OVER THE BORDER.

By WALTER BESANT.

"My head," said Dan, banging it with his great fist, "is like the church bell before the service—goeth ding-dong. And my tongue, it is as dry as a bone. Last night—last night—where the devil was I last night?"

"Get up, fool, and put on your coat, and come out. We have work to do."

The fellow made no reply. He was stupidly wondering why his head was so heavy and his legs like lead.

"Come," Mathew repeated, "there is no time to lose. Up, man."

They left the house and walked up the street.

When they were gone, Nan took the pipe out of her mouth, and considered the position of things with a cheerful smile.

"As for Mathew," she said with a grin, "he will get salt eel for his supper. Salt eel—nothing short."

She doubted for awhile whether to impart the plot to the fugleman. But she remembered that though he was no older than herself he would take the thing differently, and a fight between him and Dan, not to speak of Mathew as well, could have only one termination. Had she been twenty years younger, she would not have hesitated to engage the man herself, as she had led many a gallant boarding party against any odds. But her fighting days were over.

What she at last resolved upon marked her as at once the bravest and the most sensible of women. But her resolution took time for the working out. She sat on her stone seat and smoked her pipe as usual. When any boys passed her door she shook her stick at them, and used her strange sea phrases, just as if nothing was on her mind.

It grows dark in the short November days soon after 4, which is the hour when folks who can afford the luxury of candles light them, sweep the hearth, and prepare the dish of cheerful tea. There was no tea for us that year, but small ale of our own brewing or buttermilk. And my mother sat in great sadness for the most part, not knowing what would be the end, yet fearful of the worst, and being of feeble faith. Certainly, there was little to give her cause for hope.

It was 6:30 or 7 that I heard footsteps outside, and presently a knock at the door. I saw, to my amazement, no other than old Nan. It was a cold and rainy evening, but she had on nothing more than her usual jacket and hat. A hard and tough old woman.

"Child," she said earnestly, "do you think that I would lead thee wrong, or tell thee a lie?"

"Why, no, Nan."

"Then mark me, go not forth to-night."

Why should I go forth? It is past 6 o'clock, and already dark."

"If messengers should come—— Look! who is that?"

She slipped behind the door as a boy came running to the door. I recognized him for a lad, half gypsy, who was well known to all runners, and often took part in driving the ponies. A hare headed boy with thick coarse hair and bright black eyes, who was afterward sentenced to be hanged, but reprieved, I know not for what reason, and I forget now what he had done to bring upon him this sentence.

"The fugleman says," he began at once, seemingly in breathless haste, "that he has fallen down and is like to have broken his back. He wants to see you at once."

"Oh," I cried, "what dreadful thing is this? Tell him I'll come at once. Run, boy, run—I will but put on a hat and"——

The boy turned and ran clattering up the road and across the bridge.

Then Nan came out from behind the door.

"It's true, then. The kidnaping villains! It's true. But I never had a doubt. Go in doors, minney. Stay at home. As for the fugleman, I'll warrant his back to be sound as my own. Wait, wait, I say, till you see Mathew's face to-morrow. A villain, indeed!"

"But, Nan, what do you mean? My dear old fugleman a villain! What has he to do with Mathew?"

"No, child, not he. There's only one villian in Warkworth, though many fools. The villian is Mathew Humble. The biggest fool is Dan Gedge. He is such a fool that he ought to be keel hauled or flogged through the Fleet, at least. Stay at home. This is a plot. The fugleman is at the Hermitage at work among the stuff. There's to be a run to-night. And they think——. Avast a bit, brother. Ay, ay, they shall have what they want. There's a hock of salt pork and a pease pudding for supper. I looked forward to that hock. Never mind it. The villain—he to run this rig upon a girl! But old Nan knows a mast from a manger yet, and values not his anger a rope's end." Here she became incoherent, and one heard only an occasional phrase, such as "from the spritsail yard to the mizzentopsail halyards;" "a mealy mouthed swab;" "a fresh water, wishy washy, fair weather sailor;" "thinks to get athwart my hawse," and so forth. To all of which I listened in blank wonder. Thus having in this nautical manner collected her thoughts—strange it is that a sailor can never mature his plans or resolve upon a plan of action without the use of strong words—she begged me to lend her my cardinal, which was provided with a thick warm hood, of which we women of Northumberland stand in need for winter days and cold spring winds. She said that she could keep her own cloth jacket, because the work she should do that night was cold work, but she borrowed a woolen wrapper which she tied over her head and round her neck, leaving her three cornered sailor's hat in my keeping. Lastly, she borrowed and put on a pair of warm leather gloves, remarking that all would be found out if once they saw or felt her hand. This, to be sure, was a great deal larger than is commonly found among women. When all these arrangements were complete, she put on the cardinal and pulled the hood over her head. "Now," she asked, "who am I?"

Of course, having my clothes upon her, and being about the same height, with her face hidden beneath the hood, she seemed to be no other than myself. Then with a last reference to swabs, lubbers and land pirates, she once more bade me keep within doors all night, if I valued my life and my honor, and trudged away, telling me nothing but that a piratical craft should that night be laid on beam ends, that her own decks were cleared, her guns double shotted, the surgeon in the cock pit, and the chaplain with him, and, in short, that she was ready for action.

I saw no more of her that night, which I spent in great anxiety, wondering what this thing might mean. But in the morning, fearing some mischief, I walked up the street to the castle. The fugleman was in his room; he had sent me, he said, no message at all; nor had he fallen, nor had he broken his back. The boy Cuddy, it appeared, had been helping him and running about backward and forward all day. When the ponies were loaded he had returned to the hermitage to set all snug and tidy. When he came back to the castle they were gone. But no breaking of backs and no sending of the boy. This was strange indeed.

"Then, fugleman," I said, "Mathew Humble sent a lying message, meaning mischief."

What he designed I understood in two or three days. But for the time I could only think that he wished to open again the question of his suit. Yet, why had Nan borrowed my cardinal and my gloves?

On the way back I looked into Nan's cottage. The door was open, but there was no one in the house.

I went home, little thinking what a narrow escape was mine. Had I known—but had I known, I should have been divided between gratitude to heaven and admiration of brave old Nan, and detestation of the greatest villain in England.

CHAPTER X.

SAILOR NAN'S RIDE.

The night was cold and raw, with a northeast wind, which brought occasional showers of sleet. There was no moon. The street, as the old woman walked up to the castle, was quite deserted, all the women and girls being seated at home about bright coal fires, knitting, sewing, and spinning, while all the men were at the ale house, telling stories or listening to them, an occupation of which the male sex is never wearied, especially when beer or rumbo, with tobacco, accompanies the stories.

Nan climbed up the castle hill, and, passing through the ruined gate, began to pick her way slowly among the stones and heaps of rubbish lying about in the castle yard. The light of the fire in the fugleman's chamber was her guide, and she knew very well that just beside the door of that room would be lurking Strong Dan, with intent to seize her by the waist and carry her off. Perhaps he designed to carry her in his arms all the way to the Border. This thought pleased her very much. Dan was quite able to do it, and the distance is only thirty-five miles or so. It pleased her to think of such a ride in the Strong Man's arms, and how tired he would be at the end.

Accordingly, when she drew near the door she went very slowly, and was not in the least surprised when, as she stood in the fire light, the man stepped from some hiding place at hand, caught her by the waist, and tossed her lightly over his shoulder, making no more account of her weight than if she had been a mere bag of meal.

"Now, mistress," he said, "struggle and kick as much as you like. It don't hurt me."

She cheerfully acceded to this request, and began so vigorous a drumming upon his ribs that, had they not been tougher than the hoops of the stoutest cask, they must have been broken, every one. As it was, he was surprised, and perhaps bruised a little, but not hurt. He had not thought that a young girl like myself had such power in her heels.

"Go on," he said, "you're a strong 'un, and I like you better for it. Kick away, but don't try screaming, because if you do I shall have to tie your pretty head in a bag. Master Mathew's orders, not my wish. Besides, what's the use of pretending, when there's nobody here but you and me, bless your pretty eyes! I know all about it, and here's a honor for you to be carried off, nothing less, by your own man. Why, there isn't another woman in Warkworth that he'd take so much trouble for. Think upon that! Now, then, miss, another kick, or a dozen, if you like. Ah, you can kick, you can. You're a wife worth having. A happy man he'll be, Lord, it would take the breath out o' most, that last kick would. Why, I'll swear there not a woman in all Northumberland with such a kick as yours. Keep it up."

Thus talking, while she drummed with her heels, he slowly carried her through the dark gateway, picking his feet among the stones.

Outside the castle, beyond the great gate, another man was waiting for them, wrapped in a great cloak. It was Mathew Humble. He had been drinking, and his speech was thick.

"Now," he said, seizing the prisoner by the arm, "you are in my power. Escape is impossible. If you cry out—but I am your master now, and for the rest of your life I mean to be. You have got to be an obedient wife. Do you hear? I've had enough of your contempt and your sneers. You'll write to the boy, will you, mistress? Ha! Fine opportunities you will have on the way to Scotland to-night. Ho! The boy will be pleased when he hears of this night's job, won't he?"

"Come, mistress," said Dan, setting her down gently, "here's the place and here's the ponies, and if you like, just for the look of the thing and out of kindness, as a body may say, to rax me a cuff or a clout, why—don't think I mind it. Oh, Lord!"

It was a kind and thoughtful invitation, and it was followed by so vigorous, direct, and well planted a blow that he reeled.

"Lord!" he cried again, "I believe she's knocked half my teeth down my throat. Who the devil would ha' thought a slip of a girl— Why, even Nan herself"——

He asked for no more clouts, but kept at a respectful distance.

There were half a dozen ponies, all loaded in readiness for the road. Mathew, Dan, and the boy they called Cuddy, were to conduct the expedition, the two latter on foot, the first on pony back. There was also a pony with a saddle, designed, I suppose, for me.

"Now, Drusilla," said Mathew, "get up; there is a long journey before us and no time to spare. Remember—silence, whether we meet friend or stranger. Silence, I say, or"—— He shook a pistol in her face.

She drew the hood more closely down, and pretended to shrink in alarm. Then, without any more resistance, she climbed into the saddle, and took the reins from Mathew's hands.

"That's a good beginning," he said. "May be you have come to your senses and know what is best for yourself. And hark ye, my lass, if you behave pretty, we'll send Barbara to the devil. If you don't you shall have a mistress at the mill as well as a master. Think upon that, now."

Then the procession started. First Cuddy; then the ponies, two by two, who followed the boy as the sheep follow their shepherd; lastly, Mathew, upon his pony, Nan upon hers; and on the other side of her Dan Gedge, still wondering at the unexpected strength displayed in those kicks and that clout.

In addition to the advantages already spoken of possessed by Warkworth for the convenience of a run, should be mentioned the happy circumstance that it lies close to the wild lands, the waste moors and hills which occupy so large a part of Northumberland. These moors are crossed by bridle paths, it is true, but they are mere tracks, not to be distinguished from sheep runs, except by the people who use them, and these are few indeed. If you lose the track, even in broad daylight, you run the risk of deep quagmires, besides that of wandering about with nothing to guide the inexperienced eye, and perhaps perishing miserably among the wild and awful hills. As for the boy Cuddy, he possessed a gift which is sometimes granted even to blind men, of always knowing where he was and of keeping in the right path. It is with some an instinct. He was invaluable on these winter runs, because, however dark the night, whether the moors were covered with thick fog or impenetrable blackness, or even if they were three feet deep in snow, he never failed to find his way direct to the point whither they desired to go. In general, however, the wildest road, though the shortest, was avoided, and the ponies were driven through the country which lies north, or northeast, of the Cheviots. But on this occasion, so great was Mathew's desire to insure the safety of a run in which his ponies carried something more precious even than lace or rum, that he resolved upon trying the more difficult way across Chill moor, south of Cheviot. Even on a summer day the way across this moor is difficult to find. On a winter's night it would seem impossible. Yet Cuddy declared that he could find it blindfold. They were to cross the Border by way of Windgate fell and to carry their stuff to the little village of Yetholm, on the Scottish side.

It was past midnight, and they had been in the saddle for five hours and more, when they reached the place, close to the village of Alnham, where they were to leave the guidance of the winding burn and trust themselves to the knowledge of the boy upon the pathless moors. Here, under the shelter of a linney, Mathew called a halt. Dan produced a lantern and a tinder box, and presently got a light. Then he found some provisions in one of the packs, and they ate and drank.

"You are so far from your friends now," said Mathew to his prisoner, "that you can talk and scream and do exactly what you please, except run away. Now you guess what I am going to do. Once over the Scottish border you will be my wife by Scottish law, if I call you wife. So that now, you know, you had better make up your mind and be cheerful."

She made no reply.

"Well, then, have you got nothing to say?"

She had nothing.

"Sulk, then," he said roughly. "Fall a sulking till you are tired. You may think, if you please, what your young devil of a sweetheart will say when he finds the nest empty! Alive and prospering, is he?"

He proceeded to express his earnest hope that the boy would shortly be beyond the reach of hope. This done, he informed Nan that the worst part of her journey had yet to be accomplished, and that she had better take some meat and drink, unless she wished to fall off her saddle with fatigue, in which case Dan would have to carry her. She accepted without speaking, and, under cover of her hood, made an excellent supper, being in fact already pretty well exhausted with fatigue and hunger. When she had finished, Mathew offered her a bottle which contained brandy. He was amazed to find when she returned it to him that she had taken at one draught about half a pint of the spirit, so that he looked to see her reel and fall off the pony. That she did not do so he attributed to the effect of the cold night air and the long ride, being unsuspicious how strong and seasoned a head was hidden beneath that hood.

Supper finished, Mathew examined the boy concerning the road. He would tell nothing at all about it, yet he said he knew where to find it and how to follow it, and, in short, undertook to guide the party without danger by as short a way as could be found across the moor. He was certain that he could do this, but he would not explain how he knew the way nor in what direction it wound among the hills. In fact, how was the boy to describe a road who knew not north from south, or east from west, nor had any but the most simple English at his command in which to speak of valley or hill, ascent or descent?

The moor over which they crossed that dark night in as perfect safety as if a broad highway had been laid down for them, and was lit with oil lanterns like some of the streets of London is the wildest, I suppose, in all England.

The boy as before, led the way walking without hesitation, though the night was so dark. What he saw to indicate the road no one could tell. Nan for her own part, could see nothing at all before her for the pitchy darkness of the night and the continual pattering of the rain.

Here is the very head of the Cheviots, the middle of the moors and fells, across which so many parties of plunderers, cattle lifters and smugglers have made their way. There is not a valley among these wild hills which has not witnessed many a gallant fight. There is not a hillside which has not run with streams of blood. There is not a mountain among them all which has not its ghosts of slain men. The heath and ling have been trampled under the feet of thousands of soldiers; for in the old days there was no peace upon the border, and every man was a soldier all his life. But, since the invasion of the Young Pretender, there has been no fighting on the Border. Smugglers have taken the place of the cattlelifters, and peaceful ponies laden with forbidden goods go across the moor in place of horses ridden by men in iron. For those who love to be awed by the wildness of Nature, a place admirable and wonderful, but full of terror at all times to the heart of sensibility. I do not say, however, that the moors were terrible to any of those who crossed them on this cold and dark night, save for the darkness and the rain, and the fear that at any moment they might all go head first into a quag. The boy, to begin with, was quite insensible to any impression which can be produced by natural objects—rocks, precipices, wild stretches of land, dark woods—all were alike to him. As for Dan, I suppose he never thought of anything at all. Mathew was too full of the gloomy forebodings which always precede the punishment of wickedness, to regard the things around him, and Nan, as insensible as the boy, was wishing only that the journey was over, because she was horribly cold and getting tired.

The boy led them by that wonderful instinct up the slope of the hill to a high level where the wind was keener and the rain colder. He kept as nearly as possible to the same level, leading them round the middle heights upon the slopes of the great Fells and above the dales. The direct distance is not more than eight miles, but by reason of the winding of the way I suppose they must have doubled that distance. It was 4 o'clock when they left Alnham behind them, and it was already 6 before they came down the hill on the north side of Windgate.

"Master," said the boy at last, pointing at something invisible, "yonder's Yetholm, and you are in Scotland."

Mathew started and sat upright in the saddle, throwing back his cloak. He was in Scotland. Why then, his work was done. He laughed and laid his hand upon his prisoner's arm.

"My wife!" he cried. "Bear witness, Dan, my wife, I say."

Ay, ay, master. Give ye joy, miss Master, another dram to drink the leddy's health."

Mathew gave him his bottle. Dan took a deep draught, and then, wiping the mouth of the vessel, handed it to the lady.

"Take a drop," he said. "It'll warm your blood after that long ride."

Then followed so prolonged a draught of the brandy that Dan, too, as Mathew had done five hours ago, looked to see the girl, unaccustomed to strong drink, fall from her saddle. But she did not. And honest Dan marveled, remembering, besides the vigor of her heels and the unexpected reality of that clout, A wife so gifted with manly strength of heel and hand who could also drink so fair, seemed to this simple fellow a thing to be envied, indeed.

As regards the run, let me say at once, so as to have done with it at once, that it was quite successful, and proved a profitable venture to all concerned, though Mathew for his part, never showed any joy when the work of the night was spoken of. It was a bold thing to venture across the moors on so dark a night; no one in office looked for such a venture in the little village of Yetholm, and the stuff taken in the farmers' carts to Kelso, was all sold off at once, therefore Mathew might have been proud of his exploit. But he was not, and when the old woman, accompanied by the boy, came home two days later and brought the news of what had happened, the success of the venture lost all its interest in presence of the wonderful tale they had to tell.

They rode into Yetholm a good while before daybreak, and the people of the inn—little more than a village ale house—were still in their beds. It was now raining again with a cold wind while they waited for the house to be roused and the fire to be laid. Nan began now, indeed, though she had borne bravely the rough journey of the night, to feel the keen morning air and the fatigue of the long ride. Her limbs were numbed, and when, at last the door was opened and the fire lit, Dan had to lift her off the pony and carry her in. They placed her in a chair before the fire where she sat huddled up in her cardinal and hood, refusing to take them off.

When all was safely bestowed, Mathew thought him of his bride, and came into the parlor, now bright with a cheerful fire and a candle. He threw off hat and cloak with a sigh of relief.

"Come," he said, "let us be friends, Drusilla, since we are married. Yes, child, married. You would have me no other way. Let us have no more skulking."

She answered nothing.

"Well, it matters not." Here the landlord and his wife with Dan and a servant wench came in together. "Something to eat," Mathew ordered. "Anything that you have. My wife is tired with her ride over the moors."

"Over the moors?" This was the landlady. "You haven't surely brought a caddy over the moors on sic a night as this?"

"Indeed, but I have," he replied. "Come, madam." He seized her by the arm and dragged her off the chair—oh, the gentle wooer!—so that she stood before him. "Bear witness, all of you," he said, taking her gloved hand. "This is

TO BE CONTINUED.

SEMI-LIQUID PEAT.

Great Destruction Caused by a Deluge of the Stuff in 1853.

The shifting of peat-bogs in Great Britain from one place to another is not a rare occurrence. On the 3rd of January, 1853, a bog of Enagh Monmore, Ireland, nearly a mile in circumference, and several feet deep, began a movement which lasted about twenty-four hours. It stopped when it had made an advance of about a quarter of a mile. Pennant describes another affair of this kind. The Solway moss in Scotland was an expanse of semi-liquid bog, covering 1,600 acres, and lying somewhat higher than a valley of fertile land near Netherby. So long as the moderately hard crust near the edge was preserved the moss did not flow over. On one occasion some peat-diggers imprudently tampered with that crust, and the moss, moistened by heavy rains, burst its bounds. On the night of the 17th of November, 1771, a farmer who lived near by was alarmed by an unusual noise. He soon discovered a black deluge was slowly rolling in upon his house, and carrying every thing before it. He hastened to give his neighbors warning, but he could not reach all of them. Many were awakened by the noise made by the Stygian tide, while others knew nothing of its approach until it had entered their bedrooms. Pennant says that some were surprised with it even in their beds. These passed a horrible night, not knowing what their fate would be until next morning, when their neighbors came and rescued them through the roofs. About three hundred acres of bog flowed over four hundred acres of land during the night, utterly ruining the farmers, overturning buildings, filling some of the cottages up to the roof, and suffocating many cattle. The stuff flowed along like thick black paint, studded with lumps of more solid peat, and it filled every nook and crevice in its passage. It is said that a cow stood for sixty hours up to her neck in mud and water, but was finally hauled out. When she was rescued she did not refuse to eat, but would not touch water, regarding it with as much terror as if she were suffering from hydrophobia.—Chicago News.

The Domestic of the Period.

"Mr. Hankinson, you will excuse me if I receive you in the dining-room this evening."

"Don't mention it, Miss Kajones. It is much more cozy and homelike."

"It is not on that account, Mr. Hankinson, but Bridget has gone into the parlor to take a nap on the lounge and given orders that she must not be disturbed."—Chicago Tribune.

Bordered Nun's Vailing.

Nun's vailing of heavier quality than that worn last year is wide enough to serve for the length of the skirt, and has a border on one selvage in self-colored and black stripes or figures, as beige with a brown border, mauve with a black border, green with black, or Suede with black. A novelty in vailing is a vandyke border at the foot finished with fringe, as green vailing with brown vandyke points, edged below with green velvet lines and completed by brown fringe; or else broche vandykes on beige vailing with black velvet stripes along the straight edge and black fringe at the foot. Striped vailings are also new, with plain stripes of mauve gray, Suede, or violet alternating with broche stripes of flowers on cream-colored grounds. Printed vailing for tea gowns has very large flowers all over the surface, or merely a border of flowers to a solid-colored fabric.—Harper's Bazar.