CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

A REPUTED CHANGELING; OR, THREE SEVENTH YEARS TWO CENTURIES AGO

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PREFACE

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I do not think I have here forced the hand of history except by giving Portchester to two imaginary Rectors, and by a little injustice to her whom Princess Anne termed ‘the brick-bat woman.’

The trial is not according to present rules, but precedents for its irregularities are to be found in the doings of the seventeenth century, notably in the trial of Spencer Cowper by the same Judge Hatsel, and I have done my best to represent the habits of those country gentry who were not infected by the evils of the later Stewart reigns.

There is some doubt as to the proper spelling of Portchester, but, judging by analogy, the *t* ought not to be omitted.

C. M. YONGE. 2*d May* 1889.

CHAPTER I
The Experiences Of Goody Madge

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“Dear Madam, think me not to blame;
Invisible the fairy came.
Your precious babe is hence conveyed,
And in its place a changeling laid.
Where are the father’s mouth and nose,
The mother’s eyes as black as sloes?
See here, a shocking awkward creature,
That speaks a fool in every feature.”
GAY.

“He is an ugly ill-favoured boy—just like *Riquet à la Houppe*.”

“That he is! Do you not know that he is a changeling?”

Such were the words of two little girls walking home from a school for young ladies kept, at the Cathedral city of Winchester, by two Frenchwomen of quality, refugees from the persecutions preluding the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and who enlivened the studies of their pupils with the *Contes de Commère L’Oie*.

The first speaker was Anne Jacobina Woodford, who had recently come with her mother, the widow of a brave naval officer, to live with her uncle, the Prebendary then in residence. The other was Lucy Archfield, daughter to a knight, whose home was a few miles from Portchester, Dr. Woodford’s parish on the southern coast of Hampshire.

In the seventeenth century, when roads were mere ditches often impassable, and country-houses frequently became entirely isolated in the winter, it was usual with the wealthier county families to move into their local capital, where some owned mansions and others hired prebendal houses, or went into lodgings in the roomy dwellings of the superior tradesmen. For the elders this was the season of social intercourse, for the young people, of education.

The two girls, who were about eight years old, had struck up a rapid friendship, and were walking hand in hand to the Close attended by the nurse in charge of Mistress Lucy. This little lady wore a black silk hood and cape, trimmed with light brown fur, and lined with pink, while Anne Woodford, being still in mourning for her father, was wrapped in a black cloak, unrelieved except by the white border of her round cap, fringed by fair curls, contrasting with her brown eyes. She was taller and had a more upright bearing of head and neck, with more promise of beauty than her companion, who was much more countrified and would not have been taken for the child of higher station.

They had traversed the graveyard of the Cathedral, and were passing through a narrow archway known as the Slype, between the south-western angle of the Cathedral and a heavy mass of old masonry forming part of the garden wall of the present abode of the Archfield family, when suddenly both children stumbled and fell, while an elfish peal of laughter sounded behind them.

Lucy came down uppermost, and was scarcely hurt, but Anne had fallen prone, striking her chin on the ground, so as to make her bite her lip, and bruising knees and elbows

severely. Nurse detected the cause of the fall so as to avoid it herself. It was a cord fastened across the archway, close to the ground, and another shout of derision greeted the discovery; while Lucy, regaining her feet, beheld for a moment a weird exulting grimace on a visage peeping over a neighbouring headstone.

“It is he! it is he! The wicked imp! There’s no peace for him! I say,” she screamed, “see if you don’t get a sound flogging!” and she clenched her little fist as the provoking “Ho! ho! ho!” rang farther and farther off. “Don’t cry, Anne dear; the Dean and Chapter shall take order with him, and he shall be soundly beaten. Are you hurt? O nurse, her mouth is all blood.”

“I hope she has not broken a tooth,” said nurse, who had been attending to the sobbing child. “Come in, my lamb, we will wash your face, and make you well.”

Anne, blinded with tears, jarred, bruised, bleeding, and bewildered, submitted to be led by kind nurse the more willingly because she knew that her mother, together with all the quality, were at Sir Thomas Charnock’s. They had dined at the fashionable hour of two, and were to stay till supper-time, the elders playing at Ombre, the juniors dancing. As a rule the ordinary clergy did not associate with the county families, but Dr. Woodford was of good birth and a royal chaplain, and his deceased brother had been a favourite officer of the Duke of York, and had been so severely wounded by his side in the battle of Southwold as to be permanently disabled. Indeed Anne Jacobina was godchild to the Duke and his first Duchess, whose favoured attendant her mother had been. Thus Mrs. Woodford was in

great request, and though she had not hitherto gone into company since her widowhood, she had yielded to Lady Charnock's entreaty that she would come and show her how to deal with that strange new Chinese infusion, a costly packet of which had been brought to her from town by Sir Thomas, as the Queen's favourite beverage, wherewith the ladies of the place were to be regaled and astonished.

It had been already arranged that the two little girls should spend the evening together, and as they entered the garden before the house a rude voice exclaimed, "Holloa! London Nan whimpering. Has my fine lady met a spider or a cow?" and a big rough lad of twelve, in a college gown, spread out his arms, and danced up and down in the doorway to bar the entrance.

"Don't, Sedley," said a sturdy but more gentlemanlike lad of the same age, thrusting him aside. "Is she hurt? What is it?"

"That spiteful imp, Peregrine Oakshott," said Lucy passionately. "He had a cord across the Slype to trip us up. I heard him laughing like a hobgoblin, and saw him too, grinning over a tombstone like the malicious elf he is."

The college boy uttered a horse laugh, which made Lucy cry, "Cousin Sedley, you are as bad!" but the other boy was saying, "Don't cry, Anne None-so-pretty. I'll give it him well! Though I'm younger, I'm bigger, and I'll show him reason for not meddling with my little sweetheart."

"Have with you then!" shouted Sedley, ready for a fray on whatever pretext, and off they rushed, as nurse led little Anne up the broad shallow steps of the dark oak staircase, but Lucy stood laughing with exultation in the intended

vengeance, as her brother took down her father's hunting-whip.

"He must be wellnigh a fiend to play such wicked pranks under the very Minster!" she said.

"And a rascal of a Whig, and that's worse," added Charles; "but I'll have it out of him!"

"Take care, Charley; if you offend him, and he does really belong to those—those creatures"—Lucy lowered her voice—"who knows what they might do to you?"

Charles laughed long and loud. "I'll take care of that," he said, swinging out at the door. "Elf or no elf, he shall learn what it is to play off his tricks on *my* sister and my little sweetheart."

Lucy betook herself to the nursery, where Anne was being comforted, her bleeding lip washed with essence, and repaired with a pinch of beaver from a hat, and her other bruises healed with lily leaves steeped in strong waters.

"Charley is gone to serve him out!" announced Lucy as the sovereign remedy.

"Oh, but perhaps he did not mean it," Anne tried to say.

"Mean it? Small question of that, the cankered young slip! Nurse, do you think those he belongs to can do Charley any harm if he angers them?"

"I cannot say, missie. Only 'tis well we be not at home, or there might be elf knots in the horses' manes to-night. I doubt me whether *that sort* can do much hurt here, seeing as 'tis holy ground."

"But is he really a changeling? I thought there were no such things as—"

“Hist, hist, Missie Anne!” cried the dame; “’tis not good to name them.”

“Oh, but we are on the Minster ground, nurse,” said Lucy, trembling a little however, looking over her shoulder, and coming closer to the old servant.

“Why do they think so?” asked Anne. “Is it because he is so ugly and mischievous and rude? Not like boys in London.”

“Prithee, nurse, tell her the tale,” entreated Lucy, who had made large eyes over it many a time before.

“Ay, and who should tell you all about it save me, who had it all from Goody Madge Bulpett, as saw it all!”

“Goody Madge! It was she that came when poor little Kitty was born and died,” suggested Lucy, as Anne, laying her aching head upon nurse’s knees, prepared to listen to the story.

“Well, deary darlings, you see poor Madam Oakshott never had her health since the Great Fire in London, when she was biding with her kinsfolk to be near Major Oakshott, who had got into trouble about some of his nonconforming doings. The poor lady had a mortal fright before she could be got out of Gracechurch Street as was all of a blaze, and she was so afeard of her husband being burnt as he lay in Newgate that she could scarce be got away, and whether it was that, or that she caught cold lying out in a tent on Highgate Hill, she has never had a day’s health since.”

“And the gentleman—her husband?” asked Anne.

“They all broke prison, poor fellows, as they had need to do, and the Major’s time was nearly up. He made himself busy in saving and helping the folk in the streets; and his brother, Sir Peregrine, who was thick with the King, and is in

foreign parts now, took the chance to speak of the poor lady's plight and say it would be the death of her if he could not get his discharge, and his Majesty, bless his kind heart, gave the order at once. So they took madam home to the Chace, but she has been but an ailing body ever since."

"But the fairy, the fairy, how did she change the babe?" cried Anne.

"Hush, hush, dearie! name them not. I am coming to it all in good time. I was telling you how the poor lady failed and pined from that hour, and was like to die. My gossip Madge told me how when, next Midsummer, this unlucky babe was born they had to take him from her chamber at once because any sound of crying made her start in her sleep, and shriek that she heard a poor child wailing who had been left in a burning house. Moll Owens, the hind's wife, a comely lass, was to nurse him, and they had him at once to her in the nursery, where was the elder child, two years old, Master Oliver, as you know well, Mistress Lucy, a fine-grown, sturdy little Turk as ever was."

"Yes, I know him," answered Lucy; "and if his brother's a changeling, he is a bear! The Whig bear is what Charley calls him."

"Well, what does that child do but trot out of the nursery, and try to scramble down the stairs.—Never tell me but that they you wot of trained him out—not that they had power over a Christian child, but that they might work their will on the little one. So they must needs trip him up, so that he rolled down the stair hollering and squalling all the way enough to bring the house down, and his poor lady mother, she woke up in a fit. The womenfolk ran, Molly and all, she

being but a slip of a girl herself and giddy-pated, and when they came back after quieting Master Oliver, the babe was changed."

"Then they didn't see the—"

"Hush, hush, missie! no one never sees 'em or they couldn't do nothing. They cannot, if a body is looking. But what had been as likely a child before as you would wish to handle was gone! The poor little mouth was all of a twist, and his eyelid drooped, and he never ceased mourn, mourn, mourn, wail, wail, wail, day and night, and whatever food he took he never was satisfied, but pined and peaked and dwined from day to day, so as his little legs was like knitting pins. The lady was nigh upon death as it seemed, so that no one took note of the child at first, but when Madge had time to look at him, she saw how it was, as plain as plain could be, and told his father. But men are unbelieving, my dears, and always think they know better than them as has the best right, and Major Oakshott would hear of no such thing, only if the boy was like to die, he must be christened. Well, Madge knew that sometimes they flee at touch of holy water, but no; though the thing mourned and moaned enough to curdle your blood and screeched out when the water touched him, there he was the same puny little canker. So when madam was better, and began to fret over the child that was nigh upon three months old, and no bigger than a newborn babe, Madge up and told her how it was, and the way to get her own again."

"What was that, nurse?"

"There be different ways, my dear. Madge always held to breaking five and twenty eggs and have a pot boiling on a

good sea-coal fire with the poker in it red hot, and then drop the shells in one by one, in sight of the creature in the cradle. Presently it will up and ask whatever you are about. Then you gets the poker in your hand as you says, “A-brewing of egg shells.” Then it says, “I’m forty hundred years old and odd, and yet I never heard of a-brewing of egg shells.” Then you ups with the poker and at him to thrust it down his ugly throat, and there’s a hissing and a whirling, and he is snatched away, and the real darling, all plump and rosy, is put back in the cradle.”

“And did they?”

“No, my dears. Madam was that soft-hearted she could not bring her mind to it, though they promised her not to touch him unless he spoke. But nigh on two years later, Master Robert was born, as fine and lusty and straight-limbed as a chrisom could be, while the other could not walk a step, but sat himself about on the floor, a-moaning and a-fretting with the legs of him for all the world like the drumsticks of a fowl, and his hands like claws, and his face wizened up like an old gaffer of a hundred, or the jackanapes that Martin Boats’n brought from Barbary. So after a while madam saw the rights of it, and gave consent that means should be taken as Madge and other wise folk would have it; but he was too old by that time for the egg shells, for he could talk, talk, and ask questions enough to drive you wild. So they took him out under the privet hedge, Madge and her gossip Deborah Clint, and had got his clothes off to flog him with nettles till they changed him, when the ill-favoured elf began to squall and shriek like a whole litter of pigs, and as ill luck would have it, the master

was within hearing, though they had watched him safe off to one of his own ’venticles, but it seems there had been warning that the justices were on the look-out, so home he came. And behold, the thing that never knew the use of his feet before, ups and flies at him, and lays hold of his leg, hollering out, “Sir, father, don’t let them,” and what not. So then it was all over with them, as though that were not proof enow what manner of thing it was! Madge tried to put him off with washing with yarbs being good for the limbs, but when he saw that Deb was there, he saith, saith he, as grim as may be, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,” which was hard, for she is but a white witch; and he stormed and raved at them with Bible texts, and then he vowed (men are so headstrong, my dears) that if ever he ketched them at it again, he would see Deb burnt for a witch at the stake, and Madge hung for the murder of the child, and he is well known to be a man of his word. So they had to leave him to abide by his bargain, and a sore handful he has of it.”

Anne drew a long sigh and asked whether the real boy in fairyland would never come back.

“There’s no telling, missie dear. Some say they are bound there for ever and a day, some that they as holds ’em are bound to bring them back for a night once in seven years, and in the old times if they was sprinkled with holy water, and crossed, they would stay, but there’s no such thing as holy water now, save among the Papists, and if one knew the way to cross oneself, it would be as much as one’s life was worth.”

“If Peregrine was to die,” suggested Lucy.

“Bless your heart, dearie, he’ll never die! When the true one’s time comes, you’ll see, if so be you be alive to see it, as Heaven grant, he will go off like the flame of a candle and nothing be left in his place but a bit of a withered sting nettle. But come, my sweetings, ’tis time I got your supper. I’ll put some nice rosy-cheeked apples down to roast, to be soft for Mistress Woodford’s sore mouth.”

Before the apples were roasted, Charles Archfield and his cousin, the colleger Sedley Archfield, a big boy in a black cloth gown, came in with news of having—together with the other boys, including Oliver and Robert Oakshott—hunted Peregrine all round the Close, but he ran like a lapwing, and when they had pinned him up in the corner by Dr. Ken’s house, he slipped through their fingers up the ivy, and grinned at them over the wall like the imp he was. Noll said it was always the way, he was no more to be caught than a bit of thistledown, but Sedley meant to call out all the college boys and hunt and bait him down like a badger on ‘Hills.’

CHAPTER II
High Treason

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"Whate'er it be that is within his reach,
The filching trick he doth his fingers teach."
Robin Badfellow.

There was often a considerable distance between children and their parents in the seventeenth century, but Anne Woodford, as the only child of her widowed mother, was as solace, comfort, and companion; and on her pillow in early morning the child poured forth in grave earnest the entire story of the changeling, asking whether he could not be "taken to good Dr. Ken, or the Dean, or the Bishop to be ex—ex—what is it, mother? Not whipped with nettles. Oh no! nor burnt with red hot pokers, but have holy words said so that the right one may come back."

"My dear child, did you really believe that old nurse's tale?"

"O madam, she *knew* it. The other old woman saw it! I always thought fairies and elves were only in tales, but Lucy's nurse knows it is true. And *he* is not a bit like other lads, mamma dear. He is lean and small, and his eyes are of different colours, look two ways at once, and his mouth goes awry when he speaks, and he laughs just like—like a fiend. Lucy and I call him *Riquet à la Houppe*, because he is just like the picture in Mademoiselle's book, with a great stubbly bunch of hair sticking out on one side, and though he walks a little lame, he can hop and skip like a grasshopper, faster

than any of the boys, and leap up a wall in a moment, and grin—oh most frightfully. Have you ever seen him, mamma?”

“I think so. I saw a poor boy, who seemed to me to have had a stroke of some sort when he was an infant.”

“But, madam, that would not make him so spiteful and malicious!”

“If every one is against him and treats him as a wicked mischievous elf, it is only too likely to make him bitter and spiteful. Nay, Anne, if you come back stuffed with old wives’ tales, I shall not allow you to go home with Lucy Archfield.”

The threat silenced Anne, who was a grave and rather silent little person, and when she mentioned it to her friend, the answer was, “Did you tell your mother? If I had told mine, I should have been whipped for repeating lying tales.”

“Oh then you don’t believe it!”

“It must be true, for Madge knew it. But that’s the way always if one lets out that one knows more than they think.”

“It is not the way with my mother,” stoutly said Anne, drawing up her dignified little head. And she kept her resolution, for though a little excited by her first taste of lively youthful companionship, she was naturally a thoughtful reticent child, with a character advanced by companionship with her mother as an only child, through a great sorrow. Thus she was in every respect more developed than her contemporary Lucy, who regarded her with wonder as well as affection, and she was the object of the boyish devotion of Charley, who often defended her from his cousin Sedley’s endeavours to put down what he considered upstart airs in a little nobody from London. Sedley teased

and baited every weak thing in his way, and Lucy had been his chief butt till Anne Woodford's unconscious dignity and more cultivated manners excited his utmost spleen.

Lucy might be incredulous, but she was eager to tell that when her cousin Sedley Archfield was going back to 'chambers,' down from the Close gate came the imp on his shoulders in the twilight and twisted both legs round his neck, holding tight on in spite of plunges, pinches, and endeavours to scrape him off against the wall, which were frustrated or retaliated by hair pulling, choking, till just ere entering the college gateway, where Sedley looked to get his revenge among his fellows, he found his shoulders free, and heard "Ho! ho! ho!" from the top of a wall close at hand. All the more was the young people's faith in the changeling story confirmed, and child-world was in those days even more impenetrable to their elders than at present.

Changeling or no, it was certain that Peregrine Oakshott was the plague of the Close, where his father, an ex-officer of the Parliamentary army, had unwillingly hired a house for the winter, for the sake of medical treatment for his wife, a sufferer from a complication of ailments. Oakwood, his home, was about five miles from Dr. Woodford's living of Portchester, and as the families would thus be country neighbours, Mrs. Woodford thought it well to begin the acquaintance at Winchester. While knocking at the door of the house on the opposite side of the Close, she was aware of an elfish visage peering from an upper window. There was the queer mop of dark hair, the squinting light eyes, the contorted grin crooking the mouth, the odd sallow face,

making her quite glad to get out of sight of the strange grimaces which grew every moment more hideous.

Mrs. Oakshott sat in an arm-chair beside a large fire in a wainscotted room, with a folding-screen shutting off the window. Her spinning-wheel was near, but it was only too plain that ‘feeble was the hand, and silly the thread.’ She bent her head in its wadded black velvet hood, but excused herself from rising, as she was crippled by rheumatic pains. She had evidently once been a pretty little person, innocent and inane, and her face had become like that of a withered baby, piteous in its expression of pain and weariness, but otherwise somewhat vacant. At first, indeed, there was a look of alarm. Perhaps she expected every visitor to come with a complaint of her unlucky Peregrine, but when Mrs. Woodford spoke cheerfully of being her neighbour in the country, she was evidently relieved and even gratified, prattling in a soft plaintive tone about her sufferings and the various remedies, ranging from woodlice rolled into natural pills, and grease off the church bells, to diamond dust and Goa stones, since, as she said, there was no cost to which Major Oakshott would not go for her benefit. He had even procured for her a pound of the Queen’s new Chinese herb, and it certainly was as nauseous as could be wished, when boiled in milk, but she was told that was not the way it was taken at my Lady Charnock’s. She was quite animated when Mrs. Woodford offered to show her how to prepare it.

Therewith the master of the house came in, and the aspect of affairs changed. He was a tall, dark, grave man, plainly though handsomely dressed, and in a gentlemanly way making it evident that visits to his wife were not

welcome. He said that her health never permitted her to go abroad, and that his poor house contained nothing that could please a Court lady. Mrs. Oakshott shrank into herself, and became shy and silent, and Mrs. Woodford felt constrained to take leave, courteously conducted to the door by her unwilling host.

She had not taken many steps before she was startled by a sharp shower from a squirt coming sidelong like a blow on her cheek and surprising her into a low cry, which was heard by the Major, so that he hastened out, exclaiming, “Madam, I trust that you are not hurt.”

“Oh no, sir! It is nothing—not a stone—only water!” she said, wiping it with her handkerchief.

“I am grieved and ashamed at the evil pranks of my unhappy son, but he shall suffer for it.”

“Nay, sir, I pray you. It was only childish mischief.”

He had not waited to hear her pleadings, and before she was half across the Close he had overtaken her, dragging the cowering struggling boy in his powerful grasp.

“Now, Peregrine,” he commanded, “let me instantly hear you ask the lady’s pardon for your dastardly trick. Or—!” and his other hand was raised for a blow.

“I am sure he is sorry,” said Mrs. Woodford, making a motion to ward off the stroke, and as the queer eyes glanced up at her in wondering inquiry, she laid her hand on the bony shoulder, saying, “I know you did not mean to hurt me. You are sorry, are you not?”

“Ay,” the boy muttered, and she saw a look of surprise on his father’s face.

“There,” she said, “he has made his amends, and surely that may suffice.”

“Nay, madam, it would be a weak and ungodly tenderness that would spare to drive forth the evil spirit which possesses the child by the use of the rod. I should fail in my duty alike to God and man,” he added, in reply to a fresh gesture of intercession, “did I not teach him what it is to insult a lady at mine own door.”

Mrs. Woodford could only go away, heartily sorry for the boy. From that time, however, both she and her little daughter were untouched by his tricks, though every one else had some complaint. Peas were shot from unknown recesses at venerable canons, mice darted out before shrieking ladies, frogs’ clammy forms descended on the nape of their necks, hedgehogs were curled up on their chairs, and though Peregrine Oakshott was not often caught in the act, no mischief ever took place that was not attributed to him; and it was popularly believed in the Close that his father flogged him every morning for what he was about to do, and his tutor repeated the castigation every evening for what he had done, besides interludes at each detection.

Perhaps frequent usage had toughened his skin, or he had become expert in wriggling from the full force of the blow, or else, as many believed, the elfish nature was impervious; for he was as ready as ever for a trick the moment he was released, like, as his brother said, the dog Keeper, who, with a slaughtered chick hung round his neck in penance, rushed murderously upon the rest of the brood.

Yet Mrs. Woodford, on her way through the Cathedral nave, was aware of something leaning against one of the great columns, crouching together so that the dark head, supported on the arms, rested against the pillar which fluted the pier. The organ was pealing softly and plaintively, and the little gray coat seemed to heave as with a sob. She stood, impelled to offer to take him with her into the choir, but a verger, spying him, began rating him in a tone fit for expelling a dog, “Come, master, none of your pranks here! Be not you ashamed of yourself to be lying in wait for godly folk on their way to prayers? If I catch you here again the Dean shall hear of it, and you shall smart for it.”

Mrs. Woodford began, “He was only hearkening to the music,” but she caught such a look of malignity cast upon the verger as perfectly appalled her, and in another moment the boy had dashed, head over heels, out at the nearest door.

The next report that reached her related how a cloud of lime had suddenly descended from a broken arch of the cloister on the solemn verger, on his way to escort the Dean to the Minster, powdering his wig, whitening his black gown from collar to hem, and not a little endangering his eyesight.

The culprit eluded all pursuit on this occasion; but Mrs. Woodford soon after was told that the Major had caught Peregrine listening at the little south door of the choir, had collared him, and flogged him worse than ever, for being seduced by the sounds of the popish and idolatrous worship, and had told all his sons that the like chastisement awaited them if they presumed to cross the threshold of the steeple house.

Nevertheless the Senior Prefect of the college boys, when about to come out of the Cathedral on Sunday morning, found his gown pinned with a skewer so fast to the seat that he was only set free at the expense of a rent. Public opinion decided that the deed had been done by the imp of Oakshott, and accordingly the whole of the Wykeham scholars set on him with hue and cry the first time they saw him outside the Close, and hunted him as far as St. Cross, where he suddenly and utterly vanished from their sight.

Mrs. Woodford agreed with Anne that it was a very strange story. For how could he have been in the Cathedral at service time when it was well known that Major Oakshott had all his family together at his own form of worship in his house? Anne, who had been in hopes that her mother would be thus convinced of his supernatural powers, looked disappointed, but she had afterwards to confess that Charles Archfield had found out that it was his cousin Sedley Archfield who had played the audacious trick, in revenge for a well-merited tunding from the Prefect.

“And then saddled it on young Oakshott?” asked her mother.

“Charley says one such matter more or less makes no odds to the Whig ape; but I cannot endure Sedley Archfield, mamma.”

“If he lets another lad bear the blame of his malice he cannot indeed be a good lad.”

“So Charley and Lucy say,” returned Anne. “We shall be glad to be away from Winchester, for while Peregrine Oakshott torments slyly, Sedley Archfield loves to frighten us openly, and to hurt us to see how much we can bear, and

if Charley tries to stand up for us, Sedley calls him a puny wench, and a milksop, and knocks him down. But, dear madam, pray do not tell what I have said to her ladyship, for there is no knowing what Sedley would do to us."

"My little maid has not known before what boys can be!"

"No; but indeed Charles Archfield is quite different, almost as if he had been bred in London. He is a very gentleman. He never is rude to any girl, and he is courteous and gentle and kind. He gathered walnuts for us yesterday, and cracked all mine, and I am to make him a purse with two of the shells."

Mrs. Woodford smiled, but there was a short thrill of anxiety in her motherly heart as her glance brought up a deeper colour into Anne's cheeks. There was a reserve to bring that glow, for the child knew that if she durst say that Charles called her his little sweetheart and wife, and that the walnut-shell purse would be kept as a token, she should be laughed at as a silly child, perhaps forbidden to make it, or else her uncle might hear and make a joke of it. It was not exactly disingenuousness, but rather the first dawn of maidenly reserve and modesty that reddened her cheek in a manner her mother did not fail to observe.

Yet it was with more amusement than misgiving, for children played at courtship like other games in mimicry of being grown up, and a baronet's only son was in point of fact almost as much out of the reach of a sea captain's daughter and clergyman's niece as a prince of the blood royal; and Master Archfield would probably be contracted long before he could choose for himself, for his family were not likely to take into account that if Captain Woodford had

not been too severely wounded to come forward after the battle of Southwold Bay he would have been knighted. On the strength of which Anne, as her companions sometimes said, gave herself in consequence more airs than Mistress Lucy ever did.

Sedley, a poor cousin, a destitute cavalier's orphan, who had been placed on the foundation at Winchester College in hopes that he might be provided for in the Church, would have been far more on her level, and indeed Lady Archfield, a notable matchmaker, had already hinted how suitable such a thing would be. However, the present school character of Master Sedley, as well as her own observations, by no means inclined Mrs. Woodford towards the boy, large limbed and comely faced, but with a bullying, scowling air that did not augur well for his wife or his parish.

Whether it were this lad's threats, or more likely, the fact that all the Close was on the alert, Peregrine's exploits were less frequent there, and began to extend to the outskirts of the city. There were some fine yew trees on the southern borders, towards the chalk down, with massive dark foliage upon stout ruddy branches, among which Peregrine, armed with a fishing-rod, line, and hook, sat perched, angling for what might be caught from unconscious passengers along a path which led beneath.

From a market-woman's basket he abstracted thus a fowl! His "Ho! ho! ho!" startled her into looking up, and seeing it apparently resuscitated, and hovering aloft. Full of dismay, she hurried shrieking away to tell the story of the bewitched chick at the market-cross among her gossips.

His next capture was a chop from a butcher boy's tray, but this involved more peril, for with a fierce oath that he would be revenged on the Whiggish imp, the lad darted at the tree, in vain, however, for Peregrine had dropped down on the other side, and crept unseen to another bush, where he lay *perdu*, under the thick green branches, rod and all, while the youth, swearing and growling, was shaking his former refuge.

As soon as the coast was clear he went back to his post, and presently was aware of three gentlemen advancing over the down, pointing, measuring, and surveying. One was small and slight, as simply dressed as a gentleman of the period could be; another was clad in a gay coat with a good deal of fluttering ribbon and rich lace; the third, a tall well-made man, had a plain walking suit, surmounted by a flowing periwig and plumed beaver. Coming close beneath Peregrine's tree, and standing with their backs to it, they eagerly conversed. "Such a cascade will drown the honours of the Versailles fountains, if only the water can be raised to such a height. Are you sure of it, Wren?"

"As certain as hydraulics can make me, sir," and the lesser man began drawing lines with his stick in the dust of the path in demonstration.

The opportunity was irresistible, and the hook from above deftly caught the band of the feathered hat of the taller man, slowly and steadily drawing it up, entirely unperceived by the owner, on whose wig it had rested, and who was bending over the dust-traced diagram in absorbed attention. Peregrine deferred his hobgoblin laughter, for success emboldened him farther. Detaching the hat from his

hook, and depositing it safely in a fork of the tree, he next cautiously let down his line, and contrived to get a strong hold of one of the black locks on the top of the wig, just as the wearer was observing, “Oliver’s Battery, eh? A cupola with a light to be seen out at sea? Our sailors will make another St. Christopher of you! Ha! what’s this’”

For feeling as if a branch were touching the structure on his head, he had stepped forward, thus favouring Peregrine’s manœuvres so that the wig dangled in the air, suddenly disclosing the bare skull of a very dark man, with such marked features that it needed not the gentlemen’s outcry to show the boy who was the victim of his mischief.

“What imp is there?” cried the King, spying up into the tree, while his attendant drew his sword, “How now?” as Peregrine half climbed, half tumbled down, bringing hat and wig with him, and, whether by design or accident, fell at his feet. “Will nothing content you but royal game?” he continued laughing, as Sir Christopher Wren helped him to resume his wig. “Why, what a shrimp it is! a mere goblin sprite! What’s thy name, master wag?”

“Peregrine Oakshott, so please you,” the boy answered, raising himself with a face scared indeed, but retaining its queer impishness. “Sir, I never guessed—”

“Young rogue! have you our licence to waylay our loyal subjects?” demanded the King, with an affected fierceness. “Know you not ’tis rank treason to discrown our sacred Majesty, far more to dishevel or destroy our locks? Why! I might behead you on the spot.” To his great amazement the boy, with an eager face and clasped hands, exclaimed, “O sir! Oh, please your Majesty, do so.”

“Do so!” exclaimed the King astounded. “Didst hear what I said?”

“Yes, sir! You said it was a beheading matter, and I’m willing, sir.”

“Of all the petitions that ever were made to me, this is the strangest!” exclaimed Charles. “An urchin like this weary of life! What next? So,” with a wink to his companions, “Peregrine Oakshott, we condemn thee for high treason against our most sacred Majesty’s beaver and periwig, and sentence thee to die by having thine head severed from thy body. Kneel down, open thy collar, bare thy neck. Ay, so, lay thy neck across that bough. Killigrew, do thy duty.”

To the general surprise, the boy complied with all these directions, never flinching nor showing sign of fear, except that his lips were set and his cheek whitened. As he knelt, with closed eyes, the flat cold blade descended on his neck, the tension relaxed, and he sank!

“Hold!” cried the King. “It is gone too far! He has surely not carried out the jest by dying on our hands.”

“No, no, sir,” said Wren, after a moment’s alarm, “he has only swooned. Has any one here a flask of wine to revive him?”

Several gentlemen had come up, and as Peregrine stirred, some wine was held to his lips, and he presently asked in a faint voice, “Is this fairyland?”

“Not yet, my lad,” said Charles, “whatever it may be when Wren’s work is done.”

The boy opened his eyes, and as he beheld the same face, and the too familiar sky and trees, he sighed heavily,

and said, “Then it is all the same! O sir, would you but have cut off my head in good earnest, I might be at home again!”

“Home! what means the elf?”

“An elf! That is what they say I am—changed in the cradle,” said Peregrine, incited to confidence by the good-natured eyes, “and I thought if I were close on death mine own people might take me home, and bring back the right one.”

“He really believes it!” exclaimed Charles much diverted. “Tell me, good Master Elf, who is thy father, I mean not my brother Oberon, but him of the right one, as thou sayst.”

“Mr. Robert Oakshott of Oakwood, sir,” said Peregrine.

“A sturdy squire of the country party,” said the King. “I am much minded to secure the lad for an elfin page,” he added aside to Killigrew. “There’s a fund of excellent humour and drollery in those queer eyes of his! So, Sir Hobgoblin, if you are proof against cold steel, I know not what is to be done with you. Get you back, and devise some other mode of finding your way home to fairyland.”

Peregrine said not a word of his adventure, so that the surprise of his family was the greater when overtures were made through Sir Christopher Wren for his appointment as a royal page.

“I would as soon send my son at once to be a page to Beelzebub,” returned Major Oakshott.

And though Sir Christopher did not return the answer exactly in those terms, he would not say that the Puritan Major did not judge rightly.