

herring, who was mighty useful to me with his information; and then there were the lawyers, with whom I felt less easy. For it was possible that at any moment I might trip on some silly custom of theirs, and so display myself as without their honorable company. But I took the notion of opening my mouth little, and of saying less. There was one of these lawyers in particular that I distrusted, for he had an oily way with him in his manner to me, but a loud and insistent voice in his general conduct. And I set him down as a bully that would toady also, and lick boots, if so be that might be useful.

I will confess that I felt somewhat out of countenance, when we were settled in the court, and the room was full, and wigs and faces bobbed at me out of a sort of mist. There was a dreadful silence too, that found its way to my gizzard, and I turned and spoke to the fellow on my right. He was all smiles and eagerness; but who he might be I knew not, save that he was of some authority there. Well, thinks I to myself, 'tis time we began, and even a fight is better than this hush; so I rapped on the table with my fist, which brought up a man in a gown.

The law is so hedged about with ceremonies and observances and customs and rites and paltry tricks, that I have no toleration of it. If a man has committed a deed, he has done so; if he has not, then a God's name say so. But these lawyers were all for observing the facts in a cloud of words and objections and cross questions and sneers and what not; till at last I lost all patience.

"Quit, quit!" says I to one of the counsel. "Quit, and cut across the fields, like a sensible man."

He seemed somewhat taken aback, and pulled up, but recovering himself continued, "As His Lordship has pointed out," says he suavely, "'tis an easy matter to see the fellow's guilt."

"Dammel! I said no such thing," I shouted; for the man so irked me; and, moreover, he was indicting of a young fellow for abduction, the which is no offense if the girl has a mind to go willingly. And here was Miss, pert and saucy as you please, and pretty enough too, to give testimony for her guardian of how she was seized one night in a chaise and driven off to a parson for marriage. It seems that the watch dogs came up ere the ceremony could go through.

"Did ye mind?" said I to the girl.

She simpered, and looked down. "'Tis not seemly, My Lord, for young girls to decide their own husbands," says she.

"Did ye kick?" said I. "Dammel! let's get to the point. I'll wager if you objected his face would be a battle field."

"I—I think I hit him once, My Lord," she said hesitatingly. But I marked the old guardian at her elbow with his whispers, and so I roared out: "Take that toad off, and bury him! I'll learn ye to corrupt the source of justice!"

And he shrank away in affright, and the girl, now left to herself, contradicted what she had said before, and blushed and exchanged glances with the young man, and finally wept a little. Lord! it was as plain as a turnpike how matters stood; and I was not going to waste time and temper on any more of it. So I stopped the gabbling lawyer that wanted the man sent to prison, as I have said.

"Gentlemen," said I to the jury, "'tis as patent as the noses on your faces how this wench stands to t'other. She would and she wouldn't; and I doubt not she hath led him on, and cosseted him, and humbugged him, after the habit of her sex. But it's pretty clear what your verdict must be, and I wouldn't give a crownpiece for any man that took ten minutes to make up his mind on it. Gentlemen, consider your verdict."

At that the glib lawyer rose, and would have protested; but I shouted him down, and glared him into sullen silence.

"Not guilty," says the jury.

"You talk sense," said I. "Let the prisoner go; and if he bussess the girl at the door this court will not complain nor notice."

There was a titter at that; but the glib lawyer threw down some papers on his desk angrily, and folded his arms and lay back. I was not for caring for him, nor indeed for any of them; for 'twas not my only encounter with those of his kidney. We were at loggerheads all the afternoon, and particularly over two cases, which I remember; but t'others are all gone from my mind.

There was one regarding a pale young wench that had stolen some ribbon, for her hair or her hat, and it came on when I was growing weary of the farce. Jack Blake was at the bottom of the court, and he kept up a constant noise of applause, which at first cheered me somewhat, but afterwards became an annoyance, particularly as he drawled it out with special significance. There was put in the box the haberdasher from whose shop the ribbons were filched, and he made a great mouth of it.

"Tol-loll!" said I. "Have you never had a sweetheart?"

"Hey?" said he in surprise.

"Wasn't there ever a maid that dressed herself up for you in finery?" I says to him.

"My Lord," says the lawyer, who was the unctuous bully I had noted, "this is a clear case, as you may see. The girl took the ribbons when the man's back was turned."

"Well, she would have been a fool to take 'em when he was looking," I said; at which there was a titter in court, and Jack Blake shouted his applause.

The lawyer looked perplexed, but turned to the

haberdasher. "Where were the ribbons hanging?" he asked.

"By the shop door, Your Honor," says he.

"Then I don't blame her," I said. "It's a temptation that isn't in human nature to resist."

The lawyers looked aghast, and my man stuttered out something. "I must protest, My Lord—" he began; but I cut him short.

"You would have this wench go hang," I said, "all to please your own dirty dignity, and I'll warrant you've much on your conscience worse than ribbons. Many's the good honest fellow you've sent to the gallows, if all was known."

And once more there was applause in court, and Jack Blake clapped his hands.

"Silence!" says I to him in a thunderous voice, though I did not take it amiss; but the law must be respected and not cheered like a raree show. The lawyer collapsed on his seat, and said never a word. And so I turned to the jury, and told 'em what I thought of it all; so much, that they lost no time in bringing in a verdict of not guilty.

"Go," said I to the girl, "and next time you want ribbons, get your sweetheart to buy 'em for you."

By this time there was consternation in the court, and whispering all round. But I was not heeding that. While I was playing Justice, I was in the mind to dispense justice in a sensible way. And presently in comes a fellow with a dirty face between two traps, and directly I clapped my peepers on him I was aware of something familiar about him.

"My Lord," said the bullying counsel, after some gabbling nonsense of the law, "Nathaniel Castle is accused of robbing on His Majesty's highway."

And at the name I started, for I knew Nat Castle, and a scurvy toss-pot he was on the road, a disgrace to an honest calling. But he stared at me, his mouth gaping, and I saw that he was bewildered. As for me, I sat back and listened and said nothing, as becomes a Judge sometimes.

"The act of robbery," says the lawyer, enjoying himself, "took place on Salisbury Plain."

"And it's a good



"Seize That Fellow in God's Name!" He Said.

place too," said I, for it was on the very heath that we had encountered the corpulent Judge in the morning.

"My Lord—" he broke off in an amaze.

"Why," said I, "I should know, having narrowly escaped a pair of rascals there this day."

"Ah, so I have heard, My Lord," he said, "and I congratulate Your Lordship."

Nat Castle's eye was fixed on me, as though it were frozen, and he a corpse; but just then something woke in it, and a grin spread over his features. He gaped and grinned; and I guessed that now he had recognized me. But it must have puzzled his five wits to see me there in all the robes and glory of office, with the apparatus of the law about me as friendly as you please. I gave him a stern glance, a while the lawyer went on. But his demeanor was now changed, for he took on a jaunty air, and quizzed the court with his eyes, sometimes opening his mouth for a remark, the which was speedily hushed by his jailers.

"You shall hear," says the lawyer, "how this man, the prisoner at the bar, acting by the persuasion of the devil, did stop the said Isaacs, and putting him in fear of bodily harm, did present a pisto'

at his face, and rob him of all his possessions."

"How much?" said I.

"A hundred guineas, My Lord, and jewels besides."

"What a plague has a man to do with jewels?"

"He was traveling upon business, may it please Your Lordship, and had the same with him for the purposes of business."

"A goldsmith?" I asked, and the lawyer assented.

The prisoner whispered a joke to one of his warders, and laughed harshly; but I shut him up, and the case proceeded. It was a tedious affair; but it grew livelier when the goldsmith was in the box. He was a short, lean, dark man with a huge nose, and breathed usury with every wheeze. And when he had been questioned by the lawyer to bring out Nat's robbery I cocked an eye at him, and says I:

"What's the price of ten guineas for a month?"

"Oh, My Lord," he said, bowing in the box, "nothing at all to Your Lordship."

"No," said I; "but the heart's blood of poor Tom Fool. 'Tis you and yours that dry up the fount of human sympathy, you toad!"

"My Lord, the man practises an honest trade," interposed the lawyer on his legs.

"Yes," said I, "and with t'other hand he draws blood like a chururgeon. A bag of gold guineas!" I said. "I'll warrant it was filched from the poor. 'Tis worse than slitting weasands to go about on such a calling, crying deliver to the poor debtor, and to rack and twist human souls. 'Tis such as you should kiss the triple beam, you rogue!"

"But, My Lord, the prisoner is being tried for robbery, and not this man for usury," protested the lawyer hotly.

"Shut your mouth up!" I retorted. "If the prisoner did deliver him of his ill gotten money, I'll warrant he spent it in a better way, in taverns and what not, where 'twill circulate better than remaining in this rogue's coffers."

'Twas plain the court was horrified at this license on my part, and I would not have spoken out so freely had the lawyer not provoked me. I could not abide his important bearing and complacency.

"'Tis a dreadful offense, Your Lordship," he exclaimed, "against the law and His Majesty, to rob upon the highway."

"Dammel! I know more of the high toby than you can learn me in twelve months," said I angrily; and I turned to the jury. These poor sheep had listened without even baaing to what was forward; but I reckon that they were flustered enough. So when I had finished I bade them consider, expecting that they would carry out my wishes as was done before. But rot me if the silly fools did not bring in a verdict of guilty, which discomposed me at first.

"The jury say you are guilty," said I to the prisoner slowly, for I was pondering what course to take, "and that you did rumpad this fellow on the

road was clear enough in the evidence. Nevertheless, 'tis an offense of small import beside other things, and I have known gentlemen of the road that were honorable and would adorn any profession. As for your act in despoiling this usurer, you shall go free,"—at that, for I made a pause, there was a loud murmur in court, and I went on,—"but for an infamous, scurvy cutpurse and cracksmen that you are known to be, rip me! you shall go to the jug for six months."

Thereupon Jack Blake's yell echoed through the court house, and after that was dead silence, while the lawyers looked at one another. I do not know what would have happened next, but at that moment I marked approaching slowly up the room a wretched figure of a man. He was fat and waddled heavily, and his garments were bedraggled with wet and distained with mud. And staring at him—for he drew all eyes—I recognized him for the man we had put out of his carriage that morning. He came looking to right and to left, and then towards me with a puzzled frown.

"Mr. Sheriff Blackwood!" he called out in a piping voice, and the man near me got up and stared.

"I offer my apologies," he said with what pomposity was left him, "for this late appearance, and assume from this gathering that you have been able to supply my place, though I know not how. I have been the victim of a dastardly outrage on Salisbury Plain."

The sheriff was still staring; but as for me, I knew my time was up, though I was resolved to play out the comedy.

"Who is this?" I asked in a tone rough as mustard. The Judge looked at me. "I am Mr. Justice

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