

The Early Fiction of Richard Jefferies

Edited by Grace Toplis

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGY -
TRAITS OF THE OLDEN TIME, (1866)
A STRANGE STORY, (1866)
HENRIQUE BEAUMONT, (1866) -
WHO WILL WIN, (1866)
MASKED, (1866) -

INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGY.

“Qui s’excuse, s’accuse.” And yet it is obviously necessary for the Editor of any early work of Richard Jefferies to account for the re-appearance of these almost forgotten writings, to give a reason for their re-publication, and to anticipate the inevitable criticism which will be evoked thereby.

It has fallen to the lot of few men to occupy such a unique position as Jefferies fills in our literature. Sir Walter Besant rates the number of his admirers at forty thousand, and though this is probably an outside estimate, there is no question as to the sincerity and devotion of his following. He is not only read. Such a “Study” as Mr. H. S. Salt’s, such a “Eulogy” from the most generous of living authors, must convince the most sceptical Philistine that there is something more in Jefferies than his purblind eyes can detect. “He who met the great God Pan face to face, fell down dead. Still, even in these days, he who communes with the Sylvan Spirit presently dies to the ways of men, while his senses are opened to see the hidden things of hedge and meadow; while his soul is uplifted by the beauty and the variety and the order of the world; by the wondrous lives of the creatures, so full of peril, and so full of joy. Then, if he be permitted to reveal these things, what can we who receive this revelation give in exchange? What words of praise and gratitude can we find in return for this unfolding of the Book of fleeting Life?¹ And though there are those who say that his cult is on the wane, Mr. Saintsbury, in the most recent volume of criticism which has been issued, pays ungrudging homage to Jefferies, even where the critic is most in evidence. “His talent, though rare and exquisite, was neither rich nor versatile. It consisted in a power of observing nature more than Wordsworthian in delicacy, and almost Wordsworthian in the presence of a sentimental philosophic background of thought. Unluckily for Jefferies, his philosophic background was not like Wordsworth’s, clear and cheerful, but wholly vague and partly gloomy. Writing too, in prose, not verse, and after Mr. Ruskin, he attempted an exceedingly florid style, which at its happiest was happy enough, but which was not always at that point, and which, when it was not, was apt to become trivial or tawdry, or both. It is therefore certain that his importance for posterity will dwindle, if it has not already dwindled, to that given by a bundle of descriptive selections. But these will occupy a foremost place on their particular shelf, the shelf at the head of which stands Gilbert White, and Gray.”² With the same discrimination

¹ “The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies.”

² “A History of Nineteenth Century Literature.”

Besant says "Of such men literature can show but two or three—Gilbert White, Thoreau, and Jefferies— but the greatest of them all is Jefferies."

It will therefore readily be understood that an invitation to edit some hitherto unpublished works of a favourite writer was a temptation to which one could only fall an easy and immediate victim, as visions of perhaps another hitherto-undiscovered "Pageant of Summer," floated before the sanguine mind. Alas for such hopes! when the manuscripts revealed themselves as the crudest and earliest work of one who had not then "found himself," and fondly fancied that it was through his fiction that Fame would come to him.— before he had tried his hand at the gorgeous word-painting which has placed him with the Masters. Fiction too of the crudest and earliest, it must be repeated. Has anyone ever been able to write with free and genuine appreciation of even the later novels? Do we not accept them simply because they are Jefferies', and not for their intrinsic worth? What then can be said for the boyish work which shows in every line the 'prentice hand, and the hand of an unpromising prentice too with no natural aptitude for the novelist's craft? They are the youthful romances which appeared in the *North Wilts Herald*, and of which the generous "Eulogy" could find nothing good to say.

Shades of Chatterton and Shelley ! At eighteen, Jefferies was capable of nothing higher than "Masked," a melodramatic burlesque, which would be ludicrous if the reader could but forget the pathetic side of it—the foregone result of total failure in an art to which his deepest longings were consecrated. The sixth chapter of the "Eulogy" deals so exhaustively with his "Fiction, early and late," that nothing is left to tell the reader now. Mr. Salt's criticisms are colder and less *human* throughout; whether he discusses the man, the poet-naturalist, the thinker, or the writer, one is reminded of the scientific process of analysis. Still his "Richard Jefferies" is a "Study" one cannot afford to miss: and of his fiction we have the following opinion : "The critics were undoubtedly justified in refusing to take him seriously in the capacity of novelist... It is true that he at first possessed a certain youthful fluency in the weaving of romantic narratives, and that, as he informed a publisher, to write a tale was as easy to him as to write a letter. But then, as it happened,... his early tales ... were of a third-rate quality; so that it is a positive relief to his readers to find that in his later volumes this fatal fluency had altogether disappeared, and that he was compelled to have recourse to another faculty which is wholly unrelated to novel-writing. In brief, he was an essayist and not a novelist at all, nor under any circumstances could he have become a novelist. Even when he was well equipped with material, he was quite unable to give any vivid dramatic life to his stories." And when, further, we read, "it is certainly to be hoped that the growing interest in Jefferies' personality will not lead, as in Shelley's case, to a resuscitation of all the poor stuff which he perpetrated in the innocence of his boyhood," it required—at least— some courage to continue a task so certain to call forth depreciatory remarks.

Why then do these early efforts make their appearance in this permanent book form?

For two reasons; the least worthy of which is, that a book-lover yearns to make his collection complete, and the *Juvenilia* of other great writers are "taken as read," and placed with their fellows, lest one link be missing. But the reason for the student is that they illustrate,—as can be done by no comment from outsiders —the mental growth of the man, and his gradual and unusually slow development as a writer. This is why they possess interest in the eyes of a Jefferiesian student, and why they are offered to the reading public as *intellectual curios*.

It has been said that Ruskin was largely responsible both for the beauties and the defects of Jefferies' later style; and in some ways the disciple surpassed the master, e.g. in his word-pictures of English scenery. But not even the most virulent of critics could bring a charge of plagiarism or imitation against this early fiction. The pathos of it all is so evident to a sympathetic reader. All through those early struggling days, the youth was conscious of a

duty laid upon him, of something which he *had* to give to the world—and all through those early days he was honestly trying to find out what it was that he had to say to men and women weary with the town life and conventionalities and pressure of the nineteenth century. And years went by before the message became clear enough to be delivered. It was worth waiting for, we say now; but think of the *meaning* of those inarticulate years, during which his most strenuous efforts only resulted in such tales as these.

The great lack in Jefferies' mental equipment was Wordsworth's want too, a total inability to see the humorous side of life, or even to catch an occasional glimpse of it. "The saving sense of humour" would have saved him much; and Jefferies is a notable example of a man of unique power of literary creation in whom the vein of humour was absolutely non-existent. Passing now to the stories themselves for such comments as they suggest, may we consider the description in "A Strange Story" of "the beams of the morning sun glancing from the steel heads of their lances, as they glance now from yon trembling dew-drop, one of nature's jewels,"--- as a whisper of what he would say about the dew-drop afterwards? Again there is a faint indication of a later passage in "The Story of my Heart" on which Mr. Salt comments at some length, ("Study" page 25), in Gerald Fitzhugh's speculations regarding "the power of the body to become, as it were, mingled with this nameless medium of which it originally was and to which it shall again return when its prison bonds of clay are loosed."

"Involuntarily I drew a long breath, then I breathed slowly. My thought, or inner consciousness, went up through the illumined sky, and I was lost in a moment of exaltation. This lasted only a very short time, perhaps only a part of a second, and while it lasted there was no formulated wish. I was absorbed; I drank the beauty of the morning; I was exalted."

On this passage Mr. Salt quotes Dr. Samuel A. Jones of Michigan University.

"Jefferies must have acquired this trick of self-projection unconsciously; he certainly was equally unaware of what he was learning and of the psychical consequences of such learning. There is no evidence extant that he understood the physiological relationship between his drawing a long breath—deep inspiration—and the breathing slowly, and the succeeding exaltation; but that process so Changes the central circulation that his brief absorption, 'only a part of a second,' is readily accounted for by the physiologist. In saying that Jefferies was not aware of what he was learning, it is implied that he had not read any East Indian literature, and there learned to practise the *yoga*. Of course the method employed by the Indian adept is much more complex than that followed by Jefferies, but at least one essential element for both is the peculiar respiration. As Jefferies began this occult practice while in his very teens, it is safe to conclude it was an involuntary and unconscious discovery of his own."

About this time too, the following verses appeared in the *North Wilts Herald* over the signature of "Geoffrey,"— "The Battle of 1866," showing an embryonic interest in politics, which never came to maturity.

TO A FASHIONABLE BONNET.

As nothing strange is stirring,
I cannot write a sonnet,
So just a line I'll pen upon
The fashionable bonnet.
Ah ! thing of straw and ribbons gay !
Like tile aside or chimney tun,
Thou keep'st not rain nor wind away,
Nor e'en the midday sun.
Thou keepest parasols in use,
A thing that on my vision jars,
Thus hiding half the light from sight,
For women's eyes are stars.
Tho' poised upon a pretty head,

And tho' to deck thee, ladies strive,
 They might as well employ their arts
 On garlanding a beehive.
 Oh ! give the girls a handy hat,
 That they may look around them,
 Unchecked by parasol, or by
 The sun that lately browned them.
 Ah, girls are girls and will be girls,
 In spite of matrons gray,
 Then why restrain their flowing curls,
 When all for freedom pray ?

THE BATTLE OF 1866.

Reform ! reform ! there came a trump on beery breezes borne,
 Bold Gladstone cried, " Come list M.P.'s 'tis Russell blows his horn."
 (That horn, 'tis true, is but a shell which Russell drags about;
 For like the snail within his shell he can't get on without.)
 And Russell rose with his brown bill, his breast with ardour burned,
 He hemmed, he heck'd 'twould do no harm, for lo! its edge was turned;
 And through the shadows of the night loud o'er the loud debate
 There came a voice which sneering said, " Brown bills are out of date !"

Gigantic figures rise around, and the gas-lit atmosphere
 Is broken into circles wide by a voice both loud and clear,
 And Russell shrinks within himself, for lo! The hum – 'tis He!
 The man of epigram is here – to Lowe, bend low the knee;
 Sent 14-pounders, 20-pounders whistling 'gainst reform,
 Now Rents and Rates, the last reserves, rush headlong to the fight,
 Ah! now where is that man of mould, Earl Russell's ancient Bright?

The ministerial flails at work, but Taylor's quite as busy;
 Division nears, and Russell brave can't help it, must be (D)izzy.
 Ah! 'tis a hard and thankless fate to leave a proud position,
 For his magic mace Majority wields for the Opposition,
 And gladsome are the cheers that rise – reform's put on the shelf,
 The snake, though famed for cunningness, was swallowed down himself.

"Henrique Beaumont" contains many passages which show the vaguest of vague acquaintance with the customs, habits, individuality, and nomenclature of the "Hindoo" race as sketched in "Ayeen"; and the reader cannot help being as much impressed as the hero no doubt was, when he was addressed as "Henry or rather Henrique Beaumont." But even here we find occasional descriptions, such as "Nature was decking herself for her bridal with the sun which men call summer-tide."

Jefferies' heroes are conscientiously melodramatic; they kneel at the feet of the maidens to whom their affections are devoted, in the absolutely correct style for such declarations; and they fold their arms on every possible occasion, carrying out this rigid adherence to the proprieties, even, in Rowland Austin's case, after committing a murder. One can but regret the absence of footlights, and the audience beyond, to applaud such strict attention to what is expected of such heroes. They "thee and thou" each other with sublime disregard of the common "you" to which they condescended but a few lines back; and they are fittingly rewarded with such names as Roderick, Chateaubriand, and Henrique. The description of their personal appearance is always carefully recorded; "white were his teeth, black his clothes"; clear grey, or deep blue eyes deserve special mention; but while a somewhat original description is given of classic features in one case, it is painful to find a villain meriting such an epithet as "oily."

“Who will Win” takes one’s breath away as the exploits of the dauntless hero are followed step by step. He shares with another the Author’s favourite description of “lips full yet not sensual,”—one wonders if another and real face were in his thoughts as he penned it. And when we read of Reginald’s fatigue in walking “as he could not swing his arms,” the recollection arises of those long walks over the Wiltshire Downs in which this habit was consciously or unconsciously indulged, and again we are brought face to face with the writer’s personality. To follow the hero through “American” regions—what other word can include all he traverses?—is to follow him into a literally New World, an America not known to its own inhabitants, nor to the ordinary reader and student of geography. But what does that matter when he shoots out a shark’s tooth with a deer rifle? Can romance go further? Be silent, Criticism, and ponder humbly on the marvellous! The monsters in the waters—presumably fish—have slimy fangs; matters nautical and military are treated from an original point of view which reminds us of Gilbert’s “Model Major-General.” But the “gem of the piece” lies in the enumeration of the reasons for Reginald’s resolution not to follow the fair damsel to whom he had, in one passing glance, lost his heart. “His first impulse was to follow the carriage. That he subdued for various reasons. Firstly, that it went too fast. Secondly, on account of the heat.” The rest of the reasons will be found towards the end of the first chapter; these are enough to show that Reginald was a careful man as well as a dauntless hero.

“Nonsense! thou art exquisite!” Was Jefferies an unconscious humourist after all?

“Masked” is more tragic, as becomes its title. It is perhaps necessary to say that the account of the inquest is not to be lightly perused; it was a serious and solemn occasion, and must be respectfully treated; at any rate the details as regards the effect of arsenic poisoning are fairly accurate, and that is more than can be said for the “facts” of some of our great modern novelists, whose heroes and heroines are poisoned as fancy paints, with effects unknown to the medical practitioner.

There is throughout, unhappily, abundance of indication of Jefferies’ want of acquaintance with the social life which he attempts to describe. This is painfully noticeable in all these early stories, and tells a tale to which no one can listen unsympathetically. There is a favourite description—at which even a cynic could hardly smile—of a beehive chair, which is always found in a stately hall or a lordly mansion. Is not this enough to show the boy’s love and veneration for what he *did* know about and could understand? After all, his very naivety has a charm for us.

It is in this spirit that his boyish work has been edited; may it be in this spirit, too, that readers will accept the republication of his boyish work, with the loving toleration born of admiration for the masterpieces of his maturity.

GRACE TOPLIS.

TRAITS OF THE OLDEN TIME

“And man to man, as leaves to leaves, succeed.” —*Iliad*.

MANNERS and men flourish and fall as the leaves, each succeeding generation bringing with it fresh men, and fresh manners, as each Spring fresh leaves, preserving a general likeness to the preceding, but widely differing in individual characteristics. If it be true that increased facilities of communication, increased facilities of acquiring knowledge, or what passes under its name, be accompanied with a gradual yet sure decay of the human form,—as the age of man is said to have decreased from a thousand to three score years and ten,—then is mankind—while striving still further to extend its knowledge, to improve its appliances for decreasing labour,—in reality slowly committing suicide, and that progress of which so much has been said is but its Funeral March.

Certainly it would seem that in these days fashions spring up, reign, and disappear, with a celerity unknown in ages past, so that it may be reasonably inferred, that ere long, unless speedily recorded, many interesting traits of our ancestors will be lost, buried beneath accumulated heaps of short lived fashions. Though each page of history reads like a monumental inscription, there is a melancholy pleasure in perusing these records of the past,—that past, which, without history, would be but a blank. One part of history is in a great measure founded upon tradition : it is that relating to the daily life of men not distinguished as having performed any great feat.

From these traditions the following facts which may prove interesting to the moderns, have been gathered. In the olden time before the “ style and calendar” was altered, (since which, according to the generation fast appearing, there have never been, nor will be, good days in old England again,) when the Bustard roamed over the Marlborough Downs, and Salisbury Plain, on which yet stands an inn known by the name of the bird, where it is said the last was seen; when instead of the demon-like shriek and thundering roar of the steam-engine, the cheery horn of the mail coach re-echoed from the high-banked, violet-flowered lanes. Though these times have been frequently styled “good,” there were many practices scarcely to sustain the title in modern estimation. If the spirit of money-getting has seized upon the nation, to the destruction of all that is manly, if there are never more to be good days in England, the degeneracy of the moderns is, in many respects a degeneracy that cannot be deplored. Such high souled abhorrence of crime as resulted in the hanging of a man, for sheep stealing or fire raising, seems to us a very arbitrary and artificial interpretation of the words “a life for a life.” To value a man’s life at the cost of a sheep—or of a rick of hay, would seem scarcely credible, even from a purely utilitarian view of the matter, and yet this was actually the fact in a professedly christian country. Nor has the law been so long abolished as might be supposed. That popular opinion was strong against these executions may be gathered from the old saying, “ that the high winds in March were an exhibition of Heaven’s anger at this wanton waste of human life”—the trials being held, and criminals usually hung in that month. These executions were generally carried out near the spot where the crime was committed, hence there was scarce a cross road without a gibbet as a ghastly sign-post, scarce a parish within whose bounds one such awful exhibition had not taken place. Some of these gibbets, in a dilapidated state, yet remain about the country ; one is still kept in good condition in consequence of some peculiar clause in a bequest.

At this date, bull-baiting flourished and the stocks were in frequent use. Almost every market town that boasted a square could show in its centre the stone to which the bull was fastened—several of these have been removed in the memory of man, while here and there the remains of the village stocks may be seen. They were usually placed in the most conspicuous spot in the village, often under a tree, and occasionally close to the church, probably with the double intention in the latter case of exposing the incarcerated criminal as

an edifying spectacle to the church goers, while the sound of the bells might admonish him to repent. A very perfect specimen of a pair in the latter position, may still be seen in the parish of Chiseldon, Wilts,³ within two hours walk of the Swindon station, upon the Great Western Railway. Through all these outrages, (as they would now seem,) upon justice, comes to the surface that great principle of English law, that great cause of English liberty—open trial, public punishment, or public execution.

That veneration which is inherent in man for the customs in which he has grown into maturity, and his forefathers before him, is very apparent, in the lower agricultural labourer of Wiltshire and the West.

Many years, even generations, had doubtless passed away, ere the people became thoroughly imbued with that mode of thought now gradually disappearing, and it will take many years even yet to entirely remove that affectionate esteem with which the old customs are still regarded, even by those who are perhaps well aware of their error. So it was with the “old style and calendar.” In the old time when almanacks were scarce and dear—that selling at three and sixpence which can now be had for sixpence,—it was a common practice of the wise man of the village,—who had perhaps assisted the clerk of the church, and been a journey with the coach, or had otherwise mixed with the outside world, and learnt more than his fellows,—to construct an almanack of his own device.

There was an old man, whose son is still living,⁴—himself a venerable grey-headed person of seventy,—whose method in the matter predicting the weather in his self-made almanack, was to observe the first twelve days of the new year – a day for a month—as indications of the weather that would prevail during the ensuing year. With the alteration of the calendar came a difficulty, but if I remember aright, the old fellow continued to calculate as usual.

It is curious even now to observe the reliance placed upon the predictions of “Moore” by the agricultural labourer, to whom the weather is an all important matter. He who has “Moore’s Almanack,” and can read it, is the oracle of the village, and this to men whose long acquaintance with the fluctuations of weather, the unreliableness even of the plainest signs, would, one would think, entirely unfit them for such blind faith. Circles will gather around the almanack oracle even at the present day, in the village inn, as, while the liquor goes round, the fire blazes up, and the wind howls without, he slowly spells out the predictions of the weather prophet, or plunging into deeper mysteries hints an explanation of the hieroglyphic, with which the proprietor’s of “Moore’s Almanack” yearly present to their readers. Any casual accordance of the weather with that predicted is treasured up in the memories of his listeners; these they produce as unanswerable arguments of his infallibility, forgetting the numerous instances of failure. This is a remnant of that superstition which saw wars predicted by the Northern Lights ; the death of high personages, or pestilence, by comets.

Here and there yet survives a grey-headed old fellow, who can recount his adventures when the militia was called out,—not the present bands, but those that preceded them ; how so and so was in the awkward squad, and how it was necessary to tie hay-bands about his right and straw around his left leg, that the ignorant recruit might know one from the other, so that the word of command ran instead of “right about, left about face,” “hay about, and straw about.” In those days, when paper was expensive and scarce, it was no uncommon thing to see dealers and farmers of considerable means, after a day’s marketing, chalk up upon the knees or thighs of their unmentionables, the separate value of each article they had sold, then strike a line and add up the total, as if on a slate. Many of these would have been at a loss with a

³ There is now a Station at Chiseldon on the Mid. and S.W. Junction Railway.

⁴ 1866

pen, some even unable to write their names, but their interest had compelled them to gain some slight knowledge of figures.

The simplicity of the poorer classes of agriculturalists at that time is well illustrated by an authenticated anecdote. When the price of bread was high, and a partial famine the result, two old men—the oracles of their village—they having made several long journeys, and even penetrated to London—were actually deputed by the starving rustics to proceed to Parliament, and lay their grievances before that assembly, a subscription was made to pay their expenses, they went, doubtless chuckling over the gullibility of their fellows, and returned after some time—the money all gone—of course, unsuccessful, being unable, they said to obtain an audience of the King.

It was formerly a common custom for the members of the farmer's family, himself included, to dine at the same time, at the same table, and upon the same viands as his labourers, who were only partially paid in money, the greater portion of their wages being in kind. Nor is this practice yet entirely extinct, among the smaller class of farmers. At that time when, owing to the bad roads, communications between outlying farms and towns was difficult, and in winter almost impossible, such farms were to some extent colonies in themselves. At the approach of winter a cow was killed and salted down, good store of October was brewed, and huge stacks of firing piled up within easy reach of the door, nor did the careful housewife forget her bundle of herbs—"yarbs" as she called them. The necessary consequences of this familiarity between master and man, this banishment from the polite pleasures of the town, and the *ennui* resulting from long evenings with little or nothing to amuse, were bacchanalian orgies, and drunken bouts; it was a frequent thing, and considered a good joke, to fill the kettle from which according to appearance the spirits served out to the guests were to be slackened with water, with spirits itself—say gin—thus were those who otherwise would have stopped short of intoxication, entrapped, and either wallowed beneath the table, or were hoisted upon horse-back, and in an incapable, foolhardy state, rode a few hundred yards towards home at a headlong pace, then fell, and if fortunate to escape death from a kick, seldom got off without severe injuries. This was one feature of the famous hospitality of our immediate forefathers. The habit which still lingers of pressing a guest to eat and drink even when assured by him that he had already done so, probably arose from the same cause. Persons whose lives were continually spent in manual labour with purely animal pleasures, naturally imagined—taking no time to think—that others must be in a like condition, and under the impression themselves, that feasting, since it was an escape from all labour, save that of a pleasing kind, must be at all times welcome, could scarcely comprehend the indifference manifested by strangers to their well meant but mistaken offers.

In few places can the ancient Anglo-Saxon accent be so well preserved as in Wiltshire. The conversation of the lower class of agriculturists, sounds like a dialogue of the Heptarchy. Words that may be found in old Saxon works, elsewhere obsolete, are here still in popular use, and to the antiquarian ear create a not unpleasant delusion. "A lissome lass," is a frequent phrase for a lithe-, some, lively, supple girl—a phrase that may be found, if I remember rightly, in many an ancient ballad. The Anglo-Saxon affix *an* or *un*, is very perceivable, as also the prefix *a*, for *be*, as afore instead of before. These few examples might be multiplied into pages with a little trouble. One, very often heard, is the use of the word "main," to express power, force, or strength, probably from the Anglo-Saxon *maegn*—strength, power, force; as a "main gurt un," a very powerful or great one, or powerful great one; "a main sharp vrost," a very powerful sharp frost; "a main blow," a strong blow or wind. These traits are fast disappearing, before the all-powerful influences of steam and the printing press. The difficulty of teaching persons to read and speak correctly, accustomed thus to make use of what is now a dialect, but was the great source of the English language, is very great, and is augmented if they possess the slightest knowledge of letters,—letters in a

literal sense—so different from the real value, is that they set upon them. I was once told by an educated farmer, that, wanting a stamping iron made with his initials J. J. upon it, he went to the village blacksmith, and explained his desire. The old blacksmith seemed perfectly to understand him, but determined to make sure ere he left the shop, he marked the letters J.J. with a piece of chalk on the wall. “Aw,” cried the old fellow, “I zee now, now I knaws. Thee said a jay (g), but thee means a jod (j).” It has often been remarked that all nations when in an uncultivated, semi-civilized state, hand down their knowledge or their sentiments by songs or ballads to their descendants. This is true even of England. Many of these old songs often of a highly comic, though rather coarse character, yet remain, and for a quart of ale or a pipe of tobacco, may be unearthed from the budgets of the grey-haired agricultural labourer. The milker sings at the pail even when his breath is frozen upon his chin, and the roaring chorus of “The Leathern Bottel,” may still be heard from a village tavern here and there, while the song itself is yet fresh in the memories of men whose singing days have long gone by. Paradoxical as it may appear, the agricultural labourer though living in the present, and rarely careful to provide for the future, yet lives in the past. All his traditions, histories, songs and customs, have been handed down to him from time immemorial, his talk is of his forefathers, and he is himself becoming antiquated and out of date. In those primitive days, men of considerable substance—, farmers—went to market in their smock frocks ; and perhaps the only persons in the parish that wore black coats, were the squire and the parson. It was then a common custom for pedestrian travellers, on account of the wretched state of the roads—which required sounding ere being ventured upon—to carry an iron-shod staff of great length, and I remember being shewn the worm-eaten and rusty remains of one of these pilgrim staves, as they might be called, religiously preserved by its possessor as a relic of his grandfather who had used it nearly a hundred years before. In the best of weather, the roads, in the estimation of the present generation, as they then existed, would have been accounted as miserable, but in wet weather, in winter, and especially in snow, were frequently impassable. Gentlemen are still living who can remember driving over the downs on the top of the snow, and getting upset upon something which turned out on closer inspection to be the roof of the mail coach—literally buried—having been by mistake driven into a kind of narrowing lane of snow, and jammed so tightly that horseflesh could not stir it backwards or forwards. It was deserted, and what became of the poor passengers no one knoweth. “The good old times.” Medical science at least, as practised in the rural districts, by the wise man or woman of the village, was in a strange state. As was said once of the remedies prescribed by the ancient physicians, their efficacy seemed measured by their nastiness. One remedy if only for its strangeness, must not be passed by. It was a custom for the old folk to go abroad early in the morning and catch all the lockworms possible ; these they placed in moss, that they might wriggle about and clean themselves, and finally confined in a closed jar, buried deep in a heap of manure. It is said that the heat melted the worms into a sort of soil, very useful to rub upon a sprained foot.

A STRANGE STORY

Why is it, as I gaze upon these verdant slopes, that the past rushes back upon my mind, and I see, rising above the crest of yonder camp-crowned hill, the forms of the ancient Northmen warriors, the beams of the morning sun glancing from the steel heads of their lances, as they glance now from yon trembling dew-drop— one of nature's jewels—pendent from the earth-born grass-blade ? Why is it that I hear in the whistling of the morning air through the bennets, the rustling of the raven standard unfolded to the breeze, and as it sighs through yon woods, the shout which greets the advancing Saxons?

“Why is it that the scene which surrounds us, the rudely-sculptured form of the White Horse above our heads, higher still the fosse and ramparts of the ancient camp, beneath us the time-worn barrow of Pendragon, on whose grass-denuded summit we rest, should have the power to render as naught the wide abyss of a thousand years, to bridge over the chasm, to call up before the mental eye deeds half hidden in the mist of years, while yet the ear is conscious of the cooing of doves sheltered from the heat among the sprays of the green woods, the eye is conscious of the shadow of a passing rook and that the hare crouching in the fern but a few yards distant, watches our movements with fear and trembling?”

Such was the question propounded to me by my friend, Gerald Fitzhugh, as we sat, one beautiful autumn morning, on the edge of the Dragon's Mount, beneath the White Horse Down; and I confessed my inability to answer it except by the oft-repeated phrases – “a peculiar action of the mind” – “a weird imagination.”

“A peculiar action of the mind! “he replied, while a slight sneer curled his finely-cut lip and his dark full eye shot forth a lightning glance. “Roderick, I see, like the majority of mankind, you are content to ignore that which you cannot understand, instead of seeking to unravel the mystery. You are acquainted with the written history of the human race, and you must be aware that in every age, in every clime, under every condition of life, mankind has tacitly believed in the existence, outside as it were of the material world, of an invisible power, an omnipresent, substance-how shall I give that a name that is nameless? Was not this great truth shadowed forth by the jinn, the genii of eastern romance, the spirits of the western world, whom by the performances of mysterious rites it lay in the magician's, the wise man's power to evoke?

“The traditionary history of every nation invariably preserves the history of some prophet, some messenger of good or evil—most frequently the latter – who delivered his prophecies while rapt from himself, while under inspiration, casting, as it were, a glance into futurity, seeing what was proceeding, or should proceed, in the council-chambers, or on the battlefields of another race, and calculating with super-eminent intellect the changes, the revolutions, which would ensue in his own country.

“Who has not heard of the throes of the Delphian priestess, when mounted on the sacred tripod, and of the charmed numbers which flowed from her tongue ? Who has not read with wonder of the marvellous deeds wrought by the Hindoo necromancers, of the “second sight” of the Highland Seers, of the divination of the east, the “black art” of the west, and what was and is thus faintly outlined by the power of the mind to separate itself from the power of the body, to become, as it were, mingled with this nameless medium, of which it originally was, and to which it shall again return, when its prison bonds of clay are loosed?

“Roderick, there are two classes of fools in the world - those who disbelieve without a reason; and those who disbelieve with a reason; do you belong to either of these ?”

“No,” I replied, “I neither believe nor disbelieve.”

“Then,” he said, “your mind is like one of the hanging stones attributed to the Druids, which are situated on the hills of Cornwall, are equipoised, and will sway at a touch. Listen to me, I will give it a final stroke, which shall either lodge it firmly for aye, or send it—fallen for

ever, crashing down the precipice which yawns at the foot of reason's mountain. I will address no argument to you, for the subject is inexhaustible; I will relate what perhaps you will consider of more weight, my own conversion.

"It was in the Autumn of 1849, that I received an invitation from an old friend, who lived in the country, pressing me to exchange the pestilential air of the cholera-stricken Metropolis, for the pure breeze which blows across the Western Downs. I immediately accepted it and shortly afterwards arrived at my friend's mansion, strangely enough on a day appointed for humiliation on account of the dreadful scourge which was decimating the population.

"My friend, whose nature presented the supposed anomaly of a kind warm heart, combined with a bitter sarcastic infidelity to the church's dogmas, had gone out for a stroll, and his wife was at church. The head servant, however, immediately recognised me, and I was shown into a small apartment, used as an ordinary sitting-room by the family. I laid myself down, to wait for my friend's return, upon a couch by the open window, which by a verandah and steps, communicated with the lawn beneath.

"A luxurious scent from the flowers in the garden floated in at the window, at times almost suffocating me, while ever and anon a powerful but sickly odour from the laurels and other exotic evergreens beneath, literally oppressed me with perfume, and, combined with the noontide heat, brought on a faintness, which rapidly disposed me to slumber. At length as it were, completely overcome, I sank into semi-consciousness. I could not have moved, hand nor foot, yet I was perfectly aware that my eyes were open, and that I still retained the sense of hearing. I could see, through the interstices of the roses which twined around the verandah, the blue hills in the far distance; the motionless branches of the trees, which seemed borne down by the oppressive weight of heat; the starling pluming himself in the shadow of a cedar on the lawn.

"I could hear, as at a great distance, the tick of the golden clock upon the marble mantle-piece the noise the canary made in the cage above my head, as he leaped from wire to wire; and, strangely enough, I could see his dark eye, I could see the hands of the clock pointing to half-past one, I could see the curiously carved antique buffet in the room behind me, covered with articles of vertu,—the large mirrors opposite it reflecting the painted rose upon the corniced ceiling. Stranger still to my mental gaze—for it could not have been to my mortal eye, the village church, deep in a valley, was visible, and I could see the sky through the bell-holes, in the square, battlemented tower.

"How long I remained in this state, grasping, as it were, the whole landscape in my mind, I cannot tell; but suddenly it seemed as though a black object passed before my eyes—all became confusion and darkness, I lost my consciousness, and fell into a deep sleep, from which I was awakened by a piercing scream. I started up and found myself confronting, in the open window, a woman whose dark eyes were fixed upon mine in undisguised terror, while her countenance, which I immediately recognized as that of my friend's wife, was pale as marble, and her form shook like an aspen leaf. Ere a word could be said on either side, my friend,—familarly addressed as the Squire of Ashurst - sprang up the steps behind his wife, and in his surprise at seeing me, did not notice her pallor, but came forward and shook me by the hand. He then turned, but she was gone, at which he seemed somewhat hurt.

"Conversation flagged at dinner, despite the Squire's sometimes sarcastic, sometimes humorous sallies. His wife seemed absorbed in reflections of pleasing character, while I scarcely heard what was said, so much had I been discomposed by the occurrences of the morning.

"We sat long over our wine, but it was in silence,—painful silence to me, and I felt relieved when a footman announced that a gentlemen desired a few minutes' private conversation with my friend.

“Scarcely had he left the apartment than his wife entered, and, walking straight up to me, laid her hand upon my shoulder. “ Were you at Church this morning ?” she asked, gazing earnestly at me, as though to preclude the possibility of my telling a falsehood. The question surprised me, but I answered at once in the negative, at which she turned pale and sank upon a chair. Still more surprised, I plied her with questions, and at length succeeded in learning the truth. It appeared that she had waited, after service was concluded, in the village church, until the congregation and the Minister had departed, for the purpose of having a few moments’ conversation with the sexton, whose necessities she had relieved. He let her out by a small door in the chancel opposite a wicket gate in the churchyard wall, which by a private footpath led to Ashurst. As she turned round from wishing him good morning, she abruptly came face to face with two persons walking swiftly towards the church, and who must have entered the churchyard by the wicket gate, although she had neither heard nor seen it opened. They seemed to brush past her, looking straight before them, and although she saw their countenances but for a moment, it was long enough to recognize one of them as mine! Startled and surprised that I had not spoken, she turned again and distinctly saw one of the figures enter the church by the chancel door, which seemed to be opened by someone within, saying to the resemblance of myself, which appeared to vanish round the corner of the church:—“Seven years.” Amazed and half-alarmed she hurried to the main door of the church, and there met the sexton who had just locked it, and in answer to her eager enquiries said that no one could have entered the church since she left, as he had securely bolted the chancel door behind her. He offered to reopen the door and make a search, but her courage here failed her ; she refused and hastened home, first however, by some singular chance, observing that hand of the church clock in the tower pointed to half-past one.

“Judge of her surprise and amazement upon finding me, as she came up the verandah steps, soundly asleep before her! Herself a Scotchwoman, she was naturally superstitious, and a firm believer in the appearance of the wraiths of persons doomed death. I could see that she already looked upon me with an expression of pity, mingled with sorrow. Scarcely knowing what to think, [for her position, her character, and the simplicity with which she told her tale, placed her above suspicion of falsehood,] yet mentally putting it down to some delusion, I was still sceptic enough to cross-examine her, and the answers she gave convinced me that what she had seen could not have been the result of trickery, or fancied resemblance. It appeared that she had followed my vanishing figure round the corner of the church, and thus to the main door, but had seen no more of it, although the churchyard was level and the line of sight clear in every direction ; while the wall was far too high to allow of a human being leaping over it.

“It could not have doubled back without her perceiving it, as the church at that end approached so near the wall that there was only room for one to pass at a time, nor had she heard, as she passed this place, any footsteps or noise such as might have been made by a person within the building. The sexton had seen nothing, although the figure—if human,—must have passed him to leave the place and, as the private path she had pursued to Ashurst at her utmost speed, was scarcely a third as long as that by which the figure must have left the churchyard,—it followed that I could not have reached the mansion—supposing, as we did for a moment, that I had visited the church in a state of somnolency—until long after her arrival. She could not remember whether the figures had actually brushed against her—as they seemed to do, nor whether they made a noise, or moved their limbs in walking, contrary to the ordinary customs of spirits, who are generally described as “gliding along.” She frankly avowed that the whole occurrence had occupied too short a period of time to allow of her noticing such a peculiarity, and that if she had done so, her subsequent alarm had entirely obliterated all remembrance of it, which admission disposed me the more readily to believe

her, as it proved that something out of the usual course of things had happened to disturb her equanimity.

“As a last resource, I questioned her as to whether she remembered the features of the other figure, and to my surprise she gave me a description sufficiently minute to enable me to identify it with a *savant*, at that moment, in all probability, some seventy miles distant, with whom, but a short time previously, I had held a long discussion, and , who, although noted for his scientific ability, could never gain converts to his theories on account of an unfortunate habit he had contracted of concocting and publishing the most improbable and unheard of fables. All these circumstances made a strong impression on my mind at that time, especially as, in accordance with a wish he had expressed, I kept them secret, and was thus perhaps led to brood upon them. Even at this distance of time I have a distinct remembrance of the shuddering sensation which ran through me as I entered my lonely chamber that night, half expecting, half dreading the appearance of something supernatural, and yet at the same time smiling at my own fear. The next morning the terrible intelligence reached us that the cholera had broken out in the adjacent village, and with such violence did it rage, that in five hours out of a population of three hundred, twenty lay at death’s door. The Squire immediately determined upon breaking up his establishment in order to repair to the seaside; I accompanied him to the railway station; and as I shook hands with his wife, I could not but observe that the melancholy smile upon her countenance announced her firm belief that we should not meet again. She was right—she died scarcely three months afterwards, of an unknown disease. The train which was to convey me back to London at length started, and as I looked from the windows of my carriage in mute farewell, I saw pass across the platform—evidently but that moment arrived, the form of the *savant*.

“Three years afterwards I revisited Ashurst, and found it strangely altered. The village street was deserted, the roofs of the cottages had fallen in, the doors creaked dismally as they swung to and fro in every blast. Not a human being could I find; the place of man was taken by the rooks, who fearlessly perched upon the rotten palings, and “cawed” me a melancholy welcome. The Squire’s mansion was utterly deserted, the doors locked, the shutters up, the weeds growing thick in the once cultivated and carefully trimmed flower beds; the starlings, who built in the roof, alone remained. I turned away with a strange sense of loneliness, and as a last resource bent my steps towards the church. Alas! the graveyard was populous enough, and the stones told a fearful tale. Up through the interstices of the pavement had sprung the green grass, while the gravel strewn paths were hidden with rank vegetation. Innumerable pigeons wheeled in crowds around the grey weather-beaten tower, or sat in rows upon the projections; to a Hindoo mind they would have seemed the souls of the dead below. Slowly I wandered round that melancholy place, the wind moaning through the sombre foliage of the yew trees, in solemn requiem, as it rose and fell; the sun was hidden behind a cloud; all seemed bear witness to the awful power of death.

“At length I approached the church portal; a bunch of keys hung from the door which was ajar; I pushed it open and entered. Glancing up the aisle with its rows of empty pews on either hand, I beheld, beneath the pulpit, leaning upon a staff, an old man, who was apparently engaged in reflection as his eyes were on the ground. He looked up as my footsteps echoed through the vast, deserted building, and in his cadaverous countenance, his cold misty blue eyes, bowed back, and tottering limbs, around which hung in folds garments far too large for his shrunken form, I recognized the Sexton. From him, only too ready to communicate his knowledge, I learnt the fearful story of the pestilence which had swept the inhabitants of a whole village from off the face of the earth, into the insatiable jaws of the grave. The Squire had escaped, but he rarely visited the place; and amongst the flourishing country around, the parish lay like a wilderness—the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Little by little I drew it all from the old man, listening with patience to his childish wanderings, and

at length I learned a truth that did indeed surprise me. It seemed that the *savant* I had seen at the railway station, had heard of the cholera breaking out in the village—he had a theory of his own, and he came here to test it, regardless of danger. He died the last of the doomed, and the sexton led me to the vault where he was interred. It lay just within the chancel door, and in the clear marble slab above his head, by order of the Squire, had been cut the frightfully mocking inscription :—” He who depopulated this parish, lies beneath.” The date upon the stone was August 16th, 1850, exactly one year from the day the Squire’s wife had seen his figure enter the chancel door.”

“A curious coincidence,” I remarked, as my friend ceased narrating. His lips again curled as he added “To-morrow will see the seven years fulfilled—will there be another curious coincidence ?” “I should like to visit that place,” I said, still incredulous. “And you shall,” he replied, and seizing me by the arm, he dragged me, at some peril to both of us, down the steep side of the Dragon’s Mount, in the direction of Uffington. Late that evening, the agency of the iron horse, set us down far in the interior of Wiltshire, and it was with strange and mingled feelings that I was introduced to the Squire of my friend’s narrative, who had once more taken up his residence in Ashurst. Nothing remarkable passed that evening but I shall never forget the sneer which curled the Squire’s lips as he replied, in answer to an observation I made on the great width of the village street, “Yes it is twice as broad as long, and has three mud huts on one side, and as many oak trees on the other, with the nest of a croaking raven in one, which the inhabitants are afraid to listen to, and afraid to kill. This we owe to science.” My friend Fitz-hugh early complained of fatigue, in consequence of which we retired to rest, nor did we reassemble until a late hour the next morning.

Fitz-hugh and I sat alone the greater part of the morning in the room where he had had his peculiar sleep, the Squire being busy in his study. My friend seemed pre-occupied and spoke but at intervals, and when he did, it was in a melancholy tone; he had evidently some presentiment hanging like a weight upon his usually buoyant spirits. A little after one, the Squire entered and engaged in conversation with me. I shall never forget the start from which I awoke from the spell which his wild, sarcastic talk was throwing around me, when, precisely as the clock pointed to half-past one, Fitz-hugh sprang up, flung the window open, and stepped out upon the verandah—regardless of a cry from the Squire—exclaiming as he did so, “Seven years are fulfilled.” It was the last sentence he uttered. There was a crash, a low rumbling sound, the verandah—one of its supports having been removed in order to be repaired—gave way, and he was precipitated from a height of twenty feet upon a stone flag. We buried him in the village church beside the *savant*, and even in that hour of tribulation and sorrow, the Squire could not refrain from exclaiming, pointing as he did so to the inscription on the tomb of the martyr of science, “That, at least, is no lying epitaph.” In conclusion, one question; Reader, what is a coincidence ?

HENRIQUE BEAUMONT

CHAPTER I.

IN the West of England stands a mansion, so closely embosomed on three sides by wooded downs, that often the dead branches of the trees, carried on the breath of the tempest, crash against the walls ; while upon the western side, after melting into a lawn, the ground again rises, and is crested with a fir plantation. At the extremity of the lawn there is an arbor, whose thickly-matted covering of ivy, served, some years ago, to shelter from the night air two persons seated on a rustic bench within, while affording them an unchecked view of the sinking sun. The elder of the twain, a man of some fifty years, leant his gray head upon his hand, gazing with some degree of sadness in his deep brown eyes at the sunset. The younger, a youth of twenty, a model of strength and manly beauty, contemplated with absent glance the tessellated mosaic at his feet, which had once formed the floor of a Roman villa. It was a spring evening. Nature was decking herself for her bridal with the sun, which men call Summer-tide, humming as she did so the glorious old melody which goat-footed Pan pipes for evermore. The sweet voices of the wood chorused the magic strain ; even the drooping bluebells rang a fairy chime as they swayed in the evening air, and were answered by the low notes of the nightingale in the hazel grove above. All was harmony—all beauty. The old man observed it, but the young one did not. He was occupied, not with nature, but with her masterpiece, wherein, as in a concave mirror, she beholds the essence of her beauties and her mysteries concentrated: he was thinking of a woman. “Nephew,” said the old man at length, “I cannot help thinking of this visitor at the squire’s, who, you say, has so rapidly won his way into my old friend’s favour. His name Austin—Austin—sounds familiar. Tell me more of him.”

“I know but little “ replied the youth. “He and his mother, Mrs. Martha Austin, as you are aware, came from the metropolis for the ostensible purpose of improving her health—they engaged a house of the squire ; I know no more, except that, strangely enough, they are said to be some relation to Bob Austin, the “obstinate old miller.”

“Martha Austin ! “ exclaimed the old man, strangely agitated. “A relation of the miller’s ? Her son --, the son of --, what was I about to say? He - .”

“What— what ? Uncle, my future happiness is concerned in your answer, for you know that he — he —dares to approach Ellen, and the squire looks at me coldly.”

“Henry, or rather Henrique Beaumont,” at length replied the old man in a suppressed voice, “it is time that you learnt your true history, and then no longer will you wonder that the name of Austin agitates me. Listen ! My sister, poor Antoinette, married your father, who was an officer in the Indian army twenty years ago. He bore the name of Beaumont, and traced his unsullied descent from the fiery companions of William the Conqueror; he could have boasted of more, for he inherited their virtues without their vices. Soon after the nuptials, the war with Tippoo broke out, his regiment was ordered to India, and Antoinette accompanied him thither. He served with honour at the taking of Seringapatam, but he, whom the deadly bullets had spared, was struck down by wasting fever. Borne down with grief, your mother resolved upon returning to England, and although fearing- that her own health would not outlast the voyage, she embarked on board a sailing vessel, carrying with her, yourself, a Hindoo female servant, and several trunks containing her whole fortune, which had been converted into jewels by Beaumont just before his death. His reason for this was, that as valuable jewels, owing-to the disturbed state of the country, were sold at nominal prices, he might thus upon returning to Great Britain, realize a large profit. Knowing nothing of business, (how should she ?) she entrusted these trunks to the captain and his wife, nor took

any safe-guard, save sending me a letter containing an inventory in her own hand-writing, but which was of no avail as there was no witness's signature to attest its truth. Basely they repaid her trust. When the vessel arrived I hastened to the port, but my poor sister had succumbed off the coast of Africa, her body was committed to the waves, her son remained in charge of the Hindoo, and her fortune was gone, none knew whither, though all might guess. We had no legal remedy as there was no direct proof of their guilt."

"The Captain's name ?" said Henrique rising.

"Austin," replied the old man, not noticing the wild expression in his nephew's dark eyes.

"Austin,—Martha Austin was the name of his wife, this Rowland is no doubt their son,—the son of thieves,—aspiring to the hand of Ellen Meremont, my old friend's daughter!" He glanced up, but Henrique was gone. His bosom filled with contending emotions—rage at the duplicity of his rival for the hand of squire Meremont's daughter, anticipated triumph, and grief for the fate of his mother, now first revealed to him. Henrique had cleared the lawn at a few strides, and turning sharply to the right, followed a steep-sided valley, his head o'er-canopied with the meeting branches of a lime-tree avenue.

For a quarter of an hour he pursued the path until the opening of the vista of the trees permitted the view of a rambling mansion, built at several periods of English architecture—each portion incongruous with its neighbour, yet forming a whole with which no fault could be found. On its many-gabled roof sat rows of pigeons, cooing vespers, their gentle notes almost lost in the cawing of the rooks, whose nests were built in a superb row of elms upon the left side of the valley. On the right, the valley approached near to the mansion, its slope wooded to the very brink of an extensive lake just beyond the building, which seemed to shut out all egress from the vale upon that side ; while, upon the other, a half ruined mill, whose wheel, exposed to every vicissitude of wind and weather, was turned by a spring raising higher up, and which, having performed its work, fed the pond, totally obscured—so narrow was the valley,—all view of a swelling English landscape below. Henrique walked to the porch of the mansion, and entering the open door without hesitation, crossed the hall, and passed into a wide and spacious chamber, whose single window afforded a beautiful view of the still surface of the lake without, only broken into ripples near the shore, under the willows, by a moorhen. Apple trees growing upon the valley's side mirrored themselves in the water, their pink blossoms forming a strange contrast with the green aquatic plants, and the dark shadow of the wooded shore. The solitary inmate of the apartment was an old man in a bee-hive chair drawn near the window, upon whom Henrique glanced without being perceived, so intently was he gazing without. His head was covered with a velvet skull cap, and he still wore the silver buckles of his youth upon his shoes. His arms were folded against his breast, his eyes were fixed in one direction. It was Squire Meremont. For forty years, evening after evening, had he sat in that position, gazing with growing hatred upon the revolving water-wheel, and ruined mill, which blocked up the view and formed a sore blot upon his estate. Full forty years had he tried every art to wrest that wretched tenement from its still more wretched but obstinate possessor, and every evening there he sat, to get what glimpses he could of the landscape beneath, or to return glance for glance with the miller, whose grimy face and red beard might even now be seen peering through the single Cyclops-eye-like window of the mill. He whom Henrique sought was not there, and as softly as he entered he left. As he crossed the hall, voices at a short distance made him suddenly pause. He started, recognizing the tones, and pushing open the door of an apartment, stood upon the threshold. A young man knelt at the feet of a maiden whom he endeavoured to prevent rising from an ottoman, by detaining her hand in his. "Rowland Austin," muttered Henrique, setting his teeth.

"Unhand me, Sir, said the maiden, while a rosy flush mantled her fair forehead, a glance of rising indignation shot from her deep blue eyes, and her lip quivered. "Hear me, Ellen

Meremont," replied Austin entreatingly. Henrique's nails dug deep into his palms, he held his breath lest he should lose the answer, on which his peace of mind depended.

"Unhand me," reiterated Ellen. "Ay, unhand her," shouted Henrique, stepping forward. Ellen fell back upon the couch where she sat, but Rowland sprang to his feet. For a moment the rivals confronted each other in silence, each with glances of equal scorn, while a strange, gladiator-like impulse rose in the heart of each to spring upon and annihilate the other.

"Your conduct is far from gentlemanly," said Rowland at length recovering his self-control. "Be gone," shouted Henrique.

"I have yet to learn that Mr. Beaumont commands in this house," replied Rowland. Henrique raised his arm, but ere he could strike, a step crossed the hall, and the Squire entered. His mouth was working and for a moment he did not speak.

"Father," said Ellen, imploringly, in her low sweet voice.

"Henrique Beaumont, thyself begone, and never enter my house again," answered the old man in tones of trembling rage.

Henrique was thunderstruck. He glanced from the inexorable countenance of the old man, to Ellen, now pale and alarmed, but whose look meeting his could not be mistaken—it was one of deep sympathy. Turning on his heel without daring to look at his successful rival, who followed his retreating form with a sneer of triumph, lest his passion should again get the better of him, Henrique left the house.

Wandering to and fro, he knew not where, upon the downs, his heated forehead cooled by the evening air, and all unconscious of the beauties of the night, Henrique sought in violent motion to absorb his violent passion ; and at length somewhat successful, he re-entered the mansion of his uncle, Mr. Bertoun. He was greeted in silence by a glance of sorrow which intimated that all was known. A gentleman came forward in another moment, and heartily shook his hand. It was Mr. Lookahed, a visitor at Meremont Hall.

"Harry," said this individual, as he sank into an easy chair, and extended his legs to a preposterous distance. "You have conducted this business extraordinarily badly. When will young men learn that the advantages of diplomacy are not confined to courts ? In the politics of every day life they are equally useful. Why did you not come to me ? Your old friend, too, whom you know nothing delights more than this sort of thing—'tis all I can do now, alas ! to be the adviser of the rising generation. I think I ought to know something of mankind, a man who has been round Cape Horn, ransacked the Pyramids, and dissected a mummy, ought to understand a little, I should imagine, of the workings of the human breast. Here is a tangled skein you have made of it. Bertoun has detailed me your history—he should have known better than to have done that to you when I was not by. I could have made your fortune out of it. You first hint—then you surmise—the Squire begins to grow suspicious, in comes his old friend Bertoun with a circumstantial account—Rowland is in dirty water, and you can send him spinning like a thrashed hound. Instead of this, you fly out into a passion—forsooth, as though history had not informed you of the effects which it invariably produces—when will the world learn that ? Your idea no doubt was to have pistoled the scoundrel and you go to work in style. The Squire sees you raise your arm—and, worse still, actually command in his house ; the jealous old gentleman hates that worse than poachers ; he knows nothing of the antecedents of the episode, he interrupts, he orders you out of the house. Why on earth did you not come to me ?"

Henrique glanced at the lengthy form of Mr. Lookahed, but said nothing. Mr. Lookahed sneered, elevated his aquiline nose in the air, and shut one of his clear grey eyes. "I see," he said, "I understand. You young fellows have a great contempt for us. Bertoun, recount to me again little Harry's history,"

Mr. Bertram gave him a resumé frequently interrupted by cross-questioning.

“What became of the Hindoo servant ?” Lookahed asked at length. “She remained with Mr. Austin,” was the reply.

“ Ah, I see an opening. This Hindoo was on board when the robbery was committed, for I have no doubt there was a robbery, she remained with the perpetrators—*ergo*, she shared in it. We must get hold of this woman, and there is no time to lose. This unfortunate affair of Henrique’s has determined the Squire upon pursuing a scheme he has been revolving for some time. He will marry Ellen to Austin. Austin is some relation of the old miller, whom Meremont hates as a child does a wash stand ; there’s the fulcrum on which Rowland places his lever. The miller dead, Rowland puts in a claim and hands it over to the Squire. Ellen will be sacrificed, dear little thing, she has no idea of disobedience,—fault of education—civilization—oh ! happy state of savagery—innocence—filial affection—Iphigenia—Jephthah’s daughter—ditto, and so on.”

Henrique could not repress a sigh. Mr. Lookahed suddenly ceased in his rambling talk, sprang up and shook him by the hand.

“Henry” he said, “I sympathise with you, I will aid you—I will bring intelligence from the enemy’s camp, I will twist myself like a snake into Austin’s secret, and I will save my old friend Meremont from this rascally alliance into which his blind hatred of the miller is leading him: And Ellen—ah ! dream of her, Henrique ! “ He was gone.

CHAPTER II.

In the afternoon of the following day, Mr. Lookahed and Mr. Rowland Austin might have been descried reclining upon the green sward opposite the ruined mill. Into that old fashioned country place the custom of dining at six, and supping at midnight had not yet crept, but following the manners of his ancestors, Squire Meremont dined at noon, nor varied except upon Sundays. Time is the most irresistible of all innovators, but fashion would seem even more powerful, for it would encroach upon time itself. Laziness is usually the characteristic of man after dinner, and no other explanation is necessary to account for the position of the pair. Mr. Lookahed leaned his back against an apple-tree whose white sweet-scented blossoms fell in clouds like snow upon the green grass, whenever a zephyr strayed through the branches. His wide-brimmed hat was sloped over his forehead, assisting the shadow of the tree to keep off the fierce beams of the midday sun. His legs were extended to their full length; his arms crossed over his bosom, and an indescribable air of epicurean enjoyment, self-satisfaction and contempt of others generally, hovered over his figure. Austin, also beneath the shade of the tree, was lying at full length on the sward, lazily smoking a cigar. His dark eyes were half closed in sensuous enjoyment of the cool shade and fragrant weed. His countenance was almost classical in profile. His cheek-bones were high, his lips fun his teeth strong as a bull-dog’s.

“ Weather reminds me of India,” remarked Mr. Lookahed at length, glancing at his companion. A yawn was the only reply.

“ Ah !—beautiful,” ejaculated Mr. Philip ; Lookahed, as a puff of smoke blew in his face. Austin looked up, and rolled over on one side, so as to get a better view of his companion’s countenance. “You don’t smoke ?” he asked.

“ Very seldom, but I have recollections, sympathies aroused, when I scent the weed.”

Another yawn from Mr. Austin, accompanied by a look which seemed to say, “ go and anecdote to your heart’s content—I am happy.”

“Yes,” continued Mr. Lookahed, “A whiff of smoke saved my life once in India. I was crossing the Carnatic in company with some native merchants—seventeen hours without

water—heat! can't describe it,—sky red-hot, sand ditto. At length I gave way and fell to the ground exhausted. They robbed me of everything and left me there to be baked to death ; all but one old Hindoo, who watched the scoundrels out of sight, and then forced the stem of his pipe between my lips. The first draw burnt my throat, the second half-suffocated me, the third I was well. Strange property that of Indian tobacco. Ah ! Hindoos are queer people, but faithful and attached—if their interest is concerned ; especially the females. Did you ever make the acquaintance of one ? “

Rowland Austin suddenly sprang to his feet. Mr. Lookahed glanced coolly up into his face. “Ants?” said he, interrogatively. “Bores,” muttered Austin, turning sharply away for the mansion, wherein his form, watched by Mr. Lookahed, soon disappeared. “ Ah ! “ thought the latter gentleman, “ Hindoos are ticklish subjects with you.” He turned his gaze and looked down upon the undulating landscape which, from where he sat, spread out to the horizon, though hidden from the mansion by the dilapidated water-sodden mill, and continued looking upon it until the clatter of horses' hoofs attracted his attention. Up the side of the valley from Meremont Hall rode three persons on horseback ; one on an iron-grey, one on a black pony, one on a chestnut hunter. He recognised them in an instant. “ The Squire—Ellen—Rowland,” he muttered, “Going to Swinburne.—Mrs. Martha—invitation. I should have kept by him and seen myself. However, too late, let me consider.”

He shut his clear grey eyes and became absorbed in reflection. Meanwhile Ellen Meremont, with her father upon one side and Rowland Austin on the other, cantered gently over the downs, looking, as she always did, beautiful. Her delicate taper fingers seemed scarcely to grasp the reins, yet the obedient, though high, spirited pony was perfectly under command. Her deep blue eye roamed freely over the landscape nor paid she any attention to the high-flown compliments of Rowland, which, although failing to reach the mark for which they were originally intended, yet did service to his cause by filling the old Squire's heart with secret pride. The distance to Swinburne was scarcely two miles, and in a quarter of an hour they reached the quaint old country town. Past the square-belfried church, past the market-place in the middle of which still remained the stone to which, in olden time, the bull was tied in the cruel sport of bull-baiting ; past the ale-house from whence issued the roaring chorus of the “Leathern Bottel,” accompanied by a reek of smoke and drink, (for be it known that the cottage is equally the abode of ennui as the palace, driving the inhabitants to their only refuge—the fiery draught); past, but a few yards further, the stocks placed beneath a spreading elm, whose proximity seemed to have no warning effect upon the frequenters of the inn, and indeed, often supplied them with amusement - that of taunting an incarcerated scoundrel; out upon the dusty road ; stopping at length before a small but snug building half hidden with hedges of flowering May. “ May Lodge,” said Rowland, as a man swung open the carriage-gate, touching his hat respectfully. Mrs. Martha Austin met them in the doorway, and welcomed them with, at least, apparent heartiness. She was a thin, emaciated woman, with a face as though cut out of paper,—so white was it, and so sharp were the outlines. The curve of beauty with her was an angle. A perpetual smile hovered about her thin lips, but it was skin deep. Her eyes were grey and cold. On the whole Martha was not prepossessing. Yet she had an air of complacency to his superior wisdom which pleased the Squire; nor could her dissent have been observed but by a keen spectator, by whom it might have been noticed that sometimes the thin lips pursed up tightly as though to repress the sharp thoughts within. Tea was already waiting. Everything had evidently been prepared for the visitors, or rather Martha was a woman always prepared. She well-knew the importance of gaining the goodwill of the pinched, bald-headed figure that sat before her. He was her landlord, his daughter might be her daughter-in-law.

Rowland, seated next to Ellen, was doing his best, but his compliments, as usual, were oily, and like oil upon spring water, refused to mingle with the pure being near him. Tea

concluded, Rowland proposed a stroll in the garden, hoping thereby to secure to himself a moment with Ellen among the hedges of flowering hawthorn. His was an irrepressible spirit, nor did he seem to remember his rebuff. He would press again, Wonderful things follow steady assurance! But, much to Ellen's relief, the old Squire, perhaps tired with his ride, did not endorse the sentiment, and, wanting his sanction, it dropped.

Soon after came the hour for returning. Rowland announced his intention of accompanying them part of the way, and went out to order the horses. He quickly appeared with them before the door, fastened his own and the Squire's to a ring, and approached with Ellen's pony. His little project of rendering assistance to her in mounting was, however, defeated by Ellen, who sprang lightly into her saddle. Austin offered no help to the Squire as a bungling flatterer would have done—he knew it would be considered an insult by the irascible old gentleman, who still remembered—and worse, recounted—his success in the hunting-field. The sun was sinking as they left Swinburne behind them; sinking in all his glory, unclouded, yet surrounded with a luminous haze. His level beams bathed the hills and the young foliaged trees in a flood of golden light, and rested upon Ellen's classic features with a glory hard to define. Over the downs they cantered side by side, but in silence, for the hour was evening and even turbulent human nature feels the approach of night. At length the last hill was surmounted, nothing but a wild waste of furze had to be traversed, and the rook-trees of Meremont were just visible on the horizon. Here Rowland said farewell, turned his horse's head, and quickly disappeared behind the summit of the down. Ellen drew a sigh of relief and her thoughts involuntarily returned to Henrique. She could not but institute a comparison between them. Rowland was smooth, oily, offensive with officiousness; Henrique handsome, passionately attached—ah! her own heart told her that. She glanced at the sunset and thought of the beautiful poetic idea of the Greeks—which had been translated for her by him—of the sun conveyed in a golden cup beneath the earth. For together they had studied. There were no sweet memories of a pensive twilight hour in the library connected with Rowland, nor of an earnest countenance uplifted towards hers, which a half smile half sigh covered with gladness; but of an angry scene—the scene in the room by the hall, the banishment of the beloved.— Ah, betrothed, whose scale fell?

Absorbed in reverie she rode on, her hand relaxing its grasp on the bridle rein, thus allowing the pony to have his own pace — a walk. The Squire's horse also had his own way, but at least kept to the road, or rather the rut mark custom denominated one, whilst Ellen's would have wandered into the furze had not the sharp prickles compelled it to keep the edge. It was thus that the pony paced slowly through a strange collection of stones by the roadside, a circle of uprights, with a huge monolith, like an altar stone, in the midst. It was as wild and weird as the night itself, and as inscrutable, Druidical or not, from time immemorial had those stones been there, and although grey and venerable with age, were shunned as though the abode of evil spirits.

As the pony passed the large altar stone, suddenly he started and backed. Up sprang a man, as it seemed, from the very earth, with a frightful yell, and seizing Ellen's bridle-rein, dealt with a stick a heavy blow upon the Squire's iron-grey. Off flew the spirited animal, bearing the Squire away, powerless to help his daughter, who was left to struggle with the ruffian. Short was that struggle. A scream, a cry for help, and the pony dashed riderless across the wild furze plain. She felt herself laid, half-unconscious, upon the dew-damp sward; dimly she caught a pair of green cat-like eyes whose evil glance seemed to freeze her very blood, a beard swept across her countenance, and she felt his hot breath tainting her cheek. Terrible forebodings rushed through her mind, but she was powerless, powerless even to struggle. She was fainting. Suddenly there came a clang as of horses' hoofs, a loud shout followed by a pistol shot rang in her ears, a mist swam before her eyes, and she knew no more.

CHAPTER III.

MR. Bertoun and Henrique Beaumont sat at breakfast. The apartment was not large but comfortable. It seemed as though it had been breakfasted in from time immemorial, and had thus a kind of family air about it. The view from the single window—obscured by the honeysuckle—was not extensive. It merely embraced the wooded slope of the hill, through the branches of the beech trees, by whose summit the rays of the morning sun found their way to sport upon the china of the breakfast-table. Mr. Bertoun, seated in an easy chair, was eating toast. Henrique, his arm upon the table, and his hand half hidden in the thick masses of his luxuriant hair, in defiance of etiquette, was slowly stirring his coffee. Neither spoke. Both seemed absorbed in contemplation, the one of his toast, the other of his coffee. This is not unusual at a breakfast-table, ere the spirits have been re-invigorated with earthly food. At length there came an interruption. Mr. Scroop was announced. Mr. Scroop was a small farmer, whom, (not unwilling, as his services were frequently advantageous to himself in a pecuniary of view,) the surrounding agriculturists had from year to year contrived to delegate to the office of constable. Mr. Bertoun was a magistrate - the inference is obvious. Mr. Scroop came on public business, and Mr. Scroop was admitted. He was a short thick man, who, it was evident, notwithstanding his long acquaintance with his superiors, had in vain attempted to gain something of their easy manners. His civilities degenerated into servilities. He bowed until the hat in his hand rubbed the carpet. He attempted to speak in aristocratic phrase; he jumbled words together in the most extraordinary manner. He was the man who, endeavouring to convey an idea of incalculable number, said that he had a “multiplicity of cucumbers.” Mr. Scroop explained his business very concisely by handing Mr. Bertoun a warrant for signature. It was for the apprehension of Robert, commonly known as Bob, Austin, the miller, for having feloniously attacked Mr. Meremont and Miss Meremont on the night of-----, with intent to do grievous bodily harm. Mr. Bertoun read it aloud in utter amazement. Henrique started from his reverie at the name of Ellen, and abruptly asked Scroop his business. “As the warrant specifieth, your honor. His honor is therein set forth, as most feloniously attacked by the miller. Miss Ellen was pulled from her horse,”----- Henrique started up,-----” But afore evil could consequent, Mr. Rowland Austin, a gentleman of great courageous deportment rode up and discharged a certain firearm, to wit, a pistol, at the defendant, who made himself scarce, as the squire fallaciously saith.” Mr. Bertoun and Henrique looked at each other. Mr. Scroop saw he had attracted attention and continued : “ But in my poor opinion the case is nonprecedent. I was in company, thereof, of the miller Austin on or about the hour when this most horrid commotion was enacted two miles off.”

“ Then you think it was not Austin ? But— is Ellen,—I mean, Miss Meremont, ill ?” enquired Mr. Bertoun and Henrique simultaneously.

“ No—yes “ answered Scroop, endeavouring to reply to both at once, “ I am of opinion that the law-----is much better-----does not-----get up this morning-----I mean that the statute —was much alarmed-----does not exemplify -----a faintness-----I mean that Miss Meremont cannot take doctors in alibi-----I-----”

“ Speak, “ exclaimed Henrique frowning.

“ Miss Meremont was in a sin cup, but she is much better this morning, sir. Will your honor sign the warrant ?”

Henrique got up and went out. He had been much disturbed by the intelligence thus suddenly communicated to him. One moment he pictured to himself Ellen’s alarm, then his breast

heaved with suppressed joy at her escape; the next, with the keen jealousy of rivalry, he almost cursed Rowland for earning her gratitude ; yet another moment, and his chivalrous nature accused itself of entertaining an ungenerous sentiment. He saw Mr. Bertoun depart for the examination, which was to take place that morning at Meremont Hall, with a wild inclination to accompany him, and, breaking the squire's injunction, enter once more the building which sheltered Ellen. But he repressed it, reflecting that it might give her pain and could do his cause no good. Anxiously he waited for intelligence from the Hall; and many times he repeated to himself the re-assuring words of Lookahed. He longed to see his friend to converse with him of her. At length his impatience grew almost unbounded ; and walking down the lime-tree avenue, he placed himself in sight of the Hall, leaning against and grasping the trunk of a tree, as though afraid that his inclination to pass the forbidden line would overcome him.

Meanwhile, in the building before him, a curious scene was being enacted. In a cold state-apartment, retained for ceremony, sat Mr. Bertoun before a mahogany table, covered with calf-bound books, and numerous papers. On his right sat Mr. Dash, the magistrate's clerk, quill in hand. A brisk young man was Mr. Dash, who looked forward to rising in his profession almost at coach speed. He spoke sharply and decisively, regarding this as a sign of superior wisdom. He elevated his nose, when a witness became verbose ; and asked him what he came there for, if he said too little. Mr. Dash was young, but his brow was already like the parchment covering of a drum; some said his head was as empty.

On Mr. Bertoun's left, sat the squire in his favourite beehive chair. Ellen was not present. Mr. Bertoun enquired if she was going to give evidence. "No," replied the squire curtly. "She is a woman, and only thinks ; she knows nothing, and won't swear. Awful thing to commit a man when he might be innocent ? As if there were a doubt! Bring forward the prisoner," he added. He was himself a magistrate, and would have sent Bob the miller to gaol without an examination; but for the prosecutor to be judge was out of order.

In charge of Scroop, Austin was brought forward until within a decent distance of the table. He seemed little affected by his situation. He did not gaze in wonder and awe at the mahogany table, neither did he- look from side to side as though searching for an avenue of escape. His small twinkling eyes were fixed upon Mr. Bertoun, and he occasionally stroked his long- red beard. A strong odour of tobacco, rum and beer, pervaded the apartment as he advanced.

The Squire was first sworn, and gave his evidence distinctly, to the effect that the prisoner, of whose identity he felt sure, had attacked him in the manner already described, he having been prevented from rendering assistance to his daughter by his horse running away.

Rowland Austin then kissed the book. He said, " I left Squire Meremont and Miss Meremont at the top of the hill in sight of the Druid's Stones. I had scarcely turned my horse's head ere I heard a loud scream. I rode back and saw a man pull Miss Meremont from her horse. She struggled violently, but I could see that he was gaining the mastery. I struck the spurs into my horse's flanks, and shouted in my excitement. The rascal heard me, sprang up, and ran towards a large fir plantation at a short distance. I forced my horse into the furze, but finding that he would be hidden among the trees before I could overtake him, I drew a pistol, and fired, without effect. He disappeared in the plantation and knowing that it was useless to follow him, I rode to assist Miss Meremont."

" Could you identify the prisoner as that man?" asked Mr. Bertoun.

Rowland shook his head. " I was not near enough," he said.

" Prisoner, do you wish to ask the witness any questions ?" said the clerk.

"Eez" replied the miller, tugging at his beard. "Now, Mister Austin, I was a-cronyfyng with thick 'ere honerable gintleman (pointing to Scroop) thick night, an you knows it."

"That is a statement," said Mr. Meremont, " Ask a question."

“Aw! Eez, Squire,” replied the miller. “I wur a-thinking at thuck time wot a sweet puddin’ them young moorhens ‘ud make, in thy pond.”

“Ask a question,” reiterated the clerk.

“Aw, eez,” said the miller, “Now Mister, wasn’t I sat down in my old grand-dad’s chair a-smoking baccy with this ‘ere blessed, dratted, ould fool of a constable? And didn’t I say to ‘un, he med sarch and sarch until a-was ableged to wur specks, afore a-would cotch I a-poaching? And didn’t I-----”

“That is enough,” said Mr. Bertoun. “Scroop what have you to say?”

“Scroop,” said the Squire, “knows nothing about it.”

Scroop looked from one to the other in confusion. He saw that the Squire wanted a conviction, and he knew that the evidence he ought, as an honest man, to give, would exculpate the prisoner. He hesitated. It was no light matter to offend a magistrate in those days,—it has its disadvantages even now.

“Naw then, Scroop,” cried the prisoner, “out wj’t. Thee knaws werry wull wur I wur thuck night.”

Scroop kissed the book in desperation. His evidence, divested of its singular combination of words, was to the effect, that, on the night in question, he had paid a domiciliary visit to the prisoner, in order to caution him against trespassing upon a certain field, wherein the miller maintained there was a right of road denied by the owner, and that he had remained smoking in the mill until the Squire’s horse—he having at length dismounted—dashed startled down the hill-side. The Squire’s brow darkened gradually, as Scroop proceeded, his lips were compressed and his eyes began to glare, until the constable broke out into a cold perspiration.

When he had finished, the Squire leant forward and whispered in Mr. Bertoun’s ear, “Convict him.” Mr. Bertoun shook his head. Under the circumstances he felt that he should be outstepping his power to do so. He dismissed the case, and the miller went off whistling, in utter disregard of the silent rage depicted upon the Squire’s countenance. As the door shut behind him, Mr. Bertoun rose and offered his hand to the in order to wish him farewell. The Squire remained seated, nor took it, while Mr. Rowland Austin bowed. The clerk fumbled about his papers, nor sprang up as usual to open the door. Mr. Bertoun felt that he had mortally offended his old friend, but he also felt that he had acted rightly. He had intended to speak to the Squire concerning Henrique,—to have used his influence and urged the claims of a friendship of thirty years’ standing. He knew that Henrique, not unnaturally expected this of him, but in the present aspect of affairs, it was impossible; his walk home, then, was not lightened by any cheering thoughts.

There was one aware of this; it was Rowland Austin. That oily gentleman had had reason to fear the interference of Mr. Bertoun, and although that was now out of the question, yet so uneasy did he feel upon the point, that he watched the uncle of his rival for some distance up the avenue. He then returned, sauntering slowly, and swishing viciously at the nettles and long bennets with his walking-stick. There was a long day of *ennui* before him. Dinner-time, it was true, approached; never did a devotee listen with more rapture to the matin-bell than Rowland to the dinner-bell. But that could not last for ever, and moreover, the Squire always told his stories over his wine, while Ellen remained upstairs. Altogether the prospect was not pleasant. However, the day passed at length, and evening saw him, lying at, full length, under the apple-trees on the valley slope, beside the dilapidated mill, with wistful eyes cast upon the pigeons upon the gabled-roof of the Hall wishing for a double-barrelled gun to scatter death among the cooing throng, so temptingly perched in a row.

Slowly evening fell. Once and once only, did Rowland start from his recumbent position—it was when a window of the mansion’s upper storey was for a moment thrown open, and Ellen looked forth upon the sunset. His sudden spring betrayed his presence—Ellen retired, and where her countenance had been, the rays of the sun, reflected from the ancient glass, seemed to glare, like an angry Cyclops’ eye, upon him.

One by one the stars came out, while a hazy light, like a distant fire, shining through the elm trees on the summit of the valley, gave evidence of the rising of the moon, Rowland, careless of the

falling dew, remained half hidden in the tall un-mown grass of the orchard. His countenance, resting on his hand, became ghastly white in the cold rays of the moon, losing its oily look, and retaining only the hard angular outlines. Motionless as the tree trunk beside him he lay, his eyes gazing into the depths of the lake beneath, over whose surface a thin mist hung—cloudlike, ghostly as though it were the dome of a water-kelpie's palace. Like the wing of the arch-fiend, a dark cloud overspread the greater half of the sky, while a low muttering sound, that came down the valley at intervals, showed that however calm the atmosphere was here, but a few miles distant a storm was sweeping the earth.

Rowland recked little of the moonlight, the silent stars overhead, the mist, or the distant storm. He was scheming—scheming for a reward almost great enough to excuse the means made use of to obtain it. His eyes had left the lake, and were fixed upon the mill, whose wheel night nor day, ceased not its never-varying round. Suddenly the extremity of the cloud obscured the moon, and he sprang to his feet. With one glance around, which seemed to assure him that he was unobserved, he descended the side of the valley, sprang over the brawling stream which ran from the lake, and was in a few moments standing in the dark shadow of the water-wheel. Here he paused. In a moment another figure came forward, and a heavy hand was placed on his shoulder.

“Nevvy,” growled the low tones of the miller's voice, “Thee bist a deep ‘un, thee bist.”

“And so's the mill pond,” muttered Rowland, a sentence which the rising night air carried away.

“But,” he continued, “I am in no mood for your trifling, you must leave—you must die.”

“Die?” reiterated the miller in amazement.

“Yes and a coffin filled with stones be buried for you”.

“I twig,” replied the miller, “but it won't do, my joug. I ain't a-gwain to desart the spot wur I wur barn just bekase ould pheasant (the Squire) ain't to be cotched without it—that's flat.”

“Fool,” said Rowland bending his brows. “Wilt ruin all?”

“Eez,” growled the miller. “Drat my nut if I'll go till I dies.”

“Then die,” exclaimed Rowland, striking the old man a terrible blow.

The miller staggered, flung up his arms, and disappeared beneath the water-wheel. There was a dull thud, a moan, a crunch as of bones ground together; and still on went the wheel in its unconscious round.

Rowland folded his arms and walked, with a composure marvellously great, from the spot, but a flash of lightning, which lit up the heavens, as he entered the porch of the Hall, showed that his countenance was as pale as death.

CHAPTER IV.

AUSTIN has made immense capital out of that adventure at the Druids' Stones” said Mr. Lookahed one morning, exactly a week after the events detailed in the last chapter, to Henrique, as they sat together in the arbor on Mr. Bertoun's lawn. “The Squire is gained—no doubt even Ellen must feel grateful; again, the mysterious disappearance of the miller is a circumstance acting in his favor. Shall I tell you? The marriage is determined upon—it takes place—unless—unless we can frustrate it—the day after to-morrow.”

“The day after to-morrow? then all is lost,” murmured Henrique, in bitterness of spirit, bowing his head and hiding his face in his hands. Lookahed spoke cheerfully. “It is not yet time to say ‘all ist verloren.’ There are two days before us. The game is desperate, but I do not despair. Listen-----if you can.”

“Go on,” said Henrique. “This woman,” continued Lookahed, “this Hindoo has never been out of my thoughts—so confident am I, that if we can succeed in getting holf of her the way will be clear before us. I have searched and enquired diligently—so diligently that I fear

Rowland suspects my intentions. He has become uncommunicative of late. This is what I have learnt: A woman, dark complexioned, black eyes, about 36, only a week ago was resident at May Lodge, apparently on equal terms with Mrs Austin. So I am informed. Yet Ellen declares that she saw no such person when she last visited there, nor can I discover her present whereabouts. All combine in stating one thing— that the disappearance of the Miller Austin would seem to be in some way connected with that of this woman, for she has not been seen since. It is my firm belief that she is confined in the house.”

“At May Lodge?” ejaculated Henrique, rising. “Then our course is clear. Let us get a search warrant. My uncle----- “

“Is a magistrate, but his powers are limited. Of what can you accuse Martha Austin? No, Henrique, we must proceed in a more underhand way. The exigencies of the case are urgent, or else I would not propose it, Martha, Rowland, and his valet, are to-night at the Squire’s. Meet me at eleven o’clock at the Druids’ Stones— together we will search the house.”

“I will,” replied Henrique. “Anything, anything, for ----- for -----” He broke down, Lookahed saw his agitation, pressed his hand and left, first whispering “Secrecy—at eleven — the Druids’ Stones.”

“I will be there,” muttered Henrique, clenching his hand; as he reseated himself upon the rustic bridge, to watch unconsciously the rolling of the clouds above the fir plantation which crested the hill before him, while the shades of night gathered around, and a moaning wind— fit accompaniment to his secret thoughts,—swept through the trees above. Darkness came on apace, for the stars were hidden, and the new moon was not visible above the horizon. Hurrying masses of cloud obscured the sky—drifting ever forward, like ships, seeking shelter, but borne before the hurricane. Certain that the night would hide his motions, Henrique now left the arbor, and proceeded upon his dreary walk. He gained the summit of the hill, pausing a moment to look back upon the lights of Meremont Hall; then, with a sigh, directed his steps across the furze plain. He arrived before the monolith—the centre altar stone of the circle, as the distant toll of Swinburne’s church bell, borne upon the night air, announced that it wanted but an hour to midnight.

He was not long alone. A rustling sound among the furze, and a figure loomed up—tall, almost supernaturally tall, in the darkness. A few words of recognition, and the friends proceeded upon their journey. It was a silent one. Henrique was impatient-anxious to run the risk, to win or lose at once; Mr. Lookahed was too much accustomed to the sort of thing to be excited, otherwise than just to that extent which quickens the faculties without impairing the powers of judgement. He walked rapidly, taking strides of enormous length, nor could Henrique, himself a good pedestrian, keep pace without exertion. Thus the lights of Swinburne were soon visible.

They did not enter the town, but made a semicircle to the left, and regained the road within a short distance of May Lodge. Here the pace slackened, Mr. Lookahed recognizing the need of caution, and of making as little noise as possible. A few steps brought them to the carriage gate, which a short examination showed was padlocked. There was no alternative but to climb over. Mr. Lookahed went foremost, but he had scarcely touched the ground ere Henrique was at his side. Lookahed seized him by the arm with a grasp like a vice, and whispered “Hark.” He glanced around and listened. Was it the sighing of the wind through the hawthorn bushes? was it fancy? or was that low moaning sound the cry of a human creature at its last gasp? It lasted but a second, yet sent a chill he would have found it difficult to account for, through his heart.

His friend Lookahed gently pulled him forward. They crossed the gravel path, their feet grating on the pebbles, and gained the first steps before the front door. All was still here—all was silent, save the rustling of the trees shaken by the wind. There was no sound within the house, not a footstep, not even a window rattled in its frame. They mounted the steps one by

one. Henrique seized the door handle, and was about to turn it, but it gave way before him and he felt the door swing open as though drawn back by someone within. Lookahed was aware of this too. He whispered in Henrique's ear, "There is someone in the garden." At that moment, once again came that low moan, seemingly to confirm his words. Curiosity seized them both, and neglecting the opportunity thus accorded them of entering the house without violence, they descended the steps, and arm in arm moved slowly forward led by the sound. It was more distinct as they advanced, coming at intervals, as of a human creature gasping for breath. A strange form of excitement seized Henrique. He would have darted forward, but Mr. Lookahed restrained him. They seemed now to stand above the sound. It was strange. Above them rose the wall of the garden, surmounted by immense hawthorn bushes— an impenetrable screen, a wall of vegetation, shutting out all light, seemingly, indeed, all communication with the world. Suddenly a ray of light illumined the wall, and fell upon the form of a woman crouched close beneath the wall beside a wicket gate. It came from a dark lantern Lookahed had that moment unclosed, and revealed what they sought almost beneath their feet. Scantly clad, thin almost to emaciation, with wild black eyes gazing upon them with a tigerish glare, she lay or crouched. Her lips moved, and sounds unintelligible to Henrique issued. "She babbles," he said.

"It is she" replied Lookahed in a tone of triumph. "She speaks Hindustani."

He stooped and whispered a few words, whose effects upon the woman were wonderful. She rose but staggered, and would have fallen had not Henrique put out his arm and saved her.

"Stay here," said Lookahed hurriedly. "I will return in a moment."

He closed the lantern, stepped into the darkness and was gone, leaving Henrique in a rather uncomfortable position, having to support the whole weight of the Hindoo, who had relapsed into a state of unconsciousness. This, however, was but a trifling inconvenience compared with the advantage he hoped to gain. Still the moment proved a long one, and he grew in the end anxious as a distant sound of carriage wheels came upon the blast. Was it the Austins returning? His heart beat quickly and he listened attentively. Nearer and nearer came the roll of the wheels— they stopped before the gate. What should he do in case of discovery? His fist was clenched, but there was no time for thought. The vehicle had stopped, but the gate was not opened, though it shook as if someone had climbed over. There was a step, a figure loomed up in the darkness, he raised his arm.

"Henrique." It was the voice of Lookahed. He had run into the town and hired, not without difficulty, and exciting endless conjectures in the mind of the landlord of the only inn, a curious sort of vehicle, half trap, half cart.

It was a work of time and trouble in the darkness to lift the Hindoo, in her helpless state, first over the gate, and then into a seat in the vehicle, where she was supported by Henrique; but it was at length accomplished, and, driven by Lookahed, their horse, stronger than its looks warranted, carried them swiftly from the scene of their midnight exploit. Avoiding the town, Lookahed swept around the base of the hills, making a circuit of two miles, but arriving at Mr. Bertoun's in half-an-hour, despite the disadvantages of darkness and bad roads.

The astonishment of the worthy magistrate was extreme, when, having remained waiting for Henrique alone, he answered a sharp knock at the door, and confronted Mr. Lookahed carrying in his arms a female, who at first appeared dead. Everything, however, was quickly explained; the Hindoo laid upon a sofa, and Mrs. Gurn, a faithful servant of the house, called up to attend her. Mrs. Gurn's amazement—she being a tidy old lady of fifty-seven, whose ideas ran pretty much in the same groove all the time—was indeed great, at being called upon at that hour of the night to take charge of a fainting female, and moreover to preserve strict secrecy. Beyond muttering that it was "main curis," the good old lady made no objection, however, and in half an hour brought down a bulletin from the upper regions that, under the influence of a cordial, the "strange woman" was sleeping soundly.

This was satisfactory, and Mr. Lookahed at once declared his intention of going, in which he persevered, despite the pressing invitation of Mr. Bertoun to spend the night beneath his roof. "No," said Lookahed, "I shall serve Harry better by driving back to Swinburne, stating that I have lost my way, sleeping there, and returning to Meremont Hall at break of day. I shall thus obviate all suspicion, Adieu."

And so they parted, Lookahed to his lonely drive, Henrique to his pillow, not to sleep, but, in waking dreams, to torture his brain with endless conjectures as to the nature of the revelations it might be expected the subtle questions of his friend would wring from the Hindoo, until a vision of Ellen crossed him and he slept.

The following day was a weary one. He did not intrude himself upon the Hindoo, although impatient enough to learn what she might have to reveal, because he doubted his own powers of cross-examination, and, moreover, Mrs. Gurn's reports were far from favourable. The Hindoo was terribly exhausted. She seemed as though she had been fed upon drugged food, or had taken opium, passing the greater part of the day in a dreamy helpless state.

At length, about two in the afternoon, to the great relief of Henrique, Mr. Lookahed arrived. His face wore an anxious, yet self-confident expression, and he was far from communicative. There was no time to be lost, he said, in answer to Henrique's question. "Rowland suspects something; I must see the Hindoo at once; perhaps it would be better for me to see her alone." None could offer any objection, and accordingly Mr. Lookahed was shown to her apartment, where he remained two hours. When he left, Henrique, with a countenance of anxiety, met him upon the landing. He asked nothing, but his eyes were sufficiently expressive of his curiosity. Mr. Lookahed smiled, but said nothing, except a general command to keep the Hindoo quiet. "Leave all to me," he said as he shook hands with Henrique. "Remain here, and see that none know of the Hindoo's presence.

He went, and Henrique was left to his reflections, which were by no means satisfactory, nor could Mr. Bertoun succeed in re-assuring him. The stake was too great – his happiness, his whole life hung upon the chance, no wonder that he watched the changes of the game with trepidation. No sleep visited him that night except a feverish unconsciousness as the day dawned, from which he was awakened by the merry chimes that came from the tower of the church at Meremont. They spoke of happiness, but it was mockery to him. He could rest no longer, but got up and went out upon the lawn. The cool morning air refreshed him, and the red rays of the sun just above the horizon poured upon him. Joyously the lark carolled above him—symbol of hope. His heart beat, his breast rose, for the moment he felt resigned to his destiny; but as he looked, the bird's pinions failed, and it dropped like a stone to the earth. He returned within and waited patiently. His patience was rewarded.

At ten a four-wheeled carriage drew up before the house, and Mr. Lookahed stepped out. A few words of congratulation and he proceeded to business. "Is the Hindoo up," he asked? Mrs. Gurn brought word that she was. Five minutes afterwards she appeared, and, seen, now that a day of rest had renovated her strength, she was far from ill-looking. She stopped as she saw Henrique and his uncle, while a visible tremor shook her frame. "Be firm, Ayeen, be firm," said Lookahed, drawing her arm in his, and leading her to the carriage. Wondering at these proceedings, Mr. Bertoun and Henrique at their friend's request also stepped within. Mr. Lookahed followed, and the vehicle, driven by a man whose face was concealed beneath an enormous hat sloped over his forehead, went rattling down the avenue. Henrique's heart beat as they approached Meremont Hall; he looked at his friend, but his friend looked out of the window. Mr. Bertoun sat silent in amazement, but resolved to see the end of the affair. They soon mixed in a stream of carriages bound for the same destination—the guests bidden to the marriage. The coachmen, making use of the freedom accorded them on such festive occasions, shouted to each other, but the man who drove them was silent, nor did he wear a

favor. A few minutes, and passing many, they drew up at the Hall; a crowd of gentlemen surrounded and filled the porch,—engaged in giving directions to their servants, or in exchanging salutations, they did not particularly notice the strange group that passed through into the Hall. Almost tremblingly, Henrique followed close upon Lookahed, who conducted Ayeen; on her right walked Mr. Bertoun; the man whose face was hidden kept in the rear. A footman, who was arranging flowers in a vase in the hall, glanced up as they entered, “Show us into the oak chamber,” said Mr. Lookahed in a voice of command, “and ask the Squire and Mr. Austin to come thither.”

Accustomed to obey his master’s guests, the man made no demur, but having shown them into the chamber which was the same that had been used a short time previously in the examination of the miller, departed to find the Squire. Meantime the party gathered around the mahogany table. None sat down. The countenances of Mr. Bertoun and Henrique wore uncertain expressions, those of Lookahed and Ayeen were decided. The man who had followed them had passed to the window, and was partly hidden in the folds of the curtains. The suspense was short; in three minutes the door was flung open, and the Squire, followed by Rowland, entered. There was a frown upon the Squire’s brow.

“What means this, Lookahed?” he said, walk - to the table.

“That to-day’s ceremony must be postponed” replied Philip.

At that moment, a lady in white muslin swept past the open door. She was pale as marble, but wondrously beautiful. Henrique recognised Ellen and, unable to restrain himself, sprang forward. The Squire was before him. He shut the door, and turned the key, and with a bitter smile returned to the table. “Now.”

“I accuse Rowland Austin of the murder of his uncle,” said Ayeen, unveiling, and darting a flash like lightning from her dark eyes upon Austin. He staggered as if struck with a shot, stepped forward and endeavoured to speak, but although his lips moved no sound issued.

“What?” thundered the Squire. “Speak Rowland!”

“It is a lie,” muttered Austin, grasping at the table for support

“It is truth,” answered a voice from the opposite end of the apartment, and flinging his hat upon the floor, the man who had secreted himself in the window-curtains came forward. It was Austin’s valet, Saunderson. “It is truth,” he repeated. “I saw it done. I saw the blow struck, and the miller disappear. I know where his body is—it is beneath the water-wheel.” Rowland shook with agitation. The Squire glanced at him, bent his brows, and began to cross-examine the valet with a facility gained in his long magisterial experience.

“Where were you?”

“At the corner of the mill—hidden behind the fir-trees.”

“How came you there?”

“To watch him—my master.”

“Why?”

The valet hesitated.

“I will explain,” said Ayeen. “This man—this spy—has been my slave for months; I set him to watch. But I must make a retrospection. When Mrs. Martha Austin struck away the pillow from beneath the head of my first mistress, Antoinette Beaumont, and she, having burst a blood-vessel in a fit of coughing, died, suffocated in her own blood, I had been lying half asleep in my cot near, but my terror overcame my prudence, and I sprang up. Terrified with Martha’s threats, (I was but a child), pleased with the prospect she described of walking about dressed in the jewels which prompted that cold-blooded crime, I consented to hold my peace. My punishment has been great. Dependent upon Martha for support ignorant of the laws of this country, and until lately even of its language, what could I do but suffer the pangs’ of remorse in silence?”

“ At length Martha removed into the country. I soon found with what purpose—that her son might gain the hand of an heiress. Yes, Squire Meremont, that was his aim—the heiress, not the heart. His scheme was easy. It was but to work himself into the father’s good graces—to obtain possession of that piece of land which he knew was coveted by the heiress’s father, and all would be well. He would have succeeded, had not accident put me in possession of the fact that the heiress he wooed, was the love, perhaps I might say, the betrothed, of the son of my poor mistress— him whom I had nursed. I determined to cross Austin, and thus, in some way, atone for the great wrong I had done my mistress’s child, I set my slave, the valet, to watch, to bring me reports of all that went forward.

“With tears interrupted by laughter, he described to me the manner in which the farce at the Druids’ Stones was enacted. How, with the aid of a false red beard, a smock-frock, and assisted by the darkness, he had counterfeited the miller.

He had dragged Ellen from her horse, in order to allow Rowland an opportunity of winning her gratitude by rescuing her from a supposed danger, while at the same time he fastened a sufficient amount of suspicion upon his uncle to have warranted his transportation, had not the constable’s unlooked-for presence at the mill frustrated the scheme by enabling the miller to prove an alibi. How he had seen Rowland, mad with rage at his uncle’s obstinate refusal to leave the mill, strike him beneath the wheel. This is what I have learned.

“ It was now that something unusual in my conduct aroused the suspicions of Martha. She drugged my food and while in a state of unconsciousness confined me in a chamber, from which she no doubt had determined I should not emerge until the marriage was consummated. In very desperation one evening I sprang from the window; fortunately my fall was broken by coming into contact with a tree, but the shock was so great that, combined with the effects of the drug I had scarcely recovered from, I could get no farther than the wicket-gate where these gentlemen found me.”

She paused and glanced around . The Squire was trembling with emotion, his fingers clutching nervously the key of the room., Mr. Bertoun’s countenance was hidden in his hand. Henrique was deadly pale, and leaned upon the shoulder of his friend Philip, whose features wore an air of triumph, of exultation in his superior wisdom Simultaneously all looked for Rowland. He had stolen to the door, but it was locked; the window was small; there was but one chance. As they glanced round, he sprang upon the Squire, attempting to wrest the key from him. The struggle was short. Taken by surprise, ere any of those present could aid him, the Squire was felled by a terrible blow, and Rowland, agile as a cat, slipping past Lookahed, whom he hindered by overturning the table in his way, gained the door, turned the key, and emerging into the hall, confronted his mother. She did not see him, but the dark orbs of Ayeen met her gaze. It was enough. She comprehended that all was known, and uttering a piercing cry fell upon the floor, while a stream of her life’s blood issuing from her mouth dyed the carpet with a sanguinary stain. All shrank back but one. The ruthless ruffian Rowland strode over the prostrate form of his expiring parent, gained the porch, and snatching the bridle-rein of a led horse from a groom, sprang to the saddle. Curvetting and plunging to the imminent danger of the crowd of fair equestrians just arrived, Rowland’s horse forced his way through, and urged by the pricking spur, sped like an arrow up the venue. There was none to pursue, nor was he ever seen more.

Three months had passed away, and time had partly obliterated the memory of the terrible events which had followed so quickly upon one another at the Hall. Once again Meremont church tower sent forth a merry peal, this time not waking Henrique to bitterness of spirit, but to pleasant anticipations. It was his marriage-day. All had been forgotten and forgiven; with the turning of the last sod above the grave of Martha Austin, all evil memories had been buried. She had made some restoration ere her death by willing the old mill, hers by the death of Austin, to Henrique.

This day there were two bridegrooms. Mr. Lookahed had decided upon entering the holy estate of matrimony. With his usual eccentricity he had chosen Ayeen, and the same day that saw Henrique and his beloved Ellen joined in the mystical union, saw their friend Lookahed forego the dearly beloved title of bachelor. As that which has been passed through the fire is purified, so let it be hoped that these pairs having undergone affliction, lived afterwards in joy and enduring prosperity.

Who Will Win?

OR, AMERICAN ADVENTURE.

CHAPTER I.

At the bottom of a dell in the interior of Wiltshire, there stands a gray, weather-beaten mansion, for centuries the home of the Bourtons. A fine old place it is, with a many-gabled roof, the slates on which are much the same colour as the rest of the house, dyed as it were with the storms of ages. Surrounded with forest land, only connected with the world by green drives, with a trout-stream brawling along almost within cast of the drawing-room windows, a pleasanter spot it would be difficult to imagine. And so it would seem had thought the members of the Bourton family, as one after the other had inherited the estate, each and all to spend their days like the fine old English gentlemen of the olden time, sporting and performing conscientiously their duties as belonging to the country aristocracy. Strange and wild as were the fireside stories of the neighbourhood, of the deeds of the Bourtons in times long past, yet they invariably appeared in the black-letter ballads preserved by the vicar of the parish, as succouring the oppressed, ever on the right side, ever gallant and true to the ladies. There was one, which, simple as it was, and still more simply told, had often drawn tears of sympathy from the good vicar's audience, when it pleased him to recite from his musty folios. How a "Bourton bold," but young, was left, under the guardianship of a neighbouring baron, who had an only daughter, "comely fair," whom the said Bourton refused to marry at any price, as, one day,

When Bourton bided on the bent.
He found ye damsel faire,
Under a tree by ye stream so free
Clad only in her haire.

The said hair in "tresses trailed" "adown to her lily-white knee," and so struck the fancy of the young Bourton that, heedless of the wrath of his guardian, he carried the owner off, with her full consent, and married her. A short time afterwards, the guardian's steward died, and revealed in the agony of death, that he had changed his master's daughter, when but a "wee babie," for his own, and that the young lady of the long tresses is the real heiress; when, without taking the trouble to explain how the said young lady came by a stream in such extremely simple garments, the ballad finishes up with a new and yet old version of the Amen,

And so may it always be.

Old Saxon coins, with the figure of a horse and a woman with long hair, or rather what it pleased the peasants to call a woman, had often been dug up in the neighbourhood; and were currently supposed to have been struck in commemoration of the "Bourton bold" galloping off with "ye damsel faire!" It was in the daily sight and hearing of such scenes and legends as these, that Reginald Bourton reached manhood. Left, like the "Bourton bold" aforesaid, early in life to the sole guardianship of an old uncle, he had not had the unpleasant prospect of a forced and loathed alliance always before him, but had been brought up with every liberty of action.

Old Jerome Bourton, his uncle, had been a fine specimen of the rover in his youth; had traversed the American continent, rifle in hand, and yet retained enough of the vital heat to return home and live to the ripe age of 83—long enough with his tales of daring to implant a wild wish to visit the new world in his nephew's breast. The old man's death was characteristic. A stag had escaped from Savernake forest, and for the first time in his life Reginald sent a bullet through the "dun deer's hide." The old instincts were reawakened in

Jerome's breast. He held a triumphal feast, in the high-vaulted apartments of Bourton Hall, and loud and long were the festive cheers which rose from a score of the surrounding yeomen. Down went the red, red wine; high rose the glee—it was the last effort, for the next morning Jerome was found dead in his bed. Reginald was greatly shocked. The old place seemed very lonely now—there was nothing to restrain him, nothing to keep him at home; the bee-hive chair was empty, and there was no one to welcome him to the fireside. The old yearning for adventure became strong—too strong to be resisted—and one fine eve, beneath an oak from whence a view could be obtained of the wide domains that called him lord, Reginald determined upon a voyage to the western hemisphere; to follow the sinking sun, whose glory was reflected from the ancient windows of Bourton Hall.

Reginald presented a strange example of inconsistency. His was a singular nature. Reckless—utterly reckless of consequences—yet shrewd, he possessed in a moment of danger, a coolness certainly remarkable; and a power of restraining himself, when he considered it necessary, no less so. He was tall, with curling masses of brown hair, clear blue eyes, heavy eyebrows, a forehead more broad than high, a straight nose, and lips full, yet not sensual. He was powerfully built, with shoulders worthy of a Hercules, yet none of that heaviness which so often accompanies strength deformed his figure. He looked made for adventure and felt himself so. The time was favourable. It was at the height of the fleeting power gained by the Confederate States of America, that Reginald determined upon his voyage.

The hero of the *Alabama* had just performed those daring deeds which gained for him the sympathy of all Europe. Lee was at the zenith of his career of conquest; a more exciting moment could scarcely have been found. Reginald instantly made a resolution of trying his luck on board a blockade runner. He had very little trouble in discovering a vessel suited to his requirements. The intentions of captains bent upon running the blockade were by no means kept a secret, and a few minutes' search in the docks at Bristol resulted in success. A long, low, steamer with a paddle-wheel, sharp, and evidently capable of great speed, was pointed out to him; nor did he make any scruple about walking on board. He did not remain long unnoticed; indeed his feet were scarcely on deck ere a squat-looking old sailor made his appearance. Reginald, without giving him time to speak, inquired for the captain. A tall individual, with a suspiciously Yankee look about him, leaning against the after-bulwarks, was pointed out to him. His request to be accepted as a passenger was received with a long stare.

“Wal!” at length ejaculated Jabez Junior Johnson, captain and owner of the *Sally Andrews*. “Wal!” repeated Reginald, imitating as well as possible the nasal twang. “Where is your objection? I will pay the way,” and he exhibited a roll of notes.

It was sufficient; Jabez was convinced, and allotted Reginald a cabin, at the same time lighting a cigar, an operation that seemed attended with danger to himself, so dried up, lucifer-match-like, and liable to ignition, did he appear. Reginald, accordingly, took up his quarters on board. He had nothing to encumber him in the way of luggage, beyond a portmanteau, and a belt round his waist, stuffed with the circulating medium. He was allowed two days to assimilate himself to the small size of his cabin, on the third day the *Sally Andrews* steamed out of dock. A crowd had collected to witness her departure, and Reginald felt himself a person of consequence as, in defiance of all rules, he stood upon the bridge, to all appearance the commander. The rocks of Clifton were covered with spectators, but they were too high for Reginald to be able to determine, to his own satisfaction, as to whether the ladies were looking at him or at the vessel.

Once out to sea, and affairs took a different tinge; he was obliged to come down, being as yet unaccustomed to the sway of the vessel. Nothing important occurred on the voyage. Reginald was terribly disappointed. He did not even get sea-sick, and so had nothing to talk about in that line. Until they began to get into warmer waters—the vessel was bound to S-----, he

found the time pass heavily. Here a little recreation afforded itself. A shark came alongside, and followed them for days. Reginald borrowed the captain's deer-rifle, and amused himself with firing at the huge monster. Either the motion of the waves disconcerted his aim, or the fish found a bullet a matter too small for serious consideration, as it took no notice of him, to his intense annoyance. At length a "nigger" sailor who had been watching the fun, observed that "massa" had hit him at last.

"Where?" eagerly inquired the sportsman.

"In de jaw, guv'nor, I seed a tooth sink."

Reginald was disgusted and hung up his rifle. He found a new means of employing his time, as they approached the Southern coast. Regardless of danger, he climbed up the main mast—the vessel was a steamer without square sails—and sat himself, glass in hand, astride of the spanker, to sweep the horizon in anxious expectation of discovering a Federal war-boat. In vain. At last, however he observed the smoke of a steamer, at a great distance, in one long wavy line against the sky. He pointed it out to those on deck and was rewarded with numberless grins.

"Yer have seed the sea-serpent, massa" remarked the abominable old nigger. Nevertheless the fires were looked to, certain murderous looking revolvers were distributed, and a watch set. The effect of which arrangement was that in three days' time the *Sally Andrews* finished her voyage by arriving in safety at S------. Reginald was the first to land. The day was blazing hot, the heat seeming to be reflected from the houses and the pavement; the streets were comparatively deserted except by the mosquitoes; on the whole his first impressions of the South were unfavourable. After wandering to and fro for some time, he was about to accost a sentinel, clad in the grey Confederate uniform, who stood motionless before the gate of a large mansion somewhat detached from the rest of the row, when an open carriage dashed out. The sentinel performed the military salute. Reginald also did homage. He had seen something that involuntarily compelled it—namely a lady of unparalleled beauty. She was simply dressed, yet leaning back in her seat with the air of a queen, nor could she have reached her nineteenth year. Her eyes were deep blue, arched with eyebrows of jet, such as no pen can describe; her lips presented that Cupid's bow which invites a kiss, her hair had the glossy blackness of a raven's wing. Others have some particular beauty—there is scarcely a woman who has not some redeeming feature; some a lip, another an eye, a third teeth of surpassing brilliancy; this one combined all these attractions.

Reginald felt his breast give a violent throb. Much has been written about love at first sight. Some deny that it is the best description of the passion; others maintain that it is. There is no doubt, however, of its existence, for, from that moment, Reginald was devoted to the fair stranger. His first impulse was to run after the carriage. That he subdued for various reasons. Firstly, that it went too fast. Secondly, on account of the heat. Thirdly, that it might return to whence it started. Fourthly, because he wished to know the name of the inmate, which was not pasted up on the door. He turned to the soldier.

"Who is the lady? What's her name?"

"Wal," replied the sentinel, bringing the butt-end of his musket, with a thud, on the pavement.

"The lady in the carriage," added Reginald.

"Miss Isabel Montgomery." The Confederate nodded, and, shouldering his rifle, moved on. Reginald, however, stuck to his side.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Wal! Now I guess you're a green-horn."

"I guess I ain't. Come, tell me. Jove! it's warm," suddenly added Reginald, a thought striking him. He drew a pocket pistol, containing a good half-pint of brandy, from his pocket, and offered it to the Confederate.

“That’s foreign,” said the soldier as he gave back the flask.

Reginald shook it, but there was no sound. It was empty. Forthwith he looked upon the man beside him as a human sponge. At any rate drink made him expand. He became communicative, and answered Reginald’s queries without fail.

He was going to the railway station. Did he know Miss Montgomery? She was his colonel’s daughter. Did he know where she was going? He was going after her as a sort of escort. And where was he going? To Kernsville. And where was Kernsville? Sixty miles south of S---”.

Did Colonel Montgomery live there? He did, he owned 800 slaves there, and commanded a force of militia and sharpshooters.

By this time, they had arrived at the station. But the bell had rung, the doors were shut, the officials would not allow of further progress. Reginald got desperate.

“I’m the bearer of important despatches—on President Davis’s business,” he exclaimed, exhibiting a large pocket-book.

“Public business,” shouted the official outside to the official inside, who drew back the bolt, and opened the door a couple of inches. Reginald and the Confederate made a simultaneous dash, bearing down all opposition. The train was already in motion, but they sprang in after the guard, whose connivance was purchased by Reginald.

He then again addressed himself to the sharpshooter, as he turned out to be. The result of their conversation was that Reginald secretly determined upon joining Montgomery’s brigade, not on account of the Confederate service, but because he found it afforded a daily chance of seeing the colonel’s daughter. That night saw him enlisted. There were no preliminary forms to go through. The Confederacy was not so flush of men as to reject volunteers on a slight question of nationality, and he laid himself to sleep that night on a cot in the Kernsville barracks, which were airy buildings. He now found that he had left his portmanteau on board. However, that was a small matter, as his money was in a belt round his waist, and he consoled himself by gazing at a star which was rendered visible by the absence of a shingle where a shingle should have been. He felt supremely happy for three reasons. He was in America. He was on a career of adventure. Lastly he was in love.

CHAPTER II.

THE Kerrisville barracks were situated on the outskirts of the town. They had been originally occupied by the slaves of Col. Montgomery and the garden which surrounded his mansion came up to their back; but upon the approach of war the slaves were turned out and the sharpshooters in. Reginald discovered when he commenced an examination of his quarters the next morning, that the architect who designed them had not been happy in his conceptions. In the centre there was an arch through which a carriage road led to the Colonel’s mansion, this arch, by some oversight, had been made so low, that a person endeavouring to ride beneath, must inevitably be swept from his steed. He soon found that his duties were far from onerous. They mainly consisted in getting acquainted with his mess, who were 14 in number, under the command of Sergeant Gumley. This was an easy matter. It was only necessary to hand about his brandy flask. It was now that he had an opportunity of more closely examining his companion of the preceding evening. His name, he quickly found, was Chateaubriand. He was very tall, beating Reginald by a head. His nose was sharp and had a horny look about it. His eyes were grey. His hair was dark. When he looked at one, probably from the constant practice of squinting along his rifle, he shut one eye and elevated his chin. Coming up to Reginald to shake hands, he suddenly seized his watch-chain.

“Wal,” remonstrated Reginald.

“Neow I guess—where did yer get this here from?” enquired Chateaubriand, pointing to a coin attached to the chain.

It was one of those ancient Saxon pieces which, as the legend went, exhibited a Bourton galloping off with his lady fair, albeit it must have been struck some centuries before the event it was said to commemorate took place. Reginald explained. Chateaubriand’s curiosity was evidently aroused, he became partially excited, and his tone was no longer nasal nor deformed with conventionalities. He discoursed learnedly upon it, and seemed loth to leave his hold. Reginald took it off and handed it to him. Chateaubriand was convulsed with gratitude. From that moment he stuck close to his friend. About noon Sergeant Gumley made his appearance, *via* the arch, carrying a book which he appeared to be perusing. He gave an order to clean the arms and passed on to his apartments, still reading as he went.

“What has he there?” said Reginald.

“He’s studying strategy,” replied Chateaubriand. “Got a head for that, if you’ll believe him. He eats his dinner by strategy—for he’s of opinion it would be unwise to allow the communication to be cut off. He’d take a wasps’ nest by strategy.”

As they scoured on, under a sort of verandah near the arch, a negro of more than ordinarily ugly appearance passed. His eyebrows formed his forehead, which was balanced by a mass of wool behind. He grinned as he went, a horrible grin. Reginald soon learnt his history. He was an engine-driver of considerable reputation in the way of killing his passengers. He had run over every mortal animal except a fox. His services were only retained because the officials were afraid to dismiss him lest worse mischief might follow.

By this time Reginald had completed the scouring of his rifle, and he put it to his shoulder to become acquainted with its peculiarities. The action led to a conversation upon shooting. Chateaubriand desired to become acquainted with his friend’s skill. A pigeon perched upon the top of a tree at some distance afforded a good opportunity. He loaded his own and Reginald’s rifle. Those who were standing by immediately decamped. They knew full well it was useless to argue with Chateaubriand, and they also knew that shooting was strictly prohibited. With this regulation Reginald was unacquainted, nor did he scruple to take aim at the bird. He fired, it dropped and he turned to look at his companion. His rifle was also smoking. A word could not pass before Sergeant Gumley came running to the spot with official indignation red in his face. For once he neglected strategy, and went right to the spot at issue.

“Who fired?”

Chateaubriand pointed to a row of rifles, amongst which were his own and Reginald’s.

“But there was but one shot,” said the Sergeant.

Chateaubriand repeated his action.

Sergeant Gumley made an examination. There were two rifles fouled. The difficulty was to fix upon the offender. It never entered his strategical noddle that two might have been fired at once. Whilst he considered, came a clatter of horse’s hoofs up the road which ran in front of the barracks. A fair equestrian came in sight. Reginald recognized the form. So did Gumley, who ran to open the gate of the arch. By this time the horse was near; and to his intense alarm Reginald discovered it was galloping madly; Isabel had lost control of it. On came the runaway animal. Gumley sprang back out of the way, for it was evidently making for the arch which was the nearest road to the stables. Reginald mentally reproached himself for firing, which he felt was the cause of the animal’s fright. Clattering over the stones it dashed into the barrack yard, with nostrils open, white flecks of foam on each flank, and eyes that seemed to glare. Right for the arch galloped the brute. Isabel saw her danger and crouched. Her face blanched, but she still retained her grasp of the reins, as her raven hair mingled with the horse’s mane. It was of no avail; the arch was too low. Reginald saw she must be swept from the saddle, and dashed forward. He was none too soon. As she neared it,

Isabel involuntarily started from her crouching position, and her breast came in contact with the roof of the arch. Fortunately it was covered inches deep with moss and twining plants—this deadened the blow; but, she, nevertheless, fell unconscious into Reginald’s arms, nearly bearing him also to the ground. Reginald felt a thrill shoot through him as he clasped that lovely form, and gazed in undisguised admiration at the drooping eyelashes, which were closed upon the azure stars beneath. The moment was but a moment, but how delicious. The next, Isabel partly came to herself, with a long drawn sigh. Still she was too weak to walk to the mansion without support, and accordingly accepted her preserver’s arm. As they passed through the garden of Montgomery for a short distance, an avenue of white roses over-arched them. Acting on the impulse of the moment, Reginald snatched an opening bud and placed it in her bosom. Either Isabel was too weak to observe the action, or it was not altogether unacceptable, for she did not remove it. With the selfishness of a lover, Reginald mentally wished the garden three times as long. As it was, five minutes saw them at the *piazza*, of the mansion, within which Isabel quickly disappeared without a word, but casting back a glance which for a moment rooted Reginald to the spot, and stilled the beating of his heart. Was it true? Was it only a fancy? Was it mere gratitude, or did she—could she think anything of him? The question was a delicate one, nay, a delicious one. With a tumult of emotions in his breast, Reginald discussed it as he returned to the barracks. He could not settle it before his arrival at the door. He found that he had not been followed. Gumley, Chateaubriand, several others, and amongst them, Colonel Montgomery, were standing in a circle around a man on horseback, who had evidently but that moment dashed up. As Reginald came through the arch he heard the clear ringing tones of Colonel Montgomery’s voice order Sergeant Gumley to take his command, and destroy the bridge over the Kerne, at Coin’s Creek. The Colonel then passed him almost running. He was evidently anxious about his daughter, but with stern self-denial, had attended to duty first. Reginald was quickly one of the circle. The first thing that he observed was a streak of blood along the horse’s flank. Chateaubriand soon explained the matter. Sherman had taken Augusta and was threatening Kernsville, which was an important post, as it contained the terminus of a railway communicating with S------. A cavalry engagement had taken place some 15 miles west of the town, between one of Montgomery’s outlying parties and a foraging squadron of Federals, in which the latter by the aid of overwhelming numbers, had proved successful. The trooper before them brought in the news of this reverse.

The commission entrusted to Gumley was to destroy a wooden bridge some ,4 or 5 miles up the river Kerne, on which Kernaville was situated. Montgomery would have sent cavalry had he had them, but he had not. Gumley was delighted with the undertaking; it was strategy, the object being to delay the advance of the Federal cavalry, compelling it to go farther up the river. In ten minutes after the bugle sounded all were ready and carrying materials for setting the bridge (which was of wood) on fire, or, if necessary, for blowing it up, they set forth, Reginald, as might be expected, contriving to march beside his friend. This was about two in the afternoon. By three they were beneath a hill round which the river made a bend. On the other side was the bridge it was their mission to destroy. Here for the first time they beheld a human being. It was a negro who suddenly came out upon the road. His heart was evidently merry within him—he alone rejoiced at the advance of the Federals, and loud he trilled his ditty as he heard the soldiers.

“Cassar, Pompey, Jake and I,
 Make de scow to berry near fly ;
 Den we hab a jolly spree,
 On de ribber Oconee.”

“His voice is about as beautiful as his monkey Jaw,” said Chateaubriand. Unheeding this unheard criticism, the negro continued to pour forth:

“ Pompey broke de lid of de locker
Caesar smashed de bottle-stopper.
Jake he catch hold ob de bottle,
Pour de liquor down him trottler ;
Den we hab a jolly spree,
On de ribber Oconee.”

“ Halt!” shouted Gumley. The negro halted.

“Whar for, Massa Mon’gomery ? Whar for? Dey is coming,” replied the negro, with a chuckle, looking over his shoulder.

“ Yer lying varment—hev yer seed ‘um ?”

“Yah, massa.”

“Humbug,” muttered Chateaubriand.

Gumley continued his examination.

“Whar? On de bridge; dey will be ober de hill dis minute.”

“ Ker-chunk ! How many ?”

“ Dis chile calc’lates forty.”

Gumley bent his brows and cocked his revolver.

“ Ef yer lies I’ll kill yer, Whar be the rest gone?”

“ Up de ribber—de wooden bridge wouldn’t take de big guns.”

Gumley whistled with delight. “Whar yer come from ?”

“Dis chile sneak along by de ribber-side down dar.”

“We can get in the rear and blow up the bridge behind them,” said Gumley.

“ Humbug,” muttered Chateaubriand. “ Don’t believe a word of him.”

“Lead on lubber,” shouted Gumley bent on strategy, “March.”

And they marched, led by the negro, down a path, in single file to the riverside. On one hand was the river, on the other, clumps of bushes, which certainly hid them from an enemy on the top of the hill; but nevertheless, looked remarkably suggestive of an ambush.

“ Don’t like it,” muttered Chateaubriand.

Gumley also became uneasy and handled his revolver, making the negro go first. They now caught a glimpse of the bridge, but it was quickly hidden again by the bushes. Suddenly there was a gleam of light—like the reflections of the sunbeams from bayonets. Gumley instantly fired, but the report of the pistol was drowned in a rattling discharge of firearms on every side. A sudden gust of wind blew the smoke away, and Reginald saw that three-fourths of the party were lying on the ground dead or mortally wounded, Gumley had not fallen, but was staggering about as if intoxicated. Instantly they were surrounded and disarmed. It was a motley crew that had composed the ambush. Armed to the teeth—some with as many as three revolvers, it was evident, from the lax condition of their discipline, and the want of uniform, that they had fallen into the hands of one of these foraging bands of banditti who fought for their own hand, and whose deeds made a black blot upon the otherwise white escutcheon of the Federal army. Their chief was a thin, gentlemanly man, addressed as Don Gorge, whose sharp black eyes seemed to see everything in a moment. Strange to say an Amazonian-looking woman—she could scarcely be called a lady, though possessed of considerable beauty, walked by his side armed like the rest. Poor Gumley chanced to stagger in her way as she came forward. With a flash of lightning-like brilliancy from her dark eyes, she coolly stabbed him with a bowie-knife—a deed that drew an admiring shout from the lawless band. Reginald’s blood seemed to freeze in his veins as he witnessed this act of ferocity.

Chateaubriand, who stood beside him, sneered, Don Gorge came forward, and in the politest tone imaginable, requested those four individuals who had been happy enough to fall into his clutches, to join the Federal army. The two soldiers, who beside Reginald and his friend, formed the captives, terrified, consented. Rifles were immediately placed in their hands.

“ ‘Tis but a test of your loyalty,” smiled Don Gorge, “just blow these two fellows’ brains out.” He pointed to Chateaubriand and Reginald.

With trembling hands the renegades raised their rifles awaiting the word of command. It was a terrible moment. Chateaubriand seemed immovable, looking hard at his executioner. Reginald glanced up as the word “fire” issued from Don Gorge’s lips, and caught the soldier’s eye as he aimed along the barrel. It was enough. The renegade—doubly false, dropped the weapon, and fled, but was bayoneted in the rear. Chateaubriand fell before the other. So rapid and intense had been his emotions that for a moment Reginald felt stupefied, nor did he awake until he was urged forward. He was then to be spared ; the revulsion of feeling was almost too much. His knees seemed to bend beneath his weight, the death-shot of poor Chateaubriand still rang in his ear, and they were compelled to drag him along. At the bridge were some twenty men, armed like the rest, mounted upon mules or strong ponies, each holding another animal by the bridle. Upon these the party that had formed the ambush mounted. Reginald was accommodated with one, and the whole party set forth at a sharp canter across the river, leaving Kernsville behind them.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER a short but sharp trot of half-an-hour, the track the party was pursuing brought them upon the embankment of the railway connecting Kernsville and S-----, at a point where it crossed the river Kern by a bridge undefended with parapets. Here the party halted, and dismounted. Nearly half crossed the river and hid themselves in the bushes, and behind the trees, which grew upon the banks. Some even climbed into the branches, and all looked to their rifles. The remainder of the troop lay down at full length upon the embankment, but just below its summit, out of sight, with their weapons lying upon the grass, the muzzles in a black row, pointing at the metals. When these dispositions had been completed, Reginald, who had meantime been left under the charge of the negro, who had betrayed them, was desired by Don Gorge to dismount. He obeyed, and was immediately seized by three men, who hurried him up the embankment, and upon the bridge. Ere he could understand what they were about, he was thrown roughly upon the ground, his arms tied behind him, and his ankles together. By a rope his feet were then securely bound to the rail which ran nearest the edge of the arch, while another was passed around his waist, and fastened to the opposite metal behind him. A dawning of the fate intended for him now seemed flashing on his mind. He was bound to the metals—for what purpose ?

As he asked himself that terrible question, Don Gorge and his companions suddenly sprang up the side of the embankment, and laid themselves, like the rest, upon the grass. At the same moment Reginald felt the earth beneath him vibrate; he knew what it was. It was an approaching train. His blood turned cold within him, and he might have shouted for help, but his tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth. His sense of hearing became exceedingly acute, and he listened with awful attention to the increasing roar of the advancing locomotive. His whole being seemed for the time absorbed in rapt attention. Meanwhile the metals to which his feet were fastened, and the earth upon which he lay, began to vibrate in a manner terribly suggestive of the weight which rolled towards him. A sudden increase in the nature of the sound caused him to glance in the direction of Kernsville. Around a gentle curve the cars were winding at a speed which to him appeared supernatural, the smoke from the funnel streaming on the wind, like the hair of an arch-fiend. On —thundering on—came the locomotive, dragging its tons behind it, and Reginald’s very body seemed to shrink together as if he already felt the grinding crush of the forewheel. In that very agony of suspense it would have been a relief to have shouted aloud, but he could

not—he was not even able to clasp his hands together, for they were bound behind his back. He struggled violently, and found that the rope around his waist had in cruel mercy been left sufficiently loose to enable him to sit up. Immediately the engine driver perceived him, and the danger whistle rang out clear and shrill, re-echoing from the banks of the river. To Reginald it seemed as though the iron monster shouted with delight at the victim prostrate before it—he even fancied he could hear its hoarse breathings, as it pressed forward with increased speed. Again he struggled for freedom— again ineffectually, and once more sounded the danger whistle. This time, however, it appeared that the driver had perceived his position, as the steam was shut off, and the screaming breaks applied. It was too late. The impetus given by the locomotive drove the cars forward, and seemed to laugh at the puny efforts of man to stop that which he had put in motion. The momentary hope which had been raised in Reginald's breast departed—his breath came at long intervals—his face turned pale, for he saw that apparently nothing could save him. The iron monster—the modern Juggernaut—remorselessly rolled along; the earth shook as if groaning beneath its weight, the breaks, like the damned, screamed aloud, and like a moving mountain of metal, the enormous machine bore down upon him. It was within ten yards. Already he could feel its hot breath—could see the anxious expression upon the countenance of the driver; aye, the buffers seemed about to hug him in a mortal embrace. One more brave struggle! a desperate one. He rolled over and brought the whole strength of his muscles to bear upon the rope around his waist—straining forward. It stretched, but no—yes, it gave way, and he stumbled to his feet, as a shout of rage rose from the embankments, and he caught a momentary glimpse of the negro running, regardless of the danger, upon the rails towards him. The next instant he lost his balance and fell over the edge of the bridge, hanging from it by his feet which were clear of the metals, but bound to them. He had scarcely comprehended his situation—twenty feet above a rapid river—ere the wheel of the locomotive severed the rope and he fell head over heels, reaching the surface of the water as three or four sharp rifle cracks reverberated from the river banks. Deep down he plunged, as it seemed into Cimmerian darkness, taking in a mouthful of water which nearly choked him. It was a relief to rise again to the surface, to breathe once more the air of heaven, but it seemed only likely to prove a prolongation of agony. He was an excellent swimmer, but what could he do with his hands bound together behind his back, and his feet kept close to each other by the coil of rope around them, which he in vain endeavoured to kick off? He had drifted beneath the shadow of the railway arch, and could hear the tramp of feet above with an occasional scream and hoarse cries of command. He now saw with what purpose he had been bound to the rails, that the train might be stopped and plundered. There was, however, no time to think of the misery that might await others. His own end appeared approaching, and it seemed that he had only escaped certain death beneath the wheels of the locomotive to undergo a protracted struggle for existence. He struck out vigorously with his feet and strove to keep his head above water: for a few moments he would be successful, but he merely succeeded in spinning round in the water, without nearing the banks, and his muscles cramped in their action rapidly lost their power. The arch above seemed to come down and bear upon his head, monsters of the river, appearing to grasp his feet in their slimy fangs, dragging him downwards, his legs became as lead.

As the drift of the current bore him from beneath the arch, once more he struggled and struck out—he saw men and would have shouted but he knew them as enemies; moreover, his mouth was beneath the water—to open it was death. His lungs seemed ready to burst. The bright sunshine dancing on the bubbles he made, mocked him in its glee—his fate that moment was wavering—his destiny had reached a culminating point, above was existence, below annihilation. His head began seemingly to turn, and objects around became dim, it must have been his last moment, had he not then in a wistful glance cast towards the shore,

perceived the troop—his captors—riding off, and amongst them, evidently detained by force, Isabel Montgomery. It nerved him to fresh exertions—he seemed suddenly endowed with a new strength, which lasted but for a moment, still long enough to place him on the bank, where he fell exhausted among reeds and rushes. Long he lay there; still and motionless, aye, powerless as a sleeping child; while the sinking sun dried his soaked garments.

But his constitution was strong and unscathed dissipation—the life blood came again, and the flush of health appeared in his cheek. He opened his eyes still unconscious of his position, and seeing the river flowing peacefully before him, hearing the wind sighing through the reeds, thought for the moment that he was lying, as had been his wont, beside the trout stream at home. The strains of a mocking-bird upon an adjacent willow recalled him to himself—he sat up, and instantly the whole occurrence flashed upon him. Chateaubriand gone, and Isabel—she too had gone. His hands clenched, a frown overspread his brow; he sprang up, and rushed up the river side. Arrived upon the embankment of the railway, a horrible sight presented itself to his view. Fifteen men, clad in Confederate uniform, lay in various positions, dead before him. He gazed upon them and the truth flashed upon him. He had understood it was Montgomery's intention the moment he had certain notice of the enemy's advance to despatch a train, carrying government stores to S ; with this it was evident he had sent Isabel, but the cunning cruelty of Don Gorge had rendered futile the precaution. Where he had been bound to the metals, lay, cut in two, the body of the traitor negro—it was evident that seeing Reginald about to escape, he had rushed forward, and had been struck down by the locomotive. Reginald turned away in bitterness of spirit, and in his heart swore vengeance. There was nothing he could do but return to Kernsville. To follow the trail of Don Gorge alone, unarmed and his hands tied behind him, would have been madness. He kicked the rope from his feet, and set forward upon his journey.

It was a long and tedious one. Seven miles of even railway track had to be traversed, and as he could not swing his arms, the walk was doubly tiresome. Thoughts of vengeance sustained him—his mind was full of the fate that might befall Isabel, and the weariness of his body was comparatively unfelt. At length as darkness began to fall over the land, he turned a long curve, and could just catch a glimpse, through the gathering gloom, of the buildings of Kernsville. At the same time the rattle of musketry at no great distance, followed by the boom of artillery, and a light that shot up into the sky to fall again, after describing an arch, informed him that Montgomery was holding his own, as well as he might. He quickened his pace—he almost ran, despite his fatigue, as the flashes from the guns became visible, and the sharp individual cracks of skirmishes, distinctly audible. It was evident that Montgomery was retreating, as the battle had rolled within half a mile of the town. Reginald now reached the station, and found it occupied by a crowd of soldiers, who were taking possession of a train of cars—the first detachment of the retreat. Montgomery himself was standing at the door of the telegraph office—watch in hand—Reginald heard as he approached, unnoticed in the confusion, the words “all right” pronounced within; Montgomery waved his hand and the cars slowly rolled away from the platform, their places being occupied by others.

It was at this moment, as Reginald was about to speak to his colonel, that a tall man suddenly came round the corner of the office and stood before him. Dead or alive, it was Chateaubriand's countenance that he saw. Reginald started, as well he might, but the soldier placed a hand on his shoulder; that certainly was substantial enough for flesh and blood.

“Chateaubriand.”

“Reginald.”

“How did you escape?”

“The coon had loaded his gun with powder—the wad struck my forehead—stunned me, and I was left for dead. How did you?”

“How can I tell you with my hands tied behind me?”

“Humph—didn’t know you were French before,” muttered the soldier, as he untied the bands.

At that moment an officer rushed up and spoke a few hurried words to Montgomery who hastened off the platform.

“Come,” said Chateaubriand, “if you wish to see a charge.”

They followed, emerging from the glaring light in the station to the dim gloom of the street without. Fifty yards ahead a line of men crossed the streets, from side to side, and a metallic clang told that the ramrods were at work.

“Front rank, kneel,” cried Montgomery, as they advanced.

Down on one knee went the men as the clatter of horses’ hoofs came upon the breeze. In the dim uncertain light Reginald could just perceive a compact mass of men and horses advancing at full speed up the narrow street towards them—could momentarily see the flash of an uplifted sabre. Hoarse shouts re-echoed from side to side as they came; and the clanging of steel grew loud, while sparks were dashed from the pavement by the iron hoofs of the chargers.

“Steadily, my men,” exclaimed Montgomery. Overhead whistled a round shot as he spoke; which struck a building a hundred yards behind, and went ricocheting far into the rear.

“Too high,” remarked Chateaubriand, striking a match. Its feeble light was dimmed by the fire from two hundred rifles which followed. Shouts and cries mingling with the groans of wounded men, and the neighing of horses rose from the struggling mass of humanity, but the noise lasted a moment only, the next the remnants of the cavalry brigade were to be seen retreating in disorder.

“We have ten minutes,” said Montgomery to an officer.

The bugle sounded, and in good order the men marched upon the platform. As they got into the cars, Reginald, thinking it no time for etiquette, seized the colonel’s arm and drew him aside.

“Miss Isabel-----”

“Isabel, what of her?”

Reginald explained in as few words as possible, what had happened.

The colonel staggered, and asked in a loud voice if he had heard the name of the commander of the ambush?

“Don Gorge,” replied Reginald.

Montgomery struck his forehead with his hand, and muttered “Then all is lost.”

At that moment an officer remarked that everything was ready, and the necessity there was that no delay should take place was forcibly shown by a cannon-ball that whistled over the platform. The colonel stepped into a car, and Reginald was about to follow him when the officer forestalled him, and seeing that it was fully occupied, he ran forward, anxiously glancing in, as he went at each window. In vain—each car was crammed—there was nothing left for it then but to climb upon the engine, which he contrived to do just as it was set in motion. Seating himself in abstraction of mind in the tender—abstraction, for he neither heard the volleys that were fired at the train by the rear-guard of the victorious Federals, nor the balls that whistled around,—Reginald leant his head upon his hand, and mentally repeated the words of Montgomery—“Then all is lost, “Why should it be? Who was this Don Gorge that his name should produce such a stunning effect upon a man of undoubted bravery? Those were the questions that occurred to him, nor was it possible to answer them. There was another, what was to be done? How rescue- her? Even that it was impossible to answer. The colonel would, doubtless, be able to suggest some mode of proceeding; whatever it was, Reginald was determined that nothing should prevent him from assisting in the rescue of his beloved. For rescued she must be, was his inward resolve. The idea of total separation was one he was unable to entertain. There was, however, nothing to

be done until the cars arrived at T-----, a station about thirty miles distant, where a large force was encamped, with which, doubtless, Montgomery intended to amalgamate his troops. It was now that Reginald became conscious that for some time past it was with very great muscular exertion he kept his seat—so irresistible was the impulse to swing, as it were, forward, or from side to side. A sensation of great heat, too—a heat exceeding any that he had hitherto felt, seemed as it were, to surround him. He fancied, also, that above the roar of the train he could hear voices, in loud acrimonious dispute. He glanced up, and immediately became conscious all was not right. The boiler plates were red hot, and diffused a sort of fiery glow, by the light of which he saw that the driver and the stoker were engaged in argument, an argument that seemed greatly to excite them. The stoker a white man, whose pale face was remarkable, had his hand upon the valve, but the driver, strange to say a black, by holding his arm prevented it being shut. Reginald stumbled to his feet, and grasping the tender rails to steady himself determined to understand the matter.

"I tell you we shall run into them—it is madness—it is murder!" exclaimed the white, struggling to shut the valve.

The black grinned horribly, and Reginald immediately recognized him. It was that negro driver who had been pointed out to him the morning as having run over everything but a fox. He saw further that there was a strong likeness between him and the rascal who had betrayed him, and remembering a chance word of Chateaubriand it suddenly struck him that this must be the father, and the other the son. From such company little good was to be apprehended. Indeed it required but a glance to show Reginald the terrible meanings attached to those words of the white. Before them—scarcely a mile,—could be seen the signal lights of T-----, and the red lights attached to the guard's van of the train which had immediately preceded theirs were distinctly visible. The horrible purpose of this second traitor became immediately apparent—it was to run into it, and thus in all probability cause the destruction of some four hundred human beings. Reginald shuddered and for a moment stood still undecided. The driver once more attempted to shut the valve. His repeated endeavours at length aroused the rage of the black, and raising his fist he dealt the white a blow which sent him shrieking in agony out into the darkness. Reginald's coolness, strange to say, instantly returned he witnessed this awful deed. He drew his bowie. His purpose was formed. The question was, "the life of hundreds and my own, or this monster's?" It required no deliberation, nor was there time for it. He struck at this inhuman wretch—unfortunately a jolt of the locomotive falsified his aim, and the sharp steel merely grazed the black's countenance. Ere he could recover himself for another blow, the negro seized him by the shoulder, and with a strength which he in vain struggled against, bore him down upon one knee. It was a terrible position. Grasping the engine rails firmly with one hand, with the other the black held him leaning backwards over the edge of the tender. Within a foot of his face grinned the horrible distorted features of the negro—behind him was death, as also in front. The negro had but to slip his hold, and-----. But he was cunning in his cruelty; had he left hold all would have been over at once; by retaining it, Reginald had the protracted agony of seeing his approach to inevitable destruction. On, on, bounding from side to side—like some human mammoth striking against the trees in its passage through a primeval forest, roared the locomotive, driven by the pent up steam.

Around and over the redhot boiler hovered a thin glowing mist—beyond this all was darkness except the signal lights they rapidly neared, and the danger signals on the guard's van of the stationary cars, which appeared like the two blood-shot eyes of some devouring fiend to Reginald's strained imagination. Running parallel and as it seemed racing with the locomotive, could be seen a gleaming light reflected from the polished rails. On, on, ever faster—ever nearing destruction. Each muscle in Reginald's body became rigid in its struggles, but he was powerless - the negro actually laughed in his maniacal fury at his

ineffectual attempts to get free. On, on—it seemed an eternity of suspense, it could scarcely have been thirty seconds, when by a jolt of the locomotive, the furnace door was thrown open, and the red-hot iron came in contact with the negro's legs. He started back with a shout of agony, dragging Reginald from his perilous position by mere contraction of the muscles. Reginald did not lose his opportunity, and the bowie knife struck full deep into the negro's chest. He staggered and fell upon the coal in the tender. Reginald turned, shut the valve, screwed tight down the screaming breaks, and applied himself to raking out the fire. He then grasped the engine rails and awaited the result, if not with confidence at least with comparative calmness. It came in a few seconds and although the shock was not sufficiently violent to throw him off his feet, it was enough to give an idea of what otherwise would have happened.

Colonel Montgomery was the first person he met upon the platform. He had seen Reginald descend from the engine, and seized his arm. Reginald explained as well as possible in the noise of the station what had happened. Montgomery immediately ordered Sergeant Gumley to take a file, and search along the line for the white driver's body. He then had the body of the negro conveyed into a private apartment, and laid upon a sofa. The scoundrel was still alive and glanced upon Montgomery with hatred—intense, beyond description—visible in his eyes. He appeared to take no notice of Reginald who stood near, it was upon the Colonel that the wrath of the dying man seemed to wish to exhaust itself. The stare was so marked and the meaning upon that hideous fiendlike countenance so plain, that it could not escape the colonel's observation.

“Why look at me thus?” said Montgomery. “I have not injured you.”

“You have. You ruined my life, and hunted me as if I was a cat-o'-mountain.”

“What,” exclaimed Montgomery bending his brows. “I ---- I certainly seem to remember your features, but nothing more.”

“I am Asaraca of the swamp,” said the dying negro.

“A runaway, if I remember rightly.”

“Twas a crime to run when I was sentenced to be burnt to death,” sneered Asaraca.

“Condemned to death? I have some recollection—the slave rising. But you mistake, it was not I.”

“Don Gorge said so.”

“Don Gorge!” exclaimed Montgomery.

“Here are the letters you wrote to my wife,” said Asaraca, taking a yellow bundle from his pocket.

Montgomery seized them eagerly, and glanced at the handwriting. “As I expected,” said he, “this is not mine.”

“It is,” almost screamed the black.

Montgomery wrote a few words in his pocket book, and held them in the light that the negro might see the difference.

“I have been deceived,” shouted Asaraca. “As he has served me, so will I him. Listen Colonel, your daughter is in Don Gorge's hands. He is ---- is ----” his voice began to fail, and the death rattle sounded in his throat, “He is – at Calcot Bay — a schooner is waiting—ship for Rio del Colorado there-I-----I-----”

His head fell back, a quiver passed through limbs, the jaw fell, and meaning departed from his glance. He was dead.

“What is to be done?” said Montgomery, gloomily, seating himself, and glancing at Reginald and Chateaubriand, who had alone witnessed the death-scene.

“Follow his trail,” said Reginald.

“Let me track him,” said Chateaubriand; “I have travelled the woods from infancy, you are unacquainted with them.”

“I will accompany you,” said Reginald and the Colonel simultaneously.

“No,” said Chateaubriand, “you, Colonel, cannot desert your command, but let Reginald get on board ship and coast down to the bay. I will keep them in sight; he can cut off their retreat.”

“Good,” exclaimed the Colonel. “Give me your hands, gentlemen. Money shall not be wanting. A thousand dollars for Don Gorge, alive or dead ; ten thousand for Isabel.”

“The dollars I care not for,” said Reginald.

“But I do,” exclaimed Chateaubriand. “I shall be able to publish my discoveries.”

“Your discoveries ?” said Reginald.

“On the stone arrow heads of the Thangpali, a tribe that existed at least nineteen centuries—a most important subject.”

Reginald stared.

“Chateaubriand is an antiquary,” explained the Colonel.

“I am a philosopher,” said Chateaubriand with emphasis.

CHAPTER IV.

BY the first train the next morning Reginald set out for S-----. He had explained his real position in life to the Colonel, and had received full powers to go to any expense. He had a considerable sum of his own around his waist, which had fortunately escaped the observation of the ambush. This he determined to devote to the cause. The arrangements he concluded with Chateaubriand were very simple. Chateaubriand was to follow the trail of Don Gorge; and if he did not, as the negro had said, go on ship-board at Calcot Bay, was to rendezvous there and communicate with Reginald. A look at the map showed that the Bay was in the Federal lines, but was uninhabited. The greater danger, then, to be incurred was in running the blockade of S----- ; and Reginald as he travelled, felt apprehensive that he should fail in engaging a vessel. His good fortune, however, as he dined in a coffeehouse at S-----, placed him *vis-a-vis* with no other than Jabez Junior Johnson. With him he quickly opened a negotiation. Johnson was no fool, and it required the display of some thousand dollars to make him a party. At length for fifteen hundred a bargain was struck, the terms of which were that Jabez way to provide a vessel, and a few desperate men—for what purpose was merely hinted at. The vessel was at hand—the *Sally Andrews* had just finished unloading ; the difficulty lay in obtaining the men ; but Johnson persevered and by nightfall seven were engaged — just sufficient to work the steamer. About eleven o’clock Reginald went on board and took up his former quarters—half-an-hour later and they stood out to sea, the route proposed being a curve.

Calcot Bay was some thirty miles south, and by the ordinary course it might have been reached by morning, but it was necessary in order to avoid observation by the blockade boats to make a long detour, running, in fact, some fifteen or twenty miles out to sea—i.e., out of sight of land, and then, putting her about, to run down the usual route.

It was three o’clock in the afternoon when Reginald, who stood forward, was informed by Jabez that according to the chart the head land seen rising high above the surface of the sea concealed the entrance to the Bay, which was of small size and unfrequented by mariners for that reason, and on account of its shallowness. The *Sally Andrews* steamed along in—Reginald, glass in hand seeking in vain for a sign of a vessel, or for a signal from Chateaubriand. Johnson ran as near the shore as he dared, and lay to, head out to sea, and keeping the paddles revolving just fast enough to prevent lee-way, without advancing.

They had remained thus a full half-hour, anxiously gazing upon the surf-washed beach some half-mile distant, when the sound of a rifle reached Reginald, and directing his glass to the spot above which rose a small cloud of smoke, he clearly enough discerned his friend. A boat was lowered, a sail hoisted, and in ten minutes the keel grated upon the pebbles. Chateaubriand sprang in, exclaiming, as he did so, "They are gone." The boat was shoved off, and as they rowed back to the vessel, Reginald learnt that Don Gorge had embarked, carrying Isabel, the Amazonian woman who accompanied him, and two men with him, on board a low rakish schooner, pierced for four guns, nearly two hours previously. "The schooner had hardly disappeared when the smoke of your vessel became visible upon the horizon," said Chateaubriand.

In answer to Reginald's eager inquiries, he explained that, making use of his Indian experience, he had tried to elude the Federal outposts—had slipped through their lines, and had followed so close upon the trail that he had been concealed behind a rock when Isabel was lifted into the boat, which afterwards conveyed her to the schooner. Reginald ground his teeth, as may be imagined.

Upon reaching the *Sally Andrews*, Johnson was enjoined to get up high pressure, which he did, and evening saw the headland of Calcot Bay sink apparently beneath the surface of the sea. It was in vain that Reginald sought rest that night. He lay in his cot listening unceasingly to the rush of the water against the sides of the vessel as she made rapidly through it, the occasional step of the watch overhead, and the jar and quiver that is caused in steamers by the working of the machinery. His thoughts were busily employed. He could not forget the fact that Isabel was in the hands of one who had proved himself a monster, a man without scruple, who could mingle cunning with cruelty. His impatience to know the worst became insupportable, and he sat up in bed. The yellow sickly light of a swinging oil-lamp illuminated the cabin, which was small, and seemed to him oppressively hot. He sprang out of his berth, and flinging a few things on, went on deck. The heavens were splendid. Stars of a brilliancy surpassing any that he had ever seen bespangled the sky; they did not as in colder climates, give the idea of frigid light, of immeasurable distance, but seemed near enough to heighten the temperature. The sea itself—one mass, one wide seething plain of phosphorescence, was scarcely less beautiful, and but little less grand. Millions of sparks danced upon the waves as if endued with life --yet not sparks, but glowing gems, ever changing, restless as the Northern Lights. Reginald leaned against the bulwarks and gazed in wonder, yet with a bitter sense of loneliness, eating away, as it were, at his heart. Had she been there to look upon the night with him, how different would have been his sensations. Could he even have known she was in safety, with what rapture might he not have looked upon the host of heaven,—that heaven which overspreads all, and was as a canopy above her head as well as his. But no! He knew not but at that moment she might be crying out for help, which there was no one to render. Like the sea his blood seemed to boil within him. He could not remain still, but strode to and fro upon the deck, always keeping wide of the man at the wheel, and the watch, for his agony was too great to bear the prying eye of a witness, even in the darkness—if that could be called darkness when, although the greater heavenly bodies could not be seen, it seemed as though the heaven above and the sea beneath gave forth light. Through that livelong night Reginald paced to and fro, his arms crossed, his brows bent, his gaze neither cast upon the dimming lustre of the stars, nor the paling glow of the phosphoric sea, but bent upon the deck. The cool damp breeze of early morning, at length soothed his heated forehead, and he retired below.

For days and days on went the steamer obliged, on account of the Federal war-boats to give a wide berth of some seventy miles to the shore, and consequently having nearly twice as much distance to travel as the schooner they pursued. On and on—wearisome yet exciting, seemingly a slow, but in reality a rapid progress. At length, one afternoon, the watch

reported a sail on the larboard bow making in for the land; the island of San Luis was just perceptible on the port bow; and Chateaubriand having examined it through the glass declared it was the vessel to which he had seen Don Gorge take his prize. There was now a slight difficulty. Jabez Junior Johnson had lent his vessel, and got together his men, on the understanding that there was some desperate undertaking to be performed, but what that was Reginald had not thought fit to communicate. The question was now, should they acquaint him with the real object of their chase, or not?

Chateaubriand decided not. He was of opinion that it was better to give Johnson to understand that on board the schooner was a political refugee, whom it was important to capture or destroy at all risks. This plan met Reginald's approval, nor did Johnson make any objection to the project. He merely lit a cigar, and shouted to the man at the wheel to ease her off a point.

It was evident that they were nearing the schooner. The wind was low and came in gusts—the worst possible weather for such vessels, as to keep up only a small spread of canvas is to miss an opportunity when the wind does come, and a large one renders them liable to a capsize which is especially to be dreaded in those southern shark-haunted waters. The steamer was slipping through the water at ten knots an hour—it was clear the schooner did not make four, but as the land was only ten miles distant there was still a chance that she might reach it before them, and disappoint their hopes by landing her passengers. An hour passed and the positions of the vessels had considerably changed. They could scarcely be three miles distant—the shore towards which the schooner was evidently making might be four from her. Those on board the schooner did not seem to consider themselves pursued,—the deck was apparently deserted, and the gun-ports were closed. This was apparent to Reginald, as, with a heart beating high with suspense, he stood for ward glass in hand. Johnson was near—hands in pocket—; Chateaubriand close by.

Another hour passed, they were within half a-mile of the schooner, which was still running straight at the shore. The land was low and apparently uninhabited—it boded shallow water, as did breakers on the starboard bow. Johnson had the line out but found the depth considerable - he

then merely commanded the steersman to follow the exact track of the schooner. It was at this moment that the vessel they pursued ran up the stars and stripes, while her deck suddenly became alive with men, and they saw the gunports opened. Johnson turned to speak to the man at the wheel.

“Ker-chunk!” he ejaculated.

Reginald glanced round and in no small amazement beheld a frigate displaying the colors of the United States standing in towards them. It was evident that they had been caught in a trap. As he turned to call Chateaubriand's attention to the fact, a violent shock ran through the steamer,—she seemed suddenly stayed in her motion, and they were thrown upon the deck. A grating sound followed, while the paddle-wheels threw up mud and sand. It was evident that they had struck a bank, but before the shout of Johnson to “back her “ could be obeyed they were over it and once more in a good depth. As they regained their feet they found the schooner, now scarcely four hundred yards distant, had furled her canvas, and dropped anchor, while the wind swinging her round presented her broad side, and showed the muzzles of two guns.

It was obvious that there was a stir on board. A boat was seen being lowered, and Reginald beheld with, a feeling akin to despair, a lady handed over the side into it. So earnestly did he gaze that he did not notice the altered motion of the steamer. It was slower, and at length suddenly stopped. The vessels were now within easy rifle shot. Reginald became conscious that something had occurred ; he turned and encountered Chateaubriand who thrust a revolver into his hand.

Ere he could speak, Jabez Junior Johnson tapped him on the shoulder, “ Neow, my precious, foller me unless yer wants a turn in Davy Jones’s locker.”

“What?”

“ Wal, my boy, I guess as the *Sally Andrews* has a hole knocked in her bottom, and is sinking pretty considerably fast—just so, and look ye here”—he pointed to the stern, and Reginald immediately perceived that the life-boat had been lowered—” just hand o’er the shiners, or go to the sharks.”

Reginald turned to consult Chateaubriand but was only in time to see his figure vanish down the after hatchway. He hesitated.

Johnson put his hand on his shoulder, “Life is sweeter than gold,” he said. “ Fork out and jump in, or I shove this ‘ere knife into yer, and make tracks for yonder frigate—see.”

“Exactly,” replied Reginald, fumbling in his pocket—endeavouring in fact, to cock his revolver, unnoticed.

Johnson stamped his feet in impatience. His lips moved, but the sound was drowned in the boom of a brace of cannon and the whistling of round-shots over their heads. Reginald glanced up, and saw the Confederate flag flying from the mainmast.

“ That skunk Chatelbrain—curse him !” cried Johnson.

“Ping” came a rifle bullet from the schooner burying itself in the capstan.

“ Capt’n—Capt’n !” was the cry from the boat’s crew under the counter, who evidently did not enjoy their position between two fires, for the frigate had lain to, and was clearing for an action at long bows—she could not come in on account of the sandbar.

“Now then youngster,” shouted Johnson, brandishing a bowie. At the same moment a sudden movement of the steamer, caused by a revolution of the paddles, threw both off their legs.

Johnson fell undermost, and the bowie cut his hand. Ere he could recover himself, Reginald seized his long and light though sinewy frame in his arms, and coolly heaved him overboard, where a second revolution of the paddles floated him under the counter. He scrambled to the boat, which was instantly shoved off, and a shot from the frigate which ploughed up the water close by, probably decided them not to attempt a return.

“ Down on your face,” cried Chateaubriand, who at that moment made his appearance on deck, and set the example by falling at full length.

A crackling musketry fire and the whistling of rifle bullets over their heads explained the reason for his timely warning.

“ We shall run down the schooner,” said Chateaubriand; “I have set the engines going, and if they weigh anchor, this breeze will drive them on shore. The frigate can give no assistance as there is a squall coming down from the eastward, and she must give the land a wide berth.”

“ See you anything of Isa----- of Miss Montgomery ?”

“When I ran up the flag I caught a glimpse of the party riding off into the interior—no doubt she is one of them.”

Another loud discharge of firearms, and a crashing sound told that the shot had struck the steamer, but the engines were as yet uninjured, and she still forged ahead though not with her old speed, as the leak had gained on her, and had sunk her deep in the water. The next few moments were exciting, a continual discharge of gun and musketry was kept up from the schooner, and the deck of the steamer was literally torn up into splinters by the bullets. A round shot carried away the funnel, and another the foremast. Still on — on she forged, bearing steadily down upon the schooner. Suddenly the firing ceased; Chateaubriand glanced up, and from an exclamation he made use of, Reginald did likewise. Certain that their vessel must go down if struck, the crew of the schooner had abandoned their guns, and were lowering a boat—strangely enough on that side of their ship which opposed the onward course of the steamer, thus exposing themselves to inevitable destruction should they not succeed in getting away fast enough. That they might have done had not the captain and two

or three others endeavoured to save some effects. The steamer's bow was scarcely twenty yards from the schooner's broadside, yet the boat was not shoved off.

"The fools," ejaculated Chateaubriand.

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth before there was a terrible crash—a grinding sound and a shout of human agony. The steamer had run into the boat, cutting her completely in two, throwing twenty men into the water, most of them encumbered with arms, and knocking a large hole in the schooner's side.

"Follow me," shouted Chateaubriand, rushing forward.

Reginald did so; and sprang on board the schooner—none too soon, as the next moment down the steamer went, leaving a black and wildly whirling vortex in which the schooner's crew were sucked and swallowed up, as it were by the insatiable sea. Reginald clasped his hands in horror. Chateaubriand with difficulty aroused him from his abstraction by pointing out that the schooner was herself rapidly settling down, and that the shore lay some quarter of a mile distant, while a squall was bearing down towards them.

"Do as I do," he said. He sprang down the companion ladder, and hastily selected a rifle from the rack in the captain's cabin. Reginald did the same, and they both returned on deck, also carrying with them a small chest of ammunition which had lain open upon the table—evidently having-been lately used. Chateaubriand closed it—it shut with a spring lock; bound it and the rifles to a spare spar that was rolling loose about the deck and, by the help of Reginald, heaved it overboard. He then divested himself of shoes, and sprang into the sea, Reginald following him in everything. The spar and its load had already drifted towards the shore, but a few strokes placed them alongside. It was now that Chateaubriand cast an anxious glance behind him.

"Swim fast—fast!" he said. "She sinks!" Reginald struck out with all his might. He heard an indescribable sound, and the next moment felt himself, as it were, drawn under by a resistless yet undefined power. It lasted but a second—his head came to the surface, and glancing around, he found that both the steamer and the schooner had entirely disappeared, Chateaubriand was swimming at a little distance. The water now became dark and inky—it was evident that the squall approached, and they made every effort to reach the shore ere it should burst upon them. The tips of the waves as they rolled past—now rising and now sinking, were crested with foam; Reginald felt the breeze upon his cheek, and redoubled his efforts. More and more troubled became the water—higher they rose upon every wave to sink the lower in the watery vale that followed it; now the shore was distinct and plain, apparently but a few yards distant, now it had entirely disappeared. The clouds overhead had become leaden in hue; and the colour of the sea was a reflection of them. It was a great relief when a long rolling breaker carried them almost exhausted upon the beach, and threw the spar with its—to them—valuable load upon the shingle close by. They dragged it out of the reach of the waves, and then looked around them for a shelter from the tempest.

CHAPTER V.

TO find shelter on that low open coast was no easy matter; and Reginald and Chateaubriand were glad to ensconce themselves within the hollow trunk of a large fallen tree, that lay extended upon the ground some hundred yards inland. Here they passed, however, by no means an unpleasant night—at least Chateaubriand declared he enjoyed it, but Reginald found pleasure only in the absence of mosquitoes, whom the rain dispersed. Sunrise found them awake and hungry, having eaten nothing since the preceding day. A walk along the beach was proposed by Chateaubriand, with the double purpose of securing their rifles and

seeing whether or no a fortunate wave had washed any of the ship's provisions on shore. In both they were successful. Several casks of junk had been rolled up, and left high and dry upon the shingle by the tide, while Reginald luckily enough, discovered a case of preserved meat, and a barrel of biscuits. Here was the substantial portion of their breakfast, a clear stream which ran into the sea furnished drink, and refreshed and strengthened forthwith, out they stepped, following the trail of Don Gorge, which, notwithstanding the rain, was still apparent even to Reginald.

He could not, however, succeed in discovering from the hoof marks how large was the party of Don Gorge. Chateaubriand declared there were five, and, only too glad to find the number so small, Reginald did not attempt to deliver an opinion. On they marched through the tall grass of the prairie which seemed to extend to an unlimited distance, and at times rose high above "their heads. It had been trodden down into a path by the passage of those whom they pursued, like a field of corn ridden through by a horseman, and the track was in consequence easy to trace. They quickly lost sight of the sea on account of the height of the grass and the level character of the country; long indeed before the solemn sound of the ceaseless waves upon the beach, became inaudible. When this died away in the distance, the sighing of the wind over the tall grass seemed to supply its place, as the grass itself the sea—so boundless did it appear, the one a sea of water, the other a sea of vegetation. On, on, Reginald had no idea previously of the sense of loneliness—although he was not alone—that came over him as he walked forward, ever forward, through and over that southern prairie. Not a bird sang or flew across the cloudless sky, not an animal rustled through the grass, there was not a sound save that of the wind and the occasional crackling of a dried-up withered plant beneath their feet—a noise that almost startled them, so out of place did it seem. It was a similar sensation to that which overcomes one in a cathedral, or a vast primeval forest – an indescribable feeling of immensity and a sensation of incapability of corresponding expansion; an idea, an impression of littleness. The silence of Chateaubriand, perhaps assisted in producing this impression. For him to be silent was something far from common—he had generally an odd observation to make, or a yarn to relate.

Noon found them many miles inland, and it was but a little past that hour when Chateaubriand suddenly stopped, stooped, picked up something, and handed it to Reginald, remarking at the same time, "Here are traces of a fire,—they encamped here last night."

It was a bracelet that Reginald held in his hand. The fastening was rather remarkable, consisting of an eagle with ruby eyes, tearing a serpent. He immediately recognized it—it was one that he had seen upon Isabel's arm, and with the extravagance of passion, contrived, unseen by Chateaubriand, to impress a kiss upon the relic.

It was evident that she had lost it, and promising himself the pleasure of restoring it, Reginald placed it in his vest. He could not, however, even with his buoyancy of spirits, help his imagination presenting to his mental gaze, ideas, which were anything but agreeable. He could not resist asking himself the question, "Was this bracelet accidentally lost or was it torn off in a struggle?" His mind hovered between hope and fear that livelong day, and he was still unsettled, still, however, as it were, hoping against hope. When the sun sank it became rapidly dark, and Chateaubriand declared it was necessary to take some rest. They made a meal upon the contents of the case, when after a short conversation Chateaubriand finding Reginald taciturn, laid his rifle by his side and shut his eyes. Reginald also was compelled by wearied nature before long to close his eyes in sleep, but it was a haunted one. He fancied that he saw far away and yet near—a paradoxical position, common enough in dreams—Isabel standing in the darkness by a blazing fire—the light from which threw an unnatural glow upon her countenance. Her hands were clasped, her hair streamed over her shoulders, her look was one of alarm, and she often gazed behind her into the darkness to turn with a

shudder towards the fire. As he gazed Reginald imagined he perceived rise up uncouth and horrid figures near her one of which looked over her shoulder, in the flickering firelight displaying the hated features of Don Gorge. Isabel suddenly turned, seemed to see him, and uttered a piercing scream which awakened the dreamer. The calm stars seemed to look down in the quiet scorn of immutability upon him, as restless and disturbed Reginald arose and looked around him. As his gaze was turned westward, and his heart gave a long throbbing as his thoughts centred themselves upon her who was a captive, a red glare—lasting but a moment—caught his eye. He gazed again imagining himself mistaken—it had disappeared; again, and once more up shot a light, blazed for a moment and apparently expired.

Reginald's heart beat fast, "The camp-fire," he muttered. "I am near and yet so far." He awoke Chateaubriand, who looked long and anxiously—in silence—at the rising and falling flame, then turned his gaze upwards and contemplated the stars. "It can be done," he said, half aloud. "The cross is but a little open."

"What can be done?" asked Reginald. "Can we come upon them?"

"We can," replied Chateaubriand.

Not another word was spoken, but feeling that their rifles were ready for any emergency, they moved forward. On—on through that silent prairie, as it were doubly silent in the night; now catching a glimpse of the watchfire, losing it again, and walking forward without a guide. At length with a suddenness almost startling, they emerged from the tall grass of the prairie upon what seemed a plain, denuded of verdure—a sandy desert. Scarcely two hundred yards distant from the edge, could be seen the embers of the fire with a little light-blue flame hovering over them. Strange and weird enough was that solitary spot of fire on the edge of the desert. There seemed none to tend it—not a figure could be seen, all was darkness around. Chateaubriand touched his friend's shoulder. "Remain here," he said, and making a step forward was lost in the darkness.

Reginald crossed his arms and waited patiently, feeling full confidence in Chateaubriand's rangership. Alone, however, the time seemed long, and he welcomed the sound which announced the approach of his friend. He put out his hand—it encountered something hairy and rough, and it was with difficulty he repressed a start.

"It is I," said a well-known voice.

"Yes, but-----" began Reginald.

"I have a brace of mules with me."

"What, where did you find them?"

"I crawled close to the camp fire and saw that, although no one was on his legs, a watch was kept. An idea struck me, I crawled on again in the darkness until I came upon these two—the other three were too near the fire to be secured with safety."

"What then is our plan of action?"

"To sleep until dawn, and act according to circumstances. It would not surprise me if Don Gorge and Isabel, and that beautiful tigress, ride on leaving the two men behind. If so—we make a detour, and get to the top of the cliffs, for we are now at the entrance to a ravine, and as the valley rises gradually to the surface we shall encounter them."

"I trust implicitly to you," said Reginald. "Else I would propose a dash at once."

"Don Gorge would escape in the darkness, not improbably stabbing her."

"Did'st see-----see-----?"

"No, but there is a small tent, and as three men lay around the fire, doubtless it is occupied by the females."

Reginald gave a sigh of relief, and, following the example of Chateaubriand, sat him down to rest, and watch for the dawn. The paling stars soon gave evidence that the reign of night was drawing to a close, and it was with no small pleasure that they observed streaks of light beginning to shoot up in the eastern sky. In another hour the light of morning was

sufficiently diffused to allow them—seated as they were just within the edge of the prairie and hidden by its tall grass, to see, although but indistinctly, the small tent which sheltered all that Reginald held most dear, and by it the dark figures of men, one of whom was leaning upon his elbow. Suddenly he sprang to his feet. Chateaubriand smiled. It was evident that the watcher had at last discovered that two of the mules were missing. He awoke his companions and they sat up just as the sun rising above the horizon sent his level beams to glint upon the barrels of their rifles, and to light up the ravine and cliffs which arose towering as a background. Over their summits the mists rolled away, chased by the sunbeams.

It was now evident that a close conference was being held between Don Gorge and his men, the result of which was that the three remaining mules were prepared, the ashes of the fire blown up, and a man was seen roasting among them something for breakfast. Profiting by example Chateaubriand and Reginald paid another visit to the preserved meat case, which with a sip from a pocket pistol, completed their meal. By this time the inmates of the tent had made their appearance the mules were immediately brought forward and they mounted.

“Isabel—Isabel,” muttered Reginald, as they rode off accompanied by Don Gorge leaving, as Chateaubriand had conjectured, the two men, whose mules they had captured, to make their way on as best they might.

“Now,” said Chateaubriand, taking the bridle of his mule. “Let us go forward.”

He led the animal along the edge of the prairie carefully, keeping hidden by the tall grass for at least an hour, until they came upon a forest of gnarled and ancient oaks which covered the space between the prairie and the cliffs. Concealed by the trees they mounted and rode rapidly on, finding the ground gradually rising as they left the prairie behind them. Up, up ever steeper grew the side of the ravine, ever thinner grew the trees. At length they emerged upon the top of the cliffs and looked down into the steep sided valley. Almost perpendicularly for a clear three hundred feet, fell the rocks—naked, except where—here and there—a prickly cactus grew in the crevices. They had timed themselves with wonderful success. Three galloping figures almost exactly beneath, but slightly ahead, were immediately recognised by them as Don Gorge, Isabel, and the Amazon.

“On” cried Chateaubriand, following on the top of the cliffs—Reginald also went forward upon, the edge, so near that had he not been absorbed in watching those below, he must have turned giddy. “On,” again cried Chateaubriand. “As I expected, they make for the Acquilantua—the House of the Ancient Kings, once there and we have no chance. Come!” Reginald needed no second invitation, and without stopping to enquire whither they were going, pressed ahead, on, on, over sticks and, stones, seeming to totter upon the very edge of the precipice. Ever narrower grew the path, ever more precipitous the ravine side, ever nearer to the edge came the belt of forest, and ever more dangerous grew the danger. Don Gorge had seen them, and evidently guessed their purpose—as he pushed forward at a terrible pace, and was gradually drawing ahead. Reginald kicked his mule frantically, and on tore the animal heedless of precipice or narrowing path, which last soon compelled Chateaubriand to fall in the rear. It was well for him that he did so. Scarcely had he-fallen behind when Reginald’s mule tripped upon a loose stone, lost its balance, ran for a moment as it were leaning over the ravine, and then toppled bodily over, carrying its rider with it. Turning somersaults with maddening velocity, Reginald realized that sensation which he had sometimes experienced in dreams—of falling falling for ever, and yet with an ever increasing dread of reaching the bottom. He fortunately disentangled himself from the mule, which fell faster than himself, bounding from rock to rock as it went. Reginald felt himself,—for he was not long enough in one position to clearly see - approaching a projection on which his momentum threatened to dash him in pieces. Involuntarily he stretched forth his hand—joy of joys, it encountered something firm. It was a cactus, and arrested his fall for the moment, but his momentum was

too great—it snapped in two, and he descended again, this time, however, falling perpendicularly, without turning. He approached the projection, could see it as it were rising up rapidly towards him, already he felt in imagination the rending jar and shake of falling from a height upon hard rock when once again his outstretched hand encountered the branch of a tree. It bent, but bore his weight, and there he might have swung securely had not his grasping it driven a cactus thorn which had stuck in his skin right into his hand. Firm enough as his will was to hold the bough, so great was the pain that he felt his muscles gradually relaxing—his hand slipped down the branch slowly, but still it slipped. It was now that the mule reaching the ground, doubtless with a heavy thud, called Don Gorge's attention to the position of the pursuers.

Reginald, whose countenance was turned that way, saw him ride his mule under the cliff, evidently with the intention of placing himself out of the reach of Chateaubriand's rifle, while motioning the Amazon to gallop on with the captive. He then dismounted, and placed his rifle at his shoulder. Reginald distinctly saw the muzzle of the weapon pointed towards him ; he listened intently for the "crack" that would be, in all probability, his death note. It came not. Don Gorge was either making certain, or resolved to torture his victim to the utmost.

Reginald felt himself turning giddy, his head began to swim, and his hand, now covered with blood, slipped fast down the branch. His eyes became partially fixed, staring down at the kneeling figure of Don Gorge, and the gaping muzzle of the rifle. Up suddenly rose a white puff of smoke—ping ! and the bullet having cut the branch to which Reginald hung, half in two just above his hand, went whistling along the edge of the cliff. The bough cracked, broke, and hung only by a piece of the tough bark which was undivided. Reginald felt himself spin round, felt himself going, when suddenly a strong arm seemed to wind round his waist and bear him up with ease. His eyes which had been partially closed, recovered their power of sight, as a terrible hiss sounded in his ear. He looked—he was hanging over the precipice suspended in the folds of an immense boa-constrictor, the lower portion of whose body was coiled around the trunk of the tree. The situation was horrible and almost bereft him of his senses. Fortunately, however, he retained his consciousness, and with a convulsive struggle, drew his bowie knife. But in vain did he attempt to raise his arm that he might plunge it into the reptile's body—its coils had surrounded him and he could not move. Backwards and forwards he swung in that terrible embrace ; to and fro darted the head of the serpent—its tongue protruding—its jaws open to the utmost extent—tighter and tighter grew its grasp. A sickening smell seemed to overpower him as the open jaws came nearer and nearer, until drawing back a short distance it seemed to dart upon him. A thought fortunately struck him—he held the bowie-knife by its centre in his fingers, and the jaws of the snake shut upon the steel—its lower jaw driving the point into the brain. Convulsively rolled the coils to and fro, now tight, now loose. Reginald almost feared lest the relaxing muscles would allow him to drop through, and then there was nothing to save him.

He looked up in hope that Chateaubriand—but what could he do ?

Yes, he could do something. High over head the intrepid ranger, with his rifle slung to his back, was descending the almost perpendicular face of the cliff by the help of a creeping plant. Down he came "hand over hand," as the sailors say, nearer and nearer, running a risk that turned Reginald's heart's blood cold. It seemed an hour, it could not have been ten minutes—ere Chateaubriand firmly planted his foot upon a ledge of rock on an even level with Reginald, and hurled his lasso over his friend's shoulder. Reginald felt the welcome rope tighten around him, and he and the serpent—half dead, were drawn upon the ledge; when the one was quickly despatched by a blow from Chateaubriand's rifle butt, and the other's hand grasped in welcome. Ere Reginald could recover himself sufficiently to express his thanks, however, or rather as he began to speak, a wild unearthly yell reverberated down the ravine. "The Apache war-whoop," exclaimed Chateaubriand.

Don Gorge also evidently recognized the sound and arose from his kneeling posture—in which he had remained during Reginald’s struggle with the serpent—apparently in amazement, sprang upon his mule and dashed up the valley following his captive. Chateaubriand looked around as once again came that indescribable yell re-echoing from side to side.

“It is a fiend,” said Reginald.

“His earthly representatives,” replied Chateaubriand. “Follow me.”

He grasped the creeping shrub, but it had been loosened by his descent, and gave way, nearly in its fall carrying him with it over the naked ledge of rock. Their retreat was cut off, and they were exposed without the slightest concealment upon the face of the precipice.

“I shall make the attempt,” said Chateaubriand, about to dash at the rock.

Reginald sized him by the shoulder, said nothing, but pointed to the face of the cliff which the plant had hidden. There was an opening. Chateaubriand unslung his rifle and probed it, but could not reach the extremity. Down they went upon their knees and crawled into the cave, as once more came that awful yell upon the breeze.

“We are safe,” said Chateaubriand, “But Isabel?”

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER crawling forward in darkness for some short time with the yells of the Apaches sounding in their ears, Reginald and Chateaubriand suddenly found the aperture widen sufficiently to allow of their standing up, and seeing that they were in a chamber of considerable size. In the centre stood a large pyramidal stone with a bronze article on it much like a lamp against the wall of the chamber or cave opposite the entrance was suspended another article of metal, looking like a concave burning mirror.

“A secret cave-chamber of the fire-worshippers!” exclaimed Chateaubriand. “It would not surprise me if it is connected with the House of the Ancient Kings by a secret passage.”

“The House of the Ancient Kings,” repeated Reginald interrogatively. “Even so. A house it is, cut out of the solid rock, inhabited say the Indians by a demon, in reality by an old pirate, or rather retired slaver—a man who had devoted his youth to importing blacks, and finally finding his trade forbidden, shut himself up there and bade defiance to the world, Indians and all.”

“And Isabel?”

“Will make him a wife, will she nill she if we do not hasten. I know old Racken the Rover well.” So saying Chateaubriand stamped with his feet around the cave, Reginald watching him in wonder. At length there came a metallic clang—his feet had struck something, and, bending down, with considerable exertion he pulled up a bronze door. At the same moment the sun having reached the meridian poured its noon-tide beams through the opening of the cave, illuminating the chamber, and revealing a dark passage beneath the trap. Chateaubriand unslung his rifle and plumbed the depth—it was but a few feet, whereupon he boldly sprang down, and followed by Reginald, disappeared as it were in the bowels of the earth. They groped their way onwards without difficulty, the passage being wide enough to admit two at a time, and strangely enough the air, seemed perfectly pure.

“There must be another opening,” said Chateaubriand.

He had scarcely spoken ere the passage became as it were split in two, one leading to the left, the other straightforward. After a moment’s hesitation they chose the latter. On—on in complete darkness they walked full a quarter of an hour without seeing a yard in front, and

sounding as it were before making each step with the butts of their rifles. Suddenly a human voice struck upon their ears.

Both paused, so unearthly, so unexpected was it in that black, pitchy obscurity wherein so to say it seemed an impossibility to articulate ; it was muffled or deadened by distance.

Chateaubriand thrust forward his hand. It encountered something solid—they had evidently reached the end of the passage. Again came the voice—low, almost inaudible, and to Reginald unintelligibly as the words were Mexican.

“ I have her at last,” translated Chateaubriand, “ and having her have him. Ah !

Montgomery—revenge is sweet. Through you I have been lame these twenty years—now art thou childless, soon shalt thou be landless, for the Confederacy totters and all must be confiscated—sold for an old song to loyal Don Gorge. He ! he ! My son-in-law, that is to be. Well has he earned it by bringing Isabel.” The voice ceased, there was the sound of steps and all was quiet.

“It must have been the Rover himself,” said Chateaubriand.

Reginald ground his teeth.

“ There must be an opening somewhere,” said Chateaubriand. “ Stay; I will prime my pistol and flash it; look well about you.”

He did so, and they discerned that the passage was closed by a stone door, apparently revolving upon -bronze hinges, and without fastening. Simultaneously they pressed against it; but no it was not to be forced without difficulty. Again and again until the perspiration streamed down they pushed against the stone with so little effect that they were almost constrained to believe it was part of the rock itself. Once more they strove with partial success, as a ray of light shot through a crevice. Into this crevice, at the risk of breaking it, Chateaubriand thrust his rifle, and using it as a lever, in five minutes they stood within the apartment. It was hung round with skins of animals, which concealed the stone walls; high and vaulted, and lighted from above by a small opening in the roof. Over the doorway was a stag’s skull. They got their weapons ready, and stepped out into a passage beyond. At that moment came the rattle of firearms, and a loud yell.

“ Fortunate, fortunate,” exclaimed Chateaubriand. “ The Apaches are attacking the Rover’s stronghold, and we shall be able to ransack it unobserved. Go you that way—I this.”

They parted, each going opposite ways.

Reginald passed several doors; they were open, and he did not trouble himself to enter the apartments. At length, however, at the turn of the passage was one closed. He hesitated a moment. The sound of men’s voices could be heard at a short distance, and the noise of ramrods in the barrels of guns. It was evident he was close upon the defenders of the place. Cautiously he glanced around the corner, and perceived the back of a man, who was evidently taking aim through an aperture in the walls. Reginald saw that the moment was favourable and dashed forward. The door was not only closed but fastened with chain and padlock. This increased his curiosity; he fancied he heard a sigh within, and he became desperate. He passed the barrel of his rifle through the loop of the chain, and with a convulsive effort twisted it round, snapping it in two. The door fell open, disclosing, joy of joys, the object of his search—Isabel—standing at a short distance.

She did not recognise him in her fright, but screamed and started back. Reginald dropped his rifle, and fell upon his knees, outstretching his hands. Isabel observed this and it appeased her alarm; she looked again, uttered a cry, evidently of pleasure, and fell half-fainting into his arms. Reginald sprang to his feet, and carrying his fair burden, bounded down the passage hoping to escape observation. But in vain, Isabel’s scream had attracted attention. He had scarcely gone a yard ere he heard an oath in a well known and hated voice. He felt himself pursued by Don Gorge, and redoubled his speed. He gained the apartment they had first entered, hoping to find Chateaubriand there; but he was not, nor was there time to close the

door before Don Gorge, sword in hand, was upon the threshold. Reginald carefully deposited Isabel upon a couch of skins, the only furniture in the apartment, and turned to encounter his pursuer. He was entirely unarmed he had dropped his rifle to carry Isabel, and wore no bowie. Don Gorge hesitated as it were for a moment, gloating upon anticipated triumph; that moment proved a turning point of his existence, and altered the aspect of affairs.

Reginald caught a glimpse of a magnificent Mexican sabre hanging by a nail to the wall. He tore it down, and warded off Don Gorge's first thrust with it still in the scabbard. Springing back to escape the second gave him time to draw the blade, and ere Don Gorge could recover himself he received a slight wound in the shoulder. This rendered him frantic. He lost all control of himself, and, with eyes glaring like those of a tiger engaged in mortal combat, thrust and struck with a vehemence which defeated his own purpose. For he became blinded with rage, over-reached himself, and struck the point of his sword into the stag's skull, that was above the door. Ere he could tug it out his life's blood poured upon the floor, Reginald's sabre having passed through his heart.

At that moment Chateaubriand having been attracted by the clash of steel entered the apartment. A grim smile passed over his countenance as he observed Don Gorge weltering upon the floor. He said nothing, but carefully fastened the door, then turned and pointed to the secret passage. Reginald immediately understood him, seized Isabel in his arms, and entered it, closely followed by his friend. As he passed the branch passage Chateaubriand laid his hand on his shoulder, passed by and led the way down it. Each step seemed to bring them nearer the light without, the air became purer; and the gloom less dense. At length they arrived at the opening, but it was blocked up by a stone, and it was in vain they attempted to force it. Suddenly an idea struck Chateaubriand.

"Push it sideways," he said. They did so, and it was moved with ease. The flood of light that burst in upon them revealed the reason of this. A shrub no doubt originally planted to conceal the entrance had grown into a tree, but could be slipped past with difficulty. For a moment they stood as if dazzled by the sunlight uncertain whither to turn their steps.

"Here are traces of a path," at length observed Chateaubriand, going forward.

They followed him, Reginald still half carrying, half supporting Isabel—a labour of love. Half an hour's walk through a forest of oaks and a solemn sound reached them carried upon the breeze—it was like the moaning of pines bending before a storm.

"The sea!" exclaimed Chateaubriand, and in five minutes they stood upon the beach. There were men moving upon it, a boat drawn up, and a ship lying to at a little distance. Friends or enemies? That was the question. It was, however, no use to endeavour to conceal themselves, they were evidently observed, as the men came running forward, and in a few minutes surrounded them. It was the Confederate uniform they wore.

"Sergeant Mayson," half shouted Chateaubriand, in excess of amazement, recognising a sergeant who had served with him under the colonel. "Is it you?"

"Ay—and is it you?" repeated the honest sergeant. "Miss Montgomery, 'too—my eye—and here comes the colonel."

Up certainly enough ran the colonel; he could not speak, but taking Isabel from Reginald clasped her in his arms. At that moment an arrow whistled through the air uncomfortably close.

"We have been tracked by Apaches," cried Chateaubriand. "To the boat."

Thither they went pursued by another and another winged messenger of death, but the distance was too great, and no harm was done. It was evident that the Indians were in too weak numbers to dare to leave the shelter of the woods. Not a word was spoken until the ship's deck was gained, and Isabel handed down below. The colonel then shook the two friends heartily by the hand, tears welling up in his eyes.

“ Friends,” he said, “ you have restored to an old man his only joy—I cannot reward you sufficiently. My fortune is, however, yours—you will spare enough for her.”

“We will touch nothing,” said Reginald.

“ Except enough to publish my discoveries,” added Chateaubriand.

“The Confederacy has fallen,” continued Montgomery. “ I have saved the larger portion of my fortune, however ; it is on board. When I found I could no longer help my country, I thought it time to search for my child. I bought this vessel, and followed by a few of my command coasted down. Fortunate meeting; but whither shall we go ?”

“To England,” cried Reginald, cheerily. “ Bourton Hall will shelter the whole ship’s crew if necessary, how much more then Isabel. Come aloft there.”

What resistance could be made to this invitation ? The sails were set, and with a flowing sheet they soon lost sight of the low, flat Mexican shore. At night, however, the watch on deck called attention to a glow upon the horizon.

“It is the Indians,” said Chateaubriand. “Without doubt tracking our trail backwards, they have discovered the secret passage—the House of the Ancient Kings was originally entirely of stone, but Racken the Rover built a wooden edifice upon it; depend upon it, it is now in flames.”

“And who is Racken the Rover?” asked Reginald.

“Let us go below,” said the colonel, “and I will explain matters.”

They did so, and seated themselves at a table in the colonel’s cabin. Montgomery spread some papers before them. “You remember Asaraca ?” he asked. “ Well, here are the letters, I have examined them, and at last understand the mystery. This Asaraca of the swamp, as he was called, was a runaway negro ; from these letters addressed to his wife, and written, gentlemen, in the handwriting of Don Gorge, it would appear that that double-dyed scoundrel had himself ruined the negro’s home, and then swore to Asaraca, a man of no learning, that it was I.”

“ But how did Don Gorge become acquainted with the runaway ?”

“ I will reveal my private history. Understand that twenty years ago I was a suitor for the hand of the fair girl who afterwards became my wife, and who now lies covered with the green turf. Don Gorge also aspired to her hand—he was rejected, hence his rage, hatred, and a hellish plot of a slave rising, with Asaraca to head the insurrection. It was, however, discovered, and a price set upon both their heads. They left the country. Time had altered Asaraca until I no longer recognised him. Their fresh plot is now apparent —the traitorship of Asaraca and his son stimulated by Don Gorge is evident, and when I tell you that this Racken the Rover was also one of my rivals whom I lamed in a duel, you will understand all.”

“ Excepting,” remarked Chateaubriand, “ how you came to land at a point so opportune.”

“We heard the sound of firing,” replied the Colonel.

“Ah, the Apaches—whom heaven confounded,” said Chateaubriand. “ Gentlemen I shall retire, and think over my discoveries—shall they be published in quarto or octavo ?”

* * * * *

Bourton Hall was merry enough that ensuing Christmas. Col. Montgomery had accepted Reginald’s invitation, he had done more, he had listened to a whisper concerning Isabel. Upon that whisper Reginald had acted—he found Isabel with a faded rose in her hand ; it was the one he had given her, he wished for nothing more fortunate. What could she do but admit he had her heart ? Hence the festivity. Huge logs blazed upon the hearth, holly and evergreens adorned the walls, cheerily rose the song, and deep were the healths quaffed to the bride.

Enough. All were happy, and even Chateaubriand contrived to forget for the time, the stone arrow heads of the Thangpati, with which he had so puzzled the brains of the learned. The

question was. were they real or accidental ? The night of nineteen centuries is not so easily seen through, and the question remains just where it was.

MASKED

CHAPTER I.

THE mass of the people is always more or less conservative. This is evident from the slow rate at which changes, whether political or social, are effected. It sometimes requires years to raise a reputation, but once gained it is a difficult thing for another, however brilliant his genius may be, to supplant it. The introduction of a new viand is always looked upon with suspicion lest the community be poisoned, and as to the *debut* of a new doctor, it is tantamount to a revolution, and a revolution in England is not so easily effected. It was from this characteristic of the Briton that the town of Larston was suddenly subjected to a fever of expectation, almost of dread, when it became aware that a new doctor had set up practice therein ; and that the manager of the Larston Theatre had announced the *début* of a new actress. The new doctor found himself looked upon as a species of wild beast, or rather a licensed, poisoner—he was avoided in the streets as though his very glance could kill. If he went to the market dinner nobody would take wine with him and even the waiters manifested an apparent reluctance to touch his money. He seemed amused rather than disconcerted by this brusque behaviour knowing full well that time would familiarise the inhabitants of Larston with his personal appearance, and that his intentions would then be considered no worse than those of others. The fact was that Larston, like other places—the metropolis itself not excepted,—had, by a long course of habit, got to believe in one or two men, and in them only. Nobody could write a better leading article than the editor of the *Larston Courier*, nobody could sell a better cheese than the grocer in High Street, nobody could manage a Theatre better than Mr. Barton, nobody could act like Mdlle. Tostino, nobody could be a better physician than Dr. Kinkelman. The latter gentleman had in truth the confidence of the whole place. He had been their only medical man for some twenty years, that is with a brass plate on his door, though there were three or four gentlemen entitled assistants who did at least four-fifths of the work. If anybody died in their hands it was their fault; if anybody was likely to recover after a lingering illness, Dr. Kinkelman always paid the last visit, and thus got the credit of the cure. “ Mr. So and So,” the patient would say, “ did me no good, but directly Dr. Kinkelman came, I felt better.”

A great deal has been written, and a great deal more might be written, concerning the effect of faith in working miracles—Dr. Kinkelman knew very well its value, and spared no pains to keep up the dignity of the profession. His iron-grey hair was brushed back from his forehead; his light grey eyes looked forth upon the world from beneath frosted eyebrows; his mouth was ever closed—he never smoked, and made a good thing of granting permission to others to do so; he was never seen to laugh ; scrupulous neatness was the order of his dress; white were his teeth, black his clothes. It was no wonder, then, that after twenty years’ acquaintance with this gentleman the inhabitants of Larston asked each other, with significant glances every morning, as to whether or no the new doctor had got a patient. When it was known that he had, in an old lady suffering from a chronic internal complaint, which Dr. Kinkelman could not relieve, the upshot of the affair was watched for with as much anxiety, by the elder portion of the inhabitants, as the approaching *debut* of the new actress by the youthful half.

The eventful evening, to the manager of the Larston Theatre particularly, and to the inhabitants of that town generally, at length arrived.

The house was filled to overflowing-; the pit crowded with a dense mass of human beings. The grand tier—there was a grand tier—contained the beauty of Larston, as the boxes did the *élite*. But the strains discoursed by the musicians did not attract so much attention as the occupants of two boxes to the right of the stage : the one occupied by an old lady, attended by a young and handsome man, and the other displaying in solitary dignity the person of Dr. Kinkelman. For the first time the doctors were seen in a position which allowed the contrast between them to become apparent. -Kinkelman stern, grave, dignified. Dr. Rinald graceful, easy, and “interesting,” as the ladies would put it. Indeed the latter most important portion of the community—the ladies to wit, began from that moment to feel an interest in the young doctor, secret of course, and confined to certain whisperings and semi-sighs raised by his prepossessing appearance. His blue eyes were suddenly found to be bluer than those of any other male inhabitant of Larston, his form more manly, his brown hair more curly, his mouth more humorous, his *personnel* more graceful, and his general appearance, over which there hovered, according to these fair inquisitors, a soft, reflective melancholy, more worthy of study. It could be no such terrible thing after all to have one’s pulse felt by his white hand. After all the arm of youth would be quite as effective, perhaps more so, as a supporter in a fainting fit, than that of age. Even the elder portion of the community acknowledged that he certainly had an agreeable appearance, and his evident anxiety for the old lady’s comfort was looked upon in a favourable light. As to the said old lady, by the young inquisitors before-mentioned, she was, of course, declared “ positively frightful,” and how she could come there to see a new actress, with one foot in the grave and the other a wooden one, was more than they could imagine ! In short, during the interval which elapsed before the curtain rose, in that period in fact, when the audience is supposed to be listening to the orchestra, Dr. Rinald’s reputation went up 50 per cent. to the great annoyance of Dr. Kinkelman, who became graver and sterner than ever, when he observed the numerous double-barrelled glasses directed by the feminine portion of the audience at the box next his.

At length up went the curtain, disclosing the first scene of the piece in which Mdlle. Tostino took the part of the mild-hearted daughter of a pirate, and the new actress Mdlle. Nelinda, that of the persecuted heroine. The manager had been very fortunate in his selection of artistes during the season, and, with the assistance of Mdlle. Tostino, had been enabled to run a piece with full houses for twenty consecutive nights, attracting, indeed several gentlemen, connected with the profession, from London—a great honour not easily achieved by a manager. Mdlle. Tostino’s beauty had become the standing criterion of female loveliness in Larston; and there was no doubt that her dark eyes, and commanding figure, contributed quite as much to keep the piece in favor as the intrinsic merits of her simple acting which, although good, was nothing extraordinary. It was thus with no small palpitation of the heart, that the manager had announced, with the first night of the new piece, the *debut* of a new, and, as yet, totally unknown actress.

The appearance of Mdlle. Tostino was hailed with a burst of enthusiasm, and her every motion watched with an interest certainly flattering. Even the stern Dr. Kinkelman leaned forward in his box to catch the words which fell from her lips, and applauded with some zest the conclusion of the first act. His enthusiasm, however, was suddenly checked by the observation he made, that the actress, ere the curtain descended, cast a glance at the occupant of the box near him, the meaning of which could not be mistaken. It was a joyful recognition, and a wistful seeking for approbation, which came not from the young doctor. Yet what was this to Dr. Kinkelman ? Why should he lean back in his seat and partially draw the red curtain of his box as if to hide his countenance ? Why should the lines upon that countenance bear evidence of some passion working within him ? What did it matter to him, with his iron grey hair, upon whom an actress cast her favors ? There was, however, but little occasion to conceal himself, as the next moment the whole attention of the audience was concentrated

upon the stage, awaiting the entrance of the new actress. The curtain rose at length, and she advanced. There was an impressive silence as she came forward, her head drooping as though she was afraid to display her beauty in the full glare of the gaslight to a thousand eyes—drooping as a snowdrop might in the fierce rays of the spring sun, but at the first sound spoken by that delicious little mouth, at the first silvery tones of that enchanting voice, at the first timid hesitating glance cast from those swimming deep blue eyes, upon the audience when she turned towards them, and the contrast of the raven black hair, with the pure white temples, and the delicate tint raised by maiden modesty, became apparent, there was a long low murmur of amazement, of admiration, almost of worship from the gazing multitude, yet Kinkelman did not draw open his curtain. He had cast one furtive glance upon the stage and no more, why did it matter to him? Nevertheless, on went the play, ever more beautiful became Mdlle. Nelinda as her shyness somewhat wore off, ever more audible became the murmur of the audience, until at length a shout seemed to split the vaulted roof. Instantly it was hushed, producing a marvellous effect, as she was seen to glance at the box next Kinkelman's, to turn pale, then blush and shrink like Diana surprised bathing, to shudder, to hesitate in her speech, to suddenly pause and leave the stage with downcast eyelids and faltering steps. Up rose a loud murmur of admiration at this, as it was at first supposed, consummate piece of acting, but when the manager came forward and expressed his regret that on account of Mdlle. Nelinda having been seized with faintness she could not again appear, the great multitude was hushed in disappointment and sympathy.

From that moment the attention visibly slackened, and she who had been hitherto the Star of Larston—Mdlle. Tostino--had the mortification to see some leaving even in the midst of her performance. Kinkelman was again leaning forward in his box, and in that position remained gazing upon the stage until the curtain finally fell, was almost the last to leave the Theatre, and even then he lingered partially hidden behind one of the pillars of the portal. Why was this? Was it because the new doctor, after seeing his patient to her carriage, had remained reading in apparent absorption the play bills upon the walls, although to a close observer it would have been evident from his frequent glances around that it was a disguise of his real purpose? Whether so or not, there the doctor remained until the audience had left and the actors came forth, generally in pairs, and talking in no suppressed voices about the success of the *débutante*. At length came Mdlle. Tostino, accompanied by the manager, who left her at the door and retired within, whilst she, after hesitating a moment, went up to the young doctor and touched his shoulder. He started, but held out his hand. A few words of greeting, and they passed on together.

Dr. Kinkelman glared from his concealment, ground his teeth, and followed at a short distance. The young doctor went but a few steps, said goodnight, and returned, passing Kinkelman without appearing to note him. Kinkelman immediately increased his pace until he at length walked beside the actress.

“A fine evening,” he observed.

“Ah, Dr. Kinkelman,” cried the actress with considerable vivacity. “I have quite recovered from my headaches—thanks to your prescriptions.”

They walked in silence.

“Dr. Rinald is highly favoured by the Star of Larston,” at length remarked Kinkelman, in bitter tone, which he strove to make composed but which quivered perceptibly.

“He is an old friend of mine,” replied the actress, quickly; “At least he saved my life once when I was foolish enough to venture upon the thin ice of the Serpentine,” she added, with some emotion.

There was a long silence. Suddenly Kinkelman said “good night,” in a low, scarcely audible voice, and crossed the street, the actress waving her hand playfully to him, as he disappeared in the darkness, muttering to himself, “Hell and furies!”

What did it matter to him ?

CHAPTER II.

IT would not have required a very close observer to have discovered on the following evening that something was astir in Larston. Either something had happened, or there was a rumour that something had. Groups of people might be seen gathered beneath the lamp-posts, the glare from the gas above disclosing their eager countenances. Hurrying individuals suddenly slackened their pace, hesitated, and finally mingled in these groups to pass on again in a few minutes with a “well I never,” “did you ever hear ?”

In every town there is a greater or less number of houses whereat true and authentic accounts may be obtained of all that is going forward. The principal place of this sort, that is, the house frequented by the higher class of inhabitants, is almost sure to be that which boasts as its sign the arms of the largest landowner or parliamentary representative of the borough. So it was in Larston. The Crumley Arms Hotel was the hotel of the town. It was situated at the top of the High Street, and had been in former times a posting House, at which some twenty coaches made a daily call; but “alas!” as the landlord, Mr Bustern, would observe, “them days was gone.” Nevertheless, the old inn was still a place of considerable importance, especially as a house of call for the higher class, who would come there, pass a social evening, read the papers, and learn the news, without that obloquy which generally attaches itself to the frequenters of public-houses. Perhaps one cause of the popularity of the place was the fact that next door resided the barber which was convenient for visitors, and as the proprietors of both establishments were upon the best of terms, each drove a thriving trade through the recommendation of the other. The Crumley Arms Hotel was then the place to learn news. There in the saloon, as the proprietor, magniloquently termed a long, low, comfortable apartment, might be seen on any evening, two at least of the seven influential landowners of the neighbourhood.

There might generally be seen the thriving grocer, and the dapper draper, the corn-factor, sometimes, though rarely, a lawyer, and always the tallow chandler, who as a man that did a greasy trade, and moreover a new comer, was looked upon as a *parvenu*, and treated as such. Even the Reverend Rector did not disdain upon occasion to take a social noggin with his most influential parishioners therein, and was liked the better for doing so. On the evening to which allusion has been more particularly made, there was a goodly company gathered together in the before-mentioned saloon. There sat three of the influential landlords, — men of mould, strong of arm, and heavy of look. There sat the grocer, the corn-factor, the draper, and the tallow chandler. There also, keeping watch and ward near the doorway, sat Mr. Bustern, landlord and proud proprietor of the Crumley Arms. Thither, too, late in the evening, came Dr. Kinkelman, whose appearance elicited various grunts of recognition from the influential landowners, hearty greetings from the grocer and draper, and a bow from the tallow chandler, none of which the doctor acknowledged further than by a nod, but seating himself, took up a paper. There was a momentary silence. “Doctor—ahem! doctor,” at length began Mr. Bustern, falteringly,—his cheeks almost bursting in his endeavours to keep himself from letting it all out at once, and so spoiling the effect.

“Well, sir,” condescendingly observed the doctor.

“Have you heard the news ?”

“No, sir.”

“Well sir, what do you think sir? Only imagine—is’nt it shocking? Mrs. Springeld, the new doctor’s patient, sir—it’s not surprising upon the whole, but she’s dead.”

“Indeed,” said Dr. Kinkelman, dropping his newspaper, as if struck. “Indeed,” he repeated in the gravest tone, “under my course of treatment she might have survived for years.”

“Just what I said, doctor,” cried a voice from the doorway.

“Come in, Mr. Springeld,” said the landlord. “No, no,” replied Mr. Springeld, hesitating upon the threshold. “It won’t do-----my poor dear sister-in-law.”

“Be’ant no harm, man, come in,” cried the three influential landlords simultaneously.

What could Mr. Springeld do but yield? He sat down, and being pressed to state the circumstances of his sister-in-law’s death, nothing loth, plunged into a disquisition upon her virtues which might have lasted until midnight, had not one of the influential landowners grunted out that “they wanted to a’hear ‘n how a’hopped the twig, not how a’lived.”

“She went off very sudden at last,” said Mr. Springeld, coming to the point. “Nurse Woodford tells me that towards morning—poor dear thing—she was took with a spasm in the side, and then vomited violently, and before the new doctor could come, she was gone.”

“Vomited violently,” remarked Dr. Kinkelman. “This is certainly very remarkable. Vomiting should of all things have been avoided.”

“Some new fangled dodge, I’ll warn,” said the tallow chandler, endeavouring to push himself into notice.

“Aye, I’ll warn it,” repeated the influential landlord.

“Has a post mortem examination been made?” inquired Dr. Kinkelman.

“No,” replied Mr. Springeld. “Dr. Rinald said it was unnecessary.”

“Very singular!” replied Dr. Kinkelman.

“Ay, he wants the sexton to hide his blunders,” said one of the influential landowners grinning at his own joke.

“There ought to be an inquest,” said the landlord of the Crumley Arms, chiming in with the humour of his guests.

“True,” said Dr. Kinkelman.

“So there shall be,” added Mr. Springeld, in an imperative tone.

And an inquest there was. On such an extraordinary occasion there was no difficulty in obtaining a jury, and the very persons who had listened to, or assisted in the foregoing dialogue, assembled together to see justice done to the deceased. After viewing the corpse in the usual meeting, the jury reassembled, and the first witness, Dr. Kinkelman, was called. He deposed that he had commenced attending upon the deceased nearly a twelve month previously, and had continued to prescribe for her until within the last fortnight. He described his method of treatment, which was listened to with profound attention by the jurors—none of them comprehending it. Dr. Rinald then stood forward, and stated that the course he had pursued was exactly like the one laid open by his fellow-practitioner. He was of opinion that the cause of death was the bursting of a small internal vessel, the consequence of violent vomiting supervening upon the introduction of some fruit which had disagreed with the deceased. It was here observed that Dr. Kinkelman gravely shook his head. The deceased’s constant attendant, Nurse Woodford, was then called, and having described her death, replied, in answer to questions put by the jurors, that “deceased had taken nothing particular before going to bed, nothing likely to disagree with her,”

The jury having been left to their deliberations for a few moments, the doors were thrown open and the coroner announced his intention of an adjournment in order to enable Dr. Kinkelman to make a post mortem examination. Meanwhile the witnesses would be bound over to appear upon their own recognisances. It was done, and the following day the jury reassembled to hear the result of Dr. Kinkelman’s examination. When called upon by the coroner that gentleman advanced, and stated that it was his painful duty to announce his discovery in the stomach of deceased, of a quantity of arsenic. At that terrible word there was

a perceptible start, and all eyes were cast upon the new doctor. He seemed unmoved, remaining in his former position, and gazing steadily at Dr. Kinkelman.

“Could that arsenic have come there in a legitimate manner?” enquired the coroner. “Could it in this case have been used as a medicine?”

“Not in any ordinary preparation,” replied Dr. Kinkelman. “Moreover the quantity is so large that I am constrained to believe that it could never have been administered as a medicine— unless by culpable negligence.”

There was an impressive silence for a few minutes. Dr. Rinald still sat apparently unmoved at the terrible imputation cast upon him.

“Dr. Rinald,” at length asked the coroner; “Did you administer arsenic either as a medicine or otherwise to the deceased?”

“I did not,” replied the young doctor firmly.

“How, then, do you account for its presence?”

“I cannot do so in any other way than by supposing she must have been the victim of foul play, or else have called in the assistance of another medical man unknown to myself.”

“Foul play,” repeated several of the jurors ominously.

“Nurse Woodford,” said the coroner; “What did deceased take before going to bed,—did she take any medicine that Dr. Rinald had left?”

“She did,” replied the nurse.

Once more the jurors were left to themselves, but the public were readmitted in a few minutes.

The foreman in a very low voice delivered the verdict, which was one of “manslaughter” against Dr. Rinald. All eyes were instantly cast upon the young doctor who slightly started and turned pale.

When the coroner had finished he replied in a distinct voice, “I am innocent.”

“Of course you will admit Dr. Rinald to bail?” said Dr. Kinkelman.

“I—I fear not,” replied the coroner.

“Certainly not,” added the jurors.

“You hear,” said the coroner.

“I will myself be bail,” said Kinkelman.

Dr. Rinald glanced at him, and his lip curled, but he said nothing.

“It cannot be,” replied the coroner decidedly. “However unpleasant it may be to me, or to you Dr. Kinkelman, as a member of the profession, my duty is to fully commit Dr. Rinald to take his trial at the ensuing Larston Assizes.”

And such was the verdict. For some days nothing was talked of in Larston but the inquest, and the news of the incarceration of the young doctor spread like wild fire. The editor of the *Larston Courier* made a capital thing out of it. The indignation excited, was positively awful. “After the encouragement we had given him,” said the good people of Larston. “The wretch,” cried the ladies. “Never trust a young doctor,” added the elders.

It is said that misfortunes never come singly— the proverb might be extended to events. It was thus but a few days after the inquest that there came a flying rumour through Larston of something, still more extraordinary having occurred. The question was, what was the matter with the new actress whose *debut* promised so much? Night after night the manager had announced that she would appear upon the following evening, only to disappoint his audience by the declaration that Mdlle. Nelinda, to his great regret, could not come forward on account of her indisposition, which threatened to become serious. The whole play-going population was in distress. So young and beautiful a creature could not but elicit sympathy wherever she went, and Dr. Kinkelman, who attended her, found himself at times almost surrounded with a crowd anxious to learn her condition.

Dr. Kinkelman shook his head with increasing-gravity each day, until the inhabitants of Larston began to fear that there was no hope of their stage being again graced with her presence. At length one evening, as the doctor passed the Crumley Arms, he was accosted by the landlord thereof with the usual inquiry, how was Mdlle. Nelinda? Was it true what had been whispered about her ?

“Very ill,” said the doctor. “Very ill, both in body and mind—in the latter especially. It has been my painful duty this day to sign a certificate of her insanity, and she is now on her way to a private lunatic asylum!”

The news fell like a thunderbolt upon the town. Sympathy was aroused, her friendless state got wind ; Dr. Kinkelman offered to receive subscriptions, and headed the list with a £10 note. The younger population almost shed tears, while the elders held up the circumstance as a sufficiently awful warning of the effects produced by the theatre.

Dr. Kinkelman when questioned concerning her insanity, was very reserved, and the Larstonites honoured him for it.

“It was a painful subject,” he would say. “I am not justified in revealing more than that, in the presence of her nurse, Mrs. Woodford, I put questions to her upon the simplest things, and was answered in a manner leaving no doubt, in my own mind, of the derangement of hers. Let us hope for her recovery.” And, said the good people of Larston, both in the matter of offering bail for Dr. Rinald, and in heading the subscription list for Mdlle. Nelinda, Dr. Kinkelman had behaved very generously.

CHAPTER III.

THREE weeks had passed, Mdlle. Tostino was again in her glory. She played to full houses, to crowded houses, to overflowing-houses. Night after night she was called before the footlights, until at length, one evening after she had been more than ordinarily successful, the inhabitants of Larston thought that in her they beheld the very concentration of female beauty, and in the loud roar of universal admiration which rose to the roof, was drowned all remembrance that had hitherto remained of the unfortunate *debutante* who was confined in a lunatic asylum. There was a crowd around the portals of the theatre long after the conclusion of the performance—a crowd awaiting the departure of the successful actress ; many of them men of fortune, who would have considered themselves honoured in attracting her glance. There, too, stood Dr. Kinkelman, amid it was leaning upon his arm that the beautiful actress disappeared in the darkness.

This was nothing unusual; he had played cavalier in this manner for several nights, and the thing was perfectly understood in Larston. “So kind and considerate of Dr. Kinkelman,” said the elderly ladies, “ to protect the dear creature from insult and annoyance—nobody could suspect him at his age, good man, and it saved the town a deal of scandal.”

Exactly so, but there were some youthful voices in the crowd who did not seem so well satisfied. Meanwhile, the actress and Dr. Kinkelman walked off in silence, It was scarcely a hundred yards to her abode—she produced a latch key and went in, asking him, as had been her wont, to enter. To her deep surprise—he had never done so before—he accepted the invitation and followed her. The apartment in which he found himself was small, but exquisitely decorated, everything betraying female taste—he scarcely however, observed this, nor had he time, as the actress having disrobed in an inner room, re-entered, and sat down upon an ottoman. What was her amazement, almost alarm, (for at first she thought him ill), when Kinkelman rose, staggered forward, and with a groan of suppressed passion fell at her feet, his hands clasped upon her knees.

“ Marie—Marie !” he cried in a hoarse voice. “I love thee—I love thee—forgive me. Marry me.”

“ Marry you!” exclaimed the actress, starting up and taking a step backwards with a loathing displayed upon her countenance, which would have daunted a less resolute wooer.

“ Even so,” continued Dr. Kinkelman, “ If a heart beating for you alone is worthy of acceptance.”

“ It cannot be,” said the actress in a low voice.

“ You love another,” said the doctor with vehemence. “ You love Rinald.”

“ And what is that to you ?” answered the actress, with equal haste, her passion rising, and here yes flashing with indignation, “ I tell you I do love him, there ! Go !”

“You are wondrously beautiful,” muttered the doctor.

“ Go !” repeated the actress.

“ Wilt thou reject me, and with me a fortune greater than thou can’st perceive—aye, and thine inheritance ?”

“A fortune — mine inheritance,” repeated Tostino.

“ Even so. Hearken,” continued the doctor. “ Know that a dying patient, torn with remorse, revealed to me thy real inheritance. Thy name is not Tostino—that, thou knowest, it is but a stage name ; nor is it Woodford as the nurse would have thee believe—it is Chesterman. Thou art the heiress of a vast fortune, and thou can’st not gain it without me, for thou dost not know where to look for it, and I still hold the deposition of my dying patient, which I can at will destroy. Nurse Woodford is not thy mother as she has taught thee—fearful and timid woman—she is but thy nurse ; and most foolishly permitted thee to go upon the stage. For thy parents went abroad and left thee to her charge ; but they are dead, and she knows it not.”

“ How dost thou know this ?” asked the actress speaking low.

“ How do I know thee—by this,” replied the doctor, lightly touching her bare shoulder, which displayed a small scarcely perceptible mark.

Tostino shrank back at his touch, and laughed scornfully.

“ Fool,” said she. “ Thou can’st not deceive me—that Nurse Woodford did, years ago, with a red hot needle.”

“ Ha, ha ! Then thou must know all,” hoarsely replied the doctor. “ Know then that in one of her bridesmaids, whom she thought a friend, Mrs. Chesterman had an enemy, by whose assistance thy mother—Mrs. Woodford—changed thee at birth for the heiress of the Chesterman estates. Thou wast brought up in luxury by thy real mother—not in thy supposed ancestral halls, for thy supposed father, angry that he had no male issue, would not look upon thee, but upon a provision made for thy support; while the real heiress, who now passed as the daughter of Nurse Woodford, was taken care of by that false friend till lately, when she, discovering that the lady with whom she had lived was not her parent as she had supposed, suddenly left, and for the time disappeared. Know that she who bid fair to rival thee upon the stage—Mdlle. Nelinda—was no other than the real heiress of the Chesterman estates, to which thou can’st lay claim supported by the oath of Nurse Woodford, and this mark upon thy shoulder, which she, happily, thought to burn in imitation of one upon that of the true heiress. Thy rival pines in a lunatic asylum. Whom hast thou to thank for this ?” continued the doctor, with increasing vehemence. “Who but she—she is not insane. The questions disconcerted her, as I knew they would, being about her parentage, of which she knew nothing, Nurse Woodford bore testimony—ha! ha ! —and I signed the certificate that thou mightest reign supreme upon the stage and might-----” he stretched out his arms.

The actress remained staring at him. Her countenance was very pale, her bosom seemed to have ceased to rise and fall—so imperceptible was her breathing. She stood like a statue as this tale of villainy was laid before her. It was a terrible temptation. Wealth and honour at the expense of a rival who might have thrown her into the shade. Well Dr. Kinkelman had

calculated upon the power that thought would exercise over his victim. She shuddered visibly. He outstretched his arms and grasped her hand. His touch removed the spell his last words had cast upon her. Once again she started back as at the sight of a reptile.

“Double-dyed scoundrel,” she cried, “Tempter—I scorn thee!”

“Thou art wondrously beautiful,” repeated the doctor, gazing in undisguised admiration upon her.

“Away,” cried the actress. “Away—thine eyes glitter like a rattlesnake’s—I will have naught with thee, thou viper. Away!”

“Listen again,” said Kinkelman. “Would’st thou save the man thou lovest from the jail and the disgrace of penal servitude, perhaps from the gallows?”

The actress shook from head to foot with suppressed emotion.

“Aye,” continued Kinkelman, “Dr. Rinald, whom thou lovest—start not, thou hast confessed it,—must be convicted unless thou yieldest.”

“Go,” hoarsely replied the actress.

“He is not guilty,” said Kinkelman slowly.

“I knew it—I felt it,” muttered the actress.

“I will trust thee with a terrible secret—but thou can’st not injure me,” continued Dr. Kinkelman. “I examined the body of his patient—there was no poison in the intestines. I placed it there, swore it, and sent him to the gaol. There he shall remain until his transportation, if thou wilt not yield.”

“Heaven have mercy upon me,” exclaimed Tostino.

“Yet more,” almost shouted Dr. Kinkelman. “Know that—I cannot be mistaken—for years I have studied the human countenance,—that thy rival Mdlle. Nelinda—thy rival to the estates, thy superior in birth, loves, and is loved by Dr. Rinald. Know that she was betrothed to him when she discovered her birth was—as she was told, low, and she left that lady whom she had, up till then, considered as her mother, finally being compelled by want to go upon the stage. Now?” His eyes glittered in triumph. He took her hand, it trembled. She was pale as marble, her eyes swam—she shook with the conflict of passions—of love, hatred, rage, ambition and duty. She did not withdraw her hand, perhaps physically incapable of doing so, and Dr. Kinkelman pressed it to his lips.

“Leave me,” she muttered, “leave me.” “It works,” muttered the doctor, and left the apartment with an elastic stride.

No sooner had the street door clanged behind him than the actress rose to her full height.

“I cannot do it,” she cried aloud in her agony. “Oh, Rinald, Rinald—thou shalt be happy even at the expense of my own happiness. This fiendish scheme shall be frustrated.”

She took her hat and cloak, and stole out by a back entrance. The street was deserted, and a cold wind blew in her face, as she stealthily, yet swiftly, hastened forward. She paused before a large, stone built, substantial mansion, and pulled the bell. After some time a man answered, asking her business gruffly.

“Is lawyer Penfeather within?” she asked. “He is just going to bed,” was the reply. “He cannot be disturbed.”

The actress, keeping her countenance concealed, slipped half-a-sovereign into his hand; he grunted to himself, but went back. In ten minutes he re-appeared, beckoning.

“Heaven sustain me,” she murmured, and went in.

Three days after was the day fixed for the trial of Dr. Rinald. The excitement aroused was something enormous. The court was crowded to excess, not only by the usual frequenters, but by the principal inhabitants of the neighbourhood, who left the desk, the counter, or the field, to hear sentence pronounced upon the young doctor. For that the verdict would go against him no one felt a doubt. The evidence produced for the prosecution was exactly the same as that given before the coroner’s court, and its effect upon both juries was much the same.

Everyone looked at his neighbour when the eloquent counsel, instructed by lawyer Penfeather for the prisoner, rose to address the court, for each was anxious to hear what defence could possibly be made.

What was their astonishment, when the learned lawyer in a brief but clear manner laid bare before the whole court that tissue of villainy, which Dr. Kinkelman had communicated to Mdlle. Tostino, in hopes thereby to secure her hand? What was the amazement of the court when that celebrated actress herself, came forward, and supported the counsel's statements in the most unqualified manner? Every eye was cast upon Dr. Kinkelman. He glanced around, as if seeking for an avenue of escape, but the dense mass of people filling up every way of exit would have effectually frustrated an attempt, without the assistance of the seven policemen who had noiselessly gathered in his rear.

As to Nurse Woodford, terrified beyond description, she confessed in court, unasked, to the truth of the statements advanced. Dr. Kinkelman was seized and searched, and upon him was found the written deposition of his dying patient, whose confession had placed him in a position to plan and almost succeed in executing, a fitting sequel to the original villainous plot.

The case was shortly afterwards adjourned, that Dr. Kinkelman might be examined before a committing magistrate, and the statements of the actress, and other witnesses substantiated. Dr. Rinald was meantime allowed his liberty, upon his own recognizance. A thorough and searching investigation was at once made; and the truth of the facts deposed to ascertained beyond doubt. The body of Mrs. Springeld was exhumed and once again examined by several medical men from a distance, who succeeded in discovering poison, but upon mature consideration came to the conclusion that it had been placed there after death. The lunatic asylum was also visited by the same gentlemen, under the authority of the Lunacy Commissioners, Mdlle. Nelinda examined, given her liberty, and declared perfectly sane; though suffering from something which hung upon her mind.

Finally at the next assize Dr. Rinald was formally acquitted, the judge declaring his innocence, amid the applause of the court Dr. Kinkelman received a sentence of transportation for perjury and conspiracy.

Nurse Woodford—the mother of Mdlle. Tostino, who had behaved so nobly, received principally upon her daughter's account, a mitigated sentence of a few months' imprisonment; while two of the assistants of Dr. Kinkelman received a severe reprimand for swearing to his deposition without actual knowledge of the facts.

As the crowning event of the whole, Mdlle. Nelinda, now known by her real name of Chesterman, was installed in her ancestral halls, and half Larston invited to her wedding with Dr. Rinald.

What became of Mdlle. Tostino no one ever knew, but she never again appeared on the stage, leaving Larston immediately after the conclusion of the trial—it was supposed having retired upon her savings. It was long ere her memory died away in the minds of the inhabitants of Larston, and it was never forgotten by that couple whom her noble conduct had rendered happy for life. Even the most bigoted anti-theatrical Larstonite was forced to admit that contact with the "boards" had not depreciated her nature.

THE END.

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