

CHAPTER VI.

Stay by me ; thou art resolute and faithful :
I have employment worthy of thy arm.

DRYDEN.

THEY were hastening down to the beach, when, as they reached the narrow bottom of the ravine, they met a party winding slowly upwards. They had no sooner come near enough to enable them to distinguish persons, than Cleaver recognized the man at the head of them to be his old shipmate Captain Macauley. The greeting between these two friends, who had sailed round the world together, but who had not met for eight or nine years, was hearty and sailor-like.

“ Well, Macauley, my boy !” said Cleaver, after their first salutations were over, “ I think you soon settled the hash of that beggarly brandy merchant. I congratulate you most sincerely, and I hope she will turn out a good prize ; but I can’t help regretting that I was not aboard of my little punt, that I might have had the pleasure

of fighting along side of you once more upon salt water, were it only for old acquaintance sake. However, I saw the action from the cliff, and I was glad to perceive that my little cockle shell did all she could to help you."

"Help us!" said Macauley, "aye that she did; why let me tell ye, that was a rare good manoeuvre of honest Jack Markham's.—Had he not run athwart her so gallantly, she might have fetched another tack,—aye and might have given me a great deal of trouble too, for the jade sailed like a swallow."

"But, stay, my gallant fellow," said Cleaver, "are you inclined for a little more tussling before you sleep? Because, if you are, you may come along with us; for we are going to attack the very citadel where the whole rascals of them have taken refuge, and where, very likely, they have stowed away most of their goods. Though I was prevented having a touch at these cocks with you at sea, I have no objections to admit you to a share of the glory we shall gain by blowing up their castle ashore, and, moreover,—you shall have all the profit."

"That's very kind in you, my good fellow," said

Macauley laughing. “ I assure you, my lads will not be sorry to fall in with some kegs of brandy and bales of tobacco ; for although we got hold of the nut, it unluckily had no kernel. She seemed to have been already cleaned out, and though apparently well victualled, had nothing on board her but ballast.”

“ Well, then,” said Cleaver, “ come along.—But, stay !—We must have some more hands with us. Let me see, who have we here ?”

“ It’s me, your honour,” replied Jack Markham. “ I came ashore with the Captain here, to show him the way to Sanderson Mains.”

“ Oh you good-for-nothing vagabond !—to allow me to remain on shore, and so little way off too, without ever so much as sending me notice of the fun that was going on !—I’ve a great mind to stop your grog, and give ye salt water, ye rascal.—But ye dog, I’ll have ye made a Master for your gallantry ; though, damn ye, I’ll always bear ye a grudge for cutting me out of such an evening’s amusement !—But who are these men with you ?”

“ Three of Captain Macauley’s lads, your honour, and there are four more in his boat below ;

your honour's boat also is on the beach with her six hands."

"Then," said Cleaver, "with your permission, Macauley, we'll take five men from each boat's crew, and let the odd ones paddle back to the vessels, that they may tell the people aboard to keep a good look-out:—and with these ten, and Lord Eaglesholme, and you, and me, we shall make a devil's dozen, without counting Bill Handy, who is within a whistle of us,—enough, in all conscience, I think, to encounter twice as many of these scoundrels—But, hold!—are we all well armed?"

"There are arms and ammunition enough in both boats for the whole party," said Macauley; "for, to tell you the truth, when I found that the villains had made good their retreat ashore, I thought it not unlikely that they might attack us as we landed on the beach. I therefore took the precaution to be prepared for whatever might happen."

"Be off then, Jack!" said Cleaver, "and bring up the lads, with every thing necessary, as fast as you can; and take care, do you hear, and send orders aboard, to make the people alert to prevent surprise."

“There is little danger of any such thing being attempted,” said Macauley, “for I anchored with the prize so close to your yacht, that they are within hail of each other.”

“That’s well,” said Cleaver. “Now, Sandy, while Jack’s away, you will have time enough to tell us how you first got sight of this same smuggler.”

“That’s soon done,” said Macauley. “After I received your letter, I thought it was just as well to take a trip over here to look out for you, particularly as Sir Alisander Sanderson is an old acquaintance of mine, and I haven’t broke a biscuit in his house for many a long day. So you see, after hauling into the bay here, with the which I am very well acquainted, I espied the yacht, and from the very build of her, I immediately guessed her to be yours. Having given orders to my people to take a station near her, I got into my boat, and went aboard of her, to see whether I could get any information about you. So as I was standing on deck talking to Markham about you, and the *Random* was preparing to take up her ground, we espied a strange-looking sail coming round the easter headland,

as if for the purpose of sailing right into bay. But no sooner had the jade caught a sight of the *Random*, whose cut you may believe is pretty well known upon this coast, than she immediately wore, and stood off, evidently with the intention of keeping out of our view if she could. But faith we were too sharp for her, and this manœuvre of hers only the more convinced me that my first suspicions were well founded.

“ I hailed the *Random* immediately, and sung out to the people not to let go the anchor, and to get up her sails directly; and getting aboard of her as fast as I could, I ran out to sea, carrying as much canvas as she could bear, but without showing any immediate intention of attacking. The enemy guessing what we were about, attempted to gain an offing, but although she sailed uncommonly well, I succeeded in shooting a-head of her, which I had no sooner accomplished, than I fired a gun to bring her to. To this she paid no attention, but began to try to make the thing out by manœuvring, during all which time we kept peppering her whenever we came within reach of her. But ——”

“ Thank ye, thank ye, Sandy,” said Cleaver,

interrupting him familiarly. “ I know all the remainder of the story, for I saw the whole matter from the cliff,—(a murrain on that fellow who didn’t send for me, else I might have been in the very thick of the thing,)—so we shall spare you the rest of your wind, for you will want it all to enable you to climb up this cursed ravine, that always makes me blow like a porpus. But stay,—if I mistake not, I think I hear the lads coming.”

As he said so, Jack Markham came singing merrily up from the beach, attended by six stout active sailors, all in high glee, at the very thought of the work they were to be employed on. And after every individual of the party had been properly appointed with arms, they set forward.

The direct way to Moatmallard lay very close by Sanderson Mains. Cleaver, therefore, sent Bill Handy forward, with Thomas the groom, who had at last ventured to join the party, even although he saw the warlock Lord at the head of it, to report the arrival of his old acquaintance Macauley, and the capture of the smuggling vessel. Bill was also instructed to tell the Ba-

ronet that they had still a piece of work to perform, which would probably occupy them the greater part of the night.

Having given him these orders, Cleaver appointed a particular spot, near the corner of one of the Baronet's inclosures, and not far from the house, but avoiding the village, where Bill was instructed to wait for him, and he desired him to make all haste. Handy ran off on his errand with the utmost speed.

The Baronet was sitting, anxiously waiting for some intelligence of Cleaver, whilst Doctor Partenclaw and the others had already nearly emptied Mr Brouster's large bowl, when Bill Handy was announced. He was immediately ordered up stairs, and Sir Alisander listened with the most intense interest to his spirited account of the sea-fight, and the capture of the *Charming Sally*. His intelligence, however, did not appear to be quite so agreeable either to Partenclaw or to Macflae, who threw lugubre looks at each other, as if all hopes of cheap brandy and claret had with them fled for a time.

Bill Handy delivered the remainder of his message, and concluded by urging the necessity

of his immediate departure to meet his master. The Baronet instantly ordered Duncan Brouster to carry some home-brewed ale, and some bread and cheese, down to the pathway, to meet the party. This command the jolly butler lost no time in preparing to execute, and his bustle upon this occasion, being rather more than ordinarily great, excited much curiosity among the inmates of the kitchen; and the more, when they learned from Thomas, the groom, that the warlock Lord was in the company.

Neither Mr Brouster, nor the other servants, would have been desirous to go near him, especially at such a time of night, had they not heard that he was accompanied by so many Christian people like themselves. Even as it was, they required the countenance of one another to give them nerve to face him; and honest Duncan, upon consideration, was by no means sorry to see them, men and women, creeping down the inside of the dike after him, in a long string, holding each other by the skirts.

Having reached the stile at the end of the wall, opposite the spot Captain Cleaver had appointed, Mr Brouster took care to have the large basket

planted in the middle of the path, some time before the party came up; and having thus disposed of it full in view, he again retired behind the wall, where he stood with his round ruby visage, glaring over it, in the partial obscurity of the night, like the disk of the sun, when in a frosty morning of December, shorn of his beams, he shines red through the smoky atmosphere of the city.

Cleaver and the party had no sooner appeared, than Duncan, clearing his throat, and coughing up his courage with three or four very considerable hems, addressed him from the secure position he had taken.

“ Captain,” said he, “ his honour, Sir Alisander, has sent me out wi’ a kebbock an’ a whin baps, to be a bite till you and your men, and twa or three bottles o’ strong yill, to wash the eatables down wi’;—tak’ care, tak’ care, Captain! or ye’ll maybe coup ower the basket, an’ hurt your shins, an’ brek a’ the bottles!”

“ Many thanks to Sir Alisander,” said Cleaver, “ it was very considerate of him indeed; the refreshment will be very grateful to the lads. Nay, I don’t think I shall be the worse for a mouthful of bread and cheese, and a drop of

your ale, myself. Pray, come forth, then, Mr Brouster, and lend a hand in cutting the eatables, and opening the bottles with as much expedition as may be, for we have much business before us, and time presses."

Duncan was not prepared for such a demand. He nudged some of the other servants who were near him. "Rab," said he, in an under voice, to one of them, "gang awa' out man, and draw the bottles.—Ritchie, canna ye budge?—what the deil ails ye, man?—dinna ye no hear his honour, the Captain?"

But Rab shrunk away up the dike-side, and Ritchie followed him; and the rest, taking one look at the grusome Lord, their fears overcame their curiosity, and some beginning to set the example of retreat, the alarm became general, and, without the order they had preserved in their advance, they ran off, pell-mell, with the utmost precipitation.

Seeing himself thus deserted, Mr Brouster's terrors were considerably augmented. But he felt that, consistently with the dignity of his office, he could not so easily abandon his post; yet to go beyond the protecting wall, his apprehen-

sion told him was impossible. In this dilemma, he saw that a small sacrifice of his importance was absolutely indispensable. Drawing, therefore, from his pocket that badge of his office yclept a cork-screw, which he never willingly parted with to mortal man, he, after two or three of his usual preparatory hems, addressed Bill Handy over the dike, in a rather tremulous voice:—

“Maister William,” said he, “ye’ll find a muckle knife in the basket among the lave o’ the things; and here, tak’ haud o’ my cork-screw,—but tak’ special care o’t, an’ put it in your pouch after you’re dune wi’t, for it’s an auld servant o’ mine, and I wadna like to lose it.—An’ noo, I maun awa’ hame, for they had just toomed the bowl as I cam oot, an’ I’ll be wanted to mak’ anither yane.”

“By my honour,” said Cleaver, “but the last bowl looked well, though I had no taste of it; and, without any reflection on your excellent ale, I should not be sorry if we had just such another here, for, without flattery, yours is the best punch I ever drank.”

But this compliment to his punch-making powers was lost upon Mr Brouster, who was no soon-

er rid of his cork-screw, than, ducking below the dike, he ran crouching along homewards, like a hare stealing away, with as much expedition as his fat legs could carry his overgrown body, frequently looking backwards, like that timorous animal of chace, and half believing that the warlock Lord 'himself was pursuing him, in some hideous and terrifying shape.

Handy did the butler's duty so well, that none of the party felt the want of the butler. The bread and cheese were soon discussed, and the bottles emptied, and the basket having been lifted behind the dike, the whole party set briskly forward on their enterprise in admirable spirits and condition. The fears of the servants secured them from the chance of their march being preceded by any alarm that might disconcert their attack.

The Castle of Moatmallard occupied an artificial mound, or, to speak more correctly, a natural mound artificially shaped, standing at the upper extremity of the lake in which the mound itself had probably at one time been an island. Leaving to geologists and antiquarians to determine whether the gradual filling up of the lake might have so far restricted its waters, as to have con-

verted the shallows in its neighbourhood into a marsh; and whether this happened before or after the period of the erection of the castle, which was ascribed to very remote antiquity; we shall proceed to give an account of its state at the time of the attack upon it.

The surrounding marsh was everywhere very deep, and it was, moreover, of such chaotic consistency, as perfectly to realize the poet's description,—

“ Instabilis tellus innabilis unda.”

Its surface was quite impassable,—nay, it was so treacherous, that it became the grave of many a stray horse and cow, as well as of many an unlucky urchin, who, tempted by the desire of robbing the nests of the numerous aquatic birds building among the reeds, had ventured into it on crazy planks, or old doors, which, sinking under them, had left them to be swallowed up in its black abyss. There was but one passage of approach to the castle, from the terra firma, and that was by a causeway of twelve or fourteen feet wide, formed of large stones laid together, and running in a straight line directly up to the opening in the outer work.

This was a rampart formed of earth, and constituted the exterior side of a broad moat, that encircled the bottom of the green mound. The ditch was still amply supplied with water, from the natural wetness of the situation, though the growth of aquatic plants in its bottom had considerably diminished its original depth, and rendered it fordable in many places. The mound within rose in a steep slope to a considerable height, crowned by the outer walls of the fortalice running round its brink. These were defended at their angles by five round towers, and enclosed a considerable space of level ground, from the middle of which arose the keep, a large square mass of masonry. The remains of numerous subsidiary buildings were attached to the walls around the inside, but they, as well as the walls themselves, were so dilapidated, as to be scaleable in many places. When the whole was in a state of perfect repair, the only entrance to the court-yard was by a gateway, flanked by two small square towers, looking directly towards the causeway.

Cleaver, who was naturally curious in such matters, had been frequently led to visit Moat-mallard in the course of his duck-shooting expe-

ditions, so that he had a very good general notion of the defences still possessed by the place. It was therefore agreed that the command and direction of the assault should be left to him.

The party advanced along the causeway with the most profound silence and caution, their leader being perfectly aware, that by gaining this important passage, they secured all who might be within the castle. With that prudence characterizing an old man-of-war's-man, Cleaver halted his troops close to the outer rampart, and having concealed them behind it, he determined to send forward an intelligent scout, to discover whether the enemy were on the alert, and if so, in what numbers. Bill Handy was the person selected for this duty, and we shall now see how he performed it.

Bill then stole forwards, and picked his way through the shallowest part of the ditch, at a place immediately opposite to the opening in the rampart, where there was a sort of passage, and where indeed the mud and water did not rise higher than the middle of his leg, and then climbing the mound, he effected an entrance under the ruined gateway without molestation. He had

no sooner gained the platform of the court-yard, than he perceived a light issuing, as it were, from the ground, within a yard or two of the foundation of the wall of the keep. The rays shot upwards, in an oblique direction, and formed an illuminated spectrum on the broad side of the building, at nearly half its height, but yet so vivid as to enable him to distinguish the leaves of the ivy which were touched by it. Judging from the elevated angle formed by the rays, he was convinced that they must proceed from some considerable depth underground; he therefore determined, in the first place, to ascertain what occasioned them. But, in order to get sufficiently near the spot, without running the risk of being observed from any of the windows or loop-holes of the keep, he was obliged to make a circuit under the shade of the outer wall, and then to cross the court-yard, opposite to one of the angles of the building, whence he stole along close to the base of the keep.

When he had got near enough to the light, he discovered that it issued from a very wide rent in the arch of a subterranean vault, whence he heard several voices arising. Kneeling down, he

crept forward upon all-fours, with the greatest caution, towards the crevice. There, many of the stones having been dislodged by time, he had a very ample view downwards, through the ivy and weeds overhanging the opening.

He now perceived that the rays of light arose from the embers of a wood fire, placed a little to one side. Around it were seated a dozen fellows, all well armed, and numerous ship muskets rested against the wine casks, and heaps of small kegs, boxes, and bales, piled up every where around the walls of the place. They appeared to be occupied in finishing the remains of some provisions they were handing about, and a flask of brandy was in the act of performing its regular circle among them. The conversation, therefore, arose but at intervals.

“ Well, Master Tomkins,” said one of them, “ I can’t conceive, after all, for the life of me, why you should have persisted in trying the bay, after the blink we had of that suspicious sail before sun-down ?”

“ I tell ye,” replied the man he addressed, “ I had the captain’s express orders, to call in for him at the very time I made the

attempt. The mouth of the cove of Eaglesholme was the place appointed for the boat to wait for him. Then who the devil was to suppose that the strange sail we saw at such a distance was to turn out to be that hiccory-faced rascal, Macauley?"

"I wish from my soul that Davy Jones had him," said the other. "That damned splinter has given my leg a plaguy scratch—I wish I had a doctor to it."

"Clap a plaiget of tow steeped in brandy to it, man," said another speaker.

"Why, zounds!" exclaimed another, "your'n an't half so bad as this here bruise in my head, I swear I'm quite dumbfounded by it."

"But I say, old Davy Stronach," said a fellow to an old grey-haired man, who had the appearance of a countryman, "did the Captain, when he called here, leave no directions about what we are to make of ourselves?"

"No!" said the man gruffly.

"Why, damn it," said another, "I think he might have had some thought about us too. Me-thinks it does not look over well, that he should clap up his sky scrapers, and be off, no one knows

whither, without troubling his nob about what is to become of his lads."

"Why, you senseless grampus," said Tomkins, "as he told Davy that he had seen the state of matters from the cliffs, he must have naturally supposed that we were all to be taken prisoners, in which case, any thought of his would have been but of little use to us. Fancy yourself peeping through the iron bars, Jem, what good would the Captain's thinking have done ye?—But he, no doubt, thought, that, if any of us did escape, we should come here, and lie snug till our consort arrives, and then get aboard of her till something else can be rigged up for us."

"A pretty comfortable birth we shall have of it truly!" said the man who had complained of the wound in his leg, "to be mew'd up in such a devil's den as this! Why, damn it, one might as well be in prison at once. 'Tis very well as a storehouse for these bales and casks,—but for a habitation, methinks it is something of the dreariest, with nothing to do but to count one's fingers.—'Twere better by half to take a turn upon the highway."

"Devil's den, indeed!" said another man. "It

seems to me to be fit for nothing but thieves and murderers."

"Well, an it were so," said Tomkins, "me-thinks you should not consider yourself ill lodged, Master Morris, after skivering that exciseman on the Welsh coast in the way you did. Do you remember that story?"

"I do," said the other impatiently; "but don't talk of that. Besides, I don't hold the sticking of an exciseman to be any great matter to men in our line."

"Aye, aye, in fair fighting, I grant you," said Tomkins; "but to run the fellow through the back, during a parley, in mere wantonness!—Take care," continued he, winking to some of the others, "for they say the devil and the exciseman are great chums.—So look sharp that Old Nick doesn't pounce upon you in this den of his, as you call it, and carry you off to a warm birth among his hot coals."

Bill Handy, thinking he had now had enough of their conversation, prepared to steal away, by slowly and silently raising himself from his hands and knees. But as he was in the act of resuming the erect posture, the toe of his shoe, somehow or

other, got entangled among the reticulated fibres of the ivy, that mantled about the edges of the opening,—he tripped, lost his balance, and sailor though he was, he went head foremost rumbling down upon the smugglers below, the pistols in his belt going off in his descent, just as the last speaker had ended his warning about the devil.

“ Lord have mercy on us, there he is !” cried the murderer, and in terrible alarm, they all scrambled, over one another, into a corner, some calling out “ the devil !” and others “ the ex-ciseman !”

Bill, though he fell on a heap of straw, was yet so stunned for some moments, that he was unable immediately to recover his legs; and Tom kins, who had been seized by the same panic as the rest, happening to look round, and seeing that it was nothing after all but a man, sprang towards him before he could rise, and seizing him, and calling loudly for assistance, they hastily bound his arms and feet, and proceeded to interrogate him. Bill, in the vain hope of deceiving them, began at first to put on an air of much simplicity :—

“ Lord, gemmen,” said he, “ I be’s but a poor

coountry lad, as ha' coomed a bird-nesting, after the owls as builds in them 'are ould walls."

"None o' your tricks, master," said Tomkins, "that is not the sort of tongue you should have put into your chops, if you had wanted to hum-bug us. You must have been but a short time in Scotland, since you cannot ape the lingo better. Besides, do you usually go owl-catching with pistols in your belt, and a hanger by your side?"

Bill seeing that his attempt at deception would not go down with them, resolved to maintain an obstinate silence, heroically making up his mind to whatever fate might befall him.

"May I never pull another rope!" said one of the fellows, looking at his face with some attention, and holding a bit of lighted wood to it that he might see it the better, "May I never see salt water again, if this be'n't a man belonging to that Kentish yacht as has been laying so long in the bay, and as helped to run us up to-night with its damned pop-guns."

"Let's murder him!"—cried Morris.—"Let's strangle him directly!"—"Let's shoot him through the head!"—"Let's pin him through

the guts with a sword!"—"Let's roast him alive!"—cried half a dozen of them at once.

"Avast," said Tomkins interfering, "that may be all very well by and by, but we had better stand to our arms now. I'll be bound this fellow hasn't come alone. You may depend upon it there's a party not far off. Stand to your arms I say, and let's try to gain the causeway without loss of time, for we're in a trap here. This here chap may have been sent forward as a scout, and if so, the rest of them may be still so far off, as to enable us to secure our retreat, should they prove too many for us. Bear a hand I say, my lads, and arm, for we have no time to lose!"

In an instant Bill Handy was forgotten amidst the bustle and confusion that ensued. All was clamour, and rattling of muskets, and seizing of swords, and bracing on of belts, and arming in all manner of ways, and in a few minutes the whole of them sallied forth, leaving Bill alone, lying upon the heap of straw where they had thrown him.