheless we panted, until evening released us to wander forth along the water-meadows by Itchen and bathe, and, having bathed, to

lie naked amid the mints and grasses for a while before returning in the twilight.

This bathing went on, not in one or two great crowds, but in groups, and often in pairs only, scattered along the river-bank almost all the way to Hills; it being our custom again at Winchester (and I believe it still continues) to *socius* or walk with one companion; and only at one or two favoured pools would several of these couples meet together for the sport. On the evening of which I am to tell, my companion was a boy named Fiennes, of about my own age, and we bathed alone, though not far away to right and left the bank teemed with outcries and laughter and naked boys running all silvery as their voices in the dusk.

With all this uproar the trout of Itchen, as you may suppose, had gone into hiding; but doubtless some fine fellows lay snug under the stones, and—the stream running shallow after the heats—as we stretched ourselves on the grass Fiennes challenged me to tickle for one; it may be because he had heard me boast of my angling feats at home. There seemed a likely pool under the farther bank; convenient, except that to take up the best position beside it I must get the level sun full in my face. I crept across, however, Fiennes keeping silence, laid myself flat on my belly, and peered down into the pool, shading my eyes with one hand. For a long while I saw no fish, until the sun-rays, striking aslant, touched the edge of a golden fin very prettily bestowed in a hole of the bank and well within an overlap of green weed. Now and again the fin quivered, but for the most part my gentleman lay quiet as a stone, head to stream, and waited for relief from these noisy Wykehamists.

Experience, perhaps, had taught him to despise them; at any rate, when gently—very gently—I lowered my hand and began to tickle, he showed neither alarm nor resentment.

"Is it a trout?" demanded Fiennes, in an excited whisper from the farther shore. But of course I made no answer, and presently I supposed that he must have crept off to his clothes, for some way up the stream I heard the Second Master's voice warning the bathers to dress and return, and with his usual formula, _Ite domum saturae, venit Hesperus, ite capelloe! Being short-sighted, he missed to spy me, and I felt, rather than saw or heard, him pass on; for with one hand I yet shaded my eyes while with the other I tickled.

Yet another two minutes went by, and then with a jerk I had my trout, my thumb and forefinger deep under his gills; brought down my other clutch upon him and, lifting, flung him back over me among the meadow grass, my posture being such that I could neither hold him struggling nor recover my own balance save by rolling sideways over on my shoulder-pin; which I did, and, running to him where he gleamed and doubled, flipping the grasses, caught him in both hands and held him aloft.

But other voices than Fiennes' answered my shout over the river— voices that I knew, though they belonged not to this hour nor to this place; and blinking against the sun, now sinning level across Lavender Meads, I was aware of two tall figures standing dark against it, and of a third and shorter one between whose legs it poured in gold as through a natural arch. Sure no second man in England wore Billy Priske's legs!

Then, and while I stood amazed, my father's voice and my Uncle Gervase's called to me together: and gulping down all wonder, possessed with love only and a wild joy—but yet grasping my fish— I splashed across the shallows and up the bank, and let my father take me naked to his heart.

"So, lad," said he, after a moment, thrusting me a little back by the shoulders (while I could only sob), and holding me so that the sun fell full on me, "Dost truly love me so much?"

"Clivver boy, clivver boy!" said the voice of Billy Priske. "Lord, now, what things they do teach here beside the Latin!"

The rogue said it, as I knew, to turn my father's suspicion, having himself taught me the poacher's trick. But my uncle Gervase, whose mind moved as slowly as it was easily diverted, answered with gravity—

"It is hard knowing what may or may not be useful in after life, seeing that God in His wisdom hides what that life is to be."

"Very true," agreed my father, with a twinkle, and took snuff.

"But—but what brings you here?" cried I, with a catch of the breath, ignoring all this.

"Nevertheless, such comely lads as they be," my uncle continued, "God will doubtless bring them to good. Comelier lads, brother, I never saw, nor, I think, the sun never shined on; yet there was one, at the bowls yonder, was swearing so it grieved me to the heart."

"Put on your clothes, boy," said my father, answering me. "We have ridden far, but we bring no ill news; and to-morrow—I have the Head-master's leave for it—you ride on with us to London."

"To London!" My heart gave another great leap, as every boy's must on hearing that he is to see London for the first time. But here we all turned at a cry from Billy Priske, between whose planted ankles Master Fiennes had mischievously crept and was measuring the span between with extended thumb and little finger. My father stooped, haled him to his feet by the collar, and demanded what he did.

"Why, sir, he's a Colossus!" quoted that nimble youth;

"'and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs and peer about—'"

"And will find yourself a dishonourable grave," my father capped him.

"What's your name, boy?"

"Fiennes, sir; Nathaniel Fiennes." The lad saluted.

My father lifted his hat in answer. "Founder's kin?"

"I am here on that condition, sir."

"Then you are kinsman, as well as namesake, of him who saved our Wykeham's tomb in the Parliament troubles. I felicitate you, sir, and retract my words, for by that action of your kinsman's shall the graves of all his race and name be honoured."

Young Fiennes bowed. "Compliments fly, sir, when gentlemen meet. But"—and he glanced over his shoulder and rubbed the small of his back expressively, "as a Wykehamist, you will not have me late at names-calling."

"Go, boy, and answer to yours; they can call no better one." My father dipped a hand in his pocket. "I may not invite you to breakfast with us to-morrow, for we start early; and you will excuse me if I sin against custom. . . . It was esteemed a laudable practice in my time." A gold coin passed.

"*Et in saecula saeculo—o—rum. Amen!*" Master Fiennes spun the coin, pocketed it, and went off whistling schoolwards over the meads.

My father linked his arm in mine and we followed, I asking, and the three of them answering, a hundred questions of home. But why, or on what business, we were riding to London on the morrow my father would not tell. "Nay, lad," said he, "take your Bible and read that Isaac asked no questions on the way to Moriah."

"My uncle, who overheard this, considered it for a while, and said—

"The difference is that you are not going to sacrifice Prosper."

The three were to lie that night at the George Inn, where they had stabled their horses; and at the door of the Head-master's house, where we Commoners lodged, they took leave of me, my father commending me to God and good dreams. That they were happy ones I need not tell.

He was up and abroad early next morning, in time to attend chapel, where by the vigour of his responses he set the nearer boys tittering; two of whom I afterwards fought for it, though with what result I cannot remember. The service, which we urchins heeded little, left him pensive as we walked together towards the inn, and he paused once or

twice, with eyes downcast on the cobbles, and muttered to himself.

"I am striving to recollect my Morning Lines, lad," he confessed at length, with a smile; "and thus, I think, they go. The great Sir Henry Wotton, you have heard me tell of, in the summer before his death made a journey hither to Winchester; and as he returned towards Eton he said to a friend that went with him: 'How useful was that advice of an old monk that we should perform our devotions in a constant place, because we so meet again with the very thoughts which possessed us at our last being there.' And, as Walton tells, 'I find it,'" he said, "'thus far experimentally true, that at my now being in that school and seeing that very place where I sat when I was a boy occasioned me to remember those very thoughts of my youth which then possessed me: sweet thoughts indeed—'"

Here my father paused. "Let me be careful, now. I should be perfect in the words, having read them more than a hundred times. 'Sweet thoughts indeed,'" said he, "'that promised my growing years numerous pleasures, without mixture of cares; and those to be enjoyed when time—which I therefore thought slow-paced—had changed my youth into manhood. But age and experience have taught me these were but empty hopes, for I have always found it true, as my Saviour did foretell, *Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*. Nevertheless, I saw there a succession of boys using the same recreations, and, questionless, possessed with the same thoughts that then possessed me. Thus one generation succeeds another, both in their lives, recreations, hopes, fears, and death.'"

"But I would not have you, lad," he went on, "to pay too much heed to these thoughts, which will come to you in time, for as yet you are better without 'em. Nor were they my only thoughts: for having brought back my own sacrifice, which I had sometime hoped might be so great, but now saw to be so little, at that moment I looked down to your place in chapel and perceived that I had brought belike the best offering of all. So my hope—thank God!—sprang anew as I saw you there standing vigil by what bright armour you guessed not, nor in preparation for what high warfare." He laid a hand on my shoulder. "Your chapel to-day, child, has been the longer by a sermon. There, there! forget all but the tail on't."

We rode out of Winchester with a fine clatter, all four of us upon hired nags, the Cornish horses being left in the stables to rest; and after crossing the Hog's Back, baited at Guildford. A thunderstorm in the night had cleared the weather, which, though fine, was cooler, with a brisk breeze playing on the uplands; and still as we went my spirits sang with the larks overhead, so blithe was I to be sitting in saddle instead of at a scob, and riding to London between the blown scents of hedgerow and hayfield and beanfield, all fragrant of liberty yet none of them more delicious to a boy than the mingled smell of leather and horseflesh. Billy Priske kept up a chatter beside me like a brook's. He had never till now been outside of Cornwall but in a fishing-boat, and though he had come more than two hundred miles each new prospect was a marvel to him. My father told me that, once across the Tamar ferry, being told that he was now in Devonshire, he had sniffed and observed the air to be

growing "fine and stuffy;" and again, near Holt Forest, where my father announced that we were crossing the border between Hampshire and Surrey, he drew rein and sat for a moment looking about him and scratching his head.

"The Lord's ways be past finding out," he murmured. "Not so much as a post!"

"Why *should* there be a post?" demanded my uncle. "Why, sir, for the men of Hampshire and the men of Surrey to fight over and curse one another by on Ash Wednesdays. But where there's no landmark a plain man can't remove it, and where he can't remove it I don't see how he can be cursed for it."

"'Twould be a great inconvenience, as you say, Billy, if, for the sake of argument, the men of Hampshire wanted to curse the men of Surrey."

"They couldn't do it"—Billy shook his head—"for the sake of argument or any other sake; and therefore I say, though not one to dictate to the Lord, that if a river can't be managed hereabouts— and, these two not being Devon and Cornwall, a whole river might be overdoing things—there ought to be some little matter of a trout-stream, or at the least a notice-board."

"The fellow's right," said my father. "Man would tire too soon of his natural vices; so we invent new ones for him by making laws and boundaries."

"Surely and virtues too," suggested my uncle, as we rode forward again. "You will not deny that patriotism is a virtue?"

"Not I," said my father; "nor that it is the finest invention of all."

I remember the Hog's Back and the breeze blowing there because on the highest rise we came on a gibbet and rode around it to windward on the broad turfy margin of the road; and also because the sight put my father in mind of a story which he narrated on the way down to Guildford.

THE STORY OF OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY.

"It is told," began my father, "in a sermon of the famous Vieyras—"

"For what was he famous?" asked my uncle.

"For being a priest, and yet preaching so good a sermon on love. It is told in it that in the kingdom of Valencia there lived an hidalgo, young and rich, who fell in love with a virtuous lady, ill treated by her husband: and she with him, howbeit without the least thought of evil. But, as evil suspects its like, so this husband doubted the fidelity which was his without his deserving, and laid a plot to be revenged. On the pretext of the summer heats he removed with his household to a country house; and there one day he entered a room where his wife sat alone, turned the key, and, drawing out a dagger, ordered her to write what he should dictate. She, being innocent, answered him that there was no need of daggers, but she would write, as her duty was, what he commanded: which was, a letter to the young hidalgo telling him that her husband had left home on business; that if her lover would come, she was ready to welcome him; and that, if he came secretly the next night, he would find the garden gate open, and a ladder placed against the window. This she wrote and signed, seeing no

escape; and, going to her own room, commended her fears and her weakness to the Virgin.

"The young hidalgo, on receiving the letter (very cautiously delivered), could scarcely believe his bliss, but prepared, as you will guess, to embrace it. Having dressed himself with care, at the right hour he mounted his horse and rode out towards his lady's house. Now, he was a devout youth, as youths go, and on his way he remembered —which was no little thing on such an occasion—that since morning he had not said over his rosary as his custom was. So he began to tell it bead by bead, when a voice near at hand said 'Halt, Cavalier!' He drew his sword and peered around him in the darkness, but could see no one, and was fumbling his rosary again when again the voice spoke, saying, 'Look up, Cavalier!' and looking up, he beheld against the night a row of wayside gibbets, and rode in among them to discover who had called him. To his horror one of the malefactors hanging there spoke down to him, begging to be cut loose; 'and,' said the poor wretch, 'if you will light the heap of twigs at your feet and warm me by it, your charity shall not be wasted.' For Christian charity then the youth, having his sword ready, cut him down, and the gallows knave fell on his feet and warmed himself at the lit fire. 'And now,' said he, being warmed, 'you must take me up behind your saddle; for there is a plot laid to-night from which I only can deliver you.' So they mounted and rode together to the house, where, having entered the garden by stealth, they found the ladder ready set. 'You must let me climb first,' said the knave; and had no sooner reached the ladder's top than two or three pistol shots were fired upon

him from the window and as many hands reached out and stabbed him through and through until he dropped into the ditch; whence, however, he sprang on his feet, and catching our hidalgo by the arm hurried him back through the garden to the gate where his horse stood tethered. There they mounted and rode away into safety, the dead behind the living. 'All this is enchantment to me,' said the youth as they went. 'But I must thank you, my friend; for whether dead or alive—and to my thinking you must be doubly dead— you have rendered me a great service.' 'You may say a mass for me, and thank you,' the dead man answered; 'but for the service you must thank the Mother of God, who commanded me and gave me power to deliver you, and has charged me to tell you the reason of her kindness: which is, that every day you say her rosary.' 'I do thank her and bless her then,' replied the youth, 'and henceforth will I say her rosary not once daily but thrice, for that she hath preserved my life to-night.'"

"A very proper resolution," said my uncle.

"And I hope, sir, he kept it," chimed in Billy Priske; "good Protestant though I be."

"The story is not ended," said my father. "The dead man—they were dismounted now and close under the gallows—looked at the young man angrily, and said he, 'I doubt Our Lady's pains be wasted, after all. Is it possible, sir, you think she sent me to-night to save your life?' 'For what else?' inquired the youth. 'To save your soul, sir, and your lady's; both of which (though you guessed not or forgot it) stood in jeopardy just now, so that the gate open to you was indeed

the gate of Hell. Pray hang me back as you found me," he concluded, 'and go your ways for a fool.'"

"Now see what happened. The murderers in the house, coming down to bury the body and finding it not, understood that the young man had not come alone; from which they reasoned that his servants had carried him off and would publish the crime. They therefore, with their master, hurriedly fled out of the country. The lady betook herself to a religious house, where in solitude questioning herself she found that in will, albeit not in act, she had been less than faithful. As for the hidalgo, he rode home and shut himself within doors, whence he came forth in a few hours as a man from a sepulchre—which, indeed, to his enemies he evidently was when they heard that he was abroad and unhurt whom they had certainly stabbed to death; and to his friends almost as great a marvel when they perceived the alteration of his life; yea, and to himself the greatest of all, who alone knew what had passed, and, as by enchantment his life had taken this turn, so spent its remainder like a man enchanted rather than converted. I am told," my father concluded, "though the sermon says nothing about it, that he and the lady came in the end, and as by an accident, to be buried side by side, at a little distance, in the Chapel of Our Lady of Succour in the Cathedral church of Valencia, and there lie stretched—two parallels of dust—to meet only at the Resurrection when the desires of all dust shall be purged away."

With this story my father beguiled the road down into Guildford, and of his three listeners I was then the least

attentive. Years afterwards, as you shall learn, I had reason to remember it.

At Guildford, where we fed ourselves and hired a relay of horses, I took Billy aside and questioned him (forgetting the example of Isaac) why we were going to London and on what business. He shook his head.

"Squire knows," said he. "As for me, a still tongue keeps a wise head, and moreover I know not. Bain't it enough for 'ee to be quit of school and drinking good ale in the kingdom o' Guildford? Very well, then."

"Still, one cannot help wondering," said I, half to myself; but Billy dipped his face stolidly within his pewter.

"The last friend a man should want to take up with is his Future," said he, sagely. "I knows naught about en but what's to his discredit—as that I shall die sooner or later, a thing that goes against my stomach; or that at the best I shall grow old, which runs counter to my will. He's that uncomfortable, too, you can't please him. Take him hopeful, and you're counting your chickens; take him doleful, and foreboding is worse than witchcraft. There was a Mevagissey man I sailed with as a boy—and your father's tale just now put me in mind of him—paid half a crown to a conjurer, one time, to have his fortune told; which was, that he would marry the ugliest maid in the parish. Whereby it preyed on his mind till he hanged hisself. Whereby along comes the woman in the nick o' time, cuts him down, an' marries him out o' pity while he's too weak to resist. That's your Future; and, as I say, I keeps en at arm's length."

With this philosophy of Billy I had to be content and find my own guesses at the mystery. But as the afternoon wore

on I kept no hold on any speculation for more than a few minutes. I was saddle-weary, drowsed with sunburn and the moving landscape over which the sun, when I turned, swam in a haze of dust. The villages crowded closer, and at the entry of each I thought London was come; but anon the houses thinned and dwindled and we were between hedgerows again. So it lasted, village after village, until with the shut of night, when the long shadows of our horses before us melted into dusk, a faint glow opened on the sky ahead and grew and brightened. I knew it: but even as I saluted it my chin dropped forward and I dozed. In a dream I rode through the lighted streets, and at the door of our lodgings my father lifted me down from the saddle.

CHAPTER III.

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I ACQUIRE A KINGDOM.

"*Gloucester*. The trick of that voice I do well remember:
Is't not the king?"
"*Lear*. Ay, every inch a king."
King Lear.

From our lodgings, which were in Bond Street, we sallied forth next morning to view the town; my father leading us first by way of St. James's and across the Park to the Abbey, and on the way holding discourse to which I recalled myself

with difficulty from London's shows and wonders—his Majesty's tall guards at the palace gates, the gorgeous promenaders in the Mall, the swans and wild fowl on the lake.

"I wish you to remark, my dear child," said he, "that between a capital and solitude there is no third choice; nor, I would add, can a mind extract the best of solitude unless it bring urbanity to the wilderness. Your rustic is no philosopher, and your provincial townsman is the devil: if you would meditate in Arden, your company must be the Duke, Jaques, Touchstone—courtiers all—or, again, Rosalind, the Duke's daughter, if you would catch the very mood of the forest. I tell you this, child, that you may not be misled by my example (which has a reason of its own and, I trust, an excuse) into shunning your destiny though it lead and keep you in cities and among crowds; for we have it on the word of no less busy a man than the Emperor Marcus Aurelius that to seek out private retiring-rooms for the soul such as country villages, the sea-shore, mountains, is but a mistaken simplicity, seeing that at what time soever a man will it is in his power to retire into himself and be at rest, dwelling within the walls of a city as in a shepherd's fold of the mountain. So also the sainted Juan de Avila tells us that a man who trusts in God may, if he take pains, recollect God in streets and public places better than will a hermit in his cell; and the excellent Archbishop of Cambrai, writing to the Countess of Gramont, counselled her to practise recollection and give a quiet thought to God at dinner times in a lull of the conversation, or again when she was driving or dressing

or having her hair arranged; these hindrances (said he) profited more than any *engouement* of devotion.

"But," he went on, "to bear yourself rightly in a crowd you must study how one crowd differs from another, and how in one city you may have that great orderly movement of life (whether of business or of pleasure) which is the surrounding joy of princes in their palaces, and an insensate mob, which is the most brutal and vilest aspect of man. For as in a thronged street you may learn the high meaning of citizenship, so in a mob you may unlearn all that makes a man dignified. Yet even the mob you should study in a capital, as Shakespeare did in his 'Julius Caesar' and 'Coriolanus;' for only so can you know it in its quiddity. I conjure you, child, to get your sense of men from their capital cities."

He had something to tell of almost every great house we passed. He seemed—he that had saluted no one as we crossed the Mall, saluted of none—to walk this quarter of London with a proprietary tread; and by and by, coming to the river, he waved an arm and broke into panegyric.

"Other capitals have had their turn, and others will overtake and outstrip her; but where is one in these times to compare with London? Where in Europe will you see streets so well ordered, squares so spacious, houses so comfortable, yet elegant, as in this mile east and south of Hyde Park? Where such solid, self-respecting wealth as in our City? Where such merchant-princes and adventurers as your Whittingtons and Greshams? Where half its commerce? and where a commerce touched with one tithe of its imagination? Where such a river, for trade as for pageants?

On what other shore two buildings side by side so famous, the one for just laws, civil security, liberty with obedience, the other for heroic virtues resumed, with their propagating dust, into the faith which sowed all and, having reaped, renews?"

In the Abbey—where my Uncle Gervase was forced to withdraw behind a pillar and rub Billy Priske's neck, which by this time had a crick in it—my father's voice, as he moved from tomb to tomb, deepened to a regal solemnity. He repeated Beaumont's great lines—

"Mortality, behold and fear!
What a change of flesh is here!"

laying a hand on my shoulder the while; and in the action I understood that this and all his previous discourse was addressed to me with a purpose, and that somehow our visit to London had to do with that purpose.

"Here they lie had realms and lands
Who now want strength to stir their hands;
Where from their pulpits seal'd with dust
They preach 'In greatness is no trust' . . .
Here are sands, ignoble things,
Dropt from the ruin'd sides of kings. . . ."

I must have fallen a-wondering while he quoted in a low sonorous voice, like a last echo of the great organ, rolling among the arches; for as it ceased I came to myself with a start and found his eyes searching me; also his hold on my shoulder had stiffened, and he held me from him at arm's length.

"And yet," said he, as if to himself, "this dust is the strongest man can build with; and we must build in our