

The Grey Dolphin

Thomas Ingoldsby

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'He won't — won't he? Then bring me my boots!' said the Baron.

Consternation was at its height in the castle of Shurland — a caitiff had dared to disobey the Baron! and — the Baron had called for his boots!

A few days before, a notable miracle had been wrought in the neighbourhood; and in those times miracles were not so common as they are now; no royal balloons, no steam, no railroads, — while the few Saints who took the trouble to walk with their heads under their arms, or to pull the Devil by the nose, scarcely appeared above once in a century; — so the affair made the greater sensation.

The clock had done striking twelve, and the Clerk of Chatham was untrussing his points preparatory to seeking his truckle-bed; a half-emptied tankard of mild ale stood at his elbow, the roasted crab yet floating on its surface. Midnight had surprised the worthy functionary while occupied in discussing it, and with his task yet unaccomplished. He meditated a mighty draft: one hand was fumbling with his tags, while the other was extended in the act of grasping the jorum, when a knock on the portal, solemn and sonorous, arrested his fingers. It was repeated thrice ere Emmanuel Saddleton had presence of mind sufficient to inquire who sought admittance at that untimely hour.

'Open! open! good Clerk of St. Bridget's,' said a female voice small, yet distinct and sweet — an excellent thing in woman.

The Clerk arose, crossed to the doorway, and undid the latchet.

On the threshold stood a Lady of surpassing beauty: her robes were rich, and large, and full; and a diadem, sparkling with gems that shed a halo around, crowned her brow: she beckoned the Clerk as he stood in astonishment before her.

'Emmanuel!' said the Lady; and her tones sounded like those of a silver flute. 'Emmanuel Saddleton,' truss up your points, and follow me.'

The worthy Clerk stood aghast at the vision; the purple robe, the cymar, the coronet, — above all, the smile; no, there was no mistaking her; it was the blessed Saint Bridget herself!

And what could have brought the sainted Lady out of her warm shrine at such a time of night? and on such a night? for it was as dark as pitch, and metaphorically speaking, 'rained cats and dogs.'

Emmanuel could not speak, so he looked the question.

'No matter for that,' said the saint, answering to his thought. 'No matter for that, Emmanuel Saddleton; only follow me, and you'll see!'

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The Clerk turned a wistful eye at the corner cupboard.

'Oh! never mind the lantern, Emmanuel: you'll not want it: bring a mattock and a shovel.' As she spoke, the apparition held up her delicate hand. From the tip of each of her long taper fingers issued a lambent flame of such surpassing brilliancy as would have plunged a whole gas company into despair — it was a 'Hand of Glory,' such a one as tradition tells us yet burns in Rochester Castle every St. Mark's Eve. Many are the daring individuals who have watched Gundolf's Tower, hoping to find it, and the treasure it guards; — but none of them ever did.

'This way, Emmanuel!' and a flame of peculiar radiance streamed from her little finger as it pointed to the pathway leading to the churchyard.

Saddleton shouldered his tools, and followed in silence.

The cemetery of Saint Bridget's was some half-mile distant from the Clerk's domicile, and adjoined a chapel dedicated to that illustrious lady, who, after leading but a so-so life, died in the odour of sanctity. Emmanuel Saddleton was fat and scant of breath, the mattock was heavy, and the Saint walked too fast for him: he paused to take second wind at the end of the first furlong.

'Emmanuel,' said the holy lady, good-humouredly, for she heard him puffing; 'rest awhile, Emmanuel, and I'll tell you what I want with you.'

Her auditor wiped his brow with the back of his hand, and looked all attention and obedience.

'Emmanuel,' continued she, 'what did you and Father Fothergill, and the rest of you, mean yesterday by burying that drowned man so close to me? He died in mortal sin, Emmanuel; no shrift, no unction, no absolution: why, he might as well have been excommunicated. He plagues me with his grinning, and I can't have any peace in my shrine. You must howk him up again, Emmanuel!'

'To be sure, madam, — my lady, — that is, your holiness,' stammered Saddleton, trembling at the thought of the task assigned him. 'To be sure, your ladyship; only — that is —'

'Emmanuel,' said the saint, 'you'll do my bidding; or it would be better you had! and her eye changed from a dove's eye to that of a hawk, and a flash came from it as bright as the one from her little finger. The Clerk shook in his shoes; and, again dashing the cold perspiration from his brow, followed the footsteps of his mysterious guide.

The next morning all Chatham was in an uproar. The Clerk of St. Bridget's had found himself at home at daybreak, seated in his own armchair, the fire out, and — the tankard of ale out too! Who had drunk it? — where had he been? — and how had he got home? — all was a mystery! — he remembered 'a mass of things, but nothing distinctly;' all was fog and fantasy. What he could clearly recollect was that he had dug up the Grinning Sailor, and that the Saint had helped to throw him into the river again. All was thenceforth wonderment and devotion. Masses were sung, tapers were kindled, bells were tolled; the monks of Saint Romuald had a solemn procession, the abbot at their head, the sacristan at their tail, and the holy breeches of St. Thomas à Beckett in the centre; — Father Fothergill brewed a XXX puncheon of holy water. The Rood of Gillingham was deserted; the chapel of Rainham forsaken; everyone who had a soul to be saved, flocked with his offering to Saint Bridget's shrine, and Emmanuel Saddleton gathered more fees from the promiscuous piety of that one week than he had pocketed during the twelve preceding months.

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Meanwhile the corpse of the ejected reprobate oscillated like a pendulum between Sheerness and Gillingham Reach. Now borne by the Medway into the Western Swale, — now carried by the fluent tide back to the vicinity of its old quarters, it seemed as though the River god and Neptune were amusing themselves with a game of subaqueous battledore, and had chosen this unfortunate carcass as a marine shuttlecock. For some time the alternation was kept up with great spirit, till Boreas, interfering in the shape of a stiffish 'Nor'-wester,' drifted the bone (and flesh) of contention ashore on the Shurland domain, where it lay in all the majesty of mud. It was soon discovered by the retainers, and dragged from its oozy bed, grinning worse than ever. Tidings of the godsend were of course carried instantly to the castle; for the Baron was a very great man; and if a dun cow had flown across his property unannounced by a warder, the Baron would have kicked him, the said warder, from the topmost battlement into the bottommost ditch, — a descent of peril, and one which 'Ludwig the Leaper,' or the illustrious Trenck himself might well have shrunk from encountering.

'An't please your lordship —' said Peter Periwinkle.

'No, villain! it does not please me!' roared the Baron.

His lordship was deeply engaged with a peck of Feversham oysters, — he doted on shellfish, hated interruptions at meals, and had not yet dispatched more than twenty dozens of the 'natives.'

'There's a body, my lord, washed ashore in the lower creek,' said the seneschal.

The Baron was going to throw the shells at his head; but paused in the act, and said with much dignity —

'Turn out the fellow's pockets!'

But the defunct had before been subjected to the double scrutiny of Father Fothergill and the Clerk of St. Bridget! It was ill gleaning after such hands; there was not a single maravedi.

We have already said that Sir Robert de Shurland, Lord of the Isle of Sheppey, and of many a fair manor on the mainland, was a man of worship. He had rights of freewarren, saccage and sockage, cuisage and jambage, fosse and fork, infang theofe and outfang theofe; and all the waifs and strays belonged to him in fee simple.

'Turn out his pockets!' said the knight.

'An't please you, my lord, I must say as how they was turned out afore, and the devil a rap's left.'

'Then bury the blackguard!'

'Please your lordship, he has been buried once.'

'Then bury him again, and be ——!' The Baron bestowed a benediction.

The seneschal bowed low as he left the room, and the Baron went on with his oysters.

Scarcely ten dozen had vanished when Periwinkle reappeared.

'An't please you, my lord, Father Fothergill says as how that it's the Grinning Sailor, and he won't bury him anyhow.'

Oh! he won't — won't he?' said the Baron. Can it be wondered that he called for his boots?

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Sir Robert de Shurland, Lord of Shurland and Minster, Baron of Sheppey in comitatu Kent, was, as has been before hinted, a very great man. He was also a very little man; that is, he was relatively great, and relatively little — or physically little, and metaphorically great — like Sir Sidney Smith and the late M. Bonaparte. To the frame of a dwarf he united the soul of a giant, and the valour of a gamecock. Then, for so small a man, his strength was prodigious; his fist would fell an ox, and his kick — oh! his kick was tremendous, and, when he had his boots on, would — to use an expression of his own, which he had picked up in the holy wars — would 'send a man from Jericho to June.' He was bull-necked and bandy-legged; his chest was broad and deep, his head large and uncommonly thick, his eyes a little bloodshot, and his nose retroussé with a remarkably red tip. Strictly speaking, the Baron could not be called handsome; but his tout ensemble was singularly impressive; and when he called for his boots, everybody trembled and dreaded the worst.

'Periwinkle,' said the Baron, as he encased his better leg, 'let the grave be twenty feet deep!'

Your lordship's command is law.'

'And, Periwinkle' Sir Robert stamped his left heel into its receptacle — 'and, Periwinkle, see that it be wide enough to hold not exceeding two!'

'Y—y—yes, my lord?'

'And, Periwinkle! — tell Father Fothergill I would fain speak with his reverence.'

'Y—y—yes, my lord.'

The Baron's beard was peaked; and his moustaches, stiff and stumpy, projected horizontally like those of a Tom Cat; he twirled the one; he stroked the other, he drew the buckle of his surcingle a thought tighter, and strode down the great staircase three steps at a stride.

The vassals were assembled in the great hall of Shurland Castle; every cheek was pale, every tongue was mute: expectation and perplexity were visible on every brow. What would his lordship do? Were the recusant anybody else, gyves to the heels and hemp to the throat were but too good for him: but it was Father Fothergill who had said 'I won't;' and though the Baron was a very great man, the rope was a greater; and the Pope was Father Fothergill's great friend — some people said he was his uncle.

Father Fothergill was busy in the refectory trying conclusions with a venison pasty, when he received the summons of his patron to attend him in the chapel cemetery. Of course he lost no time obeying it for obedience was the general rule in Shurland Castle. If anybody ever said 'I won't,' it was the exception; and like all other exceptions, only proved the rule the stronger. The Father was a friar of the Augustine persuasion; a brotherhood which, having been planted in Kent some few centuries earlier, had taken very kindly to the soil, and overspread the county much as hops did some few centuries later. He was plump and portly, a little thick-winded, especially after dinner; stood five feet four in his sandals; and weighed hard upon eighteen stone. He was moreover a personage of singular piety; and the iron girdle, which, he said, he wore under his cassock to mortify withal, might have been well mistaken for the tire of a cartwheel. When he arrived, Sir Robert was pacing up and down by the side of a newly opened grave.

'Benedicite!' fair son ' — (the Baron was as brown as a cigar) — 'Benedicite!' said the Chaplain.

The Baron was too angry to stand upon compliment. 'Bury me that grining caitiff there!' quoth he, pointing to the defunct.

'It may not be, fair son,' said the friar, 'he hath perished without absolution.'

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'Bury the body!' reared Sir Robert

'Water and earth alike reject him,' returned the Chaplain; 'holy St Bridget herself —'

'Bridget me no Bridgets! — do me thine office quickly, Sir Shaveling! or, by the Piper that played before Moses —' The oath was a fearful one; and whenever the Baron swore to do mischief, he was never known to perjure himself. He was playing with the hilt of his sword. 'Do me thine office, I say. Give him his passport to Heaven.'

'He is already gone to Hell!' stammered the Friar.

'Then do you go after him!' thundered the Lord of Shurland.

His sword half leaped from its scabbard. No! the trenchant blade, that had cut Suleman Ben Malek Ben Buckskin from helmet to chine, disdained to daub itself with the cerebellum of a miserable monk; — it leaped back again; — and as The Chaplain, scared at its flash, turned him in terror, the Baron gave him a kick! — one kick! — it was but one! — but such a one! Despite its obesity, up flew his holy body in an angle of forty five degrees; then having reached its highest point of elevation, sunk headlong into the open grave that yawned to receive it. If the reverend gentleman had possessed such a thing as a neck, he had infallibly broken it! as he did not, he only dislocated his vertebrae — but that did quite as well. He was as dead as ditch-water!

'In with the other rascal!' said the Baron; and he was obeyed; for there he stood in his boots. Mattock and shovel made short work of it; twenty feet of superincumbent mould pressed down alike the saint and the sinner. 'Now sing a requiem who list!' said the Baron, and his lordship went back to his oysters.

The vassals at Castle Shurland were astounded, or, as the Seneschal Hugh better expressed it, 'perfectly conglomerated,' by this event. What! murder a monk in the odour of sanctity and on consecrated ground too! They trembled for the health of the Baron's soul. To the unsophisticated many it seemed that matters could not have been much worse had he shot a bishop's coach-horse — all looked for some signal judgment. The melancholy catastrophe of their neighbours at Canterbury was yet rife in their memories: not two centuries had elapsed since those miserable sinners had cut off the tail of the blessed St Thomas's mule. The tail of the mule, it was well known, had been forthwith affixed to that of the Mayor; and rumour said it had since been hereditary in the the corporation. The least that could be expected was, that Sir Robert should have a friar tacked on to his for the term of his natural life! Some bolder spirits there were, 'tis true who viewed the matter in various lights, according to their different temperaments and positions; for perfect unanimity existed not even in the good old times. The verderer, roistering Hob Roebuck, swore roundly, 'Twere as good a deed as eat to kick down the chapel as well as the monk.' Hob had stood there in a white sheet for kissing Giles Miller's daughter. On the other hand, Simpkin Agnew, the bell-ringer, doubted if the devil's cellar, which runs under the bottomless abyss, were quite deep enough for the delinquent, and speculated on the probability of a hole being dug in it for his especial accommodation. The philosophers and economists thought, with Saunders McBullock, the Baron's bagpiper, that a 'feckless monk more or less was nae great subject for a clamjamphry,' especially as the supply considerably exceeded the demand; while Malthouse, the tapster, was arguing to Dame Martin that a murder now and then was a seasonable check to population, without which the Isle of Sheppey would in time be devoured, like a mouldy cheese, by inhabitants of its own producing. Meanwhile, the Baron ate his oysters, and thought no more of the matter.

But this tranquillity of his lordship was not to last. A couple of Saints had been seriously offended; and we have all of us read at school that celestial minds are by no means insensible to the provocations of anger. There were those who expected that St Bridget would come in person, and have the friar up again, as she did the sailor; but perhaps her ladyship did not care to trust herself within the walls of Shurland Castle. To say the truth, it was scarcely a decent house for a female Saint to be seen in. The Baron's gallantries, since he became a widower, had been but too notorious; and her own reputation was a little blown upon in the earlier days of her earthly

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pilgrimage: then things were so apt to be misrepresented — in short, she would leave the whole affair to St Austin, who, being a gentleman, could interfere with propriety, avenge her affront as well as his own, and leave no loop-hole for scandal. St Austin himself seems to have had his scruples, though of their precise nature it would be difficult to determine, for it were idle to suppose him at all afraid of the Baron's boots. Be this as it may, the mode which he adopted was at once prudent and efficacious. As an ecclesiastic, he could not well call the Baron out — had his boots been out of the question; so he resolved to have recourse to the law. Instead of Shurland Castle, therefore, he repaired forthwith to his own magnificent monastery, situate just without the walls of Canterbury, and presented himself in a vision to its abbot. No one who has ever visited that ancient city can fail to recollect the splendid gateway which terminates the vista of St Paul's-street, and stands there yet in all its pristine beauty. The tiny train of miniature artillery which now adorns its battlements is, it is true, an ornament of a later date; and is said to have been added some centuries after by a learned but jealous proprietor, for the purpose of shooting any wiser man than himself, who might chance to come that way. Tradition is silent as to any discharge having taken place, nor can the oldest inhabitant of modern days recollect any such occurrence. Here it was, in a handsome chamber, immediately over the lofty archway, that the Superior of the monastery lay buried in a brief slumber, snatched from his accustomed vigils. His mitre — for he was a mitred Abbot, and had a seat in Parliament — rested on a table beside him; near it stood a silver flagon of Gascony wine, ready, no doubt, for the pious uses of the morrow. Fasting and watching had made him more than usually somnolent, than which nothing could have been better for the purpose of the Saint who now appeared to him radiant in all the colours of the rainbow.

'Anselm!' said the beatific vision, — 'Anselm! are you not a pretty fellow to lie snoring there when your brethren are being knocked at head, and Mother Church herself is menaced? — It is a sin and a shame, Anselm!'

'What's the matter? — Who are you?' cried the Abbot, rubbing his eyes, which the celestial splendour of his visitor had set a-winking. 'Ave Maria! St Austin himself! Speak, Beatissime! what would you with the humblest of your votaries?'

'Anselm!' said the saint, 'a brother of our order, whose soul Heaven assoilzie! hath been foully murdered. He hath been ignominiously kicked to the death, Anselm; and there he lieth cheek-

by-jowl with a wretched carcass, which our sister Bridget has turned out of her cemetery for unseemly grinning. Arouse thee, Anselm!'

'Ay, so please you, Sanctissime!' said he Abbot. 'I will order forthwith that thirty masses be said, thirty Paters, and thirty Aves.'

'Thirty fools' heads!' interrupted his patron, who was a little peppery.

'I will send for bell, book, and candle —'

'Send for an ink-horn, Anselm. Write me now a letter to his Holiness the Pope in good round terms, and another to the Coroner, and another to the Sheriff, and seize me the never-enough-to-be-anathematised villain who hath done this deed! Hang him as high as Haman, Anselm! — up with him! — down with his dwelling-place, root and branch, hearth-stone and roof-tree, — down with it all, and sow the site with salt and sawdust!'

St Austin, it will be perceived, was a radical reformer.

'Marry will I,' quoth the Abbot, warming with the Saint's eloquence; 'ay, marry will I, and that instantly. But there is one thing you have forgotten, most Beatified — the name of the culprit.'

'Robert de Shurland.'

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'The Lord of Sheppey! Bless me!' said the Abbot, crossing himself, 'won't that be rather inconvenient? Sir Robert is a bold baron, and a powerful; blows will come and go, and crowns will be cracked and —'

'What is that to you, since yours will not be of the number?'

'Very true, Beatissime! — I will don me with speed, and do your bidding.'

'Do so, Anselm! — fail me not to hang the Baron, burn his castle, confiscate his estate, and buy me two large wax candles for my own particular shrine out of your share of the property.'

With this solemn injunction the vision began to fade.

'One thing more!' cried the Abbot grasping his rosary.

'What is that?' asked the Saint.

'O Beate Augustine, ora pro nobis!'

'Of course I shall,' said St. Austin, 'Pax vobiscum!' — and Abbot Anselm was left alone.

Within an hour all Canterbury was in commotion. A friar had been murdered, — two friars — ten — twenty; a whole convent had been assaulted, attacked, burnt, — all the monks had been killed, and all the nuns had been kissed! Murder! fire! sacrilege! Never was city in such an uproar. From St George's-gate to St Dunstan's suburb, from the Donjon to the borough of Staplegate, it was noise and hubbub. 'Where was it? — ' When was it? — 'How was it?' The Mayor caught up his chain, the Aldermen donned their furred gowns, the Town Clerk put on his spectacles. 'Who was he?' — 'What was he?' — 'Where was he?' — He should be hanged, — he should be burned, — he should be broiled, — he should be fried, — he should be scraped to death with red-hot oyster shells! 'Who was he?' — 'What was his name?'

The Abbot's Apparitor drew forth his roll and read aloud:— 'Sir Robert de Shurland, Knight banneret, Baron of Shurland and Minster, and Lord of Sheppey.'

The Mayor put his chain in his pocket, the Aldermen took off their gowns, the Town Clerk put his pen behind his ear. It was a county business altogether — the Sheriff had better call out the posse comitatu.

While saints and sinners were thus leaguings against him, the Baron de Shurland was quietly eating his breakfast. He had passed a tranquil night, undisturbed by dreams of cowl or capuchin; nor was his appetite more affected than his conscience. On the contrary, he sat rather longer over his meal than usual: luncheon-time came, and he was ready as ever for his oysters: but scarcely had Dame Martin opened his first half-dozen when the warder's horn was heard from the barbican.

'Who the devil's that?' said Sir Robert. 'I'm not at home, Periwinkle. I hate to be disturbed at meals, and I won't be at home to anybody'

'An't please your lordship,' answered the Seneschal, 'Paul Prior hath given notice that there is a body —'

'Another body!' roared the Baron. 'Am I to be everlastingly plagued with bodies? No time allowed me to swallow a morsel. Throw it into the moat!'

'So please you, my lord, it is a body of horse — and Paul say there is a larger body of foot behind it; and he thinks, my lord, — that is, he does not know, but he thinks — and we all think my lord, that they are coming to

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— to besiege the castle!

'Besiege the castle! Who? what? What for?'

'Paul says, my lord, that he can see the banner of St Austin, and the bleeding heart of Hamo de Crevecoeur, the Abbot's chief vassal; and there is John de Northwood, the sheriff, with his red cross engrailed; and Hever, and Leybourne, and Heaven knows how many more; and they are all coming on as fast as ever they can.'

'Periwinkle,' said the Baron 'up with the drawbridge; down with the portcullis; bring me a cup of canary, and my nightcap. I won't be bothered with them. I shall go to bed.'

'To bed, my lord?' cried Periwinkle, with a look that seemed to say, 'He's crazy!'

At this moment the shrill tones of a trumpet were heard to sound thrice from the champaign. It was the signal for parley: the Baron changed his mind; instead of going to bed, he went to the ramparts.

'Well, rascalions! and what now?' said the Baron.

A herald, two pursuivants, and a trumpeter, occupied the foreground of the scene: behind them, some three hundred paces off, upon a rising ground, was drawn up in battle array the main body of the ecclesiastical forces.

'Hear you, Robert de Shurland, Knight, Baron of Shurland and Minster, and lord of Sheppey, and know all men, by these presents, that I do hereby attach roll, the said Robert, of murder and sacrilege, new, or of late, done and committed by you, the said Robert, contrary to the peace of our Sovereign Lord the King, his crown and dignity: and I do hereby require and charge you, the said Robert, to forthwith surrender and give up your own proper person, together with the castle of Shurland aforesaid, in order that the same may be duly dealt with according to law. And here standeth John de Northwood, Esquire, good man and true, sheriff of this his Majesty's most loyal county of Kent, to enforce the same, if need be, with his posse comitatus —'

'His what?' said the Baron.

'His posse comitatus, and —'

'Go to Bath!' said the Baron.

A defiance so contemptuous roused the ire of the adverse commanders. A volley of missiles rattled about the Baron's ears. Nightcaps avail little against contusions. He left the walls, and returned to the great hall.

'Let them pelt away; quoth the Baron: 'there are no windows to break, and they can't get in.' So he took his afternoon nap, and the siege went on.

Towards evening his lordship awoke, and grew tired of the din. Guy Pearson, too, had got a black eye from a brickbat, and the assailants were clambering over the outer wall. So the Baron called for his Sunday hauberk of Milan steel, and his great two-handed sword with the terrible name:— it was the fashion in feudal times to give names to swords: King Arthur's was christened Excalibar; the Baron called his Tickletohy, and whenever he took it in hand it was no joke.

'Up with the portcullis! down with the drawbridge!' said Sir Robert; and out he sallied, followed by the élite of his retainers. Then there was a pretty to do. Heads flew one way — arms and legs another; round went Tickletohy; and, wherever it alighted, down came horse and man: the Baron excelled himself that day. All that he had done in Palestine faded in the comparison; he had fought for fun there, but now it was for life and lands. Away went John

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de Northwood; away went William of Hever, and Roger of Leybourne. Hamo de Crevecoeur, with the church vassals and the banner of St. Austin, had been gone some time. The siege was raised, and the Lord of Sheppey was left alone in his glory.

But, brave as the Baron undoubtedly was, and total as had been the defeat of his enemies, it cannot be supposed that La Stoccata would be allowed to carry it away thus. It has before been hinted that Abbot Anselm had written to the Pope, and Boniface the Eighth piqued himself on his punctuality as a correspondent in all matters connected with church discipline. He sent back an answer by return of post; and by it all Christian people were strictly enjoined to aid in exterminating the offender, on pain of the greater excommunication in this world, and a million of years of purgatory in the next. But then, again, Boniface the Eighth was rather at a discount in England just then. He had affronted Longshanks, as the royal lieges had nicknamed their monarch; and Longshanks had been rather sharp upon the clergy in consequence. If the Baron de Shurland could but get the King's pardon for what, in his cooler moments, he admitted to be a peccadillo, he might sniff at the Pope, and bid him 'do his devilmost.'

Fortune, who, as the poet says, delights to favour the bold, stood his friend on this occasion. Edward had been for some time collecting a large force on the coast of Kent, to carry on his French wars for the recovery of Guienne; he was expected shortly to review it in person; but, then, the troops lay principally in cantonments about the mouth of the Thames, and his Majesty was to come down by water. What was to be done? — the royal barge was in sight, and John de Northwood and Hamo de Crevecur had broken up all the boats to boil their camp-kettles. A truly great mind is never without resources.

'Bring me my boots!' said the Baron.

They brought him his boots, and his dapple-grey steed along with them; such a courser! all blood and bone, short-backed, broad-chested, and — but that he was a little ewe-necked — faultless in form and figure. The Baron sprung upon his back, and dashed at once into the river.

The barge which carried Edward Longshanks and his fortunes had by this time nearly reached the Nore; the stream was broad, and the current strong, but Sir Robert and his steed were almost as broad, and a great deal stronger. After breasting the tide gallantly for a couple of miles, the knight was near enough to hail the steersman.

'What have we got here?' said the King. 'It's a mermaid,' said one. 'It's a grampus,' said another. 'It's the devil,' said a third. But they were all wrong; it was only Robert de Shurland. 'Gramercy,' said the King, 'that fellow was never born to be drowned!'

It has been said before that the Baron had fought in The Holy Wars; in fact, he had accompanied Longshanks, when only heir apparent in his expedition twenty-five years before, although his name is unaccountably omitted by Sir Harris Nicolas in his list of crusaders. He had been present at Acre when Amirand of Joppa stabbed the prince with a poisoned dagger, and had lent Princess Eleanor his own tooth-brush after she had sucked out the venom from the wound. He had slain certain Saracens, contented himself with his own plunder, and never dunned the commissariat for arrears of pay. Of course he ranked high in Edward's good graces, and had received the honour of knighthood at his hands on the field of battle.

In one so circumstanced, it cannot be supposed that such a trifle as the killing of a frowsy friar would be much resented, even had he not taken so bold a measure to obtain his pardon. His petition was granted, of course, as soon as asked; and so it would have been had the indictment drawn up by the Canterbury town-clerk, viz., 'That he, the said Robert de Shurland, had then and there,, with several, to wit, one thousand, pairs of boots, given sundry, to wit, two thousand, kicks, and therewith and thereby killed divers; to wit, ten thousand, Austin Friars,' been true to the letter.

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Thrice did the gallant grey circumnavigate the barge, while Robert de Winchelsey, the chancellor and archbishop to boot was making out, albeit with great reluctance, the royal pardon. The interval was sufficiently long to enable his Majesty, who, gracious as he was had always an eye to business, just to hint that the gratitude he felt towards the Baron was not unmixed with a lively sense of services to come; and that if life were now spared him, common decency must oblige him make himself useful. Before the archbishop, who had scalded his fingers with the wax in affixing the great-seal, had time to take them out of his mouth, all was settled, and the Baron de Shurland had pledged himself to be forthwith in readiness, cum suis, to accompany his lord to Guienne.

With the royal pardon secured in his vest, boldly did his lordship turn again to the shore; and as boldly did his courser oppose his breadth of chest to the stream. It was a work of no common difficulty or danger; a steed of less 'mettle and bone' had long since sunk in the effort: as it was, the Baron's boots were full of water, and Grey Dolphin's chamfrain more than once dipped beneath the wave. The convulsive snorts of the noble animal showed his distress; each instant they became more loud and frequent; when his hoof touched the strand, and the horse and his rider stood once again in safety on the shore.

Rapidly dismounting, the Baron was loosening the girths of his demi-pique, to give the panting animal breath, when he was aware of as ugly an oldwoman as he had ever clapped eyes upon, peeping at him under the horse's belly.

"Make much of your steed, Robert Shurland!" Make much of your steed!" cried the hag; shaking at him her long and bony finger. 'Groom to the hide, and corn to the manger! He has saved your life, Robert Shurland, for the nonce; but he shall yet be the means of your losing it for all that!'

The Baron started: 'What's that you say, you old faggot?' He ran round by his horse's tail; The woman was gone!

The Baron paused; his great soul was not to be shaken by trifles; he looked around him and solemnly ejaculated the word 'Humbug!' then slinging the bridle across his arm, walked slowly on in the direction of the castle.

The appearance, and still more, the disappearance of the crone, had, however, made an impression; every step he took he became more thoughtful. "Twould be deuced provoking, though, if he should break my neck after all.' He turned and gazed at Dolphin with the scrutinising eye of a veterinary surgeon. 'I'll be shot if he is not groggy!' said the Baron.

With his lordship, like another great commander, 'Once to be in doubt was once to be resolved:' it would never do to go to the wars on a rickety prad. He dropped the rein, drew forth Tickletohy, and, as the enfranchised Dolphin, good easy horse, stretched out his ewe-neck to the herbage; struck off his head at a single blow. 'There, you lying old beldame!' said the Baron; 'now take him away to the knacker's.'

* * *

Three years were come and gone. King Edward's French wars were over; both parties having fought till they came to a stand-still, shook hands, and the quarrel, as usual, was patched up by a royal marriage. This happy event gave his Majesty leisure to turn his attention to Scotland, where things, through the intervention of William Wallace, were looking rather queerish. As his reconciliation with Philip now allowed of his fighting the Scotch in peace and quietness, the monarch lost no time in marching his long legs across the border, and the short ones of the Baron followed him of course. At Falkirk, Tickletohy was in great request; and in the year following, we find a contemporary poet hinting at his master's prowess under the walls of Caerlaverok —

Ovec eus fu achiminez
Li beau Robert de Shurland
Ki kant seoit sur le cheval
Ne sembloit home de someille.

The Grey Dolphin

A quatrain which Mr. Simpkinson translates,

'With them was marching
The good Robert de Shurland,
Who, when seated on horseback,
does not resemble a man asleep!'

So thoroughly awake, indeed, does he seem to have proved himself, that the bard subsequently exclaims in an ecstasy of admiration:

Si ie estoie une pucelette
Je li donroie ceur et cors
Tant est de lu bons lu recors.

'If I were a young maiden;
I would give my heart and person,
So great is his fame!'

Fortunately the poet was a tough old monk of Exeter; since such a present to a nobleman, now in his grand climacteric, would hardly have been worth the carriage. With the reduction of this stronghold of the Maxwells seem to have concluded the Baron's military services; as on the very first day of the fourteenth century we find him once more landed on his native shore, and marching, with such of his retainers as the wars had left him, towards the hospitable shelter of Shurland Castle. It was then, upon that very beach, some hundred yards distant from high-water mark, that his eye fell upon something like an ugly old woman in a red cloak. She was seated on what seemed to be a large stone, in an interesting attitude, with her elbows resting upon her knees, and her chin upon her thumbs. The Baron started: the remembrance of his interview with a similar personage in the same place, some three years since; flashed upon his recollection. He rushed towards the spot but the form was gone — nothing remained but the seat it had appeared to occupy. This, on examination, turned out to be no stone, but the whitened skull of a dead horse! A tender remembrance of the deceased Grey Dolphin shot a momentary pang into the Baron's bosom; he drew the back of his hand across his face; the thought of the hag's prediction in an instant rose, and banished all softer emotions. In utter contempt of his own weakness, yet with a tremor that deprived his redoubtable kick of half its wonted force, he spurned the relic with his foot. One word alone issued from his lips, elucidatory of what was passing in his mind — it long remained imprinted on the memory of his faithful followers — that word was 'Gammon!' The skull bounded across the beach till it reached the very margin of the stream ; — one instant more and it would be engulfed for ever. At that moment a loud 'Ha! ha! ha!' was distinctly heard by the whole train to issue from its bleached and toothless jaws: it sank beneath the flood in a horse laugh.

Meanwhile Sir Robert de Shurland felt an odd sort of sensation in his right foot. His boots had suffered in the wars. Great pains had been taken for their preservation. They had been 'soled' and 'heeled' more than once — had they been 'goloshed,' their owner might have defied Fate! Well has it been said that 'There is no such thing as a trifle.' A nobleman's life depended upon a question of ninepence.

The Baron marched on; the uneasiness in his feat increased. He plucked off his boot; — a horse's tooth was sticking in his great toe!

The result may be anticipated. Lame as he was, his lordship, with characteristic decision, would hobble on to Shurland; his walk increased the inflammation; a flagon of aqua vitae did not mend matters. He was in a high fever; he took to his bed. Next morning the toe presented the appearance of a Bedfordshire carrot; by dinner time it had deepened to beetroot; and when Bargrave, the leech, at last sliced it off, the gangrene was too confirmed to admit of remedy. Dame Martin thought it high time to send for Miss Margaret who, ever since her mother's death, had been living with her maternal aunt, the abbess, in the Ursuline convent at Greenwich. The young lady came, and with her came one Master Ingoldsby, her Cousin-german by the mother's side; but the Baron was too far gone in the dead-thrrow to recognise either. He died as he lived, unconquered and unconquerable. His last words

The Grey Dolphin

were 'Tell the old hag she may go to —' Whither remains a secret. He expired without fully articulating the place of her destination.

But who and what was the crone who prophesied the catastrophe? Ay, 'that is the mystery of this wonderful history.' — Some say it was Dame Fothergill, the late confessor's mamma; others, St Bridget herself; others thought it was nobody at all, but only a phantom conjured up by conscience. As we do not know, we decline giving an opinion.

And what became of the Clerk of Chatham? — Mr. Simpkinson avers that he lived to a good old age, and was at last hanged by Jack Cade, with his inkhorn about his neck, for 'setting boys copies.' In support of this he adduces his name 'Emmanuel,' and refers to the historian Shakspeare. Mr. Peters, on the contrary, considers this to be what he calls one of Mr. Simpkinson's 'Anacreonisms,' inasmuch as, at the introduction of Mr. Cade's reform measure, the Clerk, if alive, would have been hard upon two hundred years old. The probability is that the unfortunate alluded to was his great-grandson.

Margaret Shurland in due course became Margaret Ingoldsby: her portrait still hangs in the gallery at Tappington. The features are handsome, but shrewish, betraying, as it were, a touch of the old Baron's temperament; but we never could learn that she actually kicked her husband. She brought him a very pretty fortune in chains, owches, and Saracen ear-rings; the barony being a male fief; reverted to the Crown.

In the abbey-church at Minster may yet be seen the tomb of a recumbent warrior, clad in the chain-mail of the 13th century. His hands are clasped in prayer, his legs, crossed in that position so prized by Templars in ancient, and tailors in modern days, bespeak him a soldier of the faith in Palestine. Close behind his dexter calf lies sepultured in bold relief a horse's head: and a respectable elderly lady, as she shows the monument, fails not to read her auditors a fine moral lesson on the sin of ingratitude, or to claim a sympathising tear to the memory of poor 'Grey Dolphin!'