

WHISTLES OF SILVER

'On the contrary part there was no warlike Musicke in the Spanish Gallies, but onely their whistles of silver.'—*Hakluyt's 'Voyages.'*

AT four o'clock on a June morning of the year 1624 the sister and niece of Master Isaak Fettiplace, Parson of Kintonbury Parva in the County of Dorset, came down to put the Parson's study to rights while the Parson was still a-bed. The elder woman opened the casement and a warm mist lapped in from the sea, whose purling waves, visible at the base of eroded chalk-cliffs, foretold a tropical day. Her daughter, with a bundle of kindling in her apron, approached the hearth. Contrary to his custom, the Parson had demanded a fire on his return from London the night before, and had sat up late by it. The women, wakeful and a trifle anxious, had heard him move up to his bed-chamber hours after midnight. Now the embers must be swept up and the pyre between the heavy steel dogs re-laid.

'He hath burnt his journal!'—the cry came from the niece, on her knees before the hearth.

'He hath burnt his journal?'—it was the incredulous riposte of the mother, wheeled round to face the scene of catastrophe.

Flake upon flake of burnt paper, steel-grey like the débris of a wasps'-nest, mingled with, where they did not cover, the brands of the extinct fire. A binding of pig-skin, wrenched off before the rest of the folio met its fate, lay under the Parson's table. The two women gazed silently at these testimonies of violence, and tears of apprehension rose in the eyes of the elder.

The younger, with the callousness and curiosity of youth on an impersonal issue, picked up a handful of pages less charred than the rest, and strove to decipher their characters.

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“ ‘ Whistles of silver, ’ ’ she read musingly. ‘ Now what hath my godly Uncle Isaak, who cannot stomach so much as an organ in church, to do with “ whistles of silver ” ? ’

‘ That is not our affair, ’ retorted her mother angrily. ‘ But why, ’ she went on, harrowed out of all consistency, ‘ Oh why hath he burnt his journal ? ’

No answer was ever given to either question, so far as the Parson’s womenfolk were concerned; nor did the Parson himself, by word or sign, ever throw light on the motives that prompted his holocaust. It marked, undoubtedly, a spiritual turning-point, the cleavage between a youth and prime of fanatical bigotry and an old age of almost wistful tolerance. For contemporary witnesses, the Parson’s back-sliding (as many of them deemed it) was never explained. For us it is otherwise, and this story is in the nature of a triple illumination. It divulges why this spurner of sweet instruments dwelt repeatedly on ‘ whistles of silver ’; why he burnt the journal he had kept for five and thirty years; and why, at the close of his life, he set himself to dissipate the rancours of his youth, and await in a peace not wholly untroubled by bewilderment the revelation of the Sons of God.

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Properly to understand the character of the Parson of Kintonbury Parva, you must know that nature intended him for a buccaneer. Grace, as he would have put it, and the misgivings of a solicitous mother, cut him off from a hereditary profession. His forbears on his father’s side were sea-faring gentle-folks of Lyme Regis. His mother was a Raleigh and counted kindred with Sir Walter himself. There was a whole clan of Lyme ship-owners—Fettiplaces, Wades, Quemerfords, and the rest—all merchant adventurers or

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privateers from the reign of the seventh Henry. Barbary monopolised their energies under the first four Tudors. Elizabeth's prime saw them penetrate the South Seas and the auriferous estuaries of the New World. Then Roger Fettiplace, father of our hero, fell at Santos in a fray with a Spanish carrack; and his widow brought up their posthumous child and only son with an eye to the family living. At Kintonbury Parva, Isaak, she felt, would be safe. He might fulminate against Spain after the manner of true-born English patriots, without even so much as coming within ear-shot of the sinister Spanish whistles. For Mistress Fettiplace had gathered from the verbosity of her husband's leisure, that whereas the English seadogs fought to the music of trumpets and hautboys, the Spaniards were urged on by the shrilling of silver whistles; and these the poor lady heard in her piteously broken slumbers, both before and after her boy was born. Isaak was swaddled in hatred of Spain and terror of Papistry even beyond the wont of the children of that harassed coast. He never thought of the Old Religion and the popular foe apart; though amongst his nearest neighbours, men as English as himself were living and dying in communion with Rome. Their faith indeed had a desperate end to keep up all over the England of his day. But in the West Country it maintained it with singular tenacity, the people being at once more simple and more fervent than the trimmers of the court and capital. And for the same reason, and because the West Country temper was ever disinclined to compromise, the Church as by law established was starched and stiffened with Calvinism. Our hero proceeded to one of the more 'reformed' of the Cambridge colleges; and emerged in a Geneva gown, the fiercest supporter of its rigidest sect. Yet he never looked the complete divine, being uncommonly tall and burly with the high forehead,

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long countenance and little pigs' eyes which unkindly contemporaries noted in his mother's folk, the Raleighs. He travelled in Switzerland; made the acquaintance of the great Beza and other like-minded theologians; and was inducted into the living of Kintonbury Parva in the year the Armada was demolished. His mother's death preceded the Queen's; but Isaak had his widowed sister and niece to fend for him, and marriage was out of his reckoning. He was wholly happy in the pugnacious tradition of his forefathers; for religion, especially a persecuted religion, is the greatest of adventures, and to be a Puritan vicar in a countryside of Papists, Episcopalians, and extreme dissenters would have given scope to the combativeness of the fiercest Fettiplace of them all. Isaak's particular tenets had a working majority among his parishioners; and the fact that he was at perpetual feud with his bishop rather flattered his pride than otherwise. He entered into sympathetic relations with his fellow incumbents of like principles over a radius of four counties; paid them strenuous and rejuvenating visits; and frequented the capital from time to time on like errands. And all that advanced their interests, or those of their spiritual opponents, he noted with characteristic exultation or abhorrence in his famous diary, a diary begun the year after his induction, and destroyed, as we have seen, in the thirty-sixth year of its age.

It is a pity it did not survive, though indeed its lucubrations were of little historical value. In 1610 their writer met (and scorned in the meeting) Walsingham's old tool, Arthur Gregory, a forger who had once been housed at Chartley to forge letters under the same roof as his victim the Queen of Scots, and was now retired and living respectably at Lyme. In 1614 his 'bowels are stirred' to hear that his fellow-Puritan, Peacham, has been examined 'by the manacles' be-

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fore Sir Francis Bacon, and questioned 'before torture, in torture, between torture, and after torture.' He sets down physical phenomena—the great pestilence of 1604, and the 'shower of blood' that fell in 1607. But his longest entries and chiefest eloquence are reserved for Popish plots and the machinations of seminary priests at home and abroad.

Isaak Fettiplace's diary was at once his confidant and his consolation; and though he was at heart a modest man, he had a sound reliance that its pages would outlive him. As he grew older, it replaced in a sense the son he had never begotten and whom he had, without knowing it, grown to miss. His childlessness he felt borne in upon him rather bitterly the day he saw young Sabin Wade depart for the Americas. The lad just turned fourteen was the son of an old friend; and though Peregrine Wade was more than suspected of recusancy, Isaak could not refrain from congratulating the father on the hopeful bearing of the son.

'Used Master Wade's Perspective glasses to see the last of his son Sabin departyd for the River of Plate in his Uncle's ship the Beare,' ran the entry of the third day of March, 1608. Its writer went on to express a pious hope that the youth would be shielded from Don and Devil, and an equally pious conviction that he was, on the whole, well away from his father's house. 'Maybe he will finde fewer Papists on the Spanish Main than lurke behynde the waynscots of Lyme. Jesuits and Seminarists creepe in everywhere; and there be Whistles of Silver that lure men to take a part in other frayes than those of the bodie.'

If by these immaterial and spiritual whistles Master Fettiplace symbolised the seductions of Rome, there seemed little doubt, as time wore on, that Master Sabin had lent ear to them. He never reappeared in Lyme; and there were rumours of Valladolid, the

priesthood, and a surreptitious return to London in disguise. Old Wade, straitly questioned, denied all knowledge of the lad's movements; but his equanimity in this undignified if not tragic predicament lent colour to the notion that he knew more than he divulged. In any case, the matter was forgotten after his death, though undoubtedly Master Isaak was not present at that passing, and there were rumours that Sabin, in his sacerdotal capacity, was. So the matter rested until the summer of my narrative, the June of 1624, when the Parson, undeterred by rumours of the plague in the capital, left Kintonbury Parva for London.

Starting out with the cavalcade of pack-horses that bore the marine harvest of Lyme Regis to the markets of the city, Master Isaak fell behind at Blandford, wearied with the heat of the season and strong smell of cow-parsley and stockfish that had attended his ride. A quiet hostelry served him with a belated meal, which he shared with one other traveller, a man of thirty, lithe, bronzed and flaxen-haired, with the address of a courtier and the gait (when he rose to summon the hostess on a matter of more bread) of the quarter-deck. The couple fraternized courteously, but at a conventional distance, over three penn'orth of Malmsey, the hereditary sea-dog in Master Isaak itching to question the traveller on his antecedents and adventures. The stranger, however, seemed more interested in the activities of Kintonbury Parva, and infallibly led the Parson back to his parish when their discourse strayed beyond its boundaries. He had had acquaintance with the village in his youth, he admitted, though he was a stranger to its present; and ever and anon as Isaak set his pint of wine to his lips and looked over the rim of his bowl at the square, flaxen-bearded face in front of him, he was certain he had seen it before but years ago and on some older man. And

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his curiosity growing personal, he redoubled his impersonal questions.

At last his young companion unbent, but always with a certain reserve at back of his communicativeness, and enlarged on the hazards and curiosities of his sea-faring past. He told of savages on whose attire there glittered plates of silver as thick as fish-scales on the quays of Lyme; of the King of Eldorado, who was said by some (but in this the narrator put no personal credence) to anoint himself in turpentine and roll in gold-dust; and of mariners and traders he had himself witnessed near Rio Grande, bartering green glass bracelets and worsted cloth with a gay stripe in it for rubies, pearls and the ore of precious metals.

‘You are a gentleman-adventurer yourself, no doubt,’ asserted the Parson.

‘Indeed, you may call me so if you will, but I trade in something stouter than tinsel,’ laughed the other.

‘Aye, no doubt the Indians are grown warier than of old,’ mused the Parson, ‘and I have heard of tools of utility and defence—spades, cutlasses and the like—passing for more than the old gauds. Being young yourself, you will be all for the newer measures and the more novel wares.’

‘Nay, the old measures and the old wares are good enough for me,’ said the stranger, rising courteously.

‘Indeed, my traffic has been little more than that of a fisherman, these last few years. But I must ride on to-night while this fair moon lasts me.’ And with a smile and a reverence he was gone.

‘A fisherman?’ repeated his catechist, left stranded over the lees of the Malmsey, ‘Seals, belike. It would take a brave fishing-ground to lure a youth of such a waking spirit.’ And with that he called for his reckoning—which it was his custom to pay over-night—and prepared himself for an early departure on the morrow.

Lightly as he left Blandford, it was a heavy and reluctant Parson who rode into the infected air of London and put up at the 'Black Bell' on Fish Street Hill. Evidences of the plague were everywhere, and the gross and evil vapours of the city, so noticeable to his country nostrils, sickened him with apprehension. What little wind there was, blew from the south, and did nothing to dissipate the excessive swarming of flies and gnats in the crooked lanes about him. And the sight of bonfires at the street corners, their clear flames shimmering in the hazy air, plainly indicated that the City Fathers were alive to the common danger. His own inn, however, was clean and well garnished; and he bespoke a large room, facing north, and a brazier burning apple-parings, storax and rosemary. He had his business to do, and went about it like a stoic, in the well-founded confidence that those who bear themselves temperately and bravely are the last, under Heaven, to suffer. Indeed, his affairs were settled and he was in the act of departing, when a West Country carrier, looking in on the ordinary below, brought news of a Dorset acquaintance in sore straits near at hand.

'It is Master Quemerford of Ebgate that hath the sickness?' demanded Isaak descended to an interview in the inn yard. The fellow was not certain. It was either Master Quemerford or one of his house. Yester-eve they said in the lane, his wife. This morning it was his maid-servant or himself. No one knew—and no one was anxious to enquire.

Scorn for their cowardly equanimity shook the heroic soul of Master Isaak; and though he called for white vinegar and cloves to bathe his forehead, and hung his niece's pomander of bugloss flowers and musk round his neck before he started, he had no hesitation whatsoever in confronting Ebgate. Only as he raised his hand to the knocker of a recluse and shuttered dwelling did misgiving cross his mind. Quemerford's wife

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was a Papist, and Quemerford himself, though well inclined, had let her go her way. It was even said that he had left Lyme for London that his partner's religious practices might be facilitated and screened. But what of that? Quemerford himself might be dying, and dying surrounded by seminarists. He knocked for the second time, and stumbling footsteps advanced from the interior to meet him. Thank God! Quemerford, at least, was safe! It was the man himself, his face swollen with grief, his hair distraught, his apparel disordered, who gazed at him with something like horror from the obscurity of the threshold.

'The sickness! Go!' he cried; but even as he spoke he himself staggered and fell back against the arras of the passage. Isaak entered, shut the door, and half led, half carried the prostrate man to a chair in the adjoining parlour. He could not leave him helpless—and indeed the whole house seemed deserted. Only very high in the attics, he thought he heard footsteps and the opening and shutting of a press. But it might have been next door. He looked round for restoratives; and finding some bottles of strong waters in a cupboard by the hearth, poured out what seemed to be *aqua vitae* and held it to Quemerford's lips.

'Why Nick, man!' he cried in the forgotten address of their boyhood, 'why Nick, man! Take heart! We will look to thy wife. Take heart, man!'

'She is dead, dead, I tell you, my Margery is dead,' sobbed Quemerford, the tears running down his cheeks. 'Our serving-folk are gone, and I myself am well enough. I am but idle-headed through lack of sleep. But the sickness hath taken Margery—she died at cock-crow.'

'Alone?'

'Nay, Master Fettiplace'—a proud defiance flushed the bereaved man's face, and the sobbing ceased. 'She had her priest with her. Heaven knows I shared

nothing of her faith; but it was her's, and what was I to deny her? He came last night in sore peril of his life. But, by Heaven, he must be gone, before the world gets wind of her passing! I was but descending to find him a bite and a sup when your knock came. You will not betray him'—he caught piteously at the Parson's cloak. 'He hath been all in all to Margery. Besides, 'tis Master Wade, Sabin Wade, the son of our old friend!'

'Master Quemerford, by your leave . . . ' a strong young voice broke in from the passage without. The handle of the door turned, but Quemerford thrust himself between the door and the Parson. 'The sickness!' he cried desperately to Master Isaak; and to his summoner, 'Anon, Sir, anon—I come!' But at the sound of the young voice, Master Isaak had joined memory to memory and fact to fact, till they met like the notched teeth of a cockle shell: the square-bearded face at the Blandford inn, the self-acknowledged dealer in old gauds, the fisherman—a fisher of souls!

'Come in, Master Wade!' he cried. 'You are as safe with me as I am safe with you.' And even as he spoke, Quemerford opened the door and Sabin Wade entered. Between the old stalwart and the young flashed a recognition that was a salute, as if the haut-boys and the whistles of silver were sounding, for once, a common chord. The death their fathers had dared on the High Seas confronted both in this ominous house and city. For Sabin had dared the plague and the halter that Margery Quemerford's passing should be illuminated by the rites of her Faith; and Master Isaak was even now adding to his desperate danger of infection, the peril of abetting a seminary priest.

With a resource far beyond his host's fumbling hospitality, he assisted to set such provisions as the place afforded before the famished priest. 'He hath not left her side,' babbled Quemerford, 'and I had for-

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gotten meat and drink and the passing of time. But he hath shifted his attire,' he continued, 'and his horse awaits him not far from here when he hath broken his fast. If only the house be not watched,' he added, apprehensively.

Isaak strode to the half-shuttered window, and looked up and down the tortuous lane now crowded with the traffic of mid-day.

'I see nought to misdoubt,' he replied; 'but I will myself accompany Master Wade to his posting-place, if he will vouchsafe it; and then, Nick, I will return to you.'

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Parson and priest exchanged their farewells in a stable at the back of the herb-market in Grass Street. The shock of their encounter past, a certain embarrassment supervened; and their speech, which dwelt rather on Quemerford's business than their own, had but one personal note in it.

'Master Fettiplace?'—it was Sabin, tightening his horse's girths and glancing up with something of the banter of their Blandford meeting—'I marvel how you would have explained matters had the poursuivant taken us together in yonder parlour, with a warrant out for a seminary priest!'

'I should have said,' replied Isaak firmly, 'that you were an old friend's son; and that there was only one minister of God there present.'

'And that,' said Sabin gently, 'would have been yourself.'

'For them, yes. For you, no. For God—who shall decide?'

HELEN PARRY EDEN.