

HELL-FIRE HARRISON

By *W. D. WATTLES*

Illustrated and Decorated in Colors

By *FRANK T. MERRILL*



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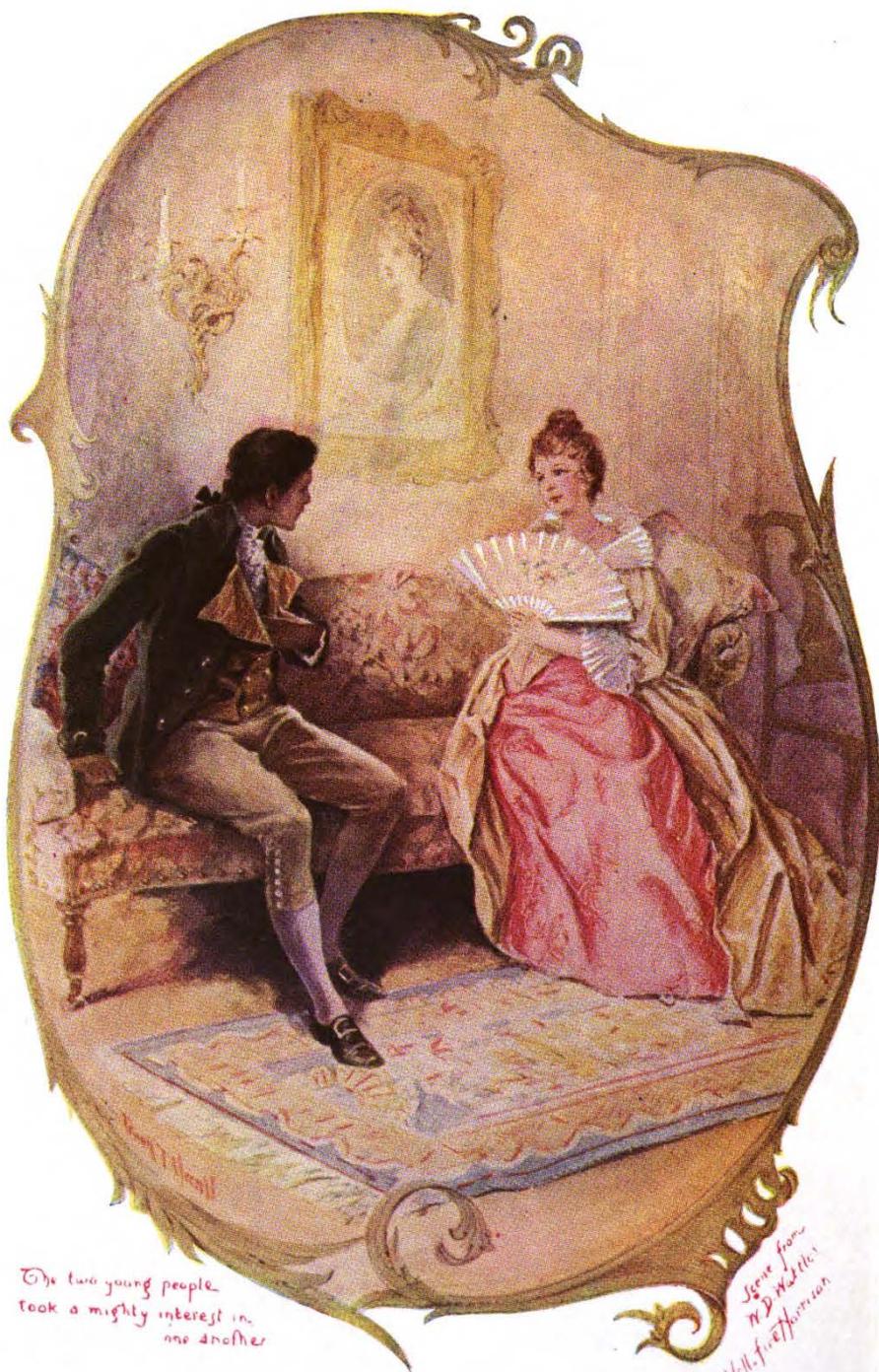
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The two young people
took a mighty interest in
one another

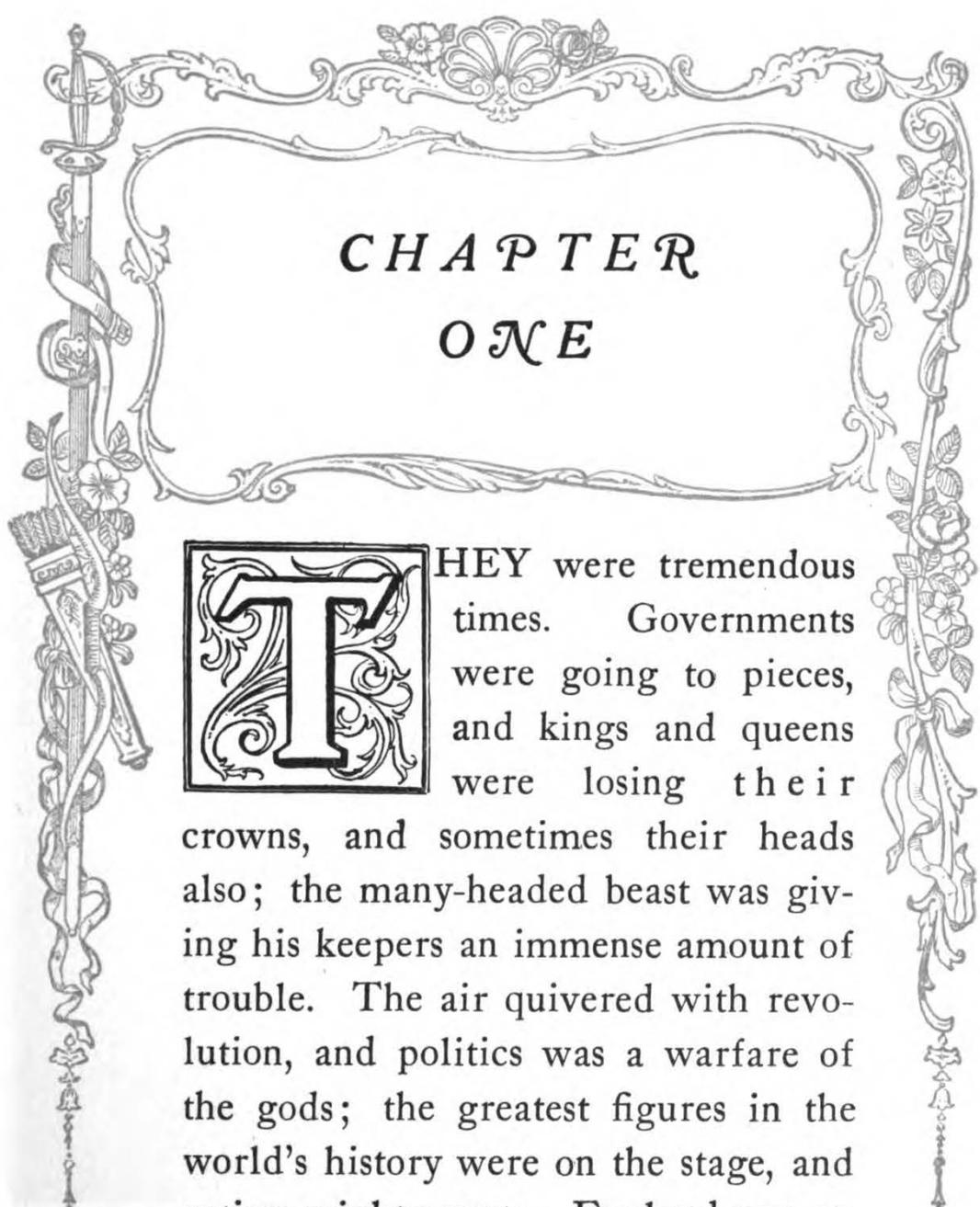
Scene from
"The Marriage of Figaro"
Hill, for Hoffman



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CHAPTER ONE

THEY were tremendous times. Governments were going to pieces, and kings and queens were losing their crowns, and sometimes their heads also; the many-headed beast was giving his keepers an immense amount of trouble. The air quivered with revolution, and politics was a warfare of the gods; the greatest figures in the world's history were on the stage, and acting mighty parts. England was on the verge of anarchy, and highwaymen

I





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plied their trade as actively on the streets of London as on lonely country roads; the hardest-working man in the United Kingdom was the hangman, and his labors were in vain so far as increasing the safety of life or property was the object. The tide of religious sentiment had reached its lowest ebb, and it was said that zeal for godliness would look as oddly upon a man as the clothing of his great-grandfather. Sincere men, recoiling from the emptiness of ecclesiastical officialism, became sceptics and stoics; they organized hell-fire clubs and made it their fashion to repress every sign of human interest or feeling, pretending to believe in nothing but themselves, and to consider themselves as not worth believing in. Duels were of





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daily occurrence; every man carried his life in his hand. Yes, they were certainly tremendous times; and it was during the maddest stage of this terrific period that Harrison came from Virginia to England to see his son, who had wintered in the mother country; and so it came about that for the first time in thirty years he visited Wycherly Castle, his birthplace and the ancestral home of his family.

He left his coach to wait at the gate and walked in through the grounds alone. He had given his elder brother, Lord Wycherly, no intimation of his coming, which was a proceeding quite in keeping with his usual ways.

Mr. Gerald Harrison, tobacco planter and member of the Congress



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of a certain very small but very pugnacious and self-respecting republic, was an uncommonly handsome man of fifty-two; straight as an arrow, of powerful build, and with the suppleness and activity of a youth. He was faultlessly dressed in the fashion of the time, from the silver buckles on his shoes to the crown of his three-cornered hat. Every garment that he wore was a triumph of the tailor's art; his hair was freshly powdered, his cheek was smooth and rosy, and his eye was very bright; his smile, although a trifle cynical and scornful, was good to see withal. He scanned the castle curiously as he drew near to its weather-beaten front, and laughed aloud.

“A little dirtier and more ruinous without,” said he, “and I doubt not, a



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little draughtier and chillier within. Gad, what a place to pass away one's life in; I would rather live in jail! Thank the kind fates for making me the younger son!"

He drew a handsome box from his pocket and took snuff, using great care lest any should fall upon his spotless waistcoat, or on the ruffled bosom of his shirt; and then he walked up the steps and plied the great iron knocker lustily.

"Tell Lord Wycherly," said he to the liveried footman who opened the door, "that his brother waits."

The man gasped with astonishment, then showed him into a room and went away; presently he came back and bade him follow. In a great upper chamber he found Lord Wycherly,



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who arose and came across the room to greet him; and though they were the only children of their father, and had not looked into each other's faces for thirty years, they shook hands as calmly as if they had parted but the day before. After the fashion of the cynical cult to which they both belonged, it was their pride to show neither feeling or affection; neither of the pair would, under any consideration, have betrayed emotion in greeting the other, especially in the presence of the footman, who was just leaving the room. Lord Wycherly was two years the elder, but, though very like his younger brother, he showed his age far more; his face was wrinkled and careworn.

“Time has used you well, Gerald,” he said, admiringly, after they had



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talked awhile. "Egad, you look but little older than your son. A fine boy that; you should be proud of him."

"I should be proud to remember his mother, rather," said Harrison, "for his bringing-up was more her work than mine. And I believe he is a passable young fellow."

"He is like you, and yet not like you," said Lord Wycherly. "He has little of the dare-devil disposition you showed at his age; and which, if half we hear is to be credited, you have not entirely outgrown. Some strange stories have come to London of the doings of a Virginia planter whom they call Hell-fire Harrison." He shot a single keen glance at his brother's smiling face.

"The name comes from a time some





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years back," said Harrison calmly, "when a few of us heard that Hell-fire clubs were the fashion over here, and we must needs organize one. I was active in it, and the more strait-laced of our godly neighbors gave the name to me; and it has clung."

"I can readily believe that it has," said Wycherly grimly, "and that it has not, in all ways, been amiss. Yours has been the easiest lot, after all, Gerald; you have had the best of me. New soil, new people, new methods, and liberty to take your own way; while I have had to uphold the family name on these exhausted acres, so hampered by silly traditions that I dare not leave the old rut, or change the antiquated system in any part. Richard tells me that your plantation brings you more





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than all my rent-rolls bring to me, and you can do what I have never done; live as you please! Well, we could not both have the luck to be younger sons, but if 'twas to be done over, I should try to wait and let you make your advent first. I see you still wear the old sword. Let me look at it again?"

Harrison drew his sword, and gave it to his brother, without speaking; and the other inspected it with a curious smile, making the flexible blade whistle through the air with a dextrous movement of his wrist. The weapon was a rapier, of unusual, and evidently of Oriental design, somewhat heavier than the dress swords generally worn by gentlemen in those days, double-edged for a little distance back from the point, and sharp as a



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razor; a tool made for service, not for show.

“Our father loved it,” said Wycherly quietly, “because of the family traditions attached to it. I hardly know whether he was most pleased or sorry when you asked for it on going away. But it was yours by right; your equal in handling it never lived. Has your hand lost any of its juggler’s cunning with the sword?”

Harrison took the weapon without answering, and stepped toward the great window, formed of many small panes of glass. On one of these, at about the level of his face, a blue-bottle fly was slowly crawling; he indicated it to his brother by a gesture. Then he held the sword at half arm’s length before him, with the blade pointing



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straight upward, and with a slight but powerful movement of the wrist, caused it to bend forward with a hissing sweep. The keen point flicked the fly from the pane without a sound to show that the glass had been touched. Harrison sheathed his sword and sat down, and the brothers took snuff, smiling at each other; for an instant the bars of their cynical pretence were down, and they looked into each other's hearts; but only for an instant.

“I remember well,” said the elder, “the night you cut the French Count's nose in half with that same stroke.”

They talked on for some time, exchanging reminiscences of their younger days, and then Harrison said:

“I saw your coach made ready as I

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came up the drive; were you about to go away?"

"I was for London; the house sits to-night. But now that you are here —"

"You will go right on, Richard. My own coach waits at the gate. I am going on to Farnham to see Alicia."

"Hah," said Lord Wycherly. "Yes. Alicia will be glad to see you, Gerald. She lives alone with her servants at Farnham Court; and you will find that she shows her years even more than I show mine. After her husband died she fixed her whole heart on her son; and he grew up a fine fellow, very like your boy. But he was killed, unfortunately, in his first duel. Yes, go and see her; she always liked you. I remember that we thought at



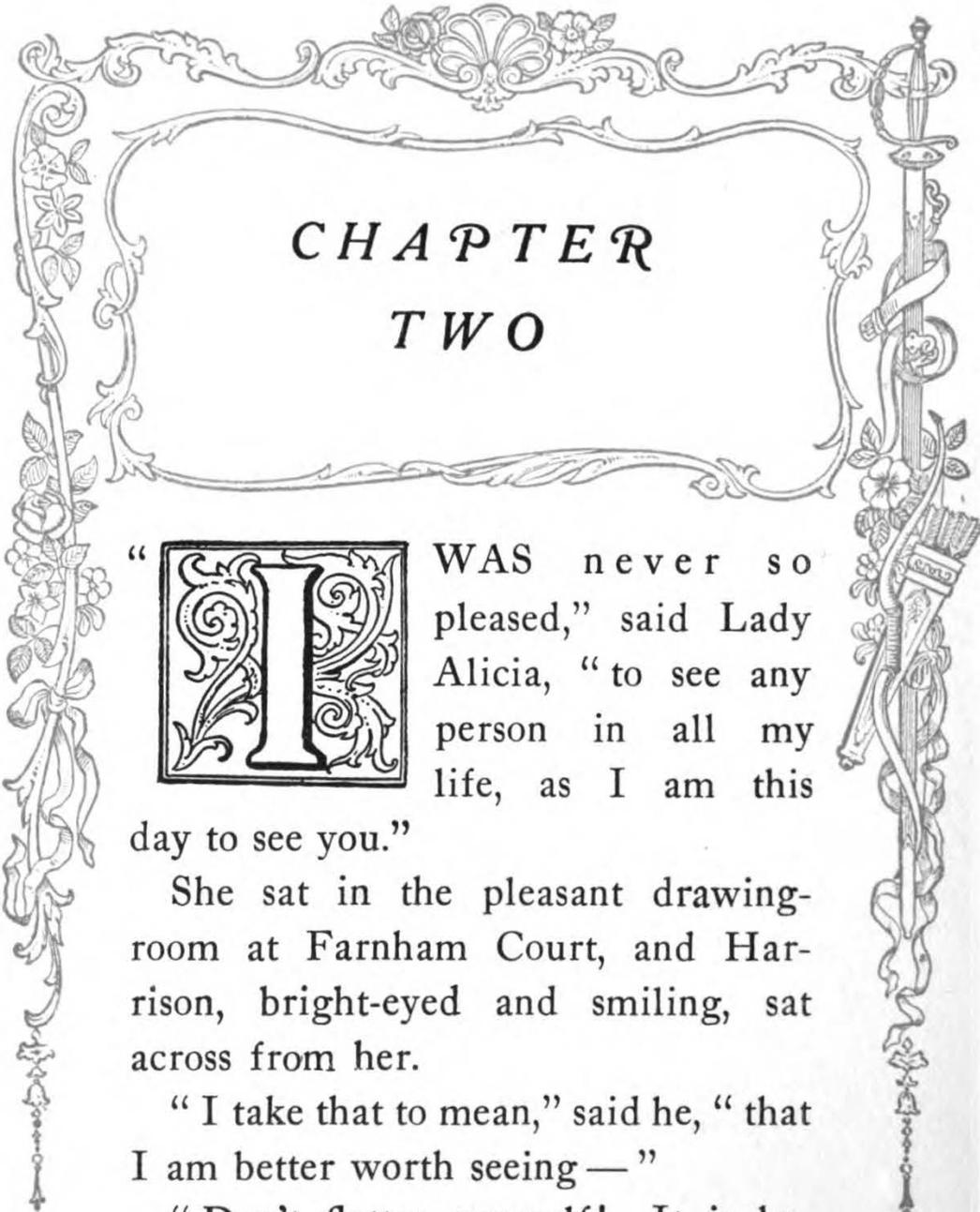


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one time you were going to make a match of it.”

“*She* never thought so,” said Harrison smiling, “nor did I. We were only the best of friends. Yes, I think she would be pleased to see me, and I need not keep you from your seat among the lords; I know there are great matters pending. I will go on to Farnham, and we will meet later.”

And presently the brothers parted at the door, with a farewell pinch of snuff, a few courteous phrases, and an air of calm indifference.



CHAPTER TWO

“**L** WAS never so pleased,” said Lady Alicia, “to see any person in all my life, as I am this day to see you.”

She sat in the pleasant drawing-room at Farnham Court, and Harrison, bright-eyed and smiling, sat across from her.

“I take that to mean,” said he, “that I am better worth seeing—”

“Don’t flatter yourself! It is because I have need of you; you come in





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the very nick of time. But of that we will speak later. And yes, my friend, I *am* glad to see you for your own sake; to see how fresh and young you look, although you make me sense my wrinkles and sunken cheeks more keenly. Do not interrupt me; you know 'tis so. Women grow old faster than men in these times, for we must sit at home with our sorrows and let them eat out our hearts, while you forget yours in battle and diplomacy. Well, never mind. I was delighted with your son, Gerald, when I met him during the one week I spent in London last winter; a right noble youth."

"As of course he must be, with my example —"

"Chut, chut! If he does well, it is



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in spite of your example, and not because of it. And he *is* a splendid young fellow; even in these days of loose living, he has no bad habits."

"One," said Harrison. "He *will* go to church."

"Why, so I heard," said she, "and I rejoiced that you had not been able to make him into a case-hardened, sneering cynic, like Wycherly and the rest of you. His mother must have been a rare woman, Gerald."

"She was, Alicia," he answered. The change in his tone was very, very slight, but she noticed it and understood; and she changed the subject instantly.

"Now, as to the matter I mentioned awhile ago," said she. "Gerald, do you remember Andrew Hogg?"





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“Ay; very well indeed.”

“And do you, by any chance, remember his son?”

“A dark-faced little boy, when I left England?”

“Yes! Dark-faced and sullen, like his father, and with a worse temper, even then.”

“I remember; I cuffed him, once, for torturing a helpless kitten. And has he grown up to fulfill the brilliant promise of his childhood?”

“He is a very devil! Drunken, brutal, licentious, fearing neither God nor man. He lives at Hackthorn Hall with three ruffians he brought with him from the wars, who are well dubbed the bloody three; renegade fighting men. He keeps no other servants than these three; they are all



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good swordsmen, and more than one life has been lost hereabout by incurring their ill-will. Andrew is nearing forty now; and as he grows older he grows worse in every way. The country people call him 'The Black Hogg.' He and his men are often away for long periods; 'tis thought that they go far from home and play the highwayman. When they are here, they spend their days in sleeping, and their nights in roistering at the hall, or at the Blue Goose Inn, in Farnham village. The whole county is afraid of Andrew Hogg."

"And what, Alicia," said Harrison, as she paused, "have I to do with this merry gentleman?"

"Do you remember Janet Ainslie?"

"Oh, right well! Gad, but she had



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spirit! She married Billy Chester, so they wrote me."

"Sir William Chester; and he died when their child, little Mary, was ten years old. Then, after three more years, Janet, being homeless and dependent, and very proud, married a squire of this neighborhood, Sladden by name; and shortly afterward she also died, leaving him to rear the child. Sladden was a somewhat dull and stubborn man, and he has grown duller and more stubborn with the passing of the years, but under his care Mary has grown to be the fairest girl in all England, and 'The Black Hogg' has set his mind on marrying her."

"Well?"

"Well? It is not well. Sladden favors Andrew Hogg with all his



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stupid strength, and they have sworn, together, that the marriage shall take place before the end of June, and 'tis near the middle of May."

"But, Alicia, surely there is little harm in a maid's being married against her will? Why, she is not supposed to have a will afterward, in any case!"

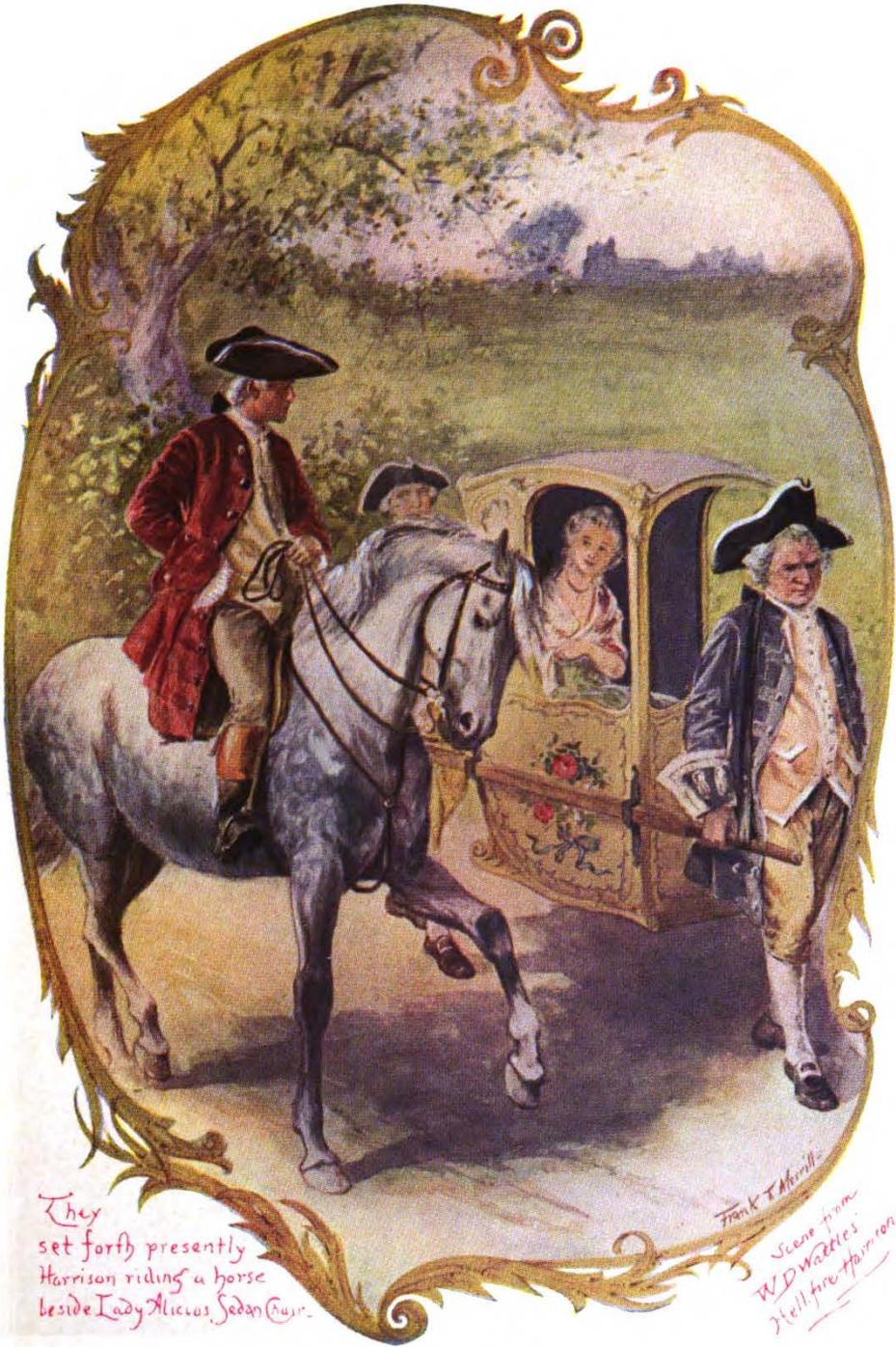
"Not the least harm in the world," said Lady Alicia, calmly.

"Even if she does not love him," Harrison went on, "she will undoubtedly come to do so, if he flogs her frequently enough?"

"And he will certainly do that," agreed the lady.

Harrison took snuff, regarding her with his bright eyes, and his most cynical smile.





They
set forth presently
Harrison riding a horse
beside Lady Alicia's Sedan Chair.

Frank T. Merrill
Scene from
The Two Gentlemen
of Verona



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“Oh, hang it, Alicia,” said he, “what do you wish me to do?”

“Why, sir,” said she, knowing her man perfectly, “but you are conceited! I have not asked that you shall do anything. What can you, a single man, do against Hogg and his bloody three? I have merely given you a bit of neighborhood gossip, so that you might understand the situation and guard your tongue; for I am going to call on Mary this afternoon, and you shall ride along to protect me on the highway. It was for that I said I needed you. The roads are not safe for a woman with no protection but a couple of footmen. While you are here, I may go a-visiting.”

“Humph,” said Harrison.

So they set forth presently, Harrison



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riding a horse beside Lady Alicia's sedan-chair, and they passed the gates of Hackthorn Hall before they came to Sladden's farm, which was a little further on. When the Virginian was introduced to Mary Chester he drew one quick breath of astonishment, and owned to himself that Lady Alicia had told the truth when she called her the fairest girl in all England. He talked with her for an hour, and found that she had a pleasant wit, and that she lacked not for a double portion of her mother's spirit.

"I have come to England," he told her as he was leaving, "seeking a wife. Are you ready to receive proposals?"

"Oh, surely, sir," said she. "What maid is not?"

"I do not seek for myself," he went





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on, "but for my son; and I have taken a mighty fancy that I should like you for a daughter-in-law."

"Thank you, sir! But is your son to have no voice in the matter?"

"He is a very bashful youth. But he is coming down from London in a day or so, and he shall fall in love with you."

"Ah! And can you make him do that, sir?"

"If he is so stupid as not to do it, I will flog him till he does."

"Oh, poor young man! What a dreadful alternative!"

"And if you do not fall in love with him," Harrison went on, "I will pull your ears."

"My precious ears! I'll not let them come to harm, sir. I think I love



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your son a little already. And does he take his bashfulness from his father, sir?"

"I think so."

"I think so too; for if you ever had any, some one has taken it."

So they bade each other a laughing farewell, and Harrison rode away beside the sedan-chair. Once out on the highway, they saw coming toward them a strange looking fellow, whose spine seemed afflicted about the hips. He wavered from side to side as he walked, and flourished his arms as if he found it hard to keep his balance. Lady Alicia stopped her bearers and Harrison at sight of him.

"See, Gerald," said she, "yonder comes Dicky Dirk. When he was born his mother was a servant at Hack-





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thorn Hall; it was during the old Hogg's time. Young Andrew had a petty spite against this woman, and one day he snatched the babe from her breast and dashed it on the floor. Still he held his grudge against her, and a few months later, in a drunken rage, he killed her husband, and she died of a broken heart. The boy grew up to walk as you see him; strangely crippled about the hips, and yet he is said to be as strong as a very giant in the arms and shoulders. He carries a great knife, and so got the name of Dick o' the dirk, now shortened to Dicky Dirk. He lives, the Lord knows how, mostly by doing odd jobs for the country people, and he rarely speaks, even when spoken to. Dicky, this is Mr. Harrison, of Virginia."





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“Give 'ee good day, zur,” said Dicky, wavering past them, and looking neither to right nor left.

“Good day, Dicky,” said Harrison, riding on; and he performed the difficult feat of taking snuff on horseback, with more than his usual carefulness. Lady Alicia watched him closely, but in silence.

“Alicia,” said he, after a while, “this Hogg of yours seems to be a rare soul.”

“Why, so he is; and I have told you only a few of his pleasant eccentricities.”

“I think I will stay in the neighborhood for a while; I was always fond of Farnham. And to prevent scandal, I will take quarters at the Blue Goose Inn.”

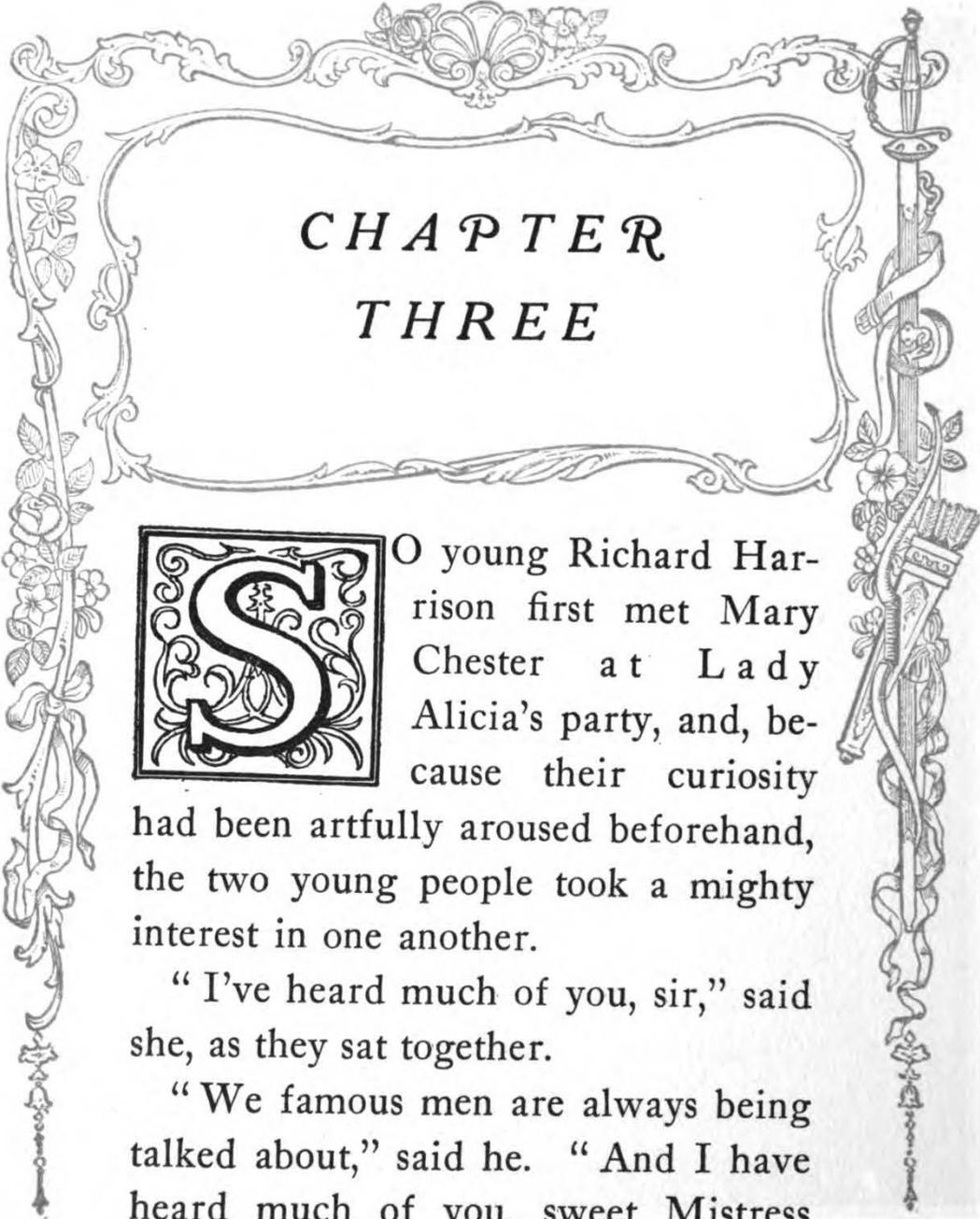


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He beamed upon her with his most pleasant smile, but she shuddered and grew cold, even as she felt that her point was gained, for the thought came to her that she had caused sentence of death to be passed on Andrew Hogg. Harrison went on quietly:

“I will write Richard, and have him down to stay with me. Get up a party of some sort for next week, Alicia, and invite Mary Chester. I will bring the boy, and we will trust in the Lord, who does all things well—with proper management on our part.”

“Don't scoff,” said Lady Alicia, “I will give the party on Wednesday.”



CHAPTER THREE

SO young Richard Harrison first met Mary Chester at Lady Alicia's party, and, because their curiosity had been artfully aroused beforehand, the two young people took a mighty interest in one another.

"I've heard much of you, sir," said she, as they sat together.

"We famous men are always being talked about," said he. "And I have heard much of you, sweet Mistress Chester."





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“We famous ladies are always being talked about,” said she.

“Famous indeed,” he answered. “Lady Alicia told me that you were the fairest girl in England; I was a little doubtful at the time, but I will swear now that she might have included Scotland, Wales and the Continent.”

“Why not America also?” she asked. “But no doubt you have left some one there who is fairer than I.”

“In America,” he replied, “most of the good looks are given to the men, as you may have noticed.”

“Why, so I had,” said she, “and yet the men are not conceited, which is very strange. But I must believe all you say, for your father told me that you were a most proper youth.”





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“ I respect my father too highly to question anything he says,” said the young man.

“ He told me,” she went on, daringly, “ that if you did not fall in love with me you should be flogged.”

“ I never wilfully gave him cause to flog me,” said he, “ and I shall not do so now.”

“ And he said,” Mary continued, “ that if I did not fall in love with you he would pull my ears.”

“ Such beautiful ears shall never be pulled; I shall see to it that you fall in love with me.”

Most of that evening they were together, and in a day or so he called at Sladden's farm; and from that time on it was evident that they were in truth falling very deeply into love with





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each other. Young Richard rode to Sladden's every day, for he was no slack wooer; and Lady Alicia looked on, trembling for what might come to pass, but with a thankful heart; Harrison looked on, bright eyed and smiling, and was always near at hand when the boy passed Hackthorn Hall; Dicky Dirk, hiding in the bushes or lurching along the road, looked on, muttering to himself; and Andrew Hogg looked on, cursing. Presently he summoned Sladden to a conference, and the latter, a square-built, square-jawed, square-headed man of sixty, took his stepdaughter to task.

“What do you mean, you hussy,” he demanded, “by letting this young cockerel come upon the place? Dost want



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to see me pitch him out upon the highway? ”

Now, though Mistress Mary had received but little kindness from her stepfather, she had never treated him with disrespect, or disobeyed him until he began trying to make her accept the love of Andrew Hogg, but upon that issue she was in open war with him.

“ Yes, sir, ” said she with a curtsey. “ I think I should much enjoy looking on while you undertook to pitch Master Harrison into the highway. ”

“ His father’s a dirty rebel, ” said Sladden.

“ But for your life, you dare not say so to his face, ” said she.

“ If you were my own daughter, ” he growled, “ full-grown as you are,



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I would whip you till you took up with Squire Hogg."

"If I were your daughter," she said with her head held very high, "no doubt but I would be willing to marry Squire Hogg; but my father was a gentleman."

"I shall forbid that whelp to come on the farm," shouted Sladden in a passion.

"And he'll come, none the less," said Mary.

Sladden did not forbid Richard the place, but when, on the next day, Mary told the young man what had happened, he urged her to marry him at once, and she refused.

"We have known each other scarcely three weeks," she said, "and if we wed now, people will say 'twas



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but the fear of Andrew Hogg drove me to you. Sir, I wish to be courted with all due pomp and circumstance. I sometimes think I like you very well, but again I am not sure of it, nor am I certain that you love me. Make me sure of both, and I will marry you, but I will not be driven to do so by Sladden and the black Hogg.”

“By Heaven, they shall not hurry you!” said Richard, looking very like his father. “Take your time, sweet mistress, for all of them. But I will not say that I shall not hurry you myself; for I am asking you to marry me because I love you. I am as sure of that as if I had known you all my life. And love me you shall, and marry me you shall, and I am coming to see you every day, Hogg or no Hogg, Sladden





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or no Sladden, until you say yes to me.”

And so he did, riding into the farm-yard every day, tossing his bridle rein and a coin to the stable boy, and receiving Sladden’s sour look with a high head and a careless smile. But Hell-fire Harrison, having been told all, redoubled his watchfulness, for he knew that the crisis was at hand.

And it was; for sitting over their liquor at Hackthorn Hall, Hogg and the bloody three were taking counsel as to the safest way of killing Richard.

“Meet the cub on the road, and run him through,” said Trainor, the most reckless of the four, and the best swordsman.

“Ay; but his father is always with him, or close at hand,” said Hogg.



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“ And they say he is the best swordsman in England. Some of us will lose blood if we try that, and why run needless risk? Here is a better plan: When the young whelp is safe at Sladden’s to-morrow, Harrison will ride back to the Blue Goose Inn to wait until nearly sunset; then he will come out to meet the boy and convoy him home. Now, an hour before sundown, let Trainor go to the Inn and get into conversation with this rebel. Drink with him, if he will, and fall to arguing if he will not; quarrel, but do not come to blows. Carry it off in such a way that if he leaves ’twill appear to the bystanders that he is afraid, but do not cross swords, or he will do for you.” Trainor sniffed doubtfully, but Hogg went on, “ Keep him there until



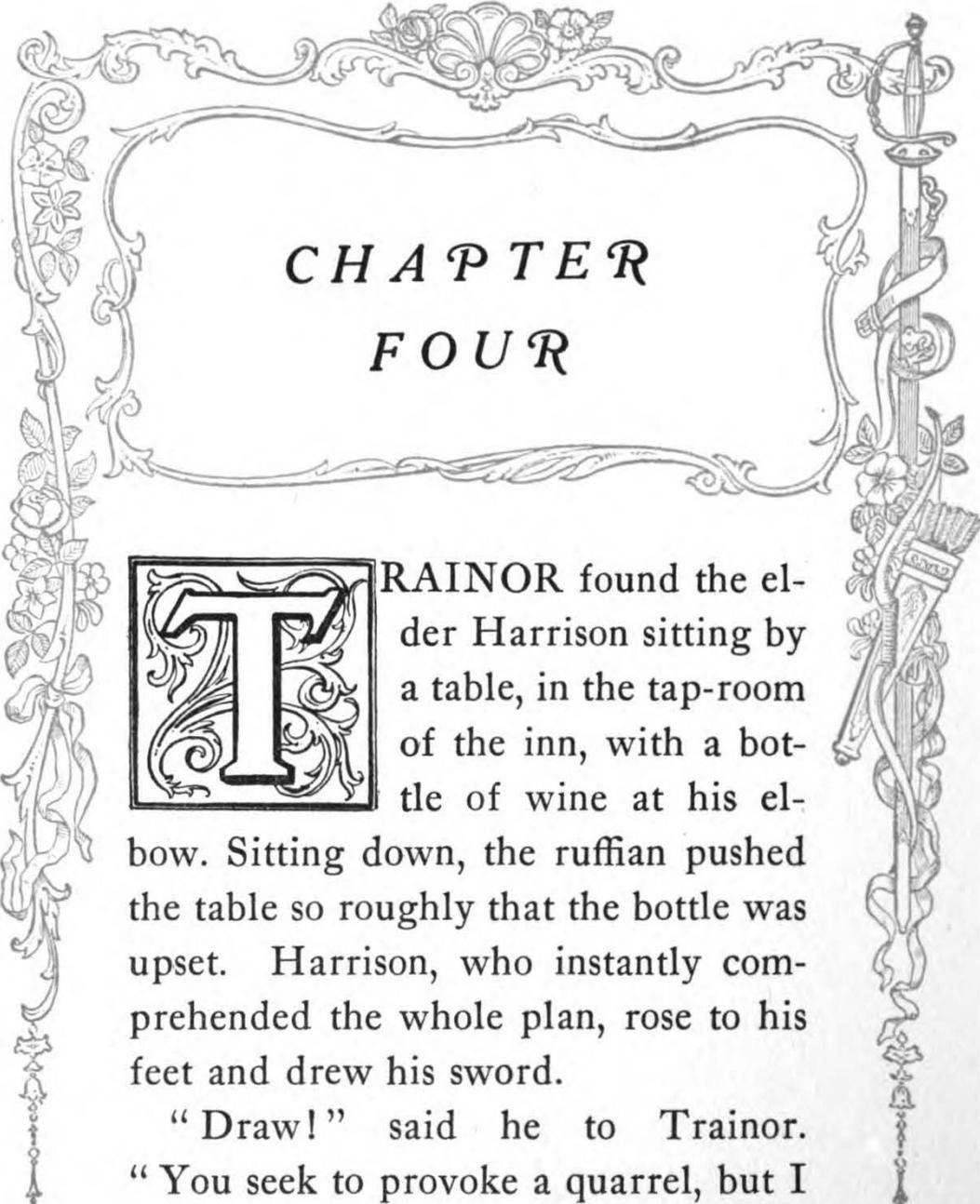


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after sunset, and then get away; apologize and eat humble pie if you must; you shall give it back to him later. Meanwhile we three will settle the young popinjay, and if the old one attacks us here, later, we will meet him at the door with our pistols, and give him no chance to come to close quarters. Will that do?"

The others accepted the plan, and so on the following afternoon, as the sun was getting low, Trainor set off for the Blue Goose Inn, and shortly after, the other three rode out upon the highway, and took their stand beneath a clump of trees to wait for Richard.





CHAPTER FOUR

TRRAINOR found the elder Harrison sitting by a table, in the tap-room of the inn, with a bottle of wine at his elbow. Sitting down, the ruffian pushed the table so roughly that the bottle was upset. Harrison, who instantly comprehended the whole plan, rose to his feet and drew his sword.

“Draw!” said he to Trainor. “You seek to provoke a quarrel, but I bandy no words with a scoundrel of your kidney. Draw, or by Heaven, I





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will run you through, where you sit!"

"Would you murder me?" blustered the fellow, as half willing, half afraid, he slowly rose and drew his weapon.

"No; but I will find out whether you are the swordsman you are said to be. On guard!"

They crossed blades, and after a few passes had been exchanged, Harrison's smile grew more contemptuous.

"I see that you cannot fence," said he, "and so we may as well make a finish of it. Look out, now; I am going to slice your nose across the middle, and cut the sign of the cross on your left cheek." And, with three lightning strokes of his razor-edged sword, he carried out his threat.



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“You are the devil!” cried the bully, staggering backward as he wiped the blood from his face. “I will not fight you more!”

“You are easily satisfied, my friend,” said Harrison, wiping his sword carefully and sheathing it, and then he took snuff, smiling, while the innkeeper hurried the wounded ruffian away to the village leech.

So, half an hour later, when Hogg and his two remaining scoundrels saw Richard coming in the distance, it happened that they also heard the hoofbeats of a horse coming from the opposite direction, and turning, saw Harrison, who rode past them with a courteous salute. Joining his son a little way down the road, he turned about, and the two came on together.





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Hogg and his friends perceived that Trainor had failed in his mission, but they did not guess how grievously, and they were puzzled as to what to do. They discussed the situation hurriedly for a few minutes, and then Andrew burst out with a great oath, declaring that the whole matter should be settled then and there. They took their stand in the centre of the highway, facing the Harrisons, who were coming in a walk, chatting carelessly together.

Andrew Hogg was a powerful man, more than six feet tall and very muscular; his swarthy face was bloated and swollen by hard drinking, and he wore his long hair unpowdered and badly combed, while his dress was slovenly. But he did not lack for brute courage, nor did either of his



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two companions, who were like him in a general way. They were all good swordsmen, and fighters of experience, and they awaited with confidence the coming of the Virginian and his son, who now rode up and drew rein, seeing that the way was blocked.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” said Harrison. “What would you have of us?”

“A pinch of snuff!” growled Hogg, expecting a refusal.

Harrison drew his handsomely engraved snuff-box from his pocket, and riding close to Hogg, presented it, open, with a courtly gesture, and the other, who did not use snuff was so confused and taken aback that he took up a pinch with clumsy and not over-clean fingers. Harrison instantly tossed





Scene from
W.D. Wattle's
'Hell fire Harrison'

Frank Merrill

He took up a pinch
with clumsy and
not overclean fingers



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the box, with its remaining contents, into the ditch beside the road.

“What do you mean by that?” roared Hogg, his dark face turning fiery red.

“I can feed swine,” said the American with his most pleasant smile, “but I will not root in the trough with them.”

“By Heaven!” shouted Andrew, “be careful, or you will feel the swine’s tusk!” and he laid his hand on his sword.

“Be careful yourself!” replied Harrison, unmoved. “I am too much of a Jew to eat pork, but just enough of a Christian to kill hogs, especially those possessed of devils.”

Young Richard burst out laughing, while the three ruffians sat hesitating;



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the calm assurance of Harrison, and his evident anxiety for a fight daunted them. He faced them in silence for several seconds, still sitting within arm's length of Andrew; and then as they made no move, he spoke again.

“If you dare not fight, draw aside and let us pass,” said he; and under the compelling power of his steady eye, the three involuntarily reined their horses toward the roadside. The father and son rode on slowly, conversing as if nothing had happened; and though they knew that their discomfited enemies had pistols in their holsters, neither of the pair so much as turned his head.

“We have them cowed,” said Harrison. “I think we shall hear no more from them.” But in that he was mis-



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taken, good judge of men as he was; he underestimated Andrew Hogg.

That night Hogg and two of his men rode away toward London, leaving the wounded rascal, Trainor, alone at Hackthorn Hall, and no one about Farnham saw either of them for a week. During this time young Richard's wooing progressed smoothly, and his father relaxed his vigilance a little, for he came to believe that Hogg, seeing only formidable and dangerous opposition ahead, had given the whole matter up. At the end of the week came a surprise; for a Captain Keatley, with an escort of half a dozen troopers, appeared in Farnham village with a letter from the King, requesting the presence of Gerald Harrison at Saltire Castle, thirty miles away,





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where his majesty was making a short visit.

The letter merely set forth that the King, learning that Master Harrison, brother to his well-beloved Lord Wycherly, had but lately come from the United States of America, requested the presence of Master Harrison, so and so; and as the audience was set for the day following the one on which Harrison received the letter, it was imperative that he should set off at once with the escort. The Virginian was caught napping; he did not think of connecting Andrew Hogg with the King's invitation, which he supposed to be due to Wycherly's influence; he knew that his brother and other liberal statesmen were working to eradicate the ill feeling toward the





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new republic which existed at court, and he never once thought of refusing to comply with the request, which was, indeed, tantamount to a command. Richard was at Sladden's farm when the message came; so, after hastily writing him a note bidding him exercise all possible care and watchfulness, Harrison rode over to Farnham Court to bid Lady Alicia farewell for a day or so. Her suspicions were instantly aroused, and she became very anxious.

"I do not like this message, coming at this time," said she. "If you go away, I am afraid for Richard — and for Mary. There is more in this than we see, Gerald. It is only the fear of you that has held Hogg in check so long, and when he gets you away he will do some devilish thing. I would





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you did not have to go, but the King's commands must be obeyed."

"Tut, tut!" said Harrison. "You are frightened at shadows. I do not think our Hogg has influence enough at court to have brought all this about; it is not his doing. He and his crew are away on some cut-purse expedition; we have scared them out. I have left a word of caution for Richard, and hang it, Alicia, the boy is no baby; he can take care of himself. If I did not know that, I would stay for all of fifty kings." Lady Alicia shook her head reprovingly; in those days the conservatives clung to an exaggerated respect for the pretensions of royalty, for which the radicals manifested an equally exaggerated contempt.

"Blaspheme not the Lord's



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anointed!" said the lady. "But there is only one man in England who is a match for black Hogg and his bloody three, and that is you, Gerald. Go, since you must, and come back quickly. I shall have no peace until I see you again."

So, smiling at her fears, he kissed her hand and went. It was well on in the afternoon when he rode out of Farnham with his escort. They had planned to ride until after midnight, for the moon was full, and then to lie at Shoresby until morning, reaching Saltire Castle early in the following day.

Now, the King's invitation had been brought about in this way: Hogg, going up to London to devise some means of getting rid of Harrison, had





HELL-FIRE HARRISON

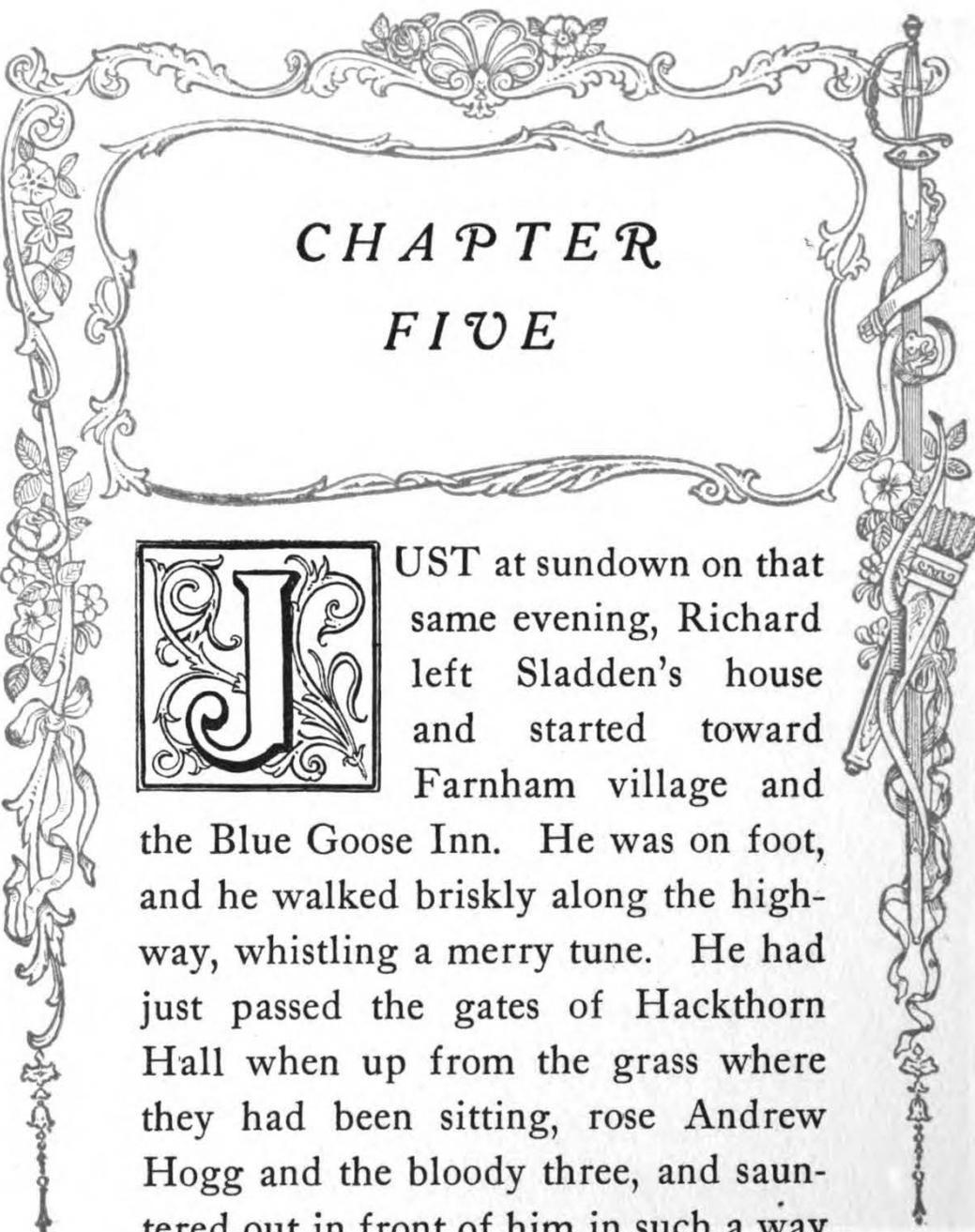
fallen in with an American tory named Cunningham, who hated the Virginian and all things connected with the republic over seas, and who had some influence at court. This man had impressed Andrew with the danger of meeting Harrison in fight, because of the latter's almost supernatural skill with the sword; and, by putting their wits together, the two had formed a cunning plan for getting him out of the way. Cunningham had procured the invitation to an audience with the King, and had seen that the letter was intrusted to Captain Keatley, an honest but somewhat thick-headed soldier, who was violently prejudiced against republican ideas. The tory had intimated to the Captain that in case Harrison should insult Royalty by declin-





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ing the invitation he was to be brought to Saltire Castle by force, and the soldier, understanding that his mission was to make an arrest under pretence of an invitation to court, was quite prepared to use strenuous measures. As soon as the Virginian's back was turned on Farnham, Hogg and his three villains were to waylay Richard and kill him; and then, when Harrison returned, they were to take refuge in Hackthorn Hall and stand guard with loaded pistols, trusting to shoot him down before he could come to close quarters. They had arrived at the hall during the night previous to the coming of the King's messenger, and they watched the Virginian from a distance, as he rode away with his escort.



CHAPTER FIVE

JUST at sundown on that same evening, Richard left Sladden's house and started toward Farnham village and the Blue Goose Inn. He was on foot, and he walked briskly along the highway, whistling a merry tune. He had just passed the gates of Hackthorn Hall when up from the grass where they had been sitting, rose Andrew Hogg and the bloody three, and sauntered out in front of him in such a way as to bar his progress; and they stood





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looking at him in evil fashion. Young Richard saw murder in their eyes, and he sent one swift glance up and down the road, thinking of his father; whereat black Andrew laughed aloud.

“Useless to look for father to protect you, little man,” he mocked. “He’s many a long mile on his way to Saltire Castle. So you must fight your own battle for once.”

“I have no doubt that he is gone, Hogg,” said Richard coolly, “else you four would not dare show your heads abroad. Say what you want, you cut-throat scoundrel, or get out of my way.”

“Oh!” said Hogg. “Now hear him try to roar, this puppy who is pretending to be a lion’s cub! Why, this is what I want, my dear young friend.”



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I want you to go back to London, and never come near Farnham, or see Mistress Mary Chester again."

"And what if I refuse your very reasonable request?"

"We'll run you through the body, and leave you lying here for the carrion crows to peck at."

"Do you want Mistress Mary yourself, Hogg?"

"Ay, and mean to have her."

"If you were not such an infernal coward," said Richard, as if considering, "how easily you and I might settle this whole matter."

"What do you mean, whelp?"

"Let your three thieves sit down again while you and I fight it out without interference, and let the best man have her. If you can best me



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fairly, I will go back to London as you say."

"Good!" roared Andrew, drawing his sword. "Sit down, men, and watch me clip this young cock's spurs. On guard, boy, and you shall howl for quarter, or I'll run you through." The other three sat down upon the grass, and the two men in the road crossed swords.

We have said that Andrew Hogg was a good swordsman; but he was not long in learning that young Richard was a better one. The youth had been carefully trained by his father, and had a fair share of the latter's marvellous skill. It was but a few moments until Hogg was bleeding from a wound in the shoulder, and was looking greatly worried and amazed.



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Richard pressed the fighting, for he hoped to disable his adversary and take to his heels before the other three could come upon him, knowing that he had no chance against all of them; but this opportunity was not to be given him, for Andrew, hard pressed, called for help and the other three rushed to his assistance. Richard defended himself gallantly, but without hope. Attacked on all sides, he was soon wounded in the sword arm and disarmed, and two of his enemies grasped him by the wrists while a third, kneeling behind him, clasped him about the knees. Andrew stood in front, furious with his defeat and the pain of his wounded shoulder.

“I’ll finish you now!” he shouted, presenting his sword’s point for a



The cowardly
villain ran him through
the body

Frank T. Merrill

Scene from
W.D. Wattle's
"Hell fire Harrison"



HELL-FIRE HARRISON

thrust. Young Richard saw his deadly purpose in his eye, and his own glance wavered for a single instant; he was young, and he loved, and it was hard to die. Then his look grew steady again, and he stood very straight with his eye on Hogg's, and smiled while the cowardly villain ran him through the body. His knees gave way and he sank in the dust of the highway, but as he went down he swayed forward and spit in Andrew's face.

“For her!” he whispered, as his eyes closed. Hogg, frothing with fury, raised his sword for another thrust; but just at that instant there came a strange moaning howl from a thicket beside the road, and he held his hand and stood glaring into the shadows, for it was growing dusk.



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The four drew close together around the body of their victim, and stood trembling; they were all superstitious, and moreover, the dread of Hell-fire Harrison was coming heavily upon them.

“Let be!” said Trainor, tremulously, grasping Hogg’s arm as he raised it again. “He’s dead enough. Come on,” and the four started off toward the Hall. As soon as they were out of sight, Dicky Dirk came from the thicket, lurching from side to side in desperate haste. He bent over the prostrate body for a moment, and then, by exercising all the strength of his powerful arms, hoisted it upon his shoulders and staggered off toward Farnham Court.

It was quite dark when he kicked





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open the great door and shambled into the entrance-hall with his bloody burden. Lady Alicia chanced to be at hand, giving her servants some directions for the night. When she saw what Dicky carried she screamed aloud, for Richard's arms hung limp on either side of his bearer's neck, and his blood was dripping from his own and Dicky's clothing; so she was justified in thinking him quite dead. She turned upon one of her two footmen, like a fury.

“Take the best horse in the stable,” said she, “and ride toward Saltire Castle. Kill your horse, if need be, but overtake Gerald Harrison and tell him Andrew Hogg has killed his son!” And the man ran out instantly.

They carried Richard into Lady



HELL-FIRE HARRISON

Alicia's own room, and sent the other footman for a physician; and meanwhile the lady and Dicky Dirk, who had spoken not a word since coming into the house, worked together to stanch the flow of blood. Presently the Farnham apothecary came, and relieved them of their task. He was well-skilled in dealing with wounds, as were most of the surgeons of that day, and he worked long and patiently before Richard's condition was to his liking. It was ten o'clock when he turned to Lady Alicia and said:

"No vital part was touched, my Lady; it was almost a miracle. With the best of nursing, the lad will live."

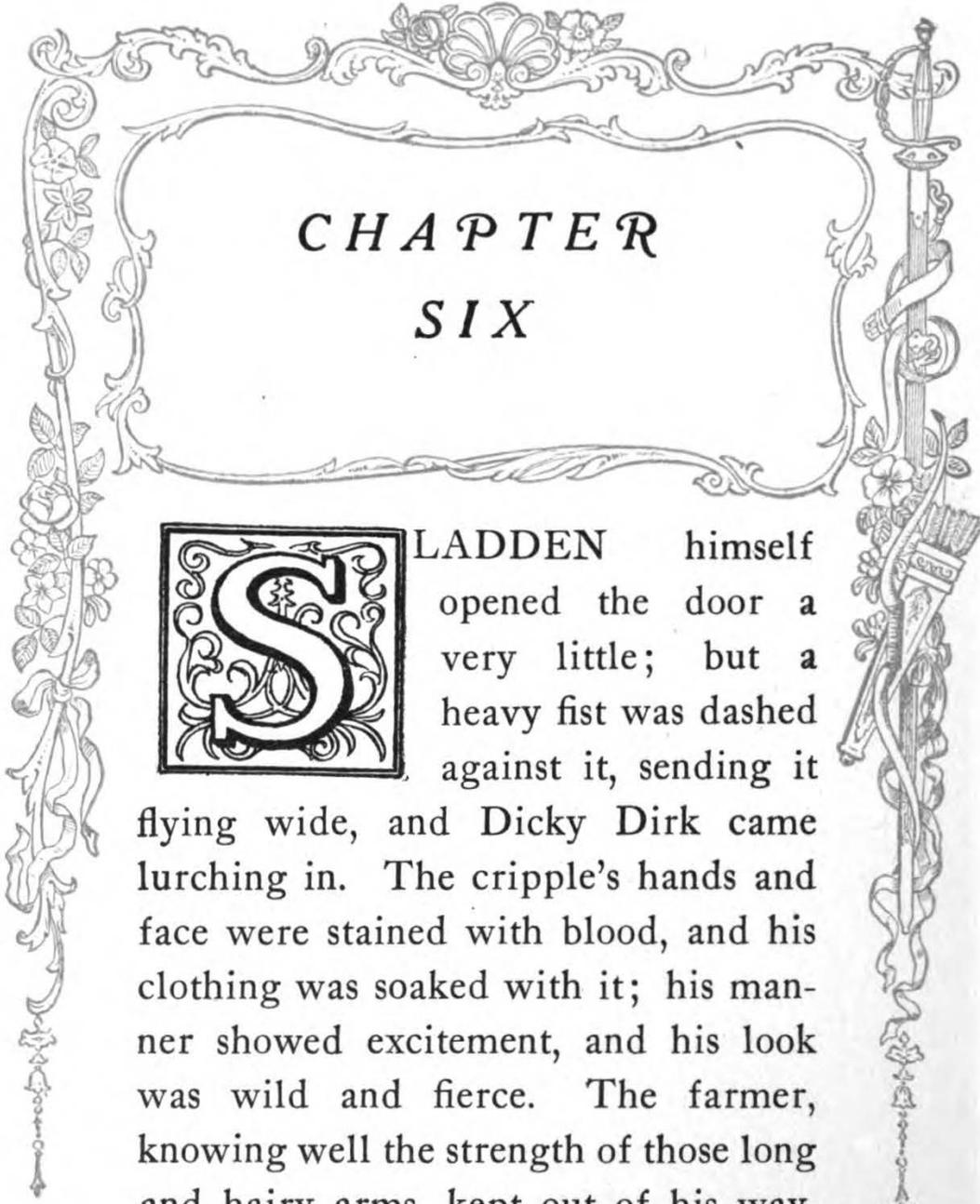
"Thank God!" the lady gasped, but Dicky, turning in silence, left the house and went swaying off across the



HELL-FIRE HARRISON

fields toward Sladden's farm. Notwithstanding his disability he got over the ground rapidly, and it was less than an hour later when, under his hand, the heavy iron knocker woke the sleeping echoes of the farmhouse. He knocked continuously until he heard footsteps within, and then stood waiting.





CHAPTER
SIX

SLADDEN himself opened the door a very little; but a heavy fist was dashed against it, sending it flying wide, and Dicky Dirk came lurching in. The cripple's hands and face were stained with blood, and his clothing was soaked with it; his manner showed excitement, and his look was wild and fierce. The farmer, knowing well the strength of those long and hairy arms, kept out of his way, staring in blank amazement.





HELL-FIRE HARRISON

"Where's Mistress Mary?" demanded Dicky.

"What's that to you?" growled Sladden. "Get out, you villain; I want to lock my door again."

"Will zee Mistress Mary," said Dicky.

"You can't see her, you bloody ruffian! What pot-house brawl have you been into? Get out. Mistress Mary has been in her bed these two hours."

"Call her."

"Now, curse your impudence! Get out, or I'll call help to throw you out. What do you want with her?"

"I'll call her zelf," said Dicky, starting toward the stairway. He knew the house well, having been often employed there. Sladden sprang before him with an oath, but the crip-





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ple put his hand on his knife and came on, and the Squire stepped aside. Dicky went up the stairs, and knocked at Mary's door, and it was quickly opened by the girl herself. She had been sitting at the window, looking at the moon and dreaming of her lover, and was fully dressed. She cried out, when she saw her bloody visitor.

“Dicky,” she said sharply, “is it Richard?”

“Ay,” said Dicky. “T’ hog met un on t’ high rowd, an’ t’ four fought un, an’ run swourd through un.” She leaned against the wall, with her face as white as snow.

“Is he dead?” she whispered, trembling.

“I carried un on back to Farnham Court,” Dicky replied, “an’ t’ leech



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says a'll live, if un has good nursin'." The color came back to her face with a rush.

"Why, that he shall have, Dicky!" said she. "Wait you for me," and she began throwing some of her apparel into a portmanteau. When it was filled she turned again to the cripple, who stood waiting at the door.

"Take me to Farnham Court," said she, and they went down the stair together. Sladden, with two of the farm-hands whom he had called, was waiting in the hall below.

"What does this mean?" he asked, astonished. "Where are you going?"

"I am going to Richard Harrison," she said, "who was attacked upon the road to-night by that cowardly murderer Andrew Hogg and his crew, no





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doubt with your full knowledge and connivance."

"You shameless hussy! Will you go to him unwed?" Her cheek grew hot, and her eye flashed hotter still.

"Dicky," said she, "if yonder man lifts hand to stop me, kill him!"

"I wull!" growled Dicky, drawing his great knife and lurching forward; and Sladden and his bumpkins backed against the wall and let them pass. It was midnight when they reached Farnham Court, where Lady Alicia greeted Mary with joyful astonishment, and yet with an anxious face.

"How is Richard?" were the girl's first words.

"He is conscious, Mary; full of hope and courage, but very weak from the great loss of blood."



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“ But will he live? ”

“ With proper nursing; so the surgeon says.”

“ I have come to nurse him.” Lady Alicia looked perplexed.

“ But Mary — ” she said, and hesitated. She was thinking of Andrew Hogg, and the fear possessed her that when he heard of Mary’s presence at Richard’s bedside he would come in a rage to finish his work and carry the girl away. And Mary, seeing her hesitation and remembering Sladden’s insult, misunderstood her. She raised her head high, and turned instantly to Dicky Dirk.

“ Dicky,” said she, “ will you do me a kindness? ”

“ Ay,” said Dicky, promptly.

“ Then go to Farnham parsonage





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for Vicar Slade, and bring him here; bring him, Dicky, whether he will or no. Tell him he is to marry me to Richard Harrison, and then we shall see who will keep a wife from her husband."

Dicky wavered out into the night, and Mary turned again to Lady Alicia, with a heaving breast and a triumphant look.

"Will any one have a better right than I?" she demanded.

The lady's eyes shone as she clasped the girl in her arms and kissed her.

"It was not of that I was thinking, Mary," said she. "But of — well, never mind; you have chosen the right way." She turned suddenly to the sleepy footman, who was sitting in the hall.





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“Thomas,” she said, “what weapons have we in the house?”

“Only a couple of muskets, my Lady.”

“Load them, and bring them here, and keep the front door barred. Let no one enter until you are certain that he is a friend.”

“You fear Hogg?” said Mary. “I had not thought of him.”

“God send Gerald Harrison back before Black Andrew hears of this!” said Lady Alicia. They put their arms around each other, and went up to the door of Richard’s room, and the woman who was watching whispering to them that he had fallen asleep, they sat down outside to wait. After a little time, Dicky Dirk came, leading the shivering clergyman by the arm.





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Vicar Slade was a typical parson of those times; a fox-hunting, gambling, hard-drinking man of the world, very much more rogue than saint; the type of ecclesiastic who brought religion into disrepute, and drove men like Gerald Harrison to the profession of open atheism. In common with all of Farnham, the Vicar was much afraid of Andrew Hogg, and it was evident that he was badly frightened; his clothing was disheveled, and Dicky grasped him tightly above the elbow.

“A was feard o’ t’ hog,” said Dicky, “an’ wouldn’t come; zo I browt un.”

“This is a most outrageous proceeding, Lady Alicia,” said the clergyman in a quivering voice.

“It is not Lady Alicia’s doing, Mr.





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Slade," said Mary, gently. "It was I who sent for you, to exercise your holy office in marrying me to Richard Harrison. Let him loose, Dicky."

"No," said Dicky, "a'll run off." And he kept his grip upon the parson's arm.

"I know enough of all this," quavered the vicar, "to be aware that I must answer to Andrew Hogg if I marry you."

"Must answer to me if ee doan't," said Dicky, putting his hand on his knife.

"You are surely between two fires, Mr. Slade," said Lady Alicia, smiling in spite of herself, at the man's terror, "for without doubt Dicky will do you a mischief if you refuse to perform this ceremony."



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“That I wull!” growled Dicky.

“I call upon you to witness then,” said Slade, “that I do it under compulsion, and in fear for my life. If you have a prayer-book in the house, Lady Alicia, have it fetched; and then I am ready, since I must.”

They sat waiting until Richard awoke, and then went together into his room, Dicky keeping near the parson, with a watchful eye upon him. When Mistress Mary saw the white face upon the pillow she came very near losing the self-possession she had retained so bravely. She stopped short, and stood for an instant with both her clenched hands pressed against her throat. Then she went quickly to the bedside, and bent above him, smiling. And seeing who it was,





HELL-FIRE HARRISON

he looked with wonder for a moment, and then smiled back at her.

“Angel!” he whispered softly. She stooped, and laid her cheek against his.

“Richard, my dear love,” said she, “do not try to move or speak. You are sorely hurt, and I have come to be with you night and day. And I have brought the parson to marry us, if you will have me, Richard.”

“Will I?” he whispered, smiling. “Ay, and be run through fifty times to get the chance.” She put her finger on his lips.

“You are only to say yes and no, sir,” said she, “and not to excite yourself at all. Do you understand?”

“Yes and no, sir,” said he. She drew a ring from her finger, and



HELL-FIRE HARRISON

placed it under the poor nerveless hand, which lay upon the cover.

“It was my mother’s wedding ring, and shall be mine,” she said. “When the time comes, I can slip my finger into it; do not try to raise your hand. Dicky, you have been our friend this night, and you shall give me away. Go on, Mr. Slade; we are ready.”

So they were married, with Lady Alicia and the serving-woman for witnesses; and Dicky Dirk gave the bride away. Then Mary put them all out of the room, and sitting down beside her husband, held his hand and sang to him softly until he went to sleep again. Day was breaking when all this was over, and Lady Alicia sat down in the hall, with her one footman and her two loaded muskets, to





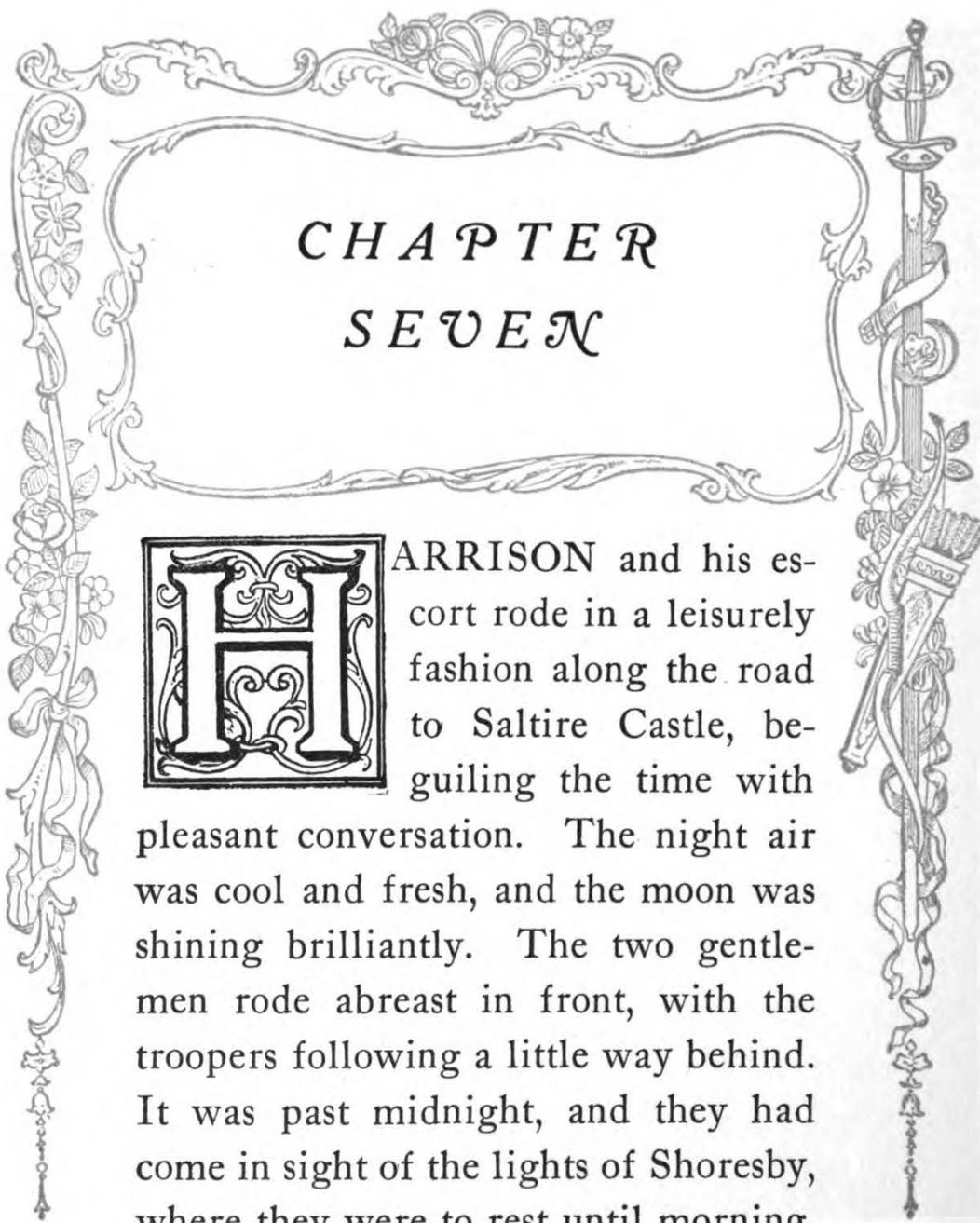
So they were married

*Scene from
The Doctor's Tale
Melville Hornum*



HELL-FIRE HARRISON

watch for Andrew Hogg, while Dicky Dirk hurried off across the fields, weaving from side to side and clutching at the air in his haste, and reaching the gates of Hackthorn Hall, sat down to wait for Gerald Harrison.



CHAPTER
SEVEN

HARRISON and his escort rode in a leisurely fashion along the road to Saltire Castle, beguiling the time with pleasant conversation. The night air was cool and fresh, and the moon was shining brilliantly. The two gentlemen rode abreast in front, with the troopers following a little way behind. It was past midnight, and they had come in sight of the lights of Shoresby, where they were to rest until morning, when they heard a horse galloping





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hard behind them, and drew rein to see what the occasion of such haste might be. And the rider proved to be Lady Alicia's footman, bare-headed and splashed with mud, who rode up and spoke to Harrison.

"My Lady sent me, sir," said he, "to tell you that Andrew Hogg has killed your son." And he added: "I saw his body brought in."

Captain Keatley cried out in horrified astonishment, and turned sharply to Harrison. An instant comprehension of the whole plot came to the Virginian. He realized that Lady Alicia had been right, and that the King's invitation had been procured to get him out of the way while his son was murdered. But whatever passed in his mind, his countenance did not





HELL-FIRE HARRISON

change in the least, and his voice was calm and natural as he answered:

“Ah! In that case, much as I regret to lose your pleasant company, Captain, I suppose I must turn back.” He waited an instant for a reply, and then slowly turned his horse about.

Captain Keatley hesitated in some perplexity. He had been very favorably impressed by Harrison, and he felt a keen sympathy for the man who met such dreadful news with so gallant and unwavering a front; and also, there began to dawn upon his mind a suspicion that he, himself, had been made an instrument in carrying out some vile plot. On the other hand, he had his instructions from Cunningham, and his almost superstitious reverence for the King's command, and,





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for a moment, he could not decide between his sympathy and what he conceived to be his duty. As the American started his horse on the backward way, Keatley found voice, and said:

“But, sir, his Majesty ordered me to bring you to him, and if I return without you, what shall I tell him?”

Harrison slowly turned his horse about again, coming face to face with the soldier; he rode up until his horse's head overlapped the captain's thigh, and their faces were scarcely twelve inches apart. The moonlight fell full on the Virginian's countenance; he was smiling pleasantly, but Keatley's blood ran cold as he caught his look, for his eyes were like coals



HELL-FIRE HARRISON

of fire, yet when he spoke his voice was soft and low.

“Tell him,” said Harrison, “to go to Hell!” Captain Keatley leaned backward as if he had received a blow, and uttered an exclamation of horror.

“And tell him,” the other went on, “that if I had believed you to be a co-conspirator with Andrew Hogg in this, I would have run my sword through you the instant I had the news. Good morning, Captain.” He wheeled his horse about for the third time, and rode back past the troopers in a walk, and no one lifted a hand to hinder him. Captain Keatley rode on to Saltire Castle, and reported simply that Harrison had turned back on hearing of the death of his son, and that he had thought it right to let him





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go. So great was his admiration for the American's courage that he never mentioned the affront which had been offered to Royalty.

Once out of earshot of his escort, Harrison gave his horse the spur, leaving Lady Alicia's man to follow at a slower pace, and rode with all speed toward Farnham. At the first tavern he secured a fresh mount, leaving his own steed for the serving-man to bring along. What passed with him during that lonely ride, whether he laughed or cried or kept his stoical composure through it all, no one will ever know. He dearly loved his son, and he believed him dead, and his heart must have burned with a fierce lust for vengeance upon the murderers, but when, in the early morning,



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he sprang from his saddle at the Blue Goose Inn, his face was as serene as ever. He went straight to his apartment, exchanging no word with any one, and there he removed all traces of his rapid ride by a bath and a change of garments. The sun was just rising when, immaculately dressed, and with every frill and ruffle in its place, with his hair freshly powdered and his rosy cheek smooth shaved, he set off afoot and at a careless pace toward Hackthorn Hall. No one was astir at the inn save the lout of a stable-boy who had taken his horse. No one yet knew of the happenings overnight, and so he went on, still believing that his son was dead. As he entered the gate of Hackthorn Hall, Dicky Dirk rose up beside him.





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“ Been waitin’ for ee,” said Dicky.

“ How came you so bloody? ” asked Harrison.

“ Picked up thy boy.”

“ Hah! Yes. Well, Dicky, what do you want with me? ”

“ To zee ee kill Hogg.”

“ No, Dicky,” said Harrison, “ I will do this work quite alone. I want neither help nor spectators.” He was about to start on, but Dicky stopped him by throwing up one of his huge hands.

“ Look ee! ” he said, and his hoarse voice trembled in a sudden outburst of rage, “ Hogg broak ma back; killed ma fayther with swourd, an’ broak ma moader’s heart. I’ve carried dirk for vifteen year to kill un, an’ by Goad, I’ll zee un die.” Harrison stood quite



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still for a moment, gazing into the cripple's passion-distorted face.

"Ay, ay?" said he. "Well, Dicky, your claim seems to take precedence over mine; though I am sorry for it. Come on, then, you shall not only see him die, but you may finish him yourself." He started on, and Dicky followed at his heels.

They walked slowly up the gravelled drive which led to the house, a strangely paired couple indeed; the smiling, splendid gentleman, looking about him with an air of half indifferent interest as he sauntered along, and behind him the blood-stained cripple, beating the air with his huge hands, and making fearful grimaces in the sudden giving way to his long hidden hatred of black Andrew Hogg.





HELL-FIRE HARRISON

Hogg and his men had held high carnival all night, celebrating the murder of Richard, and as day was breaking they had decided that Trainor should stand guard in the grounds with his pistol, against the possible coming of Harrison, while the others went to sleep. They had been in their beds but an hour or so when the Virginian arrived, and Trainor, sitting at the foot of a great tree beside the driveway, was drowsing also, with an empty bottle beside him. So Harrison walked up to him, and stood for a moment looking down at the nodding head and bandaged face.

“Kick him awake,” he said to Dicky, and the cripple brought one of his heavy hands down on the sleeper’s head with a resounding slap.



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Trainor leaped to his feet on the instant, and seeing at the first glance who his visitors were, he proved his readiness by firing his pistol, which had been ready in his hand, point blank at Harrison. The Virginian sprang aside, and Dicky struck up the fellow's arm, so the bullet went wide of the mark, and Harrison, whipping out his sword, ran the man through. He fell upon the driveway, and Dicky, bending over him and seeing that the sword-thrust had gone rather low, drove his dirk with great precision through the ruffian's heart. Harrison drew a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his sword carefully before sheathing it; and Dicky wiped his knife upon his bloody sleeve.



“You seem to have a good work-





HELL-FIRE HARRISON

man's taste in these matters, Dicky," said the American as they started on. "You do not like to leave an imperfectly finished job behind you."

When they came to the front of the house, Harrison paused and inspected the silent building reflectively; he expected to be fired at from the windows, but nothing of the kind happened, and there was no sign of life.

"They must be still asleep," he said to Dicky. "I wish we had a way to break down the door."

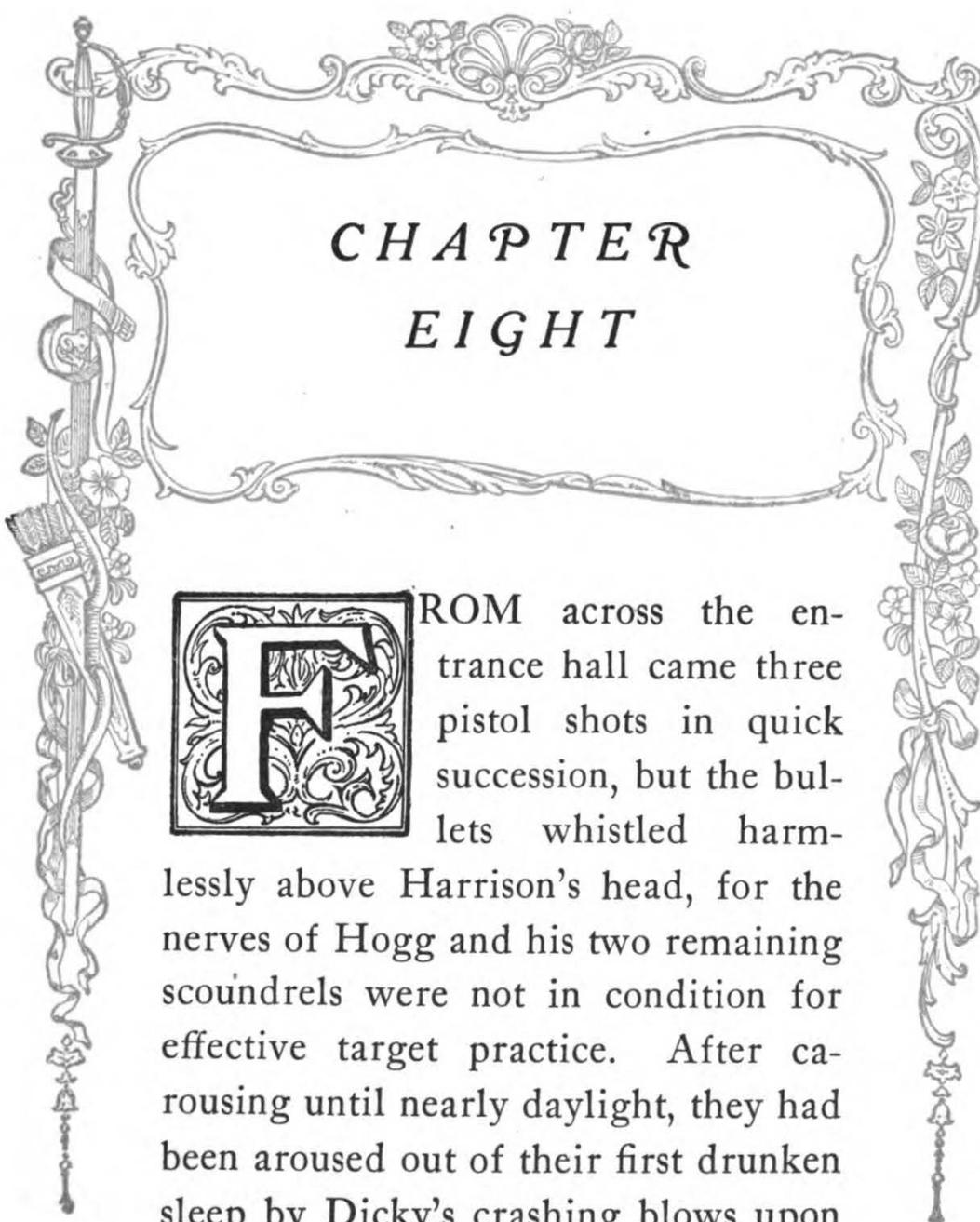
"Wait," said the cripple, shambling off around the house, and presently he came back carrying a great axe. He went up the steps, and swinging the tool with all the strength of his powerful arms, began to batter at the lock of the heavy oaken door. The sound



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of the crashing blows reverberated through the house like thunder, and Harrison kept close watch upon the windows, but still he saw no sign of life. Presently, the thick wood about the lock having been beaten to fragments, the door swung open, and the Virginian stepped in with Dicky close behind him.





CHAPTER EIGHT

FROM across the entrance hall came three pistol shots in quick succession, but the bullets whistled harmlessly above Harrison's head, for the nerves of Hogg and his two remaining scoundrels were not in condition for effective target practice. After carousing until nearly daylight, they had been aroused out of their first drunken sleep by Dicky's crashing blows upon the door, and tumbling out of bed half-



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dressed, as they had retired, they had run down the stairs carrying swords and pistols. When Harrison stepped inside the door they fired hastily, and now, their firearms which had been their chief reliance against the terrible Virginian, being empty and useless they dashed them to the floor and drew their swords. They were truly a loathsome sight as they stood huddled together by the farther wall; their uncombed hair hung in tangled masses about their bloated and desperate faces, and the fear in their burning eyes was like that of rats caught in a trap. Stepping at once between them and the stairway, Harrison came on, smiling and calm. At a little distance from them he halted and drew his sword, and then clapping it under





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his arm, took a pinch of snuff. Returning the box to his pocket, and carefully brushing off a speck which had fallen on the front of his ruffled shirt, he saluted courteously.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” said he. “I am sorry to disturb you so early, but my business is urgent; I have come to rob the hangman of a job.”

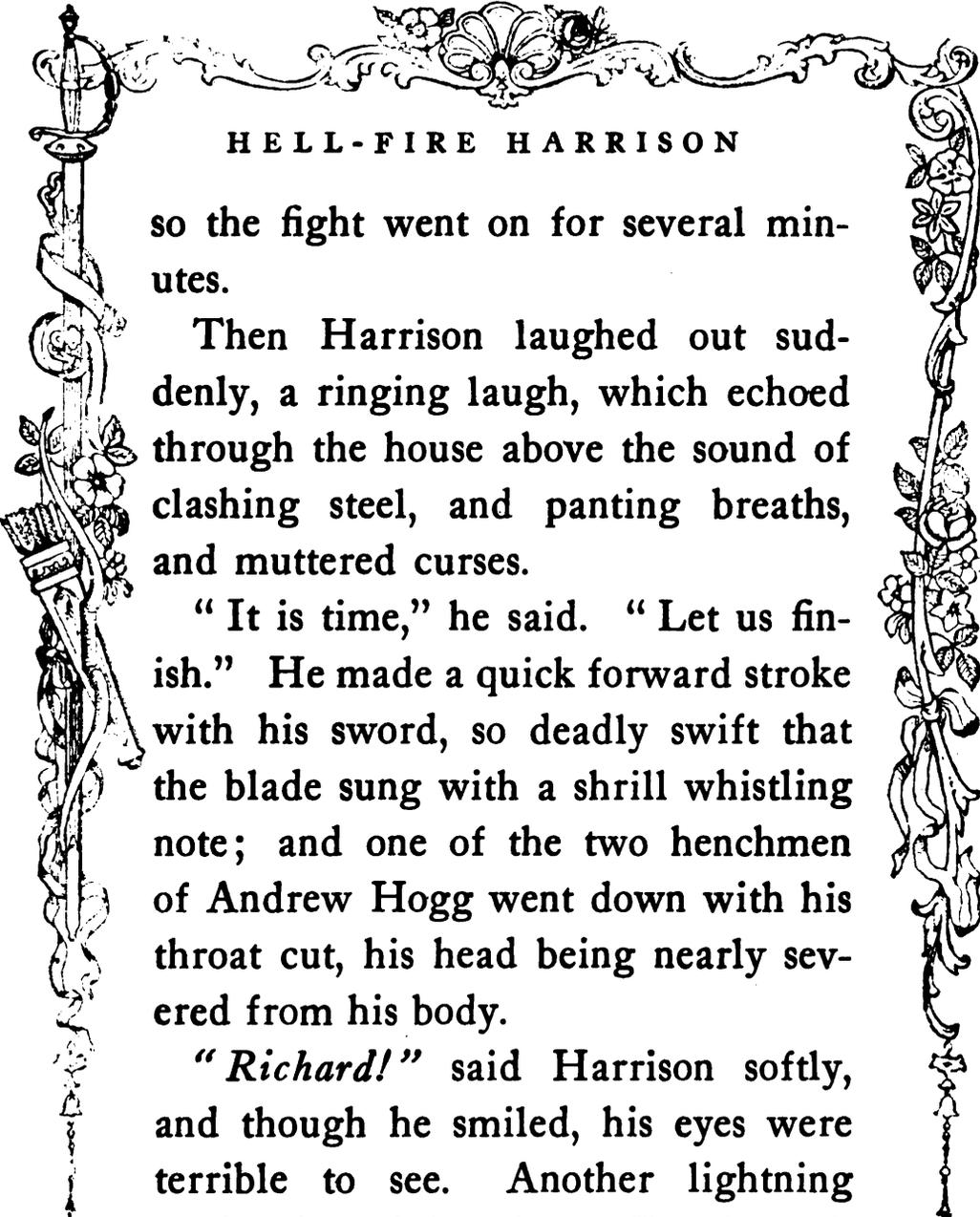
At that, Andrew Hogg knowing that he must fight for his life as he had never fought before, burst out in cursing and sprang forward, calling out to his men, and the three fell upon Harrison. And now Dicky Dirk, looking on, saw such an exhibition of skill in fence as few have witnessed in this world. Harrison’s sword became a glittering wall of steel; it seemed to



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encase him from head to foot like a suit of armor. He did not leap and spring about to dodge their thrusts, but stood still, beating aside their blades with his own flying weapon. His quickness of eye and hand, his strength of arm and wrist, were marvellous; it was the skill of a wizard, a prestidigitator, rather than that of a merely expert swordsman. They could not reach him with their thrusts or blows, they could not even make him give back an inch, or step aside; and they were compelled to keep in front of him by Dicky, who, whenever one of them stepped out to take the fencer on the side, came quickly in behind the fellow and made him jump toward the front again for fear of getting the huge dirk between his shoulders. And





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so the fight went on for several minutes.

Then Harrison laughed out suddenly, a ringing laugh, which echoed through the house above the sound of clashing steel, and panting breaths, and muttered curses.

“It is time,” he said. “Let us finish.” He made a quick forward stroke with his sword, so deadly swift that the blade sung with a shrill whistling note; and one of the two henchmen of Andrew Hogg went down with his throat cut, his head being nearly severed from his body.

“*Richard!*” said Harrison softly, and though he smiled, his eyes were terrible to see. Another lightning stroke pierced the other ruffian through the heart, and Andrew, now mad with





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fear, faced Harrison alone. The Virginian dropped the point of his sword and stepped back.

“Hogg,” said he, “I came to kill you; but I found Dicky on the same errand, and his rights to be your executioner seem to precede mine. You made him fatherless and motherless, and the crawling, staggering thing he is, while you have only made me childless. Dicky shall kill you, Hogg, but I will put out your eyes first. On guard!” And they crossed swords again.

It was soon over. Two dextrous strokes of the razor-edged blade, and the point was slashed through each of Andrew's eyes; he dropped his sword and clapped his hands to his bloody face, howling with pain and fright;



Clipped his hand, to his bloody
face boiling with pain
and fright.

Scene from
W.D. Mearns
Hell for Heron



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and Dicky, laughing as fiends may laugh in hell, lurched forward, and driving his great knife through the black villain's heart, left it sticking there.

They left the house without a word, and walked out to the highway. There Harrison paused, and said quietly:

“Is my son's body at Lady Alicia's, Dicky?”

“A' bain't no boady,” said Dicky. “A's livin'.”

“What?” cried Harrison sharply, startled for once out of his composure.

“I zaw Hogg run un through, right yonder,” said Dicky, “while t'others held un fast; a' stood straight, an' spit in t' hog's face when swourd went home. I picked un oop, an' carried un vor dead to Farnham Court; but



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t' leech says un'll live, if has good nursin'."

"Now, by all the gods!" cried Harrison. "But this is the greatest news man ever told to man! Good nursing, sayest thou? Why, that he shall have, Dicky."

"Zo Mistress Mary zaid," said Dicky.

"What?"

"I went to t' farm at midnight," said the cripple, "an' to her bedroom door, an' told her. 'Why then,' says she, 'good nursin' he shall have,' an' packed her portmantle. Sladden would stop her, an' says she, 'Dicky, kill him.' Zo I pulled dirk, an' Sladden run."

"Go on, thou bravest-hearted knight that ever stood by lady in distress,"



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said Harrison. "What happened next?"

"When we coom to t' Court," said Dicky, "t' Lady was for not lettin' maid stay; an' Mistress Mary zaid to me, 'Dicky, go bring Parson Slade to marry me to Richard; we'll zee who keeps wife from her husband.' Zo I browt parson, and a' married un."

"Now, by all the gods!" said Harrison again, but very softly now, and somewhat as if he choked, "but here's a lady! A right noble lady, on my soul! And what more, prince of story-tellers?"

"No more," said Dicky. "I came here to wait for 'ee. An' now t' hog is dead I've nowt to stay here for; will 'ee tak me to Ferginny?"





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“Will I take you? Ay, that I will. Whither I go, thou shalt go, and my people shall be thy people; unfortunately for the rest of the quotation, I have no God, but if ever I find one, he shall be thy God also, Dicky.”

“Doan’t woant no Goad,” said Dicky Dirk.

Lady Alicia, still watching with her loaded musket, greeted Harrison with joyful relief when, serene and smiling, he came a half hour later to Farnham Court.

“All’s well,” said she, “now that you are here to protect your own. I have been in dreadful fear lest Hogg should come with his bloody three to finish his work and carry your daughter away.”

“Hogg and his bloody three will



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trouble no one more, Alicia," said he, "for Dicky Dirk and I have been to Hackthorn Hall."

She was silent in awe for a moment, well knowing what his words implied.

"What word did you send the King, when you turned back?" she asked. He laughed at this, truly a woman's question at such a time.

"I sent him word," said he, "that he might go to Hell!" Lady Alicia, trained to the greatest reverence for Royalty, cried out in horror.

"Do not be alarmed, my dear Alicia," said Harrison, taking snuff. "Now that things have turned out so much better than I thought, I shall not insist upon his going; I will write Wycherly this morning to tell him so. And now, how is Richard?"





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“Doing well, and happy in the love of his dear young wife; thank God!”

“Why then,” said Hell-fire Harrison, “it will be the first time in forty years, but I think, Alicia, that I shall have to say Amen!”

THE END.





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