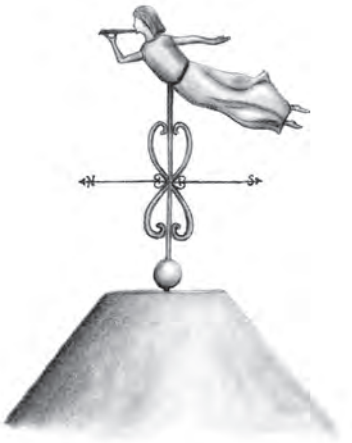
The Lady of Blossholme

By

H. Rider Haggard

Centennial Edition



Revised and Edited
By
Michael J. McHugh

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Contents

About The Author v
Preface vii

Chapter 1 Sir John Foterell 1
Chapter 2 The Murder by the Mere 15
Chapter 3 A Wedding 35
Chapter 4 The Abbot's Oath 51
Chapter 5 What Passed At Cranwell 65
Chapter 6 Emlyn's Curse 87
Chapter 7 The Abbot's Offer 105
Chapter 8 Emlyn Calls Her Man 125
Chapter 9 The Blossholme Witchings 139
Chapter 10 Mother Megges and the Ghost 155
Chapter 11 Doomed 173
Chapter 12 The Stake 191
Chapter 13 The Messenger 211
Chapter 14 Jacob and the Jewels 229
Chapter 15 A Costume at Court 245
Chapter 16 The Voice in the Forest 265
Chapter 17 Between Doom and Honor 281
Chapter 18 Out of the Shadows 299

Classic Novels By Sir H. Rider Haggard 319

The Lady of Blossholme was published slightly over one century ago, yet it has received little recognition over the years compared to the classic masterpiece by H. Rider Haggard *King Solomon's Mines*. Now, through *The Lady of Blossholme*—Centennial Edition, the publisher hopes to introduce this classic novel to a whole new generation of readers in the United States and abroad.

About The Author

Sir Henry Rider Haggard was born in England on June 22, 1856. He was the eighth of ten children, and received most of his primary and elementary education at home through private tutors and occasionally at a local grammar school. His parents took him on frequent trips to mainland Europe during his childhood days. In 1875, when Haggard was nineteen, he traveled to South Africa to work as a secretary for the newly appointed governor of Natal. Three years later, the young Englishman resigned his post at the high court of Pretoria to take up ostrich farming in Natal. Haggard visited England in 1880 and was married on August 11 to Mariana L. Margitson.

The newlyweds soon returned to their farm in Natal to resume the business of farming. In his spare time, Haggard began to work on his first book project, and also began to take up the study of law. In 1882, the Haggard family sold their farm in Natal and returned to England. Henry Haggard completed his law studies in 1884 and accepted a call to the bar of attorneys in London where he worked as an assistant to a chief judge. It was during this time that he made use of what he describes as his "somewhat ample leisure time in chambers" to write his first successful novel, *King Solomon's Mines*. This book, as he put it, "finally settled the question of whether to pursue a legal or literary career."

Henry Haggard went on to write over sixty-six novels, as well as numerous papers, producing nearly one book for each year of his life. Haggard traveled extensively throughout the world during much of his married life. His knowledge of the culture, customs, and terrain of many parts of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East enabled him to construct a host of adventure novels set in various locations around the globe. The recognition of his contributions as a writer were crowned in the year 1912 when Henry Rider Haggard was knighted. Sir Haggard died in London on May 14, 1925, at the age of sixty-eight.

Preface

The novel you are about to read is a work of historical fiction. It is set in England during the mid 1530's, when King Henry VIII was busy trying to expand the Tudor dynasty while also working to establish the independent Church of England. The later years of King Henry's reign were marked by an extensive amount of political and ecclesiastical upheaval, and this fact is accurately depicted in the pages of this novel. The Protestant Reformation was just beginning to bring needed reforms to the Church within England during this era, although the progress of these reforms was often compromised by the unbiblical acts of King Henry VIII or by high ranking officials who were loyal to Rome. For this reason, major power struggles were taking place during this time as powerful leaders in both church and state sought to expand or protect what they considered to be their rightful authority. At one point, the tension and turmoil of this period erupted into a full scale rebellion in the North of England, as thousands of Roman Catholic clergy and commoners chose to take up arms in an effort to force the Crown to make political reforms and concessions. This armed struggle became known as the Pilgrimage of Grace.

The Lady of Blossholme presents the moving story of an English woman and her family, who are victimized by the schemes of a high churchman who is bent on taking advantage of anyone or anything in order to advance his selfish ambitions. The perils and difficulties that the lady named Cicely and her family face at the hands of a wayward abbot, force them to make many hard choices. In the end, however, they find that the God-given gifts of courage, love, and mercy provide them with the strength that they need to overcome the challenges that are put in their path.

It is important for readers to understand that all of the essential aspects of the original version of *The Lady of Blossholme* were left intact during the process of revising/updating the manuscript. For those readers who wonder why it is even necessary to revise or update a literary gem, I simply submit that even the finest of gemstones need a bit of careful cutting and polishing to enhance their original luster. One century ago, Henry Haggard was regarded as one of the world's premier writers of adventure novels and historical fiction. Many of his works are now rightly regarded as classics.

The book that follows, *The Lady of Blossholme*—Centennial Edition, deserves to be counted among the best of Sir Haggard's history-based novels. It is the sincere belief of the publisher of this stirring novel, that it is now in a state to be enjoyed to the fullest, for yet another century, by all those who love good literature.

Michael J. McHugh
2012


SHETLAND ISLANDS
ORKNEY ISLANDS
NORTH SEA
Moray Firth
Firth of Tay
Firth of Forth
SCOTLAND
ENGLAND
IRELAND
Holy Isle
Newcastle-on-Tyne
Solway Firth
Leeds
Manchester
Liverpool
Sheffield
R. Humber
The Wash
Nottingham
Birmingham
Cardigan Bay
Bristol Channel
London
River Thames
Beachy Head
Dover Strait
ENGLISH CHANNEL
FRANCE
HOLLAND
BELGIUM
Brussels
Longitude from Greenwich West 0 East

Chapter 1

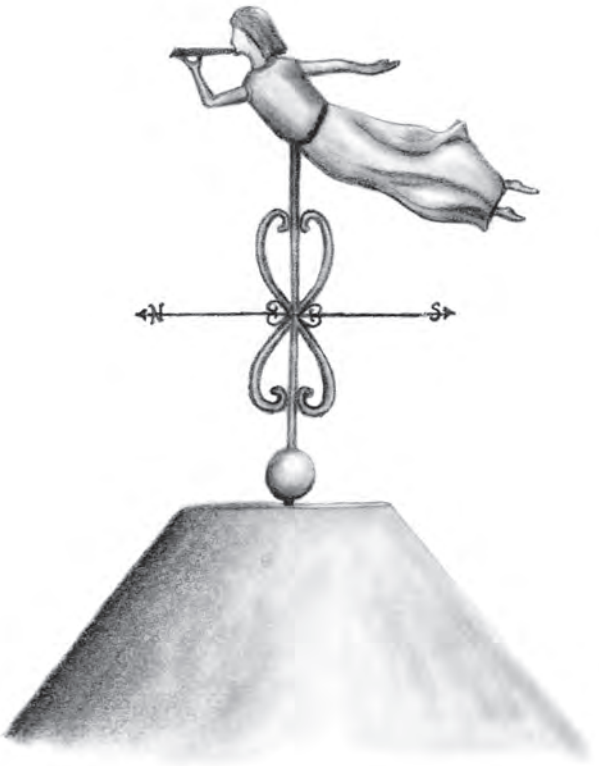
Sir John Foterell

Rare is the person that can forget the ruins of Blossholme Abbey, once he has set his eyes upon them. This small segment of English countryside is perched on a mount between the great waters of the tidal estuary to the north and the rich grazing lands and marshes that, backed with woods, border it to the east and south. As one looks to the west from the top of this spot, he would see rolling uplands that slowly merge into a glorious purple moor. And, far away, he would note the majestic eternal hills sitting patiently in the distance.

In all likelihood, this scene has not changed very much since the days of Henry VIII, when those things happened of which we have to tell; for here no large town has arisen, nor have mines been dug or factories built to scar the earth and defile the air.

According to the parish records, the village of Blossholme has also changed very little over the centuries in terms of its population. This may be due, in part, because a rail line never connected this place to the outside world. It is also probable that the general look and charm of the buildings that grace this tiny village have changed little, for houses built from the local gray stone do not readily fall down. The folk of past generations, therefore, undoubtedly walked in and out of the doorways of many of these buildings, although the roofs for the most part are now covered with tiles or rough slates in place of reeds from the dike. The parish wells have changed somewhat with the times, for they are now operated by electronically controlled iron pumps instead

of the old rollers and buckets. Still, the same deep cisterns provide the townspeople with drinking-water, just as they have done since the days of the first Edward, and perhaps for centuries before.



Although their use, if not their necessity, has passed away, the old stocks and whipping-post still stand not far from the abbey gate in the middle of the Priests' Green. These devices evidently held both young and old alike, for they were arranged with three sets of iron loops fixed at different heights and of varying diameters to accommodate the wrists of man, woman, and child. This place of humiliation and confinement, it should be noted, was situated under a quaint old shelter that was supported by rough, oaken pillars. The roof which covered this shelter, was adorned with

a weathercock that some monk fashioned into the shape of an archangel blowing the last trump. His clarion or coach-horn, or whatever instrument of music it was he blew, has vanished. The parish book records that in the time of George I a boy broke it off, melted it down, and was publicly flogged in consequence. This was the last time, apparently, that the whipping-post was used. In spite of this act of vandalism, however, Gabriel still twists about as manfully as he did when old Peter, the famous smith, fashioned and set him up with his own hand in the last year of King Henry VIII. At this same location, a stone marker also stands to commemorate the fact that on this spot stood the stakes to which those who were condemned as witches were burned.

So it is with everything at Blossholme, a place that time has touched but lightly. The fields, or many of them, bear the same names and remain identical in their shape and outline. The old farmsteads and the few halls in which reside the gentry of the district, stand where they always stood. The glorious tower of the abbey still points upwards to the sky, although bells and roof are gone, while half-a-mile away the parish church that was there before it—having been rebuilt indeed upon Saxon foundations in the days of William Rufus—yet lies among its ancient elms. Farther on, situated upon the slope of a vale down which runs a brook through meadows, is the stark ruin of the old nunnery that was subservient to the proud abbey on the hill.

It is of this abbey and this nunnery and of those who dwelt around them in a bygone era, and especially of that fair and persecuted woman who came to be known as the Lady of Blossholme, that my story will now begin to recount.

It was in the dead of winter, in the year 1535, when old Sir John Foterell, a white-bearded, red-faced man of about sixty years of age, was seated before the log fire in the dining-hall of his great house at Shefton. He was, at this hour, beginning to read through a letter which had just been sent to him from the head Abbot of Blossholme Abbey. This old knight soon mastered the contents of the letter that he was now holding with great firmness, and

then proceeded to break into a rage that was remarkable, even for the time of the eighth Henry. At the climax of this tirade, Sir John dashed the document to the ground, and called for his only available servant to bring him another tankard of strong ale, of which he had already had enough.

After a brief period of refreshment and silence, the enraged knight once again began to vent his indignation. He called upon heaven in his most expressive language, in order to urge the Almighty to consign the body of the Abbot of Blossholme to the gallows and his soul to hell.

"He claims my lands, does he?" he exclaimed, shaking his fist in the direction of the abbey that sat adjacent to his estate. "What does the rogue say? That the abbot who went before him parted with them to my grandfather for no good consideration, but under fear and threats. This thief then has the nerve to add that Secretary Thomas Cromwell, whom they call Vicar-General, has declared that the said transfer was without legal standing, and that I must hand over my lands to the Abbey of Blossholme, on or before Candlemas! What was Cromwell paid to sign such an order before inquiry was made with all parties, I wonder?"

Sir John poured out and drank a fourth cup of liquid courage, before he proceeded to walk up and down the length of his great hall. Before long, however, he halted in front of the fire and addressed it as though it were his enemy.

"You are a clever fellow, Clement Maldon; they tell me that all Spaniards are, and you were taught your craft at Rome and sent here for a purpose. You began as nothing, and now you are Abbot of Blossholme; and, if the King had not shunned the Pope, you would be more. But you forget yourself at times, for the Southern blood is hot, and say things that should not be uttered. There were certain words you spoke before me and other witnesses less than a year ago, of which I will remind you presently. Perhaps when Secretary Cromwell learns of them he will cancel his gift of my lands, and then lift that plotting head of yours up higher. Perhaps

now is as good a time as any to pay you a visit, and remind you of them."

Sir John strode toward the closest doorway and shouted in order to rouse his servant; it would not be too much, in fact, to say that he bellowed like a bull. After several minutes, a serving-man appeared before the master of the house. He was a bow-legged, sturdy-looking fellow with a shock of black hair gracing his balding head.

"Why are you not quicker, Jeffrey Stokes?" he asked. "Must I wait your pleasure from noon to night?"

"I came as fast as I could, Master. Why, then, do you rate me?"

"Would you argue with me, fellow? Do it again and I will have you tied to a post and lashed."

"Lash yourself, Master, and let out the stench of foul ale that has poisoned your manners, which you need to do," replied Jeffrey in his gruff voice. "There be some men who never know when they are well served, and such are apt to come to ill and lonely ends. What is your pleasure? I'll do it if I can, and if not, then the task won't get done."

Sir John lifted his hand as though to strike him, then let it fall again.

"I like one who braves me to my teeth," he said more gently, "and that was ever your nature. Do not be cross with me and take it not ill, man; I was angered, and have cause to be."

"The anger I see, but not the cause, though, as a monk came from the abbey but now, perhaps I can hazard a guess."

"Aye, that's it, that's it, Jeffrey. And now I must ride at once to yonder abbey to confront a rogue. Saddle me a horse."

"Good, Master. I'll saddle two horses."

"Two? I said one. The journey is not long, and so why would I have need of a pair of horses?"

"Because you will ride one and I another. When the Abbot of Blossholme visits Sir John Foterell of Shefton, he comes with hawk decorating his wrist, with chaplains and pages, and ten stout men-at-arms; of whom he keeps more of late than a priest would seem to need about him. When Sir John Foterell visits the Abbot of Blossholme, at least he should have one serving-man at his back to hold his nag and bear him witness."

Sir John looked at him shrewdly.

"I treated you as a fool," he said, "but you are none except in looks. Do as you will, Jeffrey, but be swift. Hold on. Where is my daughter?"

"The Lady Cicely sits in her parlor. I saw her sweet face at the window but now staring out at the snow as though she thought to see a ghost in it."

"Um," grunted Sir John, "the ghost she thinks to see rides a grand gray mare, stands over six feet high, has a jolly face, and a pair of arms well made for sword and shield, or to hold a girl in. Yet the ghost I speak of must continue to remain outside of the reach of my darling daughter, Jeffrey."

"It is a pity that it must be so, Master. Moreover, you may find it hard to keep your daughter from the one that occupies her every thought. Ghost-laying is a priest's job, and when maids' waists are willing, men's arms reach far."

"Stop your babbling, and get to your duty, man!" roared Sir John, as Jeffrey slowly began to back away from his presence.

Ten minutes later, the two men were riding for the abbey, three miles away, and within half-an-hour Sir John was knocking, not gently, at its gate. While the visitors waited, they could hear monks scurrying to and fro within the walls of the abbey like startled ants, for the times were rough, and they were not sure who threatened them. When they finally identified their visitors, they set to work to unbar the great doors and let down the drawbridge that had been hoisted up at sunset.

A short time later, Sir John stood in the abbot's chamber, warming himself at the great fire, and behind him stood his serving-man, Jeffrey, carrying his long cloak. It was a fine room, with a noble roof of carved chestnut wood and stone walls hung with costly tapestry, whereon were worked scenes from the Scriptures. The floor was partially covered with rich carpets made from colored wool crafted in the Far East. The furniture in this room was rich and foreign-looking as well, being inlaid with ivory and silver, while on the table stood a golden crucifix, a miracle of art, that captured well the light from a hanging silver lamp that fell upon it. To complete the scene, a life-sized picture of the Magdalene painted by some great Italian painter stood nearby. In this painting, the great lady was turning her beauteous eyes to heaven while beating her fair breast.

Sir John looked about him and sniffed.

"Now, Jeffrey, as you look around you would you think that you were in a monk's cell or in some great dame's bower? Whose portrait is that, think you?" and he pointed to the Magdalene.

"A sinner turning saint, I think, Master. Good company for priests now that she is a saint. For the rest, I could find it quite easy to enjoy these surroundings after a cup of red wine," and he jerked his thumb towards a long-necked bottle that sat on a nearby table. "Also, the fire burns bright, which is not to be wondered at, seeing that it is made of dry oak from your Sticksley Wood."

"How know you that, Jeffrey?" asked Sir John.

"By the grain of it, Master—by the grain of it. I have hewn too many a timber there not to know. There's that in the Sticksley clays which makes the rings grow wavy and darker at the heart. See there."

Sir John looked, and a frown soon appeared upon his brow.

"You are right, man; and now that I come to think of it, when I was a little lad my old grandsire bade me note this very thing about the Sticksley oaks. These thieving monks waste my woods

right beneath my nose. My forester is a rogue. They have scared or bribed him, and he shall answer for it."

"First prove the crime, Master, which won't be easy; then talk of punishment, which only kings and high abbots, 'with right of gallows,' can do at will. Ah! you speak the truth," he added in a changed voice; "it is a lovely chamber, though not good enough for the holy man who dwells in it, since such a saint should have a silver shrine before the altar yonder, as doubtless will happen before he grows too long in the tooth," and, as though by chance, he trod upon his lord's foot, which was somewhat gouty.

As soon as his servant stepped back a few paces, Sir John turned around sharply like the Blossholme weathercock on a gusty day, with a look of pain etched upon his face

"Clumsy toad!" he yelled in the direction of his servant, then paused, for there within the dimly lit doorway stood a tall, tonsured figure clothed in rich furs. Behind him stood two other figures, also tonsured, in simple black robes. It was the Abbot Clement Maldon with his chaplains.

"Welcome to our humble dwelling!" said the abbot in his soft, foreign voice, lifting the two fingers of his right hand in blessing.

"Good-day," answered Sir John, while his retainer bowed his head and crossed himself. "Why do you steal upon a man like a thief in the night, Holy Father?" he added irritably.

"That is how we are told judgment shall come, my son," answered the abbot, smiling; "and in truth there seems some need of it. We heard loud quarrelling and talk of hanging men. What is your argument?"

"A hard one of oak," answered the old knight sullenly. "My servant here said those logs upon your fire came from my Sticksley Wood, and I answered him that if this were so they were stolen, and my reeve should hang for it."

"The worthy man is right, my son, and yet your forester deserves no punishment. I bought our scanty store of firing from

him, and, to tell truth, the count has not yet been paid. The money that should have discharged it has gone to London, so I asked him to let it stand until the summer rents come in. Blame him not, Sir John, if, out of friendship, knowing it was naught to you, he has not bared the nakedness of our poor house."

"Is it the nakedness of your poor house that caused you to send me this letter saying that you have Cromwell's writ to seize my lands?" asked Sir John, as he glanced round the sumptuous chamber. Before the abbot could think of responding, however, the offended knight continued to press his argument, and casting down the document upon the table added; "or do you also mean to make payment for them—when your summer rents come in?"

"Nay, son. In the matter in which you speak duty led me. For twenty years we have disputed your claim to those estates which, as you know, your grandsire took from us in a time of trouble, thus cutting the abbey lands in twain, against the protest of Abbot Ingham in those days. Therefore, at last I laid the matter before the Vicar-General, who, I hear, has been pleased to decide the suit in favor of this abbey."

"To decide a suit of which the defendant had no notice!" exclaimed Sir John. "My Lord Abbot, this is not justice; it is roguery that I will never bear. Did you decide any other critical matters that concern the future of my house, pray you?"

"Since you ask it—something, my son. To save costs I laid before him the sundry points at issue between us, and in sum this is the judgment: Your title to all your Blossholme lands and those contiguous, some eight thousand acres, is not voided, yet it is held to be tainted and doubtful."

"For the love of justice! Why?" asked Sir John.

"My son, I will tell you," replied the abbot gently. "Because within a hundred years they belonged to this abbey by gift of the Crown, and there is no record that the Crown consented to their alienation."

"No record," exclaimed Sir John, "when I have the indentured deed in my strong-box, signed by my great-grandfather and the Abbot Frank Ingham! No record, when my said forefather gave you other lands in place of them which you now hold? But go on, holy priest."

"My son, I obey you. Your title, though pronounced to be doubtful, is not utterly voided; yet it is held that you have all these lands as tenant of this abbey, to which, should you die without issue, they will relapse. Or should you die with issue under age, such issue will be ward to the Abbot of Blossholme until he or she marries with his approval. In the event that we both die, that is, if there were no Lord Abbot and no abbey, your lands would fall to the Crown."

Sir John listened, then sank back into a chair, while his face turned as white as a sheet.

"Show me that judgment," he said slowly.

"It is not yet engrossed, my son. I expect the documents within ten days or so. Yet, I am concerned for you appear faint to me. The warmth of this room after the cold outer air, perhaps. Drink a cup of our poor wine," and at a motion of his hand one of the chaplains filled a goblet from the long-necked flask that stood there, and brought it to Sir John.

He took it as one that knows not what he does, then suddenly threw the silver cup and its contents into the fire. As the enraged knight stood staring in the direction of the fire, one of the chaplains carefully labored to recover the costly goblet from the flames with a pair of metal tongs.

"It seems that you priests are practically my heirs," said Sir John. Then he added in a new, quiet voice, "or so you say, and, if that is so, my life is likely to be short. I'll not drink your wine, lest it should be poisoned. Hearken now, Sir Abbot. I believe little of this tale, though doubtless by bribes and other means you have done your best to harm me behind my back up yonder in London. Well, tomorrow at the dawn, come fair weather or come foul, I

ride through the snows to London, where I too have friends, and we will see, we will see."

"Now, now, I counsel you not to take action in a state of blind rage and anger," replied the abbot.

"You are a clever man, Abbot Maldon, and I know that you need money, or its worth, to pay your men-at-arms and satisfy the great costs at which you live—and there are our famous jewels—yes, yes, the old Crusader jewels. Therefore you have sought to rob me, whom you ever hated, and perchance Thomas Cromwell has listened to your tale. Did it ever dawn upon you greedy men," he added slowly, "that the Vicar had it in his mind to fat this Church goose of yours with my meal before he wrings its neck and cooks it."

At these words the abbot started for the first time, and even the two impassive chaplains glanced at each other.

"Ah! Does that touch you?" asked Sir John Foterell. "Well, then, here is what shall move you even further. You think yourself in favor at the Court, do you not? This is likely because you took the oath of succession which braver men, like the brethren of the Charterhouse, refused, and died for it. But you forget the words you said to me when the wine you love had a hold of you in my hall—"

"Silence! For your own sake, silence, Sir John Foterell," broke in the abbot. "You go too far."

"Not so far as you shall go, my Lord Abbot, ere I have done with you. Not so far as Tower Hill or Tyburn, thither to be hung and quartered as a traitor to his Grace. I tell you, you forget the words you spoke, but I will remind you of them. Did you not say to me when the guests had gone, that King Henry was a heretic, a tyrant, and an infidel whom the Pope would do well to excommunicate and depose? Did you not, when I led you on, ask me if I could not bring about a rising of the common people in these parts, among whom I have great power? Did you not also urge me to call upon those gentry who know and love me, in order to encourage them

to overthrow the King, and in his place set up a certain Cardinal Pole? Yes, you did, indeed! And then you went on to promise me the pardon and absolution of the Pope, and much advancement in his name and that of the Spanish Emperor if I cooperated."

"Never," answered the abbot.

"And did I not," went on Sir John, taking no note of his denial, "did I not refuse to listen to you and tell you that your words were traitorous? In fact, I have little doubt that you well remember how I warned you that I would be duty bound to report your words to the proper authorities should they ever be repeated. Aye, and have you not from that hour striven to undo me, whom you fear?"

"I deny it all," said the abbot again. "These be but empty lies bred of your malice, Sir John Foterell."

"Empty words, are they, my Lord Abbot! Well, I tell you that they are all written down and signed in due form. I tell you I had witnesses you knew naught of who heard them with their ears. Here stands one of them behind my chair. Is it not so, Jeffrey?"

"Aye, Master," answered the serving-man. "I chanced to be in the little chamber beyond the wainscot with others waiting to escort the abbot home, and heard them all, and afterward I and they put our marks upon the writing. As I am a Christian man that is so; though, Master, this is not the place that I should have chosen to speak of it, however much I might be wronged."

"It will serve my turn," said the enraged knight, "though it is true that I will speak of it louder elsewhere, namely, before the King's Council. Tomorrow, my Lord Abbot, this paper and I go to London, and then you shall learn how well it pays you to try to pluck a Foterell out of his own nest."

Now it was the abbot's turn to be frightened. His smooth, olive-colored cheeks sank in and went white, as though already he felt the cord about his throat. His jeweled hand shook, and he caught the arm of one of his chaplains and hung to it.

"Man," he hissed, "do you think that you can utter such false threats and go hence to ruin me, a consecrated abbot? I have dungeons here; I have power. It will be said that you attacked me, and that I did but strive to defend myself. Others can bring witness besides you, Sir John," and he whispered some words in Latin or Spanish into the ear of one of his chaplains, whereon that priest turned to leave the room.

"Now it seems that we are getting to business," said Jeffrey Stokes, as, laying his hand upon the knife at his girdle, he slipped between the monk and the door.

"That's it, Jeffrey," cried Sir John. "Stop the rat from reaching his hole. Listen well, Spaniard. I have a sword. Show me to your gate, or, by virtue of the King's commission that I hold, I do instant justice on you as a traitor, and afterward answer for it if I win out."

The abbot considered a moment, taking the measure of the fierce old knight before him. Then he said slowly—

"Go as you came, in peace, O man of wrath and evil, but know that the curse of the Church shall follow you. I say that you stand near to perdition."

Sir John looked at him. The anger went out of his face, and, instead, upon it appeared a strange smile.

"By heaven and all its saints! I think you are right, Clement Maldon," he replied. "Beneath that black dress of yours, you are a man like the rest of us, are you not? You have a heart and a soul that will never die. You have members, and you have a brain to think with and a mouth to utter words. In short, you are a fiddle for God to play on, and however much your superstitions mask and alter it, out of those strings now and again will come some squeak of truth."

"You weary me with your false tongue," remarked the vexed abbot. "Can you not make an end of your foolish speaking?"

"I will be done soon enough. But before I depart, I would have you know that I also am a fiddle, of a more honest sort,

mayhap; though I do not lift two fingers of my right hand and say, 'Benedicite, my son,' and 'Your sins are forgiven you'. I speak, therefore, in sincerity and truth when I tell you just now that the God of both of us plays His tune in me, and I will tell you what he says in my heart. I stand near to death, but you stand not far from the gallows. I'll die an honest man; you will die like a dog, false to everything, and afterwards your memory will rot. Only after you have gone to the grave, will you discover that your beads and your masses and your prayers to the saints will never rescue you from damnation and hell. And now, my Lord Abbot, lead me to your gate, and remember that I follow with my sword. Jeffrey, set those two scoundrels in front of you, and watch them well. Now, do as I say, and you and your servants will live at least a few more days. Forward, man!"