The Bandits of the Osage: A Western Romance

Emerson Bennett

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TO
GEORGE HATCH, ESQ.,

OF NEW YORK,
ONE OF MY EARLIEST AND MOST ESTEEMED FRIENDS,
This Volume
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED BY
THE AUTHOR.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION—THE TRAVELERS.

A few years since, most of the western States and Territories—particularly those bordering upon the great Mississippi—were infested with bands of lawless desperadoes, collected from all parts of the globe, who, having become criminals in their native land, here sought an asylum, either beyond the pale of the law entirely, or where stern Justice being weak, was relaxed from that severity which she exercised in the more populous sections of the country. Here, in many cases, they formed themselves into bands, choosing some one of the more bold and daring of their party for leader—their purpose, doubtless, being the greater facility of proceeding in their depredations, as well as firmer security against apprehension.

But, although, as we have remarked, they formed themselves into bands or parties, yet rarely, in fact we believe only in extreme cases, did they openly act in concert; their policy being to conceal from their more honest neighbors the fact that there was such a regular organized combination of men for outlawry purposes in the vicinity. It was their policy, also, to disperse themselves throughout the country; to meet only at certain intervals, and then in secret, under cover of night; by which means they would appear as honest citizens; live, many of them, unsuspected, and in all cases be among the first to learn of whatever movement might chance to be in progress detrimental to their interests as a body, or to any member individually, and thus be enabled to take measures to prevent, or lay secret plans to counteract it. This will, we think, sufficiently account for their, in many cases, long and sometimes undisturbed career of dissipation and crime.

Our story opens a few years subsequent to the close of the last war with England, and at a period when the interior of Missouri—the theatre of the scenes, incidents and characters which are about to follow—was, comparatively, but little known; in fact, we believe we may with propriety say, there were portions within its territorial boundaries at this time unseen and untrod by the eye and foot of the white man. But notwithstanding there were sections of it uninhabited, there was already a tide of emigration setting in from the eastward, which rendered it probable that in the course of a few years, at the farthest, it would not only be fully explored, but settled, by some of the more enterprising and industrious inhabitants of the States lying east of the great Mississippi. Even now the eastern portion of it was beginning to exhibit signs of settlement and civilization, and already the blue smoke arose from many a cot which here and there dotted the long line of forest bordering on the Mississippi. This forest followed the windings of the river and extended back some fifteen or twenty miles, opening, in some places, upon the large and beautiful prairie, where the tall grass waved to and fro in the breeze, containing its legions of wild animals, and where the eye could range uninterruptedly for miles on miles, as over some vast sea, until finally shut in by the far distant horizon. In some parts of this forest the ground for miles was nearly level, and only required the removal of the underbrush to make it a beautiful grove, while other parts were wild, rocky and mountainous, presenting to the eye of the beholder many grand and romantic scenes, as though Nature had designed to soothe, awe and display her power by strong and varying contrasts.

As before remarked, that region of country known as Missouri, was fast emerging from savage to civilized life—from a gloomy wilderness to the abodes of civilization. The axe might now be heard in the forests where, but a few years before, echoed the wild war−whoop of the Indian. On the banks of that rapid and mighty stream, from which Missouri takes her name, a few regular settlements had sprung up—among the most prominent of which we will mention the old town of Franklin, a place that has long since disappeared, having been literally swept away by the eternal knawings of this river whose bed is continually changing.

The inhabitants of Missouri at the time of which we write, as must naturally be the case in every new settlement, were composed of all classes, from the refined, educated and intellectual, to the coarse, ignorant, demi−savage race, which are ever found to exist as a kind of medium between refinement and utter barbarity.

Having made these few preliminary remarks, so that the reader may form an idea of the then existing state of the country, we will now at once proceed with our story.

It was near the close of a hot sultry day, in the summer of 18—, that two travelers were slowly wending their way over a wild and somewhat mountainous tract of land, some thirty miles distant and in a south−westerly

direction from St. Louis. The elder of the two was a man about thirty−five years of age, whose height rather exceeded six feet, and although not what might be termed of handsome proportions, yet of that close knit and sinewy build which gives evidence of great muscular strength and a capability of enduring much hardship and fatigue. His forehead, which was visible from his hat being partly removed, was of medium proportions, on one side of which was carelessly parted his long raven colored hair. His face was long, thin and rather strongly marked. His mouth was large, around which played a peculiar smile which, to convey an idea of, we shall term a philosophical one. His lips were thick—cheeks somewhat hollow— nose long and pointed—eyes small and grey, with a peculiar twinkle in the latter, when speaking, which led one to fancy there was more meant than said—and altogether the whole expression of his features was a combination of cunning, shrewdness and candor, mingled with a quiet, thoughtful and humorous turn of mind. In speech he was very deliberate, and no matter by what circumstances surrounded, would never fail to give each word its proper bearing. His dress was a plain home−spun suit of sheep's grey—an article much worn by the yeomen of that day— and his dialect partook strongly of that peculiarity which distinguishes the people of New England— particularly those who have little access to society—from almost every other; and was, besides, of that uncouth form of speech, which is engendered from habit, when not polished by the refinement of education.

His companion was a very different personage; in fact, of an entirely opposite cast. In years he was some five the other's junior—some three inches less in stature—of a form full of grace and elasticity—a face almost round—a complexion ruddy—large, restless grey eyes—with much *hauteur* in his bearing, and of an active and rather irritable temperament. His articulation corresponded with his temperament, being quick and impetuous, and his language gave evidence of his superiority over the other in point of education. His dress was a plain suit of black, a little the worse for wear perhaps, but of an excellent fit, which, together with the fine texture of the cloth, the graceful ease with which it was worn, had been proof sufficient the wearer was no laborer, even were not the soft white hand, holding a light fancy cane, to be taken as evidence.

To some, perhaps, it may appear singular that two individuals, so directly opposite in personal appearance, manners, dress and temperament, should be companions, and what is more, friends; yet such was the case. Notwithstanding the old adage that "like clings to like," it must be admitted we have a great many exceptions, and that like clings to unlike may be said with propriety of the social relations and connections of mankind in general. It is by this process the great strings of Nature are made to blend their sounds in harmony.

It was, as we have said, near the close of the day, and the last rays of the setting sun had been intercepted by a thick, black thunder cloud, which, approaching rapidly, threatened our travelers with a heavy shower. For some minutes neither spoke, but silently glancing toward the west, both immediately advanced from a slow to a rapid pace.

The younger was the first to break silence with the exclamation "Ha!" as a flash of lightning, more vivid than any previous, flung its red lurid glare over them, and for a moment seemed to put the forest in a blaze, followed almost instantaneously by a heavy crash of thunder. "By heavens! Bernard, there is no mistaking that! How far are we now from Webber's?"

"Wal, I should guess about five miles," replied Bernard.

"Five miles!" echoed the other quickly, with a touch of sarcasm. "Why, Harvey, what are you thinking about? It was only ten miles when we last enquired, nearly two hours since, and now you think we have only reached half way!— Pshaw!"

"Wal," remarked Bernard, coolly and quietly, "this ere's a free country, and every body's got a right to their own opinion any how; and so, as the feller said, if you don't like the distance at five miles, you can have it for any distance you're a mind to."

For a moment a half angry smile played around the mouth of the younger, as though he would have laughed, but was checked by some opposite feeling, while he bit his nether lip and tapped his cane in the palm of his left hand with a quick, nervous motion.

"Well, well," rejoined he, quickly, "if we have yet five miles to travel, our pace must be still increased, for the night gathers fast!"

"I calculate we'd about as well be seeking for a shelter," remarked Bernard, quietly.

"A shelter!" exclaimed the other in surprise; "surely you do not dream of spending the night in this lonely place?"

"Wal, as to the matter o' that," answered Bernard, "I reckon I don't dream no how, 'cause I'm awake and its a sartin thing; and when a body's awake and sartin, ye see he ain't a dreaming; but"—and he looked coolly at the other, speaking slowly and impressively—"if you want to tell your friends of your adventures, and put this 'ere night in as one of 'em, you haint got a minute to lose 'tween this and the time your head's under something more powerful to protect it than that are beaver."

"Why, what mean you?" cried the other, turning somewhat pale.

"D'ye see that are cloud?" said Bernard, elevating his finger to an angle of some forty−five degrees; "now mark all the twists in't, and keep tally for about a minute all them are streaks o' lightning dancing up and down, and I reckon you'll come to the conclusion that the safest place for Marcus Tyrone don't lay in the open air by any means."

"Ay! true, true!" returned Tyrone, with a start. "You are right, Bernard, right; for there is something awful in yonder cloud. But what is to be done? We can reach no habitation, and to remain here is, I fear, but to expose ourselves to certain death! Can we not find shelter under some of these rocks?"

"Why, ye see, Mark, I'll jest tell ye how 'tis," answered Bernard. "If we don't find some place to git our heads under soon, its my opinion they wont be no further use to us; for that are storm aint a going to be no common one, or else I aint no judge. Now right away here to the left o' us is a cave; for a feller pointed it out to me when I traveled this way afore, and said folks kind o' reckened as how it were a ren—ren—something, for robbers."

"Rendezvous, doubtless," remarked Tyrone.

"O yes, that's it! I don't see what makes folks use such tarnal hard names now−a−days; they didn't use to when I got edicated. 'Spect they're gitting a great deal smarter, oh! Mark?"

"Doubtless," replied the other, with a smile. "But of the cave, Harvey?"

"O yes; wal, I calculate we'd about as well be putting our heads inside on't, for we wont no more'n git killed if its got robbers in it, and if we stay out here, I swow we'll git blown clean into a jiffy, for that are harrycane yonder aint a going to be over nice about what it does, that's a fact."

"But where is this cave, Harvey?"

"D'ye see that are rough pile o' stones, right away there, that look jest as if they'd been playing stone wall all their lives?"

"Ay, ay."

"Wal, that's the place, and I swow we can't git there too soon, for that are last streak o' lightning fairly felt hot. Come on, Mark, don't go to getting skeered now."

"Pshaw!" returned Tyrone, his features becoming a shade more pale; and following Bernard, he proceeded directly towards the spot designated; though, perhaps, with feelings less at ease than he would have his companion imagine.

The cave alluded to, was situated near the brow of a steep, rocky hill or bluff, some several rods distant to the left of the road, which our travelers had just quitted, and appeared to have been formed by some great convulsion of nature, in the rending and upheaving of rocks, which had fallen together so as to leave a cavity sufficiently large to contain several persons. The mouth of this cave fronted the south, and overlooked the beautiful Maramee, which rolled sparkling along some fifty yards below, and was surrounded by scenery romantic in the extreme. The hill on which it stood was a portion of a ridge which extended in an irregular line far away to the southwest and northeast. Immediately above and below this cave were large projecting rocks, which, to all appearance, were so slightly bedded in the earth, that but little force was necessary to send them thundering to the bottom. A dwarfish growth of shrub−oaks had struggled up between them, and presented their rough, shaggy tops above, as though to give the scene an air of wildness and desolation. But notwithstanding this, there was a fine redeeming trait in the surrounding scenery—viewed from the brow of the hill—whose beauty was heightened by contrasts the most pleasing. At its base on the western side, was a finely timbered forest, stretching far away northward, and finally opening upon a beautiful strip of meadow or prairie land, over which the eye might wander for miles, to rest at last upon a blue hazy ridge of mountains in the distance.

The view towards the east and south was not so extensive, but this likewise had its attractions. A distant perspective was cut off by another ridge, running almost parallel to the one just described; but the loss was amply compensated, by the wild picturesque scenery presented, and the gentle murmur which stole sweetly upon the ear, as the Maramee sent its waters foaming and dashing over its rocky bed between, anon to glance off into a still

silvery belt and for a time mirror surrounding objects ere forever lost in the bosom of the mighty Mississippi.

The road of which mention has already been made—though it would, perhaps, poorly compare with some of the present day—was, for this period and section of country, uncommonly good— being mostly clear of stones, stumps, brush and the like—so that a skilful horseman might dash rapidly over it with little danger of life or limb. To the eastward it followed the windings of the Maramee, for some considerable distance, through a thick, dark ravine, and then branched off through a level and extensive forest.

As light one horse vehicles were not in use at this period, and more especially in this part of the country, the horse was ridden instead by those who prefered an easier and more speedy locomotion than walking, and in consequence every settler of note was supplied with a number of these noble animals, for the use of himself and family.

But we fear the reader will think us digressing, and so let us return to our travelers.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORM—THE KIDNAPPERS.

Although Bernard approached the cave with a firm step, apparently indifferent as to what might be therein concealed, yet it must be admitted there were feelings within his breast strangely at variance with his calm, unmoved exterior. Twice he seemed on the point of coming to a halt, but then, as though actuated by some counteracting feeling, he strode steadily onward, and was soon standing at the entrance. It was now fast growing dark, for the coming storm had considerably advanced the night, and although the sun had barely set, objects at but a little distance appeared dim and indistinct, save when thrown into bold relief, for a moment, by some vivid flash of lightning, when, as if to repair the error, they apparently sunk into a deeper gloom than ever.

Casting a hasty glance behind him, and perceiving his companion close at hand, Bernard motioned him to silence, and had cautiously began his entrance, when a hurried exclamation from the other caused him to look around, and seeing him gazing steadily towards the west, he turned his eyes in that direction, and soon became transfixed as though by a spell.

We have already remarked it was growing dark, but below the gloom had deepened into night, which lay like a pall along the valley, into which even the lightning, as it played along the tops of the trees with a lurid glare, seemed unable to penetrate. But the scene higher up was what had caught and riveted the attention of our travelers.

Just over the summit of another hill, towards the west, was a white misty streak, which lay spread along the horizon, like in appearance a bank of snow seen through a fog, above which awful black clouds were rolling, and tumbling, and twisting themselves into the most angry shapes possible — belching forth their forked tongues of lightning—seeming like some dark and mighty spirits of the etherial, enraged, and charging with all Heaven's artillery against this nether world. During the intervals between each clap of thunder, a roaring sound, like that of some distant waterfall, was borne to the ears of the travelers with a startling distinctness, gradually increasing each moment, until it sounded like the roll of an hundred drums.

During this brief space—for brief indeed it was— not a twig was seen to move—not a leaf to stir— but all, all was motionless, us though Nature were holding her breath in awe of some great and mighty convulsion. The air felt hot, thick and oppressive, as from the breath of an evil spirit. Suddenly the trees on the other hill became dreadfully agitated—bowing their heads, and writhing, and twisting themselves into all manner of shapes possible, while a dark misty shadow crept, or rather swept along, and buried them in terrible night.

Thus it appeared to our travelers, who, warned by this and a few heavy drops of rain, now eagerly sought their shelter; Bernard, as previously, taking the precedence. Moving cautiously forward, after entering the mouth of the cave— for caution was a part of his nature—he presently gained the interior, where he was immediately joined by his companion.

A flash of lightning at this moment discovered to our travellers that they were the only occupants of the cave, when something like a sigh from Bernard, and the ejaculation of "Thank God!" from Tyrone, attested the relief felt by both.

"I say, Mark," began Bernard, who was the first to speak, "I don't believe this ere cave's a ren— what d'ye call it?"

"Rendezvous," answered Tyrone.

"O yes, rendezvous. I say, I don't believe this ere cave's a rendezvous for robbers, for when that are last streak o' lightning danced around in here, I could'nt see no traces of its being inhabited."

"But what led you to think inhabited, Harvey?"

"Why, when I's out here afore, I hearn a good deal o' talk about a banditti, which had been skeering people round here, and some feller told me they used to meet in this ere cave."

"Indeed? But why did not the citizens take measures to apprehend them?" enquired the other.

"Wal, there was some such kind o' talk, but I don't know how it come out, for jest about that time I went back to the East, and haint never heard nothing on't since. But I say, Mark, its lucky we've got in here, I

swow—robbers or not— for that are harrycane's ripping every thing afore it. Jest listen how it roars. I never—" the remainder of the sentence, if spoken, was drowned in a terrible crash of thunder, that shook the ground beneath them, and caused both the speaker and his companion to start involuntarily.

During the conversation just recorded, the storm had been rushing on with all the wild fury of a tornado, and now came sweeping down the opposite hill—tearing along through the valley— up the hill—dashing against the cave, as though to rend it asunder—snapping lofty trees like twigs— tearing them, in many instances, quite up by the roots−−hissing, and foaming, and roaring—on, on it went in its mad career, seeking new victims amid the quiet glades, and making the very earth beneath it tremble in its fierce carousal! For some half hour our travelers stood mute—awed to silence by the raging of the elements—gazing forth through the aperture, assisted by the incessant flashes of lightning, upon the awful devastation going on without.

"A fortunate escape, truly!" remarked Tyrone, at length, drawing a long breath.

"Jest what I's a thinking on exactly," returned Bernard. "I knowed when I seed it a coming up, that there wouldn't be no child's play about it; but its gone clean ahead o' my calculations altogether. How them are streaks o' lightning did dance around us here, and cut capers 'mong the trees. I never seed the like on't afore in all my born days. For the matter o' that, they haint done yet," added he, as a bright flash for a moment blinded him, and a peal of thunder shook the cave.

For some minutes his companion made no reply, and then in a complaining, petulent tone said: "Was there ever any thing so unlucky? Only to think of our being literally forced to pass the night in such a place as this, and so near our destination too! I declare it vexes me."

"Hello! What's all this ere gammon about now?" cried Bernard. "You're the strangest, queerest chap I ever seed in all my life; one minute all thankfulness and the next all grumbles. Why don't ye larn a little patience? A body'd think when you'd jest 'scaped with your life, you would'nt, in all human probability, set up grumbling for half an hour, at least."

"Well, well, Bernard, say no more," replied Tyrone, in a voice of contrition. "You know my hasty, impatient nature, and must overlook my language. I know it was wrong in me to complain; but I had set my heart so much on reaching Webber's to−night, that it seemed hard to relinquish the design."

"Now you speak a little more sensible like," rejoined Bernard; "and as to gitting to Webber's, I guess we'll be able to do it yit. The moon 'll be up in about an hour, and I reckon this ere storm will clear away by that time."

And Bernard was right. In an hour the storm had passed on to the east, leaving behind it a few broken, scattered clouds, sailing lazily through the air—above which Heaven's diamonds gleamed and sparkled—now hidden from the sight, now shining out merrily—while the far off flashes and distant rumble betokened the storm still speeding on in its fury. Anon the moon arose, slowly and majestically, to pour her silvery flood of light upon the scene,

While here and there a modest star
Drew back from Luna's ray,
Yet shining in its realm afar,
Perchance the queen of day.

Our travelers, now that the storm was passed and moon risen, deeming it expedient to resume their journey, emerged at once from the cave, and had advanced a few paces towards the road, when their attention and progress were arrested by the sound of voices in conversation. At first the sounds were indistinct, but gradually they seemed to grow louder, denoting thereby the approach of the speakers. At length they descried two figures descending the hill, and instantly crouching behind a rock, were enabled to overhear a few sentences as they passed.

"I don't believe a word on't," growled a gruff voice, accompanied with an oath. "Its only one of the old fool's freaks; and for my part, I've served him long enough, and blast me if I don't slit his wesand, as soon as I find out whar he stows the shiners, and then make off and set up for a gentleman in some foreign part; hey, Bill? ha, ha, ha!"

"Hist!" returned his companion. "Thar's no perticular use in telling every body else what you're going to do, as I knows on; and besides, if the gal and her lover should happen to hear ye, why ye see its all up at once. Curses on that ar' storm," he added; "I'm feard as how they'll bunk somewhere and take daylight for't. I wouldn't like 'em to slip me now, for such a chance don't come every day, you know."

"But what can the old fool want of the gal?" growled the other.

"Why I've told ye once, you—but hark! they're coming, and so—" here the conversation became so indistinct that our travelers could make out nothing further, save the word "pistols," which occured shortly after; but enough had been gleaned to denote foul play, and simultaneously grasping their weapons, both advanced cautiously in the direction taken by the others.

The moon as yet had not risen sufficiently to be of any material service in distinguishing objects even on the summit of the hill, and the ravine below still lay in the gloomy repose of solitude and darkness.

Gliding quickly forward, but at the same time as stealthily as possible, our travelers soon gained sufficient on the ruffians to enable them to see their dusky forms, and overhear their conversation.

At length the foremost two came to a halt, at the foot of the hill, just where you enter the ravine already mentioned, and separating, each took his station opposite the other—one on either side of the road—which being at this point uncommonly narrow, owing to some rocks having been removed and piled up on either hand, made it a desirable place for their attack upon the individuals approaching, who must necessarily pass within their reach.

Ensconsing themselves behind some bushes, which grew by the way side, Bernard and Tyrone awaited in anxious suspense the moment when they would, probably—in defence of others—be called into action of no enviable nature. For some moments all was still, and then the silence was broken by one of the ruffians.

"I say, Bill Riley!" began he of the gruff voice, "blast me, but your ears is a little over−keen to−night. Per'aps you hears 'em coming now, but hang me if I do, and what's more, haint heard 'em."

"Per'aps I's mistaken," answered the other; "at least I thought I heard 'em. However, thar's no perticular harm in being ready 'gin they do come, you know."

"You're right thar', my trump. But what d'ye think, croney; is't best to leave the younker in Heaven?"

"No! no! Curdish," replied the other vehenently; "no murder, if we can help it. Tap the feller over, but no killing; that's a perticularly agly business, brings ugly consequences, and a feller's mighty apt to catch hemp fever arter it. No, no, Jack, my boy, we musn't have no killing. Jest knock the younker over gently—mount his horse—I'll mount behind the gal, and then we'll sort o' travel, you know."

"Why hang me for a green un, but I think— rayther think, Bill—we'll travel then, ha, ha, ha. But 'sposin, my ace o' trumps, the younker happens to take it into his head not to be knocked over gently?"

"Why then, Jack, you must kind o' take it out agin, you know,—ha, ha, ha."

"Well, well," growled Curdish, don't be gittin' foolish over it."

"No!" returned the other drily; "one fool in a party'll do, I reckon."

Following this last remark, was a pause of some minutes, when the conversation was again renewed by Curdish.

"I say, Bill, what's yer honest, disinterested, confidential and most perticular opinion of old Ben, any how?"

"Why that's come at without any study," answered Bill. "I jest think he's an arrant knave."

"A what?"

"A bloody rascal!"

"I'll take yer fist on that, Bill, by —," and the speaker uttered an oath. "What a long hooked nose he's got, haint he? If I'd such a nose, by St. Christopher! I'd sell myself for a screech owl—ha, ha, ha."

"Hush, Jack! You always laugh as if you wer' a going to split yer jaws."

"Ye−e−s, per'aps so."

"By−the−by, Jack, I couldn't never exactly understand how you and old Ben come to be on such friendly terms? You've said you didn't like him."

"Like him!" cried Jack. "O yes, I like him— ha, ha, ha! Jest wait, Bill, don't be in a hurry, and I'll show ye how I like him. Hang me for a dog, if I don't cut his bloody old heart out o' him 'fore I'm done!"

"Well but Jack, I say, how the dence comes it you've seemed on such friendly terms?"

"Why ye see, Bill, I'll tell ye. The old chap kind o' did me a favor one time, in the way of savin' me from the hemp fever, in the case o' that ar' young man as was suddenly missed, when people took the perticular trouble to swear that I— put him out o' the way, you know; and being's I'm sort o' in his power yit, why I've rather kept up an affectionate feeling, ye see—ha, ha, ha! But I say, old feller, seein' as how I've answered your question, maybe you'll have the perticular goodness to answer mine. What is the old cut−throat goin' to do with the gal?"

"Why's I've told ye afore, I ain't sure, but I 'spect thar's a curious design about it. I've bin kind o' watching

round, a pickin' up a little here and a little thar, puttin' 'em together and guessin' on the whole, and it looks raythe mysterious, I tell ye. You know the old feller we stuck and fleeced a few months back, and how old Ben, not satisfied, stuck him twice more, and then saved his life—a thing he warn't never known to do afore; well you know as how he got hold o' some papers too, which he said warn't o' no account to us, and so took 'em for his share, which looked sort o' curious agin, and which bein' all put together, makes me think as how them ar' papers, this gal, and the 'tother old feller ar' all kind o' mixed up into a secret; for ever since he's bin mighty anxious to git hold o' the gal, and I overhearn him say one time, when talkin' to himself, that he'd sometime be a great man, and as soon he could get the gal he was goin' to mizzle and set sail on the big brine."

"Set sail, eh!" growled Curdish. "He said as how he'd set sail, did he? Well, blast me, if he don't too; but it'll be an ugly voyage he'll be goin', by—! or else Jack Curdish ain't no prophet."

The conversation after this for something over an hour, was carried on in a tone so low, that our travelers were unable to distinguish what was said, when the voice of Riley was again heard to articulate:

"I'm afeard this ere storm's knocked our calculations all in the head, Jack."

"Hark!" returned the other; "don't you hear 'em?"

"Ha! yes, 'tis they at last. Now be careful, my boy, and jest do up the thing safe and genteel, for thar's a few shiners at stake, you know." As he spoke, horses were heard approaching at a quick pace, and presently the voices of their riders in conversation.

"Now then, Mark," whispered Bernard, grasping a pistol with one hand and his companion's arm with the other, "jest let us show these ere chaps that there's other folks about."

"Ay!" returned Tyrone, setting his teeth hard, "they need an honest man's lesson."

A thrilling scream aroused them to action, and both sprang forward at once. Immediately after was heard the sharp report of a pistol—a groan— another scream, and the clatter of a horse's hoofs on through the ravine.

CHAPTER III.

THE LOVERS—THE WARNING—THE CAPTURE.

We must now go back in our narrative, to a short time previous to its opening in the first chapter. On the same road already mentioned as leading on through the ravine, about ten miles to the northeast of the place described in the foregoing chapter, and on the same day the events just recorded took place, were two personages, well mounted on a couple of beautiful horses, riding along at a leisure pace. Of the two, one was a young man, apparently about twenty years of age, of a fine form and manly bearing. His countenance was well shaped, open, frank and noble, and of a high intellectual cast; while his bright, hazel eye sparkled with a true poetic expression. His forehead was smooth, broad and high, surmounted by dark brown hair, which hung in graceful curls far down his neck, giving to him a somewhat feminine, though not unpleasing, appearance. He was well dressed—uncommonly so for this section of the country—in a fine suit of black; the lower extremity of his pantaloons being encased in fine buckskin leggins, while his head was covered by a beautiful cap of dark silk velvet, on either side of which a couple of gold mounted buttons shone conspicuously. He rode his high mettled steed in that easy, graceful, dignified manner, which sets forth the rider to so much advantage, and which is only acquired by constant practice, together with a knowledge of the rules of horsemanship.

His companion was a female, elegantly attired in a riding suit, and likewise rode very gracefully. Of years she had seen some eighteen, was medium in stature, and beautifully formed. Her countenance, strictly speaking, could scarce be account ed handsome, for her features were not entirely regular; yet there was something so noble, so intelligent in the expression, her dark blue eyes were so lit up with the fires of an earnest soul, that ten to one you would pronounce her beautiful, ere the form of her features was distinctly recognised; thus unconsciously awarding another proof of the mind's immortal triumph over matter. Her hair was a glossy auburn, the front of which was neatly braided, brought down with a graceful curve below her ears, and fastened behind. Her checks were slightly dimpled, and around her mouth lingered one of those pleasing expressions—a sort of half smile—which, combined with a bright flashing eye, invariably wins upon the beholder in spite of himself, and leads us to fancy there is an influence of a Mesmeric nature connected therewith.

The country through which the two were traveling, was mostly level, and heavily shaded by thick, dark woods, stretching far away on either hand, occasionally broken a little in places by the clearing up of some settler, whereby the beams of the sun poured gently in, refreshing to the eyes of civilization, as the cool springs of water to the thirsty traveler of the Arabian Desert.

It was an exceedingly warm day, and the travelers would have suffered much, had they not been so well protected from the rays of the sun, which already far advanced toward the western horizon, threw the shade of the lofty trees directly across their path. Still the air was hot and sultry, unaccompanied by any cooling breeze, and although jogging along at a very moderate pace, both horse and rider perspired freely.

"Ah! how refreshing!" exclaimed the lady, as a cool breeze fanned for an instant her heated brow, rustling the leaves with that pleasing sound so delightful in a forest. "See, even my noble Fanny pricks up her ears, and seems greatly rejoiced."

"Ay, and so does Sir Harry," returned her companion. "It is delightful truly, after this intense and almost suffocating heat. Ah! it dies away again; I would it were to continue."

"Well, Edward, let us be thankful for a little, you know that is my motto."

"True, Emily, and I agree with all my heart."

"*All?*" enquired Emily with emphasis, casting her head a little one side, and throwing on him one of her peculiar, fascinating glances; "with *all* your heart, Edward?"

"That is, *all* there is left me," replied Edward, with a meaning smile, gracefully bowing to the lady.

"Ay, that indeed! well put in, Sir Knight! but a little late withal. However, better late than never, says the adage, and I trust you will be a little more circumspect of speech hereafter."

"I will do any thing you require, Emily," returned Edward gallantly; "you have only to command to be obeyed."

"Indeed, Sir Knight! you are very proficient in promises; you have yielded to a hard task−master, and I fear me if put to the test, your actions would much belie your words."

"Nay, indeed, Emily, you are in error; only give me the trial, and see if I do not produce the proof."

"Well, sir, since you require it, please ride forward and announce to the good inhabitants—if you should chance to meet any—that a lady is approaching, in the person of Emily Novance, whose gallant by her orders goes before as a herall.— What? you hesitate! is this the way I am to be obeyed? Go, sir! it is my command!"

"Nay, but Emily, this is unfair."

"So, then, you question my orders, do you? Ah! I fear you are like all the rest of your sex— full of promises, which doubtless you all fulfil, when the fulfilment proves agreeable to yourselves; but when otherwise, ah me! for our sex;" and the speaker shook her head with an arch look.

"Now, now, Emily; but I see you are determined to carry the point your own way, so I will fain give in, lest I get worsted by argument."

"Ay, do if you please, Sir Knight! and you will oblige me much, very much."

For some minutes after this both rode along in silence, when the conversation was again opened by Edward.

"I say, Emily," began he, at length, "to one of your refined taste, does not this country life, so tone, so solitary, in the woods as it were, seem very irksome? Methinks to one of your light turn of mind, that had been used to the gay crowds which throng the city, it must be very tiresome, full of sameness, causing *ennvi* and discontent."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the lady, a slight flush singing her fair noble features, while her eyes sparkled with more than wonted brilliancy. "Indeed! think you so? then have I given you more credit for discernment than you really possess, if thus you judge the heart of Emily Nevance! What are the gay crowds of the city, of which you speak? Of what are they composed, but of fops and fools—apes of fashion—walking advertisements for tailors and milliners—whose mirrors are their prophets, and themselves the only God they worship!—whose very souls are confined within the trappings of dress, and know as little of what human beings should be, as the insects that crawl beneath our feet! And do you think I sigh for their society? No! give me Nature in her wildest, grandest, seul−inspiring moods!— away from the haunts of men, let me contemplate her in silence, and in awe! 'Tis then, far from loncliness, I feel I hold communion with the All Pervading Spirit! I look around me, and behold the works of One, compared with whom, I sink into utter insignificance. Ay! away with dusty cities! Give me the hills, the dales, the rocky steeps, the level plains, the tall, majestic, sighing forests, with the music of their creating— the laughing, rippling, sunay streams, that dance along in childish glee—and with a soul pure, sinless in the sight of God, I will rest content to spend my days in holy contemplation."

"Spoken like yourself, Emily!—my sentiments, for the world!" exclaimed Edward, with a bright, enthusiastic animation of countenance that told the feelings within more eloquently far than words "I was but jesting, dear Emily."

"Well, I am glad to hear you say that, at all events. I should be sorry to have you form such an opinion of me as you first expressed." This was said in a sad, almost mournful tone of voice, while the speaker bent her head forward, and appeared to be examining some of the trappings of the saddle.

"Nay, never fear, dear Emily, that I will think aught of you but what is most worthy," replied Edward, in that deep, earnest tone of voice which invariably carries conviction with it the speaker is sincere. "But why," continued he, after a pause of some moments, during which each seemed buried in some deep study, "why, dearest Emily, when every thing concurs to prove us so fitly adapted to each other, why will you withhold your consent to be mine? O, if you did but know the deep, ardent passion I possess for you, methinks you would not turn so deaf an ear to all my pleadings!"

"There, Edward, you do me wrong," replied Emily; "I am not deaf to your pleadings, far from it; nor do I in the least doubt the passion of which you speak; but Edward, as I told you before, we are both as yet young, and I would rather, ere you bind yourself by a solemn promise, that you look more about you, lest by too hasty nuptials you do an act which you may repent the remainder of your days. Besides, you know you are wealthy; I am not; and your parents will, perchance, object to your wedding one so far beneath you."

"Ah! Emily," sighed Edward, "that is the unkindest word of all. *Beneath* me," cried he suddenly, "by heavens! it were not well for any to utter that in my presence, save Emily Nevance! Beneath me, indeed! and in what am I your superior? In gold! And did not you yourself despise it but now, and all its idle votaries?"

"But then, Edward, you know the world—"

"Pshaw! what care I for the world? The *world* — nonsense! I am a man, and I stand on my own opinions, in matters of my own concern! Surely I would be mad, or worse than mad, to sacrifice my own happiness to please the world!"

"But then, Edward, you know your parents may think differently in regard to the opinions of the world."

For some minutes Edward, mused thoughtfully, before making a reply. He knew that Emily was correct in her surmises, for his parents were both rich and proud—his father more especially—and he knew too that the latter, in his own mind, had already disposed of his hand, to one he had never seem, simply because she was a personage of wealth; and consequently, that it would be a difficult matter, even if done at all, to gain their consent to his union with another, and furthermore too, when that other was poor; but still he loved Emily sincerely, deeply, and was fully determined not to sacrifice his own happiness to gratify the caprices of others, even were those others his parents.

"Well, Emily," he at length replied, "depend upon it, whatever my parents may think, my views and sentiments shall, at least, ever remain unaltered; and since you will not now sacredly promise to become mine, I will live on the joyful hope of some day winning your consent— some day calling you so, with the sanction of the laws of both God and man."

"And I," rejoined Emily, in a low sweet tone, with her eyes cast down, "I will live on in the sincere hope, that should that day ever come, I may be worthy of you."

"Ah, then you admit—"

"No! for the present I admit nothing. But see! the sun is already nearing the western horizon, where black clouds are looming up in sullen majesty, and we have a goocly distance yet to ride. Let us put our horses to the spur."

"Ay, you are right," returned Edward; "time flies so rapidly when with those we love we scarcely head it. But we must make amends for our delay in this instance, as I like not the looks of yonder claud, and methought but now I heard the distant sound of thunder."

Accordingly putting spurs to the noble animals, they rode forward at a fast gallop. Half an hour of good riding brought them to an humble cottage, where, finding the storm was likely to prove detrimental if they continued their journey, they concluded to await its termination. Alighting, Edward secured the horses under a sort of shed, and then led the way into the hovel, which was a rough, homely fabric, composed of logs, put together in the rude, half−civilized manner common to the first settlers of the West. At the door, or entrance, they were met by a female—the hostess—a woman somewhat past the middle age, of rather an unprepossessing appearance, who gave them a cold salutation, and learning the object of their visit, civilly bade them enter. She was dressed in the simplest, coarsest garb of the day, and wore a stern, haughty, or rather an angry look, which made her person appear to her guests anything but agreeable. The room which they entered waslow, dark, and dirty; the ground—for it could not boast of a floor—being strewed with damp, filthy straw. In one corner was some of a fresher, cleanlier appearance; used, undoubtedly, as a place of rest for the occupants. Several rough benches promiscuously standing about, together with a plain deal table, a few pots and kettles, apparently completed the stock of furniture.

"You're jest in time," remarked the hostess, retreating within, and pointing our travelers to one of the benches; "you haint bin a minnet too quick; for sich a guster as we're goin' to have, arn't seen in these diggins often."

"Do you think, madam, we shall have a severe shower?" enquired Edward, casually.

"*Think!*" cried she contemptuously, drawing herself up, her small black eyes flashing angrily, "I arn't one to think, sir! *I knows!* Thar's goin' to happen one of the greatest gusters as ever was knowd on, sir! The tall big trees ar' going to snap like pipe stems! Listen! The thunder growls like a savarageous lion! The lightning dances like mad! *Think,* indeed! Hetty Brogan what tells fortunes, arn't one as thinks much, I reckon Thar! d'ye hear that?" screamed she, as a tremendous crash of thunder broke over their heads. "That ar's the speret o' the storm, cheering it on! Hist! d'ye hear that ar' roarin? I tell ye its comin'. Young folks, bewar'! thar's danger in your way! I see it—the storm—the woods!" and she strode to and fro the apartment, her eyes turned upward, apparently fixed on some distant object, gesticulating, the while, in that wild manner, which led our travelers to believe her touched with insanity. Suddenly stretching out her long bony arm, pausing, and pointing with her finger in the direction she was gazing, while with the other she seemed to brush a mist from before her eyes, she exclaimed with vehemence, "I see it again! the woods!—the ambush—all—all! Young folks bewar'! thar's danger in your

way!—be—" a vivid flash of lightning, followed instantaneously by another crash of thunder, that made the old cabin tremble, here cut her speech short. "Well, enough," muttered she to herself, "if Jack and Bill only manage to play their parts, I'll git more credit for witcheraft."

The storm now howled in all its fury, making the rough old timbers of the cabin creak and tremble, as though about to be demolished, while a thick, heavy darkness shut in every object, save when relieved by the lurid glare of lightaing. Edward and Emily sat mute, gazing upon the scene with that sense of awe, which intelligent and sensitive minds ever experience, when brought by the fierce combat of the elements into the presence of the Almighty Spirit of the Universe.

Something less than two hours served to clear away the storm, when our travelers prepared to leave. The horses were found safe, though the saddles were rendered disagreeable from being saturated with the rain. This, however, being of minor importance, they mounted, thanked the hostess for her accommodation, and rode away—she the while repeating: "Bewar', thar's danger on yer way!" so long as they were within hearing.

"What think you of that old woman?" enquired Emily, as they rode along, carefully picleing their way, it still being dark, while here and there a tree felled directly across their path, warned them to move cautiously.

"Why, I scarcely gave her a thought, except to think her a little deranged," answered Edward.

"But if what she vaguely hinted should prove true—"

"Poh! Emily," interrupted Edward, "do not give it a thought. Surely, you are not frightened at the idle outpourings of such an illiterate old woman as that?"

"I scarcely know, Edward, whether I am or not. But something weighs heavily on my spirits, and I feel a strange foreboding of some coming ill."

"O, the effect of the storm no doubt; it will soon pass away; come, come, do not be down−hearted, the moon will be up presently, and then we can move forward with greater facility."

They now rode on for some time in silence, occasionally venturing their horses into a trot, whenever the road appeared a little more open, until they entered the ravine, where the trees being of much smaller growth, of a swampy nature, had made little or no obstruction to their progress, when giving their steeds the reins, they moved forward at a much faster pace. The Maramee, running along to their left, being much swolen by the late rains, now rolled on with that sullen, gloomy, monotonous sound, which the turbulent waters of a flood will invariably produce.

"Oh, how gloomy!" began Emily, breaking the silence they had for some time maintained; "I shall feel much relieved when we pass this lonely place, for here every sound seems to send a chill to my heart."

"And my spirits," returned Edward, "from some cause, are less buoyant than is common with me. I wonder if that old woman could have any secret meaning in what she said? But no! pshaw! what a foolish idea;" and he tried to laugh, as if to shake off his thoughts, but the attempt ended in a hollow tone, that sounded strange and unnatural.

"I fear, Edward, there was more in her words than you are willing to eredence. But here we are, thank Heaven! at the foot of the hill: now then, we shall leave this—" what more she would have added was interrupted by a scream, as two figures, springing from either side of the path, grasped the bridles of both Edward's horse and her own. The next moment Emily felt herself seized by one of the raffians, who instantly mounted behind her—saw her companion felled to the ground—saw two more figures rush forward— heard the report of a pistol—a groan, and uttering another wild scream of fear and despair, she was rapidly borne away into the dark ravine.

In the execution of this nefarious design, Curdish was less successful than Riley; for having struck Edward from his horse, and just as his foot was placed in the stirrup to mount, a shot from the pistol of Bernard disabled him, and he was immediately taken prisoner. At this juncture Edward, recovering from the stunning effects of the blow, sprang to his feet, and learning from Tyrone how matters were, in an agitated voice of deep emotion, said:

"Gentlemen, you are both strangers to me, but you have acted like *men*, and from my heart I thank you. Some five miles from here, on this road, you will find a cottage occupied by one Webber, where you can confine this villain, and take such measures as you may think proper. Inform Webber of the circumstances, and say that Edward Merton has gone in pursuit of his ward."

"His ward!" echoed Bernard and Tyrone in a breath.

"Even so; adieu!" and mounting his horse, which stood by him, while speaking, he drove the spurs into his sides, and dashed on in pursuit of the kidnapper, with that wild, reckless daring, that uncertainty of purpose,

which hot−brained youth ever exhibits, ere subdued by the stern, calm teachings of experience.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Tyrone, as Merton rode away, ere he was fully aware of his purpose; "his rashness may spoil all. But come, Bernard, let us take this cut−throat along, and forward to Webber's as soon as possible."

"Wal, that's to my notion exactly," returned Bernard. "So, Mr. Jack Curdish, you didn't quite come it this ere time, I guess, did ye? Pre'aps you'll have better luck agin you git another such a chance. If I's you, I wouldn't holler and laugh quite so loud next time; I'd du it all a great deal more stiller like; I would, I swow, that's a fact."

"Curses on ye!" growled Curdish between his clenched teeth. "I'll pay ye some day, hang me if I don't!"

"O, you needn't cuss and squirm, 'cause 't wont be o' no use, not a darned bit. I guess I've seen chaps afore to−day git cured, when they got a little obstropulous, mighty tarnal quick too; so come along with ye;" and taking hold of one arm, while Tyrone walked on the other side, the arm of which was broken by the shot of Bernard, they proceeded in the direction of Webber's, where they arrived in about an hour and a half, and where for the present we shall leave them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PURSUIT—THE INFORMATION—THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGERS.

Wild and turbulent as the waters that rushed along by his side, were the thoughts and feelings crowding the breast of Edward Merton, as he spurred his noble animal on through the ravine. His mind was now a perfect chaos, where hope and fear, love and revenge, were alternately struggling for the mastery. One thought, however, was ever uppermost: Emily Nevance *must* be rescued; but as to the manner time and place, he scarcely gave a thought; for amid the whirlwind of ideas crowding his brain, there were none of calm delit ration, so essential to the effecting of his purpose. As he cleared the ravine and entered the forest, he was very forcibly reminded of his headlong speed, by the stumbling of his horse against a tree that had been blown partly across the road, by which he was nearly thrown to the earth.

Immediately dismounting, and finding his horse not materially injured—having only in one or two places slightly ruptured the skin—Merton seated himself upon the fallen tree, and for a few minutes seemed to hold a consultation with himself. Whatever this consultation was, it probably savored more of reason than his former transactions; for on remounting he proceeded at a much slower pace, his mind evidently occupied with matters which at first had been overlooked.

"Yes, she *must* be saved!" exclaimed he, at length, vehemently. "But how is this to be done? where can I find her? for what purpose is she thus taken away? Doubtless for some foul end! Oh God! if she but come to harm—but no! no! I will not think it—it must not, *shall* not be!—and yet, and yet, if it *should* be"—and Edward pressed his hands to his throbbing, burning temples, in an agony of mind almost insupportable. "Oh, the villain! if he do but wrong her, I swear his heart's blood shall answer for it, though I spend a life in search for him! But why do I idle here, when perhaps I may overtake the ruffian—may save her from death, or what is worse, dishonor? Gods! if he wrong her!" and as he spoke, Merton buried the rowels in the flanks of the gallant horse which bore him, and again he was wildly dashing forward, seemingly forgetful of the former accident. But he remained unharmed, and a few minutes hard riding brought him to the cot which had protected him from the storm, when, as if struck by a sudden thought, he ejaculated, "Ha! I will know," and immediately reined in his noble beast, already covered with foam, close to the entrance. A loud hallo not serving to bring any one to the door, he sprang to the ground and for some time vigorously applied his fist to it with no better success. As he was about to remount, however, thinking there was no one within, the sound of smothered voices caught his ear and determined him to continue. His efforts were at last rewarded by a somewhat husky voice calling out:

"Who's thar'?"

"A friend!" replied Merton.

"What d'ye want?"

"To gain an entrance."

"We don't never admit strangers arter night; call to−morrow."

"I cannot delay!—my business is urgent."

"Who d'ye want to see?"

"Hetty Brogan."

Here the smothered conversation was again renewed, which at length resulted in the door being unbolted, and a man's head peeping cautiously out.

"Ar' ye alone?" enquired the same husky voice.

"I am!" replied Merton.

"What brings ye here?"

"I wish to question Hetty Brogan."

"Consarning fortins?"

"Yes!"

"Come in."

Merton immediately secured his horse and entered. Some half smothered embers on a rude hearth cast forth a

sombrous light, and served to relieve the various objects from total darkness. Hetty immediately came forward and enquired of Merton his business.

"When I was here a short time since," answered he, "you warned me of danger lying on my path, to which I then gave little heed—for, to tell you the truth, I thought you deranged; but I have since learned the sad reality. I was felled from my horse by a ruffianly blow, while my companion was kidnapped and borne I know not whither. It matters not to me at present how you gained the knowledge you imparted, but I wish to know more. Tell me, if indeed you can tell, where she is at the present moment, or whither her destination, and you shall be richly rewarded."

"To tell you whar' she is don't lay in my power. Her destination is—"

"Where? where?—for Heaven's sake speak!" exclaimed Merton, as the old woman paused.

"Thar', thar', don't git in a passion: you hain't said what you'd give to know; and I reckon as how Hetty Brogan arn't one as tells for nothing."

"Speak, then! old woman; there is gold to unloose the hinges of your tongue!" cried Merton, placing in the hands of Hetty a well filled purse, which she grasped with avidity and dropped into a side pocket; then motioning him to a seat, she resumed:

"Why, ye see, mister—what's yer name, sir?"

"No matter! go on with your story!" said Merton, sternly.

"Ye see, this ere ar' rather ticklish business; and I don't much like the idea o' gitting myself into a scrape, which prehaps I might do by telling a hot−headed younker like you, what you want to know consarning the gal, without first gitting precautions taken."

"Do you mean to say you are going to refuse me the information for which you are already paid?" enquired Merton, angrily.

"Now, now, don't be gitting angry, don't. I only wanted to make you promise you wont never in no way use this ar' information against me; `cause if some folks should find it out, my head wouldn't be worth that;" and she snapped her fingers.

"Well, well, go on! I promise all you desire, on the honor of a gentleman," returned Merton, hastily.

"Well, then, d'ye ever happen to hears o' old Ben David, the Jew, what lives on the bank of the Mississippi?"

"Ay! heard of him for a cut−throat!"

"Hush! not so loud."

"Well, well!—speak, speak! what of him?"

"Thar's whar' the gal's gone."

"Gracious Heavens!" cried Merton, wildly, springing from his seat and clasping his forehead with his hand; "surely, surely not there! My God! what can be done? I will fly to her instantly!— but how gained you this information?—yet no matter!—I will fly this instant!" and Edward bounded to the door, where he suddenly recoiled as though met by some repulsive obstacle, while at the same instant the dark figure of a man filled the entrance, and a deep voice cried, "Hold!" The next moment the figure had advanced into the centre of the room and the door was again closed.

"Hetty, what means this? who have we here?" asked the same deep, stern voice.

"A—a—gen—a stranger, sir! as was just enquiring his way to the river, sir!" stammered Hetty, confusedly, who on the entrance of the last comer had retreated to the farther−side of the apartment, where the darkness screened her from observation.

"Ha! you seem agitated! Beware now you deceive me! A light here!—quick—a light!"

The individual whom we first noticed as questioning Merton previous to his entrance, and who had since remained a silent spectator, advanced to the fire and placed thereon a pine knot, which immediately sent forth a ruddy gleam, lighting the whole cabin and producing a picturesque effect. A momentary pause ensued, during which the gaze of Merton and the stranger met. The latter was tall, commanding in figure, with broad massive chest and limbs to correspond. The outline of his form was decidedly handsome, as was also that of his features, which although of a dark, almost dingy hue, were very expressive, and seemed lit up with the fires of a mighty, and but for a certain slight sinister expression, a noble soul. His eyes were dark and brilliant—his forehead broad and high, surmounted by jet−black hair, which fell down around his neck in long glossy ringlets. His face was medium in length, with rather prominent cheek−bones, cheeks a little dimpled, from which ran two gently curved

lines, terminating at the corners of his mouth. His lips were thin and generally compressed— though when otherwise, turned up with something of a sneer. His chin rose prominently from a graceful curve below his mouth, on which was a handsome imperial, and ended with an oval turn. His dress was fashioned much like a sailor's. He wore a roundabout of dark blue cloth, richly embroidered with silk and tassel, tastefully set off by two rows of gold mounted buttons. Underneath of this he wore a fine blue shirt, with large open collar, falling negligently back from the neck, secured by a dark silk cravat, which was in turn secured by running through a plain gold ring. His nether garments were in singular contrast with his upper. His pantaloons of coarse, dark cloth, were fastened around the waist by a sort of wampum helt, in which were confined a knife and two pistols. They came a little below his knees, where they were met by leggins from the skin of deer, which connecting with moceasins, formed a sort of rough boot. On his head he wore a singular covering of untanned leather, shaped something between a hat and cap. Altogether, his whole appearance bespoke a man of a wild, reckless, yet withal, fanciful disposition.

For a moment he stood gazing on Merton with a severe expression—his dark eyes gleaming with unusual brightness—his broad forehead gradually contracting into a frown, as he found his bold gaze returned by one equally bold and unquailing.

"Who are you, and what is your business here?" demanded he, in the tone of one who deems he has a right to know.

"Ere I answer," replied Merton, somewhat haughtily, without removing his gaze, "I would know by what right you question."

"By the right of might!" rejoined the other quickly, his dark eyes flashing.

"Indeed!"

"Ay, sir, indeed!" and his lips parted with a sneer. "Come, sir, do not trifle!" he resumed, again compressing his lips. "If you are unfortunate, speak out, and if it is in my power I will assist you; but if you are beat on an evil errand"— and his eyes flashed fiercely—" *beware!*"

"My errand is truly not one of evil, and I am rather unfortunate," returned Merton, struck by a singular frankness about the other, and thinking he might perhaps render him assistance. "But whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"I am called Barton. But go on! go on! I would know your story!" he added hastily.

Merton simply related some of the incidents with which the reader is already acquainted.

"Ha!" exclaimed Barton—as Edward concluded his account of the kidnapping of Emily—"and you are now in pursuit?"

"I am."

"But where can the villain have borne her? Here, Hetty, you pretend in second sight, give us the desired information!"

"Why rea−really sir, I—"

"Speak, woman!" interrupted Barton, fiercely. "You know me;" he muttered in an under tone.

"I−I thinks to−to−David's, sir!" stammered Hetty, turning pale and trembling.

"What, the Jew!" cried Barton, with a start. "Here, young man;" and turning to Edward, he hastily drew from his finger a curiously wrought ring; "take this, and speed! speed! for there is not a moment to be lost. Do you know the residence of the Jew?"

"I know the vicinity, and can find it," answered Edward.

"Enough, then! away, away! for you have no time to lose. Find the Jew, present this ring, and demand the girl. He will not refuse your demand. *He dare not!*" added Barton, with strong emphasis, as he saw Edward look incredulous.

"But—"

"Nay, young man, no questions now. I will see you anon and explain all. Enough, that I have taken a fancy, and am willing to serve you. But come, come—away, away, or you may be too late!" and hurrying Merton from the house, Barton assisted him to mount, and then turned away with an abrupt "adieu!" Once more burying the rowels in his horse, in an instant Merton was rapidly speeding on to the great river, lost in vague conjectures concerning this singular individual, and how his own strange adventure might terminate.

CHAPTER V.

THE JEW—THE KIDNAPPER—THE RESCUE.

On the margin of the Mississippi, some eight or ten miles below St. Louis, stood, at the time of which we write, an old, somewhat dilapidated, and apparently untenanted log hut. Although standing on the bank of the river, it was well screened from observation by thick branching trees and a dense shrubbery, which completely surrounded it. The ground in the rear of it was mostly level; but in front, it abruptly descended to the river, which came sweeping along some thirty yards below. The hut itself, on close inspection, presented both externally and internally a very disagreeable appearance. It contained but one apartment, if we except a place partitioned off at one end, for what purpose may, perhaps, be seen hereafter. However ugly and disagreeable the matter may prove, dear reader, it now becomes necessary for us to introduce you within the precints of this old dwelling—for dwelling indeed it was—at an hour not the most agreeable, were you obliged to enter corporeally.

Seated upon an old stool, beside a small table, on which his elbow rested, his head in turn resting upon his hand, was a man over whom some sixty years had made their circling rounds. One hand held a paper, on which he was intently gazing, while some few others were scattered carelessly over the table. It was near the "witching time of night," and a dim, flickering candle served to show the outline of his form, and bring his features into a more bold relief. His countenance was strongly marked by several lines which depicted cunning and avarice to a remarkable degree. His eyes were small, dark and piercing, and were surmounted by heavy beetling brows. His forehead was low, and deeply wrinkled; and his head, though a little bald, was generally covered with long hair, besprinkled with the silver touches of time. The most striking feature of his face, was his nose; being long, pointed and aquiine— denoting him to be one of that often despised race, the Jew. His beard was suffered to grow, unmolested by the civilizing touches of a razor; was rough, of a dirty brown color; and came below his chin sufficiently, with his head bent forward, to rest on his bosom. His skin was dark and filthy, deeply wrinkled, and begrimed with dirt. Altogether his whole appearance betokeued a man full of treachery and deceit; of dark sinister motives; and one who, to a person of the least refined taste, would prove repugnant in the extreme.

He was seated as before said, intently gazing on a paper held in his hand, which trembling in the light, threw over his swarthy, hideous features a flitting shade; making them, if possible, even more hideous in expression. Gradually his small, while a sinister smile hovered around the corners of his mouth, as he uttered a low, chuckling laugh.— Suddenly starting, a paleness overspread his countenance, the paper dropped from his hand, and he looked hurriedly around the room, vainly endeavoring to peer into the darkness, his limbs trembling with cowardly fear, exclaiming:

"Ha! mine Gott! vot wash dat? O! poh, poh! twas noshings; vot fors should I pees afraids?— noshings vill hurtish me;" and turning to the table, he again took up the paper, muttering— "Dis ish von good documents, as shall makes mine fortunes. De old Jew vill von days pe a very great mans, mid a young handsome wifes;" and again he chuckled, with a fiendish glee.

Scanning the papers for a few minutes, he commenced rolling them carefully together, and ended by securing them with a string. When done, he laid the roll upon the table before him, and gazed upon it long and wistfully:—then rising from his seat, he shuffled slowly across the apartment, to the place already mentioned as being partitioned off, where disappearing for a few minutes, he reappeared, returned, reseated himself on his stool, crossed his arms an the table, bent his head forward, and, judging from his vacant stare, was soon engaged in some deep study.

"Ha! mine Gott! but dey mush succeeds!" exclaimed he, at length, as though speaking from a train of thought:—"yet I fears dat infernal showers will make it too mush bad. Ah! vot wash dat!" cried he suddenly, starting up and bending forward in alistening attitude. "Blessed pe Fader Abram! dat ish de signals," continued he, rubbing his hands, chuckling, and advancing towards the door, as a clear, shrill whistle rang through the hovel. "Ah, mine Gott! mine Gott! von day nows I shall haves plenty of monish;" and he attempted a feeble imitation at dancing, which, with his stooped figure and trembling limbs, presented a spectacle disgusting as it was ridiculous.

Advancing to the door, the opened it, gave an answering signal from a piece of ivory which he applied to his

mouth, and then leaned against the door post, as if in expectation of some visitor.— For some minutes all was silent, and then came the sound of approaching footsteps, with which was occasionally mingled a grunt and a deep muttered curse, as though the comer was toiling with some heavy burthen. Directly the figure of a man was seen struggling through the bushes, bearing a human body in his arms, and a moment after, entering the hovel, he deposited it on the ground.

"Thar,' Mister Jew David, when you want another gal cotched, I reckons as how you'll have to cotch her yerself—for Bill Riley aint found on such an errand agin, not afore this scrape's forgot, anyhow."

"Vare ish Mistoor Jacks?" enquired the Jew.

"Why ye see, old feller, that ar's much easier axed, than answered. Most likely he's in a straight jacket by this time, if he arn't already bored through the body. I did'nt wait to see how it come out, for I thought one was about as many as I could tend on, conveniently."

"Vy, vot dosh you means?" cried the Jew, in alarm.

"O, nothing much, only somebody happened to hear what was a goin' on, and come up in a hurry, pistol in hand, which probably went off accidentally, and ye see Jack arn't here; that's all I know about it."

"Oh, mine Gott! mine Gott! do you thinks Jacks vosh kilt?" enquired the Jew, his dark eyes gleaming strangely.

"Can't say—most likely he's dead by this time."

A low, half−smothered chuckle escaped the Jew, which Bill overheard, and turning fiercely to him, exclaimed:

"Look ye here, old rough−head! I believe you're a most outrageous, old villainous cut−throat! I do upon my honor."

"Vot fors you shays dat?" asked the Jew, with a savage grin.

"Cause I jest think so, and I al'ays like to speak my mind. Here you are now, laughing to yerself, for ye darn't to laugh out like a man, thinking Jack, poor feller's, dead. Well, it's lucky for you if he is: that's my opinion about it."

"Vot for you shays dat?" repeated the Jew, turning a little pale.

"Come, come, old feller, not so fast. Bill Riley don't peach; if he did"—and he looked keenly at the Jew, drawing his right hand obliquely across his throat, making a gurgling sound— "somebody might get that ar' you know. But come," he added, "I've done the job, and now I'll trouble you for the chinkers—a cool hundred, you remember."

"Oh, mine Gott! it vosh but fifty!" cried the Jew, starting back.

"Fifty apiece, old covey, and thar's two on us, which jest makes it a hundred. As Jack's not here, I'll jest take his for him, and in case I cum across him, its easily paid over, ye see."

"Oh, mine Gott! I vill not not do so," whimpered the Jew, who in Jack's absence thought he might cheat him of his share.

"You won't, eh?" exclaimed Bill, advancing to the table and returning with the light, which he held close to the features of Emily, who lay extended on the ground, pale and motionless, yet even lovely withal: "Look thar,' Jew! d'ye see that ar' innocent young lady, whom God forgive me, for bringing into harm's way! D'ye see her? Now look at me;" and he drew himself up to his full height, bringing the light full in front of his face, while the Jew stood wondering:—"Look well! d'ye see me? do I look like a feller that can be trifled with?" Then drawing a pistol, he raised it to a level with the head of David, who turned pale, trembled, and threw up his hands in an imploring attitude as he continued: "Now mark me, Jew David, if them ar' chinkers arn't forthcoming in about two minutes, I'll send a bullet through your head, by—!" and he concluded with an oath.

"Oh, Fader Abram!" exclaimed the Jew, trembling like an aspen leaf; "poot down de pishtools, Mistoor Rileys, and you shall haves de monish."

For a moment the other stood gazing on him with a look of ineffable scorn, and as he did so, the trio formed a scene worthy the pencil of an artist.

Near the centre of the room was Riley, his tall straight form drawn proudly up, one foot thrown a little back, his right hand grasping a pistol, his left the light, which throwing its gleams upon his countenance, exhibited it in strong relief. His features were not handsome—strictly speaking— and yet they were well formed; the outlines bold and rather prepossessing. Their expression was stern, rather than villainous, and his clear, bold, grey eyes, which were now fastened with intensity upon the Jew, spoke more the courage of a man, than the braggadocio of

a scoundrel. There was something in his look which told you he would do what he said; and one that to trifle with under circumstances like the present, would prove a dangerous individual. His lips thin, and generally close drawn over his teeth, were now parted and slightly drawn up with a sneer, wherein was concentrated all the scorn which a truly brave man feels at the sight of a whimpering, cowardly ruffian. Some two or three feet in front of Riley, stood the Jew; his withered form, blanched cheeks, quivering lips and trembling limbs, presenting a striking contrast. Ay, he, the dastardly cutthroat, who would not flinch from burying the murderer's dagger in the heart of some poor, unsuspecting victim, now quaked and trembled at only the bare thought of death overtaking his shriveled, worthless carcase! A little to the left of Riley, lay the apparently lifeless form of Emily Nevance; her pale features looking even more pale and death−like, as the dim light of the lamp fell faintly upon her lovely, upturned countenance; while night formed the back−ground, and compietely encircling them, threw a dark veil over surrounding objects.

After gazing a moment on the Jew, Riley advanced to the table, replaced the light, seated himself on the stool, and then bade the Israelite "make haste with the chinkers."

Old David tottered slowly across the apartment, to the closet before spoken of, groaning at the very idea of parting with so much money; but presently he returned, bringing with him a leathern purse, which he emptied on the table, exclaiming;

"Dare, Mistoor Rileys, ish all my monish.— Oh! mine Gott! I shall always more pe one ruined mans."

Riley deigned no reply, but cooly commenced counting the money and transferring it to his pockets. Then turning to the Jew, he enquired what he intended to do with the lady.

The Jew looked at him steadily for a moment, and then as if satisfied there was nothing to fear, replied, with a grin, his small black eyes twinkling with savage humor:

"Vy, Mistoor Rileys, I tinks I shall makes her my vife."

"Your what?" cried Bill, half starting up.

"My vife," repeated the Jew, scarcely knowing whether to be alarmed or not.

"Your wife, eh? ha, ha, ha!—that's capital; a mighty good joke that, old boy—ha, ha, ha!— You're such a good looking, soft eyed, clean faced old beauty, that if the lady don't fall in love with ye at first sight, you'll have the perticular satisfaction o' knowing the fault warn't yours, anyhow— ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!" laughed the Jew, grinning hideously.

"But I say, Jew, what's yer object in throwin' yerself away at such a tender age?"

"Vot fors mine objects?" repeated the Jew, enquiringly.

"Yes! what'll ye get by marryin' this ere lady? for in course ye'll gain somethin' or yer wouldn't do it."

"O, mine Gott! I shall marrys for loves, Mistoor Rileys;" replied the Jew, with stoical gravity.

"For love, eh?—ha, ha, ha!—ho, ho, ho!" roared Bill, holding his sides:—"For love, eh?" and again he went into convulsive fits of laughter. "Why you confounded, stupid old heathen! do you think as how you can make an ass o' Bill Riley? Do you really think thar's anything perticularly verdant about him? Love—paugh! your shrivelled old carcase never fell in love with anything yet, unless thar' was "monish" attached to't. Now jest mark me!" continued he, looking steadily at the Jew, raising the forefinger of his right hand, and assuming a serious tone of voice: "Thar's a mystery connected with this ere business, and per'aps you thinks as how you can blind me, and per'aps you may; but I tell you one thing, bewar' what you do! for if this ere gal comes to harm, through your doings, I, Bill Riley, swear by the honor of a gentleman, to send a bullet through yer loathsome carcase! I do, by heavens! And Jew, I know more consarnin' this, than you're a thinkin' on. Thar's some secret connected with this gal's birth, and you intend crossin' the big waters."

The Jew started back, exclaiming: "Vy, how you finds dat outs?"

"Ha! then I'm right there," thought Bill.— "No matter how I found it out," he replied; "but ye see I know a little what's a goin' on, so have a care friend David. But enough! I'll have to begin to travel; so good bye, old boy, and jest keep yer eye skinned for squalls;" and rising as he spoke, he moved for the door.

At this juncture, Emily, whom they supposed lay in a swoon, but who in reality bad feigned it, in order to learn as much as possible regarding the wherefore of her capture; and who, thinking from the foregoing conversation there might be something gained by appealing to the feelings of Riley; uttered a scream, and sprang into a sitting posture, exclaiming:

"Save me, save me!" But her plan did not succeed. Riley, either fearful of being discovered, or that she might

work upon his feelings, pushed quickly forward and disappeared.

As the door closed behind the kidnapper, the Jew looked hurriedly around, gave a low chuckle, rubbed his hands together, and advanced towards Emily, who instantly sprang to her feet. Recoiling a step or two, he gazed upon her with undisguised admiration, as well he might. Her beauful figure drawn gracefully up, the flush of excitement mounting her face and neck with a ruddy glow, her proud lip curling with a look of scorn, again reflected from her brilliant, dark blue eyes, as she crossed her arms on her breast and stood regarding him; formed a picture which might win the admiration of even a miserly cutthroat.

"O, mine Gott! she does looks so mush pooty!" cried the Jew—"Vot a fine wifes!"

"Jew," began Emily, in a dignified tone, "what means this? why have I been brought hither?"

For a moment the Jew looked at her steadily, and as he did so, his ugly features contracted into a grin, followed by a low chuckle.

"You ish very mush pootish, gal," he replied, "and Ben David vill makes you his wifes."

"*Never!*" cried Emily, in a voice so loud, bold and firm, that the Jew involuntarily started back "Never, sir! *I* become your *wife?* No! sooner would I die a thousand deaths!"

"O, mine Gott! she does looks so mush pootish!" exclaimed old David, recovering from his surprise as Emily ceased, and gazing upon her with a doting look of exultation. "Come, young ladish, we vill takes a walk," continued he, approaching and taking hold of her arm, which she threw off with a contemptuous look,—at the same time drawing a dagger from the folds of her dress, while the Jew again started suddenly back, she exclaimed:

Beware, Jew, beware! It were better for you to beard a lion in his den, than a woman armed, in my situation. Do not attempt to touch me with your foul, polluted hands, or your much fouler soul, thrice damned with sin, with all its hideous weight of guilt, shall wing its flight and stand arraigned before the bar of the eternal God! And Jew," continued she solemnly, "there *is* a God! and one of justice."

So sudden the action, so bold the movement, so solemn the tone of Emily, all combined, took the Jew completely by surprise; and he stood for a moment, gazing upon her dark blue, soul−speaking eyes, with alook wherein was blended all the awe, admiration and respect, which one like him was capable of expressing. It was but for a moment however. A dark shade suddenly flitted across his forehead; his eyes shot forth strange, savage gleams; his lips quivered, as he attempted to compress them over his almost toothless gums, and he bent on Emily a look so full of the expression of a fiend, that she felt her eye quail, while the blood receded to her heart and a tremor of secret terror ran throughout her system.

Applying the ivory to his lips, the Jew gave a peculiar whistle, which was immediately answered from without. A minute later, two figures entered the doorway; and ere Emily had fairly comprehended what was going forward, she found herself pinioned in the grasp of two ruffians.

"Oh!" exclaimed she, "all is lost!" and she uttered a heart−piercing scream.

The Jew chuckled merrily, and advancing toward her, until she felt his very breath on her face, said:

"You looks very mush more pootish;" and he attempted to press his loathsome lips against her face. Recoiling as much as lay in her power— each wrist being grasped by the strong arm of a man—Emily managed to evade what she would have suffered death sooner than permitted, a kiss from the Jew. At this moment she thought of Edward, and scarcely knowing why, she called upon his name for help.

"Vot fors you calls?" chuckled the Jew. "Mistoor Edwards vill not comes!"

"'Tis a lie!" uttered a deep, manly voice, that made Emily scream for joy, as the figure of a man sprang quickly forward, a pistol in either hand, still exclaiming:—"Back, fiends of hell! back! ere I send a bullet through your brains!" and the next instant Emily was clasped in the arms of Edward Merton, who pressed her to his bosom with all the wild foundness of a first passionate love.

After leaving Merton in the previous chapter, he had ridden quickly forward, but had been somewhat delayed, as the exact location of the old hut was unknown to him. He had secured his horse at a short distance, and was searching along the bank of the river, assisted by the light of the moon, which pouring down her silvery flood of light, gave to each thing a calm and pleasing effect— when the scream of Emily arresting his attention, effectually enabled him to find the house; which being completely surrounded by trees and bushes, had thus far eluded his observation. Instantly springing forward, he reached the entrance just in time to hear the voice of her he loved, in tones that went to his very soul, calling on him for help, and the taunting reply of the Jew. Mad, almost, with

hope, rage and fear combined, he entered as described; but so suddenly, and unexpectedly, that the ruffians relaxed their hold and retreated to the farther side of the apartment; while the Jew, not knowing what he had to fear, stood trembling with very fright. Seeing there was but one, however, he somewhat recovered, exclaiming:

"Vy you don't sheize him? vot fors you ish afraids?"

"Off, ruffians, off! or by heavens you journey to another world!" cried Merton, springing in front of Emily. "And as for you, old dastardly cutthroat!" continued he, turning to David, as the ruffians paused—"I have a word to say, which you will do well to heed! This girl I demand by virtue of this ring!" and as he spoke, he presented the one given him by Barton.

Whether Merton expected this to have any effect on the Jew or not, certain it is that he was very much surprised at the singular change it did effect; for the Jew instantly advanced in a fawning manner, while the ruffians slunk quietly away. Content that his purpose was gained, without seeking the mysterious cause, Merton, accompanied by Emily, quitted the hovel as soon as possible. The Jew followed them to the door, whispering them a good night, pleasant journey and so forth, and even went so far as to offer his service as a guide, which of course was declined. As Merton entered the bushes, he looked back and saw the Jew standing in the doorway, his face upturned as though gazing at the stars. At this moment a cloud which had obseured the rays of the moon passed, and the light streaming full upon his countenance, exhibited features so wrought up in expression with all that was dark, treacherous and devilish, that in Merton's estimation the owner was well worthy to become the master fiend of hell itself.

A short walk of a few minutes brought them to the spot where Merton had left his horse, when to the surprise of both, they found the one Emily had ridden standing along side. Merton accounted for this by supposing that the kidnapper, either forgetting, or not having any further use, had left her at liberty, when attracted by the neighing of Sir Harry she had sought him out. Assisting Emily to mount, he was soon once more astride his own fine steed; and moving away with lightened hearts, they were shortly traversing a path which led on toward Webber's, engaged in mutual explanations of what had occurred to each in the others absence; and if in doing so, Merton did ride a little closer to the side of Emily than was actually necessary—and if when the moon shone full on her fair countenance, he did bend forward and gaze thereon with a look of fondness that told of holy love, drinking in the glances of her dark blue eyes—and if in attempting to lay hold of her bridle−rein, to guide her horse in the better path, he sometimes touched her hand, pressing it within his own, and whispered words so soft and low the very zephyrs could not catch their import, causing her head to droop, while a rosy tint sprang brightly o'er her face,—is it anything that the reader should stop to wonder at? We think not. Very few but would have done the same under like circumstances.

CHAPTER VI.

WEBBER AND HIS FAMILY—RETROSPECTION—MYSTERY— EMILY NEVANCE.

About five miles from the place where our tale first opens and in a southwesterly direction, stood a neat cottage, in size and appearance greatly the superior of the generality of these buildings, erected in this part of the country. It was composed of logs it is true, but then parts of them were hewn and put together with compactness and regularity, while the crevices were neatly filled with a clay−like substance. The roof was pierced by a chimney built of stone, and was well thatched with straw. A stranger, after traveling through much of the surrounding country, would have been struck with the air of taste and elegant neatness belonging to it, compared with the more slovenly appearance of many of its neighbors. The ground round about, was generally level, of a fertile order, and exhibited marks of fruitful tillage. In the immediate vicinity of the cottage, grass had sprung up, forming a thick green sward, a sure indicative of civilization. A few fences, rough it is true, but still answering the purpose for which they were designed, marked out the fields of tillage, and secured the crops from the invasion of cattle. In the rear of the cottage, was formed a garden; back of which, in orchard regularity, were set out various kinds of domestic trees—such as the apple, pear, peach, and so forth. Opposite the house, some hundred yards distant, was a barn, built of logs, where the cattle could find shelter from the rough storms of winter. In front of the house ran the road before mentioned, which wound over a hill a short distance to the right. Altogether, the whole betokened the owner a farmer of the first class, bred in some of the Eastern States, who had come to the "Far West" with the intention of here passing the remainder of his days. Such was the fact; and although in speaking of him and his family, we may digress a little from the main story, we trust the reader will deem such digression pardonable.

William Webber was a man in size far above the ordinary—standing six feet one inch, with limbs and body well proportioned. In years he numbered some forty−five, with a robust, healthy look about his face that would have set him five years younger. There was nothing remarkable in his countenance, which was open and frank in expression, wherein was likewise written a look of honest hospitality. His complexion was light, with light−brown hair, cut close and combed up above a high, intellectual forehead. His eyes were grey, full, and very expressive, as were his features generally. Around his mouth were a few lines that denoted firmness, when roused, with courage to act; while his features exhibited a calm self−possession that would be of very material service to one in the hour of peril.

He had been born and bred in the good old State of Massachusetts, where he lived in comfortable circumstances, until about five years previous to the opening of our story; when following up a desire he had for sometime entertained, he came to the West, purchased the land where he now resided, built the cottage, returned, and soon removed his family hither; which consisted of a wife and two sons—one now aged twenty, the other some three years his elder.

His wife was a robust, healthy looking woman, some five years his junior, of the medium height, very fleshy, with a full, round, good−natured−looking countenance, such as we behold almost daily, and one to whom the adage, "fat, fair and forty," would be truly applicable.

The eldest son, John, in some respects resembled his father—tall, well−built, with features of a similar shape, though in expression far different. In saying there was a resemblance between him and his father, we wish the reader to distinctly understand it was only in the formation of the features— all else being totally different. His complexion was dark, with jet black hair, and eyes somewhat shaded by dark, heavy, overhanging brows. Around his mouth were lines similar to those of his father, yet taking more of a sinister turn. His look generally, was that of a man dark, deep, and treacherous, and one little likely to inspire confidence. But it was when he smiled, which he did but seldom, that you would have been the most struck by an expression from which you would involuntarily recoil, as from the gaze of a deadly serpent.

From youth up, John had been a being isolated as it were from the world, wrapped up in his own dark thoughts, communing but seldom with any, and then with those of a disposition like to his own. Already had he caused his father much anxiety and trouble; and was, in fact, one cause of his removing to the West, where he

thought he would be free from the snares and temptations likely to be thrown around him in the East, and where as he supposed he would be free at least from companions in vice, and where, to sum up, he would in all probability spend his days in honest pursuits. Could the first design of his father have been strictly carried out, viz: that of removing him from temptation, bad company, and so forth, the latter might perchance have followed. But alas! in selecting the West, and more especially this part of it, he undesignedly opened a field for the cultivation of his son's natural disposition, by throwing him among the most depraved villains of which society could boast. That he was an apt scholar, the sequel of our story will probably show.

His brother Rufus, younger by three years, was of a make and disposition in every respect totally different. In stature he was of the medium size, straight and slim, with light hair, and a fair, sunny countenance. His features were regular, approaching perhaps a little too much the feminine, with such an open, expressive frankness of look, that your confidence was immediately won. His disposition was mild and affable, his voice rich and musical in tone, while his full blue eyes not unfrequently flashed forth gleams of a lofty intellect. Around his mouth also, were lines similar to those of his father, expressive of firmness and a determination of character.

There is one other of whom we must speak to complete the family, in order to do which it will be necessary for us to go back somewhat in our narrative. About fifteen years prior to the date of our story, a stranger, accompanied by a little girl some three years of age, cailed late one evening at the residence of Webber, and requested permission to tarry through the night, which request was granted. He was a dark, stern looking man, some thirty−five years of age, and of a moody, taciturn disposition. But little was gleaned from his conversation, as to who he was or whence he came. In the morning he asked permission for the child to remain a few days, stating as a reason that business of importance called him away. The permission was granted and he took his leave, since when he had never been heard from. Enquiries were instituted by Webber, but nothing authentic had ever been heard concerning him. A man answering his description was seen a short time after in the western part of New York, apparently bound for the West; and Webber came to the conclusion the child had been voluntarily deserted; the more so, as on questioning her, the account she gave was of harsh treatment, and sometimes severe chastisement, for asking of home. The child was too young to give even a succinct detail of her adventures, remembering only some of the more glaring, such as the dark man carrying her away from home, putting her in a house that floated on the water, and the like—from all of which Webber drew his conclusions that she had been brought from another country, perhaps across the Atlantic, by an intrigueing design he was unable to fathom.

It was a riddle too deep for the gossips infesting the neighborhood of Webber (as what place do they not) to solve, concerning who was the child, who were her parents, where she came from, and so forth; and after various conjectures, probable and improbable, they finally agreed that her parents were no better than they should be, and that being of that doubtful cast, it were better to shun the company of the child, lest by intercourse their prudish decorum should be vielated, and their over−wise virtuous principles become contaminated.

So much for ye, moth−eaters of reputation colleagues of idleness and breeders of scandal!— who "strain at a knat and swallow a camel"— blasting all with your polluted breath whom the world hath not acknowledged above your reach— preying upon society as the worm will sooner or later prey upon your corrupted flesh!—God send that the innocent and harmless wanderer be not caught within your damning toils!

If the child was shunned by some, she was not by all; for Webber, to whom she soon became an object of affection, determined to rear her as though she were his own; and as she grew older, he had no cause to regret it; for naturally of a sweet, affectionate disposition, she won friends among those who were at first disposed to treat her uncivilly, while to Webber she clung with all the fondness of a child to a parent.

Time in the meanwhile rolled on, and what at first created a great commotion among the gossips, gradually wore away, settled down into a shake of the head whenever the object of calumny approached, until at length, won over in spite of themselves by her angel disposition, even the retailers of scandal ceased their persecutions and the unknown wanderer became an object of general regard.

About this period an event took place, which created another mighty sensation, although gossip this time ran in a very different channel from the previous one. It was a calm summer evening in the month of August. The sun had just retired behind the Western hill, and was yet tipping the mountain tops with a rich golden tint; the songsters were singing their farewell songs for the night; the breeze came with that gentle, soothing effect, so delightful on such an eve, making one feel that placid, yet saddened happiness, which wins our thoughts from the darker things of life, and directs them into a higher, nobler, holier vein. Around the porch of Webber's dwelling

were seated himself, wife, and two children— one a fair−haired boy of winning appearance, the other a girl of bright eyes and golden tresses, whose age might be thirteen. In the countenance of the latter there was something so noble, so fascinating, combined with such a quiet, thoughtful, almost melancholy air, that ten to one a stranger would have paused to wonder why one so young should bear the look of maturer years. As Webber gazed upon her, and mused on her sad, singular fate—torn from home and friends at so early an age—thrown upon the world for protection, and thought what if such had been the case with one of his own children, he involuntarily hove a sigh, and vowed to watch over her with more than a parent's care.

Suddenly the attention of the group, which had been occupied in various ways, was arrested by the rapid approach of a horseman. A minute later he was standing among them, his horse foaming and panting from hard riding, while with his own head uncovered he wiped the perspiration from his heated brow.

"Is your name Webber?" demanded he of that individual.

"It is."

"William Webber?"

"The same."

"Ten years ago a stranger left with you a little girl: am I right?"

"You are," answered Webber, wondering what was to be revealed. "This is the child;" and he pointed towards her.

The stranger turned an enquiring glance, examined her attentively from head to foot, apparently much struck by her appearance, and then said abruptly: "Enough! I am commanded to deliver you this packet;" saying which he placed a sealed package in Webber's hand—turned— mounted his horse—dashed the spurs into his sides, and ere the astonished group had recovered from their surprise, he was fast speeding out of sight.

"Strange," remarked Webber, breaking the seal; "what new mystery is this?" As he spoke, he opened the parcel, and was surprised to find ten one hundred dollar notes, accompanied with the following singular epistle:

"*To William Webber, greeting:*—Ten years since was placed in your charge a child, who bears or bore the name of Emily Nevance. In the name of God! treat her well! Educate her for any station in society, and accept the notes enclosed, with the thanks of the

Unknown."

CHAPTER VI.

Great was the wonderment among the gossips, when the news went forth of Emily's great fortune,— for rumor soon swelled it into a fortune— and the following six months were employed by all the unmarriageable spinsters and old ladies with spectacles, in conjectures and discussions as to the strange singularity of such an event; and she who had in her earlier years been considered in birth far beneath them, was now, by this incident, placed far above. Oh! the inconsistency of human beings!

A new epoch was now opened to Emily; for Webber, punctual to what he considered a duty, took immediate steps to place her in one of the best institutions in the city of New York, in charge of a distant relative, who, moving in the best circles of society, gave her not only the advantages of intellectual education, but also that of acquiring the ease, grace and dignity belonging to the true etiquette of fashion. Soon after this disposition of Emily, Webber made a tour to the West, purchased a farm as already shown, and removed thither with his family.

Four years passed, and Emily saw nothing of the Webbers. During this period she had grown to womanhood, and what had promised so well when young, was amply fulfilled in maturer years. She became attractive in person, graceful in accomplishments, while her intellectual faculties far exceeded ordinary minds. Her temperament was truly poetic, with nothing of affectation or coquetry (which spoils so many) in her manner.— She was a warm patriot and enthusiast; and when conversing on some noble theme, dull must be the eye that would not flash, or the mind that would not fire, with the inspiration thrown from her speaking eyes and glowing flowery language.

It was in New York that Edward Merton, then a student in the University, first became acquainted with Emily; and struck, we might add fascinated, with manners and appearance so far above the gay flirting things with which she was surrounded, he sought, gained an introduction, and almost immediately commenced paying her his addresses. The result of those addresses, thus far, the reader has already seen.

Although it was generally believed that Emily was rich, yet she knew to the contrary; and possessed of a pride too noble to take advantage of such a reputation, she, through a sensitive delicacy, repulsed the advancements often made by those whom she considered her superiors in point of wealth. Wealth was certainly a great bar to the progress of Merton; a bar, in fact, which he found far more difficult to pass than he at first supposed; and although his nobleness of heart, his sincere, ardent passion, inspired within her own breast feelings of affection—of love—yet pride prevailed; and Merton, to whom she revealed her scruples, saw with painful regret that unless there were some counteracting power, Emily might love, but would never consent to be his.

Tired of city life, and the gay frivolties of the day, Emily longed for the quiet retreat of her guardian; and having made preparations to that effect, about six months prior to the opening of our story, she, accompanied by Merton, whose father resided in St. Louis, set out for the West.

Happy, most happy, was the meeting between Emily and her friends, who had been to her as parents and brothers. Webber, when he came fairly to recognise the "long lost one," as he termed her, could scarcely restrain himself for joy.— Even John, as he extended the hand of welcome, seemed to smile with less of deceit and more of earnestness than was his wont; while Rufus approached her with that bashful timidity, almost amounting to awe, which persons of sensitive minds often exhibit when they fancy themselves in the presence of their superiors.

A great change had been wrought in the personal appearance of Emily. She had left them as it were a child, and as such they remembered her; consequently there was surprise mingled with their joy, to behold such a fine, graceful, lady−like form, combined with such ease and dignity of manner, returned in place of the image on which memory still dwelt. But as it is not our purpose to enter into details here, therefore let it suffice, that up to the time of the commencement of our story, things had run on smoothly.

Merton, whose collegiate course was finished, was now preparing to practice law in St. Louis; but sometimes finding bright eyes a much more pleasing study, not unfrequently wandered off in the direction of Webber's; and almost as frequently, through a singular coincidence, he and Emily might be seen mounted on their fine steeds, scouring the country in various directions:—in fact, it was on one of these excursions, in which they were first introduced to the reader. As their proceedings since then have been made known, we trust sufficient has been said

to justify us in proceeding with our tale.

CHAPTER VII.

WEBBER'S—SINGULAR CONDUCT OF RUFUS—ARRIVAL OF BERNARD AND TYRONE WITH THEIR PRISONER— ILLNESS OF RUFUS—RETURN OF EDWARD AND EMILY—MORE MYSTERY.

At the time of which we write, the unsettled state of the country required every settler to be as much as possible on his guard, and for this purpose Webber had provided his house with a heavy oaken door, strengthened still more by cross bars of iron, through which passed bolts of the same solid material. The windows were protected by shutters similar to the door, and when closed, which could be done almost at a moment's notice, the house, manned by a few within, seemed of sufficient strength to withstand a regular seige. A few loop−holes, cut here and there, would enable those within to fire on an attacking party, with but little danger to themselves. The main, in fact the only entrance to the house, was by the door already mentioned, which opened into a hall running through the centre of the building, on either side of which was a door, opening in turn into other apartments. To the right of the entrance was a room of good dimensions, comfortably furnished, containing an old fashioned fire−place, where the meals were cooked and served, and where the family generally assembled. From this apartment was a stair−case leading to a floor above, which ran along under the roof, forming a place of deposit for old rubbish, and which, if necessary, could be used as a sleeping room. The cottage was well furnished throughout, better than could reasonably have been expected in this part of the country—Webber having brought much of the furniture with him from the East.

In the apartment to the right, just spoken of, on the evening of the day which opens our tale, were assembled Webber, his wife and younger son. In the middle of the floor stood a table, covered with a clean white cloth, on which were ranged various dishes, some evidently used, while others remained untouched in their places, indicating that a part of the family, and a part only, had partaken of the evening's repast. A candle placed on the table, served to light the apartment and exhibit the features of the occupants, all of whom seemed to wear an air of gloomy apprehension.— The doors and windows being thrown open, admitted the breeze, which came with a cool and invigorating effect. For some minutes the silence remained unbroken, while Webber arose from his seat, and paced with anxious strides the floor of the apartment.

"I wonder they do not arrive!" at length he exclaimed; "they surely have had time enough since the shower!" and as he spoke he strode to the door.

The moon had sufficiently risen to throw light upon a scene, where the work of devastation had been carried on to a remarkable degree. As Webber gazed around him, he beheld in every direction tall, lofty trees torn from their foundations— limbs torn from the trunks of others—fences leveled to the ground, and the crops, the toil of a season, beat to the earth as though trampled by a caravan. But with this it was evident his mind was but little occupied; for after casting a hasty glance over the scene, he turned in another direction, and his eye followed the road, which at some little distance to the east wound over the brow of a hill. Here he gazed intently for a few moments, while the gloom which had been settling over his features, gradually deepened. As he stood gazing thus, a sigh, which seemed to come from the heart, caused him to turn his head, when he beheld Rufus—who had noiselessly followed him to the door—with his eyes fixed in the same direction, his features pale, almost ghastly—while the workings of his countenance, and the quivering of his lips, denoted a strange nervous excitability.

"Rufus! Rufus!" cried Webber, taking hold of his arm; "what means this, my son?—why are you so agitated?"

The young man started, passed his hand across his eyes, looked hurriedly around, as one suddenly awakened from a dream; and then, while a slight flush tinged his handsome features, quietly withdrew without deigning a reply.

At another time such singularity of conduct on the part of his son, would have attracted the attention of Webber to know the cause; but under the present circumstances, his own mind was too much occupied to give it heed. For a moment longer, he stood, his eyes fixed in the direction mentioned, and then, as if sadly disappointed, with slow and musing pace returned to the apartment.

"Strange!" said he, "that they do not return. I fear they have met with some serious accident; for this storm has

been most alarming in its consequences."

"Had we not better go in search?" enquired Rufus, his voice trembling with emotion.

"True, my son, we must!" replied Webber, with decision. "Can the horses be found conveniently?"

"I observed two, but a few paces distant," rejoined Rufus.

"But you will not both leave?" said Mrs. Webber, enquiringly.

"Why, no," answered Webber, thoughtfully; "one I think will be sufficient."

"Then *I* will go," said Rufus, with energy.

"Why so, my son?"

"Ask me not, father; I have reasons," replied he, confusedly.

"Well, be it so; but be speedy." As he spoke, he started, for he fancied he heard voices in conversation; and moving quickly to the door, both father and son listened attentively.

"Ha! they come!" exclaimed Webber, as some figures were descried descending the hill.

"*She* is not there!" cried Rufus, quickly.

"How know you that?" enquired Webber! "With my eyes I cannot distinguish individuals at that distance. How know you Emily is not there, Rufus?"

But Rufus was gone; and his father discerned his figure, at some little distance, gliding swiftly on in the direction of the horses. A moment or two later, he heard the clattering of hoofs, and his son rode quickly past. He called to him, but in vain. He heard not, heeded not, but urged his horse to his utmost speed.

"Why the youth is insane!" remarked Webber, to himself. "Ha! he stops!—he has met them returning. But no! on he goes again!— now he dashes over the hill!—surely, something has happened, or he would have returned;" and with an agitated step, he moved on in the same direction.

The voices of the approaching party were, in the meanwhile, growing louder as they neared him, and Webber was soon enabled to hear their conversation. He paused to listen, for he fancied he heard a voice with which he was not unfamiliar.

"Now jest keep right on, Mr. Jack; you haint got a great ways furder to go, no how; and I kind o' guess you'll git rested by the time you'll be wanted to travel agin. Now ye needn't look so tarnal cross about it;—I don't much like the idea o' bragging over a chap that's hampered, but I'll jest tell ye what 'tis, Mr. Jack Curdish, I jest think I could lick you in a fair rough and tumble fight in about two minutes; I do, I swow!"

"Hush!" said another voice. "Be not too over−bearing— remember the man is your prisoner."

"Wal so I do, Mark; but the feller won't say nothing. He's as stuffey as a mule, and I's jest trying to see if I could'nt brag something out o' him."

"Why, Harvey Bernard!" cried Webber, springing forward, as he fully recognised the speaker, and grasping his hand,—"welcome, most welcome, friend Harvey."

"Jest the same old Webber yit," returned Bernard, giving his hand a hearty shake. "Why you look jest as naternal as life. This ere's Marcus Tyrone, a friend o' mine."

"Welcome, Tyrone," said Webber, cordially extending his hand.

"This other chap's name's Jack Curdish. You needn't shake hands with him; for he's jest as big a rascal as ever run."

"Why, what mean you?" enquired Webber, in surprise.

"Tell him, Mark; you can git at it a great deal quicker than I can."

Tyrone accordingly explained, in as few words as possible, how matters stood.

"Gods!" exclaimed Webber, as he heard of Emily's capture, his features working with the most powerful emotion; and for a moment he buried his face in his hands, while his whole frame shook convulsively. Again resuming his outward calmness, he walked close to the side of Curdish, who glanced uneasily about him, and in a voice of suppressed passion, between his clenched teeth, said: "Curdish, by the living God above us! if that girl come to harm, I will make such an example of you, that it shall find a place on history's page for its atrocity! Tell me, where is the girl? and if I succeed in finding her, unharmed, it shall go much better with you."

"I'll tell you nothing to−night," growled Curdish; who fearful of consequences, if they went in pursuit, thought he would gain time by delaying the search.

"Why not to−night?"

"'Cause I won't—that's why!—hang me, if I'm goin' to give ye any more explanations."

"Then your blood be on your own head!" rejoined Webber, sternly. "To the house with him, as fast as possible! I will hurry forward and prepare a place for his reception."

In a few minutes Curdish was placed in the room on the left of the hall, the door and windows made fast, and there left to pass the remainder of the night, in communion with his own dark thoughts. And dark and dreadful are the thoughts of the guilty!—for their conscience is a hell, from which there is no escape.

After a brief consultation, Webber and his friends concluded it were better to wait till morning, ere they set out in search of Emily; the more so, as both Edward and Rufus had already gone in pursuit, and perchance, by awaiting, tidings might be gained of her. But little was said, for all felt a heaviness of heart; and wearied by traveling, Bernard and Tyrone partook of the food set before them, in gloomy silence.

"This is a sad meeting!" began Webber, after a long pause, in a voice so changed that both Bernard and Tyrone involuntarily started. "A sad meeting! If this girl comes to harm, I fear my reason will desert me."

"Why, William!" cried his wife; "are your thoughts more bound up in the child of a stranger, than in your own flesh and blood?"

"Yes, Sarah, I confess it is even so. I have struggled hard against it—I have sought to share my affection alike with each member of my family; but why, I know not—perhaps by her angel disposition—the gentle forsaken has been the idol of my secret thoughts. But enough of this, Sarah; the subject is painful to me;" and he pressed his hands against his heated temples, as though to still their throbbing.

"What course do you intend to pursue with your prisoner?" enquired Tyrone, anxious to draw his thoughts into another channel.

"*Death!*" exclaimed Webber, quickly and fiercely, while his teeth clenched, and his brow contracted into a frown of unshaken resolve.

"Death!" cried all at once.

"Ay, death! there must be an example made!" said Webber, in a deep, stern tone.

"William!" cried his wife, rushing to him:— "You are not yourself,—do not talk thus!"

"Sarah," returned Webber, gently pushing her from him, while the frown grew darker on his brow, "seek not to alter it; I have said."

"But why not appeal to the law for redress?" asked Tyrone.

"You overlook, Tyrone, that our laws here are almost ineffective, and force us, in a measure, to make our own."

"True! I did not think of that."

"Now, Bill Webber, I'll jest tell you what 'tis," began Bernard: "I know my opinion aint o' no great account, any how; but I've known you ever since I was a leetle boy, and somehow I kind o' feel I have a right to say something; and I'm jest agoing to say, if you could manage to punish this ere infernal scoundrel some way, without taking his life, you'll feel a great deal better when you come to die yourself. I haint the least doubt but the feller oughter die, to get his deserts; but ye see, the Almighty made him, and has kept him alive, so far, and will undoubtedly punish him, some day or other; and now the question is, whether you hadn't better let the Almighty take his own way about it, instead of taking all o' the responsibility yourself?"

"I know your honest heart, Bernard," said Webber, approaching and grasping his hand; "I know in all you say, you aim for my own good; but in this I am resolved, and must have my own way, therefore seek not to alter me."

"Wal, if your mind's made up," rejoined Bernard, "I aint the chap to say anything furder; only if you want any help, Harvey Bernard's right here, and he haint never been known to refuse a friend assistance yit. I jest spoke, 'cause I kind o' considered it a duty to do it, and bein' as how I've eased my mind, I haint nothing furder to say about the matter."

Just at this instant was heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and all sprang eagerly to the door. "What news, my son?" cried Webber, as Rufus, pale and breathless, leaped from his panting steed.

"*She*—they are safe and coming!" replied he, almost wildly.

"Thank God, and you!" exclaimed Webber, clasping him in his arms, as though he were a child. "You have relieved my brain of a weight of anguish. But what is the matter, my son?"— added he in alarm, as he became aware of an increasing languor on the part of Rufus.

"Father, I am ill!" sighed Rufus, faintly.

"You are indeed, my son!" and he bore him into the house.

Cordials, such as they had, were administered, but to no effect. He grew wild, delirious, and was finally placed in bed, in a high state of fever. His mother, whose whole soul seemed bound up in him, paced the room, wringing her hands in an agony of grief, and crying: "Oh, my God! my God! spare me this!"

There are some people so constituted by nature, that they possess no feelings in common with the rest of mankind. With those around them they have no kindred ties, no sympathetic chord that vibrates at the slightest touch, linking soul with soul in the holy bond of friendship. They live in, yet separate as it were, from the world; and are thought by the rest of mankind to be cold, unsocial, unfeeling. Perhaps in a great measure they are so; yet notwithstanding, they have their objects of affection, for the heart must cling to something, and in proportion as they isolate themselves from the many, so does their soul embrace the few, or the one, with a violence of passion others deem not they possess. Such was, in part, the case with Mrs. Webber. 'Tis true she liked her husband, she liked her family, her friends, but Rufus was the idol, the only idol of her soul. In him were her hopes, fears and joys centered. A woman that said very little, she was not one to make an outward show of affection, by a thousand little demonstrations that count so much in the eyes of the world, and a stranger might have thought she felt alike toward all. She would steal away unseen, and hour by hour watch, concentrating her very soul on him, with all the deep, holy devotion of a mother's love. And well was he worthy—for within his breast beat a pure, a high−minded, noble heart. What then were her feelings when she saw him stretched on a bed of sickness—pain—with reason, the immortal endowment of God, tottering upon its throne? Who shall tell—who describe a mother's anguish in a scene like this? when she beholds the beloved of her soul in the jaws of earth's mightiest foe, Death! Words fail, the pen droops, and we veil the feelings from the eyes of all but imagination.

An hour or two later Merton and Emily arrived. They were warmly greeted, but there was no rejoicing. Over all hung the cold icy gloom which pervades the house of mourning.— Words were said in whispers, and each glided stealthily about, with that mysterious air which reminds one of the fabled spectres of tradition.— Emily, like a ministering spirit, immediately took her place at the bedside of the sufferer. She felt grieved to the heart, for she loved him with a sister's love. Both herself and Merton were surprised to learn he had been in pursuit of them.— They had never seen him. Once they had fancied they heard the sound of a horse somewhat distant, but nothing further. This annunciation surprised all, for it was evident that he had seen them, as he had told of their coming. Webber mused on the singular conduct of Rufus, prior to his departure, which now struck him with force, shook his head gravely, but said nothing. As soon as Merton had partaken of some refreshment, he mounted another horse and rode swiftly to St. Louis for a physician, who arrived toward night of the following day. He felt of the sufferer's pulse—looked grave—felt of his pulse again—shook his head, and pronounced it a severe case of intermittent fever.

On opening the door of the apartment where Curdish had been confined, to the astonishment of all it was found empty, which was the more unaccountable, as everything was fast just as it had been left the evening before. Webber was both vexed and perplexed that the villain had thus escaped; but after reasoning awhile with himself, he came to the conclusion that under the present circumstances it was all for the best; and his thoughts of vengeance gradually emerged into fears for the life of his youngest born.

We must now leave all for the present, and turn to another scene.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

THE GRAND RENDEZVOUS OF THE BANDITTI—THE BANDIT CHIEF AND HIS WIFE—THE SONG—THE TALE.

On the banks of the Osage, some several miles from where it empties into the dark and muddy Missouri, is a wild, gloomy and romantic spot.— Even at the present day it has not been reached by civilization, and still stands alone in the solemn grandeur of nature. Here mountains rear their rugged heads steep and stupendous; there fearful chasms yawn as if awaiting some prey for their mighty jaws; while anon dashes along some sparkling rivulet, leaping from rock to rock, making music in its devious course, until finally plunging into some larger stream, its tiny youthful song is forever buried in oblivion.

From the Osage, back for some little distance, flows a creek—reflecting its rugged banks in its silvery bosom as in a mirror—and terminates in a semi, or three−quarter circled cove, surrounded by tall, majestic, overhanging cliffs. This water is supplied from the Osage, and passing as it does between such craggy steeps, forms a dark, lonely, silent retreat. The rocks surrounding its termination are high and arching, so that their base can only be approached by water. Within this cove, beneath these rocks, at the time of which we write, was an extensive cavern—known at the present day by the name of "The Robber's Cave." It was well calculated as a fugitive retreat; for defended by a few, it would be a risky attack for a combined force, even though possessed of overwhelming numbers. It could be approached only by boats coming from the Osage, as the sides of the creek were lined with precipitous rocks, where descent would be at the imminent peril of the hardy adventurer. It was, in fact, a spot which seemed as it were planned and fortified by Nature, in one of her wildest moods, for some great and daring enterprise.

Standing on the summit of one of the surrounding cliffs, the eye embraced an extensive scope of country, whose ragged, picturesque surface presented scenes sublimely beautiful, and as variegated as the wildest conceptions of the most vivid imagination. Here you beheld a stunted growth of trees overhanging some frightful precipice; there rocks piled topling up, until they seemed ready to fall with a crashing vengeance upon minor objects below; while winding like a silvery belt between, at some little distance, was the dark and silent Osage, gliding on to be united with one of earth's mightiest rivers, and then forever lost in its last long home of the boundless deep.

There is, in contemplating the beauty and grandeur of Nature, something so fascinating, so holy, so inspiring—we feel so drawn away from the many petty trifles of common life, that to die amid such scenes appears to us as it were robbing Death of half his terrors. 'Tis then we feel purified— elevated; we feel that we are alone in the presence of God—Almighty God! and when it shall be our fate, as sooner or later it must be, (and with all) to pass the bourne whence none return, O! let our body be consigned to dust beside the dashing of some stream, away from the haunts of men, where the soul, the sublime soul of Nature herself pervades!

The cavern of which we have made mention, and to which we must now turn our attention, was entered from the creek, through a small aperture some two feet above the water. From this you descended rather abruptly some ten or fifteen feet, when you found yourself in a large, arching cave of stone, sufficient in size to contain an hundred and fifty persons. From this was a low arched passage through the rock, leading into another apartment, some twenty by thirty feet.

This secret retreat, at the date of our story, was the grand rendezvous of a numerous banditti, of whom mention has been made in the opening.— Along the sides of the cave were ranged pistols, knives, rifles, carbines, powder−flasks, and all the various insignia of warfare. At one end was erected a platform, whereon the chief of the banditti sat or stood, when holding public council. Along the sides were ranged oaken benches, where the members could be seated, and the whole together wore an air of comfort and convenience. But of the Inner Cave, or Chieftain's Chamber, as it was generally called, we wish for the present to speak more particularly. Could one have been introduced into it privately, or without knowing where he was, and seen it lighted in all its brilliancy, he would have fancied himself in the gorgeous apartment of some palace, rather than in a robber's cave. Everything in the shape of splendor and luxury was there. A rich damask silk curtain, arranged in graceful folds,

extended round and completely screened the walls; against which, from floor to ceiling, extended four splendid mirrors, in gilt frames, each placed opposite the other, occupying the four sides of the apartment and reflecting every object in it. Much of the intervening space on the walls was filled with paintings of various and fanciful designs, but all evidently executed by artists of no ordinary talent:—in fact, some of them were from the great masters of Europe. On the floor, which was dark, of marble polish, stood several sofas, of elegant workmanship, together with a table of solid stone, most beautifully carved, on which, strange as it may seem, were piled books and music. A guitar and violin, evidently in much requisition, were lying carelessly on one of the sofas, beside which, in seeming contrast, lay a brace of pistols, a gold mounted short sword and a silver handled dirk.— In fact, several of the last mentioned articles were occupying positions in different parts of the Chamber, strangely at variance with its otherwise poetical aspect. There was no outlet to this apartment, save the aperture already mentioned as connecting it with the larger cave, and consequently the light, which must of necessity be artificial, proceeded from a gold mounted chandelier, suspended midway of the ceiling, and gave to each thing a soft, dreamy, voluptuous appearance. We have said there was no outlet, save one; but in addition to what the reader has already seen, was a recess, entered by drawing aside the folds of the curtain, sufficiently large for a sleeping apartment, and was doubtless used for this purpose, as it contained the requisites.

It may perhaps appear strange to the reader, that so much of luxury, civilization, and even refinement, should be found at this period, so far back in the wilds of Missouri, and what is more, in a robber's cave. But to the very circumstance of its being a robber's cave, let it be attributed; for the access that an organized banditti would have to various kinds of plunder, may be said to be almost limitless. That such things as we have mentioned could have been procured and brought hither, no one will question—that they were, we assert. There is also another thing to be taken into consideration. That the chief of these outlaws was no ordinary individual, that he was a man of some learning, taste and refinement—of a fanciful, poetical temperament—the selection and arrangement of the articles in his private apartment go to prove. But this will doubtless be developed in the progress of our story, therefore we will not anticipate, but turn our attention to the present occupants of the Chieftain's Chamber.

On the afternoon of the same day with which we closed the preceding chapter, reclining in an easy, graceful attitude on one of the sofas of this elegant apartment, was a beautiful female of some twenty summers. To give anything like a perfect description of her dress and appearance, will, we fear, be an impossibility; yet we may be able to draw a sketch, from which the imagination of the reader may fill the picture. Her features were cast in nature's finest mould, and though not strictly classic, yet possessing an appearance of delicate chiseling, if we may so express it, which is never seen save in those whose mental power predominates over their physical—or, in other words, whose intellectual commands our respect, where otherwise the animal would excite our passions. Her skin was dark and spoke her Spanish origin. Her hair was black, and fell in a sort of graceful negligence around a beautiful rounded neck, which was bared low, and gave her a somewhat voluptuous appearance; nor was this lessened by her round, plump, soft arms—bare nearly to her shoulders—one of which was thrown gracefully under her head, and ended in a small pretty hand, with gently tapering fingers,—the latter, by the way, glittering with rings of great value. Her eyes were black—sparkling black—in whose liquid depths you could see the fire of passion, the jealousy of love and the revenge of hate. Love was there—wild passionate love—but it was love that must know no rival, else the fawn would be changed to the tigress. It was love that would dare all,sacrifice all, for the object on which it was fixed; but that object must love in return, or be itself a sacrifice. There was about her mouth a peculiar expression, which we cannot forbear to notice. It was a smile, but then it was a smile wherein you could read to a certain extent the mind which governed it. Was she sad, it was mournful; was she happy, it was pleasing; was she angry, it was full of scorn, defiance and revenge; but in all moods, all changes of feeling, it was ever there, it was ever a smile Her dress was cut low around the neck, leaving the arms also bare, and was fancifully trimmed with gold lace, which gave it a very singular effect.

The other occupant of the Chamber was a female slave—a mulatto—who was standing before one of the mirrors, arranging her curly hair with great precision, and viewing her comely features with no small degree of pride. She was of good proportions, some twenty−five years of age, possessed a rather pleasing countenance, and, for one of her race, of more than ordinary intellect. She was gaily and somewhat fantastically dressed.

For a few moments the lady on the sofa gazed upon her slave in that languid manner which bespeaks the mind occupied in some pleasing reverie, and then slightly raising herself and altering her position, in a voice peculiar for its musical tones, said:

"Cyntha, do you hear the dip of oars?"

The other listened a moment, and then made answer: "No, missus."

"I think your ears are a little dull, Cyntha.— Question the sentinel!"

The other instantly disappeared into the larger cave and quickly returned. "O yes, missus right, massa coming."

"As I thought," replied the lady, with a pleasing smile. "You see, Cyntha, the ears of love are quick."

"O yesum, missus, I knows 'em berry quick."

"Well, now, arrange my hair, quickly as possible."

The slave sprang to her mistress, with the agility of one accustomed to obey with promptness the slightest command of her superiors, and in a few moments all was arranged in tasteful order.— Scarcely was it completed, when a heavy tread was heard in the Outer Cave, and the next moment a figure of commanding appearance stood full in the light of the Chieftain's Chamber. The lady arose, flew to his arms, and the lips of both met: then leading her to a sofa, he seated himself beside her, removing at the same time from his head a cap of very singular construction, and exhibiting a forehead broad and high, surmounted by glossy raven hair, which fell in ringlets adown his face and around a neck, whose full, handsome proportions were indicitive of great muscular power. His complexion was dark, darker even than the lady's. His eyes were black and brilliant— his features bold, though in outline rather handsome, and his chin was graced with an imperial. His dress was of a strange order, and seemed to combine the sailor and the back−woodsman—in fact he was a man that the most casual observer would not have passed without a second notice.— Turning to the lady with a look of tender admiration, he threw his arms around her waist, drew her fondly to him, and again pressed his lips to hers, saying at the same time, in a low tone:

"My Inez looks beautiful to−day!"

"And Inez is proud that Ronald thinks so," replied the lady, with a smile of sweetness, her eyes beaming with love, and fixed earnestly upon his. "But tell me, Ronald, why have you been thus long away? Oh, wearily the hours have passed, and methought last night would never bring a morn."

"Business, Inez, business prolonged my absence," answered the other somewhat hurriedly. "But come," he added, as though to change the theme, "let us have some music! I am sighing for a tender strain, to drown a world of thought!"

"Thought, Ronald, thought! what makes you think?" enquired Inez, gazing into his face with a look of anxiety.

"Nothing, love, nothing. Ho! Cyntha—the music!" and as the slave brought forward the guitar, he continued:—"There Inez, my pretty one, come, music, music!—a song, love, a song!"

Inez took the guitar, still eyeing him steadily, as though there was something in his humor unnatural and which she could not comprehend.

"Will you not accompany me, Ronald?"

"No, Inez, I will listen."

"What shall I play and sing?"

"Anything! something wild!"

"Wild, Ronald?"

"Wild and sweet, Inez."

"Ronald, you are not yourself;" and Inez ran her fingers over the strings, paused and gazed tenderly upon him. "Something troubles you, Ronald. Tell me, tell your Inez the secret;" and the smile was mournful.

"I swear to you it is nothing—I am cheerful;" and he turned to her with a smile. "But the song! the song!"

"Shall it be The Rover?"

"Ay! The Rover."

Inez made no further remark, but tuning her instrument, in a voice rich in melody sang

THE ROVER.

Thoughtful he stood
On the mountain's high brow—
Sadly he gazed
On the valley below;
For there, 'mid a grove, by a silvery stream,
Was the spot of his childhood, his youth's happy dream.

Sadly he mused
As his look wandered o'er
Childhood's bright scenes,
That must know him no more;
And his eyes they grew dim, and his cheeks they grew pale,
For he felt he was gazing his last on the vale.
Slowly he turned
From that sweet quiet spot;
One struggle and all
Life's bright scenes seemed forgot;
And far down the mountain the Rover's voice rang,
As in musical tones thus wildly he sang:
`Ha, ha, ha!—ha, ha, ha!
I'm a Rover and free;
And the wide world is mine—
No shackles for me:
Over mountain and valley,
Over ocean I'll roam;
And the spot that is brightest
Shall give me a home!
`Ha, ha, ha!—ha, ha, ha!
I am free as the air;
But ye who have made me.
I charge ye, beware!
For I'll come like the tempest,
In furious wrath,
And wo to ye, wo,
Who have darkened my path!
`Ha, ha, ha!—ha, ha, ha!
I laugh at thy scorn,
Proud lady, that dared
To call me lowly horn:
But deem not the Rover
Will ever forget;
And I swear to thee, lady,
We meet again yet.
`Ha, ha, ha!—ha, ha, ha!
I will stand by thy side;
Will scoff thee, will taunt thee,
Will humble thy pride!
And loudly I'll laugh,
As on low bended knee,
Thou suest for favor
Of me, lady, me!
`Ha, ha, ha!—I go forth,
And the world shall proclaim
In shuddering wonder
The hold Rover's name!
And ye who have forced me
Thus early to care,
Beware of the Rover,

I charge ye, beware!'

"Well sung, Inez!" exclaimed Ronald, with animation, as the last notes died away. "Well sung! and apropos: there is something in the song much in unison with my own feelings; and somehow there seems a connection between the Rover and myself. Where learned you the song?"

"In a southern city, of a traveling minstrel."

"It reminds me forcibly of my boyhood days," returned Ronald, with a half−stifled sigh.

"Indeed!" said Inez, gazing earnestly upon him. You have often promised me the story of your birth, Ronald; why not tell it me now?"

"I would have told you ere this, love; but somehow the recalling of the golden days of youth, the revival of the past, ever tends to make me sad; and you know I dislike being sad, Inez. But no matter—you shall have the story now; there will perhaps never be a time more appropriate. Cyntha, you may leave us;" and as the slave departed, he continued: "Prepare yourself to listen—so runs the tale:

"England is the land of my nativity. My mother, God rest her soul! I well remember. She was one of those sweet, gentle, affectionate, sensitive beings, that occasionally find their way into this world of sorrow and strife, as though to remind man if the picture be dark, it has its bright, sunny spots. She was a woman on whom none could gaze with feelings of indifference. She was herself all soul, all feeling; one whose eyes would ever grow dim at a tale of sorrow. Oh! how I loved her!—with what wild, passionate devotion! My very existence seemed centered in hers; and the very idea of a separation by death would often fill my young eyes with tears. I remember we lived in comfortable circumstances. We occupied a beautiful little cottage, surrounded by a landscape variegated and pleasing, stretching far away in gentle undulations, like the swell of the ocean in a calm, and ending in hills, which to my young fancy seemed rising as guardians to overlook and watch the valley below. There was a delightful quiet about the spot, which even as I recall it lends a soothing influence to my restless, turbulent spirit. Near to our cottage was a shady grove, through which slowly meandered a lovely stream, on whose velvet−like banks I have lingered many an hour, angling for the finy tribe in its placid bosom. In the more immediate vicinity of the cottage was a garden of flowers, of all kinds and hues, and the walls themselves were shaded by the creeping, clinging ivy. The whole scene might be described as a perfect picture of domestic happiness; and to this and my mother's gentle disposition, I have ever felt myself indebted for those finer feelings which are so foreign to my present occupation.

"But notwithstanding this seeming happiness (and, alas! reality has taught me that if we fathom the human heart we shall find in most cases that what we took for happiness was but the seeming) there was sorrow even in that cottage—in the heart of my own beloved mother. It often appeared strange to me, even in my earliest days, that I never saw my father, that I never heard my mother speak of him; and when curiosity excited me to enquire of her—as it sometimes would—the reason, she ever grew sad, melancholy, and put me off with the answer that she would inform me at some future time—that I was not yet enough advanced in years to understand. This of course but added fuel to the flame; but as I saw the question ever pained her, I finally dropped it altogether, trusting that she would inform me in her own good time.

"She was a woman of fine taste and education, and under her own instructions I was early taught to read and write; and possessing a choice library of poetry and romance, and my mind being naturally bent in that channel, I took to books with great avidity, and whiled away many a long evening, or what would otherwise have been so, in reading to her such passages as I fancied most in accordance with her gentle spirit. Thus passed the first twelve and happiest years of my existence.

"Feeling that I had now arrived at the proper age, and that it was a duty she owed me, she determined on sending me to school; and though the idea of parting with me was painful, yet as she felt it was for my own benefit she did so, the pleadings of duty became paramount to feeling, and unknown to myself every thing was arranged for my departure. When she first broke the news to me, it came like the shock of an unexpected thunder−bolt; nor could I believe her really in earnest until she had thrice reiterated it. Never shall I forget the feelings which the thought of separation occasioned. Separation had been the one secret dread of my life; but it had been the separation of death only—voluntary separation having never entered my mind. She at once perceived my feelings—for they found a sad echo in her own heart, and by gentle reasoning sought to convince me of the necessity and benefit of our parting for a time. She informed me it was in her power to give me an education; but beyond that little or nothing; and she felt anxious I should gain that, which, whatever misfortunes

might befal me in after years, would ever be mine. I listened to her,—I saw her mind was bent upon it, and I acquiesced, without a word of murmur. A few days and we parted; but sad, most sad, was the parting. Pardon me, Inez, but the thought of it makes me childish," and Ronald passed his hand across his eyes, and for a few moments remained silent.

"Never," he resumed at length, "shall I forget her sweet, mournful features, as she stood gazing upon me, on the morning of my departure, with a look wherein was concentrated all the deep yearnings of a mother's heart, for a son she might never behold again; and doubtless there was a presentiment of this kind at work within her,— for when we came to the final adieu, she clasped me to her heart, almost convulsively,—the tears rolled down her cheeks,—and it was with difficulty she could utter, `God bless you, my son!—farewell! If we never meet again'—she paused— `forget not my memory!' My feelings, Inez, you may imagine; I cannot describe them—words are too weak. Thus we parted"—Ronald paused as if struggling with some deep emotion, and them added, faintly—"forever!"

"Forever!" exclaimed Inez, involuntarily.

"Ay, forever! But—the story:—I must be more brief. The school to which I was sent was some hundred miles distant, and was one, if truth must be said, better calculated to learn me in the ways and vices of the world, than in knowledge of books. I was there thrown among all classes, and left without a guide to choose my companions. Naturally of a bold, reckless disposition, I unfortunately became a favorite of the worst class; and by degrees was led into scenes of revelry and wickedness, of the existence of which, ere I went there, I had never even dreamed. It is unnecessary for me to dwell in detail; suffice it, therefore, that at the end of three years I left the school in disgrace. An hour after my dismissal, I received the news of the death of my mother, the only friend I had in the world. Oh! what were my feelings! I have an indistinct recollection of a pressure—a whirl—a fire in my brain, and I knew no more. I was mad—raving mad! The messenger who bore me the news, bore me home a maniac. Home, no! Oh God! it was home no longer! Ere I recovered my reason, my mother was mouldering in the dust. I shall not dwell on my feelings of grief and utter desolation, when I again comprehended all:—the subject is too painful, and other matters press me for narration. The only legacy left me was a sealed package, which I opened with a trembling hand—the contents I distinctly remember, for they are engraved upon the very tablets of my heart. A letter within, ran thus:

"`My dear son, God be with you! I am dying, and can never see you again on earth, but will in the land of spirits. My strength is failing—I have but a few minutes to live, and will devote them to you. You have often questioned me of your father. I have delayed answering you,—but the time has now come when it is necessary you should know all. God give me strength to pen, and you to read the secret of my life!—and Ronald, dear Ronald, whatever you do, do not reproach, do not curse my memory! I shall enter but little into detail, for time and strength will not permit. At the age of twelve I was left an orphan, and was taken in charge of some distant relatives of my mother, with whom I lived in easy circumstances, until the age of sixteen. They were not wealthy, and yet had enough wherewithal to live independent. They treated me with much affection, and life passed pleasantly for four years. At the age of sixteen, I accidentally became acquainted with Walter Langdon, only son of Sir Edgar Langdon, whose large estate and residence—for he was very wealthy— was but a few miles distant. He found opportunity and declared his attachment, but at the same time informed me that our relations on either side would be opposed to our union, and begged me to make no mention of it, but to prepare myself and elope with him; that when the ceremony was over, and no alternative, all parties would become reconciled. He was young, handsome, and accomplished—his powers of conversation brilliant. He plead with a warmth of passion I could not withstand—for know, Ronald, I loved him, with the ardent first love of a girl of sixteen, and I consented. Alas! Ronald, that I am forced to tell you more: this rash act was my ruin!

"`My strength is failing so rapidly I cannot enter into particulars, my son,—and yet, why should I?—they would only pain you to read, and me to write. Suffice, Ronald, that he deceived me—I became his victim−−and you, Oh God! you are the offspring of our guilt.

"`Shortly after this I learned, to my horror, that he had united himself with a lady of wealth. He afterward saw me and offered me the reparation of money:—alas! what a reparation to one whose hopes were ruined! Had it not been for you, my son, I never would have lived to feel my disgrace. As it was, I accepted his offer, on condition that he would never see me more. To this he reluctantly consented, and gave me a life lease of the place where you were reared, and settled on me a certain annuity, which ceases at my death. By economy I have been enabled

to save a thousand pounds, which is here enclosed. Take it, Ronald, and may God enable you to live an honest life. Poor boy! you are homeless—friendless,— for she who has watched over and loved you as only a mother can, will, ere this reaches you, be in her grave. God support you, dear Ronald! But for the thought of your grief and suffering, I could die contented. I have, save you, no friend on earth,—all have thrown me off and treated me with contempt. Well, well, it is all for the best; may God forgive them! It is a just punishment for my sin; and yet it is hard—very, very hard. Oh! Ronald−−dear, dear Ronald!−− that I could see you once again—could clasp you once more to this broken heart—could feel you close my aching eyes!—but no! no! it cannot be—death is upon me! I feel it in my palsying limbs—my leaden eye−lids−−my struggling breath. I would advise you, but I cannot; I leave you to act as you think proper; but, my son, do nothing rash! Oh! Ronald, do not curse me!—will you? Oh! if I but knew you would forgive me!—but— ah!—God!—I am going. Adieu! adieu!—Ronald, bear your mother's name, and drop a tear upon the earth that covers her. Farewell—farewell!

Clarrisse Bonardi.'

CHAPTER I.

"Oh! Gods! Inez, what think you were my feelings, when I read this? It seemed as though all the demons of hell itself were at work within my heart! Is this the world? cried I. Do men live and pass unpunished—ay! and more!—are they courted by the world, that trample upon and break the hearts of God's loveliest images? Does society uphold men in deeds of wickedness that would even blacken the character of hell's archfiend? Do they drag man before their mock tribunals, and sentence him to rot in prison, because necessity forced him to take a morsel of bread to save himself and offspring from starvation? Is this society?—is this the boasted land of justice and religion? Then deliver me from it!—then let me war against it!—ay! let me be an outlaw from that society, which is itself an outlaw from all that is good! Such were the thoughts, Inez, that rushed forth from my burning brain! Boy I was in years, but boy no longer! I felt I was alone in a world black, with sin, and must choose and act for myself. Nor was I without experience. The last three years of my life, if not in book learning, had advanced me much in knowledge of the world. A change had come over me. Once I thought of nothing but innocent affections and happy dreams of the future. Now clouds dark and gloomy rose in wild fantastic shapes before me. And life, what was it?— and what was I? What hopes had I of brightness? A being of noble birth, but not I galized by the laws of the land, sent into the world to be the jeer of my fellows! I, son of Sir Walter Langdon—for he had now assumed the title of his father, deceased—who by right should claim his affection, to be looked upon by him—by my own father—as a being low−born, and perhaps spurned from his presence, should I seek him out? Oh! how these thoughts crowded upon me!

"I went abroad, young as I was, and visited the principal cities of Europe. At the end of three years I returned to England, exhausted in funds, and for the first time determined on visiting my father. I sought him out and stood before him. He demanded my name and business. My name, I replied, is one you will long remember: Ronald Bonardi, or Ronald Langdon, as circumstances may be. He turned pale and his eye sunk before my steady gaze; then recovering his self−possession, he bade me begone and never enter his presence again—said he knew me not—that I was a base imposter! Oh! Inez, that moment had nearly been fatal to him, such a wild passion was aroused within me! I could feel the blood drop by drop retreating to my heart, and I fairly reeled. Such words from my father—from the author of my existence—nearly dethroned my reason! By a mighty effort I conquered myself and replied, my lips quivering with suppressed passion, that I would leave on *one* condition and never see him more. He demanded it. Money! was my only answer. He gave me money and I left; but ere I did, I told him the orphan's curse was on him; ay! father though he was, I cursed and left him trembling. That curse, Inez, was fulfilled—terribly fulfilled. His wife, then in the bloom of health, shortly after died. His son, near my own age, was murdered. His daughter, then some three years of age, disappeared suddenly; and he, to sum up, survived but a few months—dying a maniac—and his estate passed into the hands of another. By what singular fatality I was avenged, I know not; but so was the termination.

"I came to America, and caring little what became of me, led a dissolute life. For twelve years I traveled through the States a professional gambler. This course of life tended to harden me to almost any deed whereby I might be the gainer in the shape of gold, that glittering earth to which all classes bow in humble reverence. By chance I fell in with a lawless band of desperadoes, who, through a fancy I never could account for, chose me for their leader. I accepted the office on condition that I should have absolute sway so long as remained their chief, and that they would allow me to organize them as I saw proper. To this, without a dissenting voice, they consented, and I was elected captain for the term of five years. My first proceeding was to find a safe rendezvous and establish such a code of laws as I deemed most beneficial to us as a body. This was done, and it is needless to tell you this was the place chosen for our secret retreat. For two years, Inez, ere I saw you, I led a wild life; and though by my deeds I made myself an outlaw, yet to this day my hands are free from the stain of blood; still I fear, if, I remain much longer chief, I shall have to put in force a law, which, as executioner, will not leave me guiltless."

"What mean you, Ronald?" asked Inez, quickly, who had been listening to his story with breathless attention.

"There is disaffection creeping into our ranks, which I fear will result in treachery and mutiny. Some evidences I have already seen. To the offender the punishment is death by the hands of the chief."

"God save you from such a crime! dear Ronald," cried Inez, throwing her arms around his neck and gazing tenderly upon him.

"Ah! gentle Inez," said Ronald, with deep emotion, tenderly embracing her, "why should fate doom you to be linked to a bandit chief?— Was there no better destiny in store for you?"

"I murmur not, Ronald," replied Inez, sweetly.

"True, you do not; yet am I not blind to your feelings. When first I saw you, dearest Inez, three years since, I felt what it was to love—never till then. In disguise I sought your acquaintance; in disguise I won your affections; but my love was deep and true, and in disguise I could not wed you. No! base as I had been—base as I then was—a bandit chief—an outlaw from society— I could not farther deceive the only being I loved on earth. It was painful, very painful, to think that I must tear myself from you, and perchance never see you more. Oh! how many sleepless nights it cost me! how much heart rending misery! But my resolution was taken. I loved you, and would not drag you to perdition. I would tell you all and part forever. I told you all; but O, what was my surprise—my joy—when instead of spurning me from your sight, you told me with your own sweet lips our fates were one! For a time, sweet Inez, I could not believe it reality; that there was for the outcast so much joy in store; but the altar proved it true. Since then, Inez, I have never been the same being. Then, for the first time in my long career of crime, did I feel guilt; for the first time sighed to be an honest man. But my oath as bandit chief bound me for five years. I could not break it, and three years had yet to expire. Those three years, Inez, you have shared with me; have been the sunlight of my existence; have tended to make me a better man. To−day my term of office expires, and I am released from my oath."

"To−day, Ronald, dear Ronald!" cried Inez, in a transport of joy; "and you will leave this place then, will you not?"

"Ah! Inez, that is what troubles me. To−night a leader must be chosen. By a law which with us is as unchangeable as those of the Medes and Persians, if one of our band be chosen without a dissenting vote, to the office of chief, he is bound to accept. If but one vote be cast against him he can act his pleasure—two−thirds of the members present being sufficient, if in favor, to constitute him duly elected. I fear a re−election without a dissenting voice."

"But can you not bribe some one to vote against you?"

"The offer, Inez, is punishable with death. No! I must bide the result, and that result I fear. I would that I could be released and left to retire to some secluded spot in quiet to enjoy the company of my own dear Inez. But I am a child of fate and must submit to the decree of destiny. If I am again elected, as I said before, I fear I shall, in my official capacity, be compelled to act in a manner foreign to my present feelings. Besides, we have of late been very inactive, and there has been dissatisfaction expressed in regard to it by some of the members. Already preparations are being made for an attack on a rich planter, whose estate lying in Tennessee, borders on the Mississippi in a manner favorable to our design; and I, as captain of the banditti, must head the expedition."

"Alas! Ronald," sighed Inez, sorrowfully.

"Alas! Inez," returned Ronald, "that fate should will it. Ah! fate! fate! Without there, ho! who knocks?" This was addressed to some one in the Outer Cave, who had given the signal for the chief, by three distinct raps on the wall.

"The presence of our captain is needed," was the reply.

"I come," returned Ronald; and pressing his lips once more to those of Inez, he hastily arose and quitted the apartment. Inez gazed after him in silence for a time; and then bending over her guitar, sung a low, sweet, mournful strain.

CHAPTER II.

THE MEETING OF THE BANDITTI—THE ADDRESS—THE SUSPICION—THE ELECTION—THE APPOINTMENT THE INITIATION—THE OATH.

The night succeeding the day in which we have introduced the reader into the grand rendezvous of the banditti, was densely dark. Clouds low and heavy canopied the heavens and veiled the light of moon and stars. To add to the gloom without, was a thick fog and drizzly rain, which completely forbade all objects to the eye, unless aided by artificial light. Within the larger cave, running through its centre, was a row of torches, whose red, flickering glare gave each thing a somewhat sombre and fantastical appearance. Near the farther end stood a group of four figures, coarsely habited, whose large statures and brawny limbs gave evidence of great animal power. Their features, by the light of the torches, were anything but preposessing, and varied in expression only by the inner workings of fierce passions. They were evidently on some exciting topic, for their gesticulations were quick and fierce, their language low and energetic, occasionally mingled with a guttural oath, which, like the distant sound of thunder, told of the accumulating storm of passion ere long to burst in fury on some devoted head. Neither of them wore coat or vest; but a coarse shirt covered their shoulders, and being entirely open in front, left their broad, bronzed bosoms free. With the exception of one, their muscular arms were bare; this exception being doubtless caused by an accident, as the owner carried his arm in a sling. Around each waist passed a belt, in which, convenient to the hand, were placed pistols, knives and daggers, ready for use at any moment. For some time the conversation, as we have said, was low and hurried; but at length a voice, as though passion had got the better of prudence, exclaimed somewhat loudly:

"Hang me, but they shall both die! I—"

"Hush, fool!" interrupted another; "would ye spoil all with your imprudence? We may be overheard," he added, in a lower tone, and again the voices died away to a murmur. Leaving them to the plotting of their own dark deeds, we will now turn our attention to another part of the cave.

We have previously mentioned, that to enter this retreat, you must descend abruptly some fifteen feet. This was done by means of a ladder, which could be removed at a moment's notice. At the foot of this ladder, day and night, paced a sentinel, whose imperious orders were to admit no one, not even the chief himself, without the password and countersign; and furthermore, should any individual, be he chief or not, persist in advancing without giving both pass−word and countersign, after being three times warned of the consequences, it should be the duty of the sentinel to fire on said person with intent to take life; in failure whereof, or being found asleep on his post, his own life was the forfeit. For farther safety against a sudden attack, was a trap door exactly under the entrance, so constructed, that by touching a secret spring it would fly open and leave an aperture some fifty feet in depth, at the bottom of which were sharp stones, so placed that no living body could fall on them from above and survive the shock.

At the foot of the ladder mentioned, on the evening in question, paced the sentinel, with the steady gait and regular wheel of an old soldier— bearing on his shoulder a rifle. For some minutes nothing was heard but the murmur of the voices already spoken of, and his own measured tread. At length a sound, like the plash of an oar, fell upon his ear. Suddenly pausing, he bent his head forward in a listening attitude; and then, as if satisfied all was right, resumed his walk. But little time elapsed ere the sound of oars was heard distinctly, and the hum of voices from without. Directly came a sound like the striking of an oar three times flatwise upon the water, when the sentinel paused, and in a quick, sharp voice, sung out:

"Heta benare?"

"Ele lio!" † was the answer.

"Come forward and give the pass and countersign!"

A figure instantly stood in the mouth of the cave, crossed his arms on his breast, drew a dagger from his belt, passed it across his neck, touched the point to his heart, and returned it; all of which was done with a rapid motion, uttering, at the same time, the pass−word: "Eliona!"

"All right—descend!" returned the sentinel; and as the figure passed down, another stood in the entrance, went

through the same ceremony, and was followed in quick succession by some fifty others. At length the signal was given that all had entered, and the last comer took up his position as sentinel on the outside of the cave, while the other kept his round within as usual. The group we have mentioned previously, on the entrance of the new comers dispersed and mingled with them. For some ten minutes there was a general hum of voices, engaged on different topics, when suddenly Ronald came forth from the Chieftain's Chamber, and all was silent. With a dignified step he proceeded to and mounted the platform or stand, where he was greeted with three loud, hearty cheers. As he listened to this spontaneous tribute to his popularity, his dark eye flashed, a look of pride shot across his stern, dark features, and raising his hand to command silence, he thus addressed the assemblage:

"Gentlemen and brothers:—To me, I must confess, the present moment is a proud one; for it revives the time when, with one universal voice as it were, you proclaimed me your captain—gave me, a stranger, your confidence; which you are aware, as well as myself, was no less than placing your lives at my disposal; and shows that your confidence in me is still unshaken. Five years ago, this night, I was elected your chief; in doing which you made my simplest word an imper ative law. That you should confer at a venture such honor, such absolute rule, on myself, on one you had never even proved, was, and remains to this day with me a matter of surprise and mystery. What I had done previously to merit your confidence, I know not; but I felt at that moment, gentlemen, that as you considered me worthy to govern you, I would throw the whole strength of my mind, would concentrate my whole thoughts upon one theme, which should be for your prosperity; and to prove, if possible, your confidence not misplaced. That I have succeeded, I *feel* in the welcome sound of your glad voices." He paused, and a universal shout echoed through the cave.

"For five years," he resumed, "I have been your leader; and by this means, as you are well aware, have made myself an outlaw, and a price has been set on the head of the bandit chief. That I do not fear being betrayed—that I do not fear, notwithstanding this, to mingle in society, even where danger is the most apparent—you, gentlemen, from my actions, can bear ample witness: but, gentlemen, in regard to this matter for the future, I would ask a favor.

"You are aware, at least most of you, that three years ago I married Inez Orlandi—a lady of noble descent, whose self−sacrificing love was such that she chose life with me, a bandit, rather than a higher destiny—or at least what the world would term a higher—with another. Since then, gentlemen, as you have doubtless perceived, I have never been the same being—have never taken the same interest in the rough sports of our wild life. To−night you again choose a leader for another five years; and the favor I would ask of you is, that you will exempt me from your choice. Let a division of all our spoils be made, and let me, gentlemen, retire into private life. It is the wish, save your prosperity, nearest my heart; and I await your answer." Again he paused, and the cave was silent as the hall of death; not even so much as a whisper relieved the stillness. Each appeared taken by surprise, and awaiting the answer of his neighbor.

Ronald cast a hurried glance over the assemblage, and read in their grave and saddened countenances, as one used to reading the thoughts of the heart by the features, that he would meet with opposition in this respect, even from those who loved him best; that save him there was no one in whom they would be united; that, in short, he was the man of their choice, without whom disorganization must take place. There is, in all, who possess strong feelings, an innate pride in being thought the first in his profession— even though that profession be to gamble or steal; a secret satisfaction in knowing that in his line he is popular, and feeling himself that he excels. Such thoughts, such feelings, were busy in the breast of Ronald, as his eye ran over the group; and pride and regret were struggling within him for the mastery. Pride, that his services were held in such high esteem by those who had tried him—regret, that he could not retire in seclusion to enjoy life with his own loved Inez. But the struggle was but momentary. Pride was, perhaps, his ruling passion; and even here pride prevailed. He could not look upon their earnest, saddened faces, at his loss, unmoved; and with an animated eye, and a flush on his strongly marked features, that gave him an almost noble look, in a voice of some emotion, he said.

"Gentlemen, you speak not, and yet I am answered; ay, loudly answered, in the silence that reigns around me—in the sad faces of those who were wont to be joyous in my success;—and, gentlemen, let me tell you, whatever may have been my feelings in asking, I am truly proud of your answer. Yes! gentlemen, you have decided my fate! Henceforth I am with you—with my life will I serve you!"

It would be impossible to describe the scene of joyous excitement that followed this announcement. We shall not attempt it. Suffice, that never before had the cave echoed such prolonged and deafening cheers; and even Inez,

who sat with her head bent forward, in the Inner Cave, raised it with a look of pride, although she felt her fondest hopes were forever destroyed. When the tumult had a little subsided, so that he could be heard, Ronald resumed:

"Gentlemen, let us to business! I pray you be seated, that we may proceed in order. Piketon, you will call the roll!" As he spoke, each quietly took his seat on one of the benches before spoken of as ranging along the walls, with the exception of the one called Piketon, who stepped forward and mounted the platform beside the captain. He was a tall, broad−shouldered, muscular man, with tolerably good features,—an eye black and piercing, dark hair, Roman nose—of a look rather stern than villainous, and some thirty years of age. There was, too, about him an expression of intelligence superior to most of those present. As he came upon the stand, Ronald handed him a paper, containing the names of the members, which he called off in a clear, distinct voice, pricking those from whom no answer was returned.

"How many present?" enquired Ronald.

Piketon ran his eye over the list and answered: "Sixty−seven, excluding the sentinels."

"Who stands on duty at the cave?"

"Moorehead and Farrar."

"Morris and Parker guard the Entrance," returned Ronald, "which adds four, leaving absent twenty−one: am I right?"

Piketon again ran his eye over the list, counting the names pricked, and answered: "You are, captain."

"Four of the absent—Lemly, Davis, Sulton and Vance—you may strike off altogether," said Ronald, sadly:—"they are written on the roll of eternity! Alas! poor fellows! they met with untimely fates—the first two shot, the last two hung—a warning that we should be prudent, or like fates may be our own. Fourteen of the absent I can account for;" and he mentioned their names. "They are scattered throughout the United States—two in New Orleans, five in New York, one in Boston, two in Philadelphia, two in Baltimore, and two in Cincinnati. They are on secret service, acting under my instructions, and with whom I am holding regular correspondence; by which means I am informed of every thing that tends to the benefit of our society—such as the description of travelers bound for the West, who are supposed to carry money, and the best method of obtaining it; which, as you are aware, gentlemen, we have not unfrequently done by gambling. Many of you have, at different times, expressed wonder that I knew so well how to choose my victims; and I have deemed it no more than right, on the present occasion, to explain; for I feel you are all entitled to my confidence."

A murmur of delighted surprise, at their captain's ingenuity, now ran among the assemblage, and ended in a hearty cheer, with: "Long live Ronald Bonardi!"

"Great astonishment, I ween," continued the captain, with a smile, "would some of the nabobs feel, did they know, when sitting down to a quiet game of cards with me, a fellow−traveler, that they would rise completely fleeced by Ronald Bonardi, a bandit chief. But come," he added, turning to Piketon, "let us finish our business. There are three names not yet accounted for: you will call them!"

Again Piketon scanned the list closely, and after a moment's pause, said: "The missing are Garrish, Riley, and David the Jew."

"Ha!" exclaimed Ronald, pressing his nether lip between his teeth, as though struck by a sudden thought:—"The Jew! not here? I know not why, but I half suspect Ben David meditates foul play."

"And I'll swear to 't, cap'en," spoke a gruff voice, from one of the benches.

An electric thrill appeared to run through the assemblage, and several of the party sprang to their feet, grasping the handles of their weapons as though to draw them.

"Pray, be seated, gentlemen," said Ronald, waiving his hand, "and let the accuser stand forth." The request was immediately obeyed; and the individual previously mentioned as having his arm in a sling, stepped forward. He was a man of large frame, mostly bone and muscle, having a head much too large for his body, with features coarse and repulsive—partly covered by a rough, dirt−brown beard—a large nose, and an eye every way villainous. His hair was of a similar color to his beard—was long, coarse and matted; and he was, besides, stoop−shouldered and bow−legged; in short, a man where the animal was wholly predominant. His age might be forty.

"Ha! Curdish," continued Ronald, eyeing him steadily, "is it you, his friend, that accuse him?"

"I don't exactly reckon myself his friend," growled Curdish, with an oath; "though I have did him some favors."

"By reason of which you have doubtless suffered some of late," added Ronald, pointing to his arm. "How happened it, Jack?"

Curdish glanced at his arm, and his features grew more fierce and his eye more villainous, as he replied: "Well, yes, I got a little hurt thar', in a scrimmage on his account; but—" and he uttered a horrible oath—"I'll be even with the rascals yit, or I aint what I used to be."

"If all I learn is true, Curdish, you deserved what you got, and more!" returned Ronald, knitting his brows, and eyeing him sternly; "but of this another time. Of what do you accuse the Jew? Beware, now, of your accusation! for if false, you know the penalty."

"I can't read, and I don't know how the law runs," said Curdish, somewhat doggedly.

"I will inform you then," rejoined Ronald; and stooping down, he unlocked a small trap−door in the floor of the ptatform on which he stood, took therefrom a parchment, turned to the light, examined it a moment, and read as follows:

"*Sec. II, Art. IX*. If any member shall be known to give any evidence against another member that is not strictly true, or which may be proved to be false, he shall suffer death, as provided under the Black Law, in Article XV of Section I: which is," added Ronald, "to be publicly shot by the captain of the band, and his body thrown to wild beasts. You understand the law on this point now, Curdish, so proceed! Of what do you accuse the Jew?"

Curdish appeared somewhat staggered at the consequences of a false statement, and his face grew a shade paler, as he replied: "I'm not exactly ready to prove what I's going to say, cap'en."

"Then you had better not say it," answered Ronald. "You can tell me of your suspicions privately, and I will take measures to learn whether or no they be well founded. You may resume your place; and I trust, for the future, ere you offer to swear to a thing, you will at least know yourself of what you intend to swear, or the terminus may not be agreeable. As I said, you may resume your place and take part in the business of the evening; after which you will consider yourself under arrest, as there are other matters of which I wish to question you!"

"But cap'en—"

"No more!" said Ronald, sternly, waiving his hand. Curdish bit his lips and slowly retired.—

`Gentlemen," continued the captain, "trust me, all shall be properly looked to; and if I find a traitor among us"—he set his teeth close and laid his hand upon a pistol in his belt—"by Heaven, he dies! But to our business. You will now proceed, gentlemen, to the election of your captain. Let each vote for him he deems most capable and worthy of holding the office. Piketon, you will go to each member present and take down the name of his choice." Piketon obeyed, and in a few minutes returned to the stand and said:

"Ronald Bonardi is re−elected captain of this band, for the term of five years, without a dissenting vote." The announcement was followed by three hearty cheers, and "Long live Ronald Bonardi!"

When the noise had again subsided, Bonardi said: "Contrary to my wish, gentlemen, when I came before you this evening, I find that I have been unanimously chosen your leader for another term. I shall endeavor to fulfil my duties faithfully; and, gentlemen, let me add, strictly. I fear, by some evidences which have of late come before me"—and he glanced at Curdish—"that I have been heretofore too lenient—too negligent. I shall make the future atone for the past; and whoever among you breaks a law, though he be my bosom friend, I swear to you he shall suffer the penalty—even though that penalty be his death by my hands! Let each and all of you bear this in mind and seriously reflect upon it."

"We, gentlemen, are outlaws; we war upon society; but, mark me, we war only upon the rich and avaricious! Most of us have had causes for forsaking that society, those laws which govern the mass. Those causes have been various; and yet, in the end, they almost invariably resolve themselves into one cause; which is, that society and its laws did not protect, did not do us justice. But notwithstanding we separate from the mass, we must have laws of our own; and by those laws we must abide. Notwitstanding we are outlaws, warring against the nabobs of the world; against those who, had they the power, would trample us under their feet; let us not forget that we are men, and that we have no right to touch the humble, the innocent, the defenceless. No! whatever we do, let us bear in mind that they are exempt from our encroachments. But above all, gentlemen, under no circumstances whatever let our hands be raised against women! Let them be sacred in our eyes! Let us remember that what they are, so are, or were, our mothers, our sisters and, with many of you I can add, our wives! Gentlemen, I ask this of you as men, as brothers, with whose fate my own is now linked! I ask it of you in formal declaration! I ask you to swear it, by rising to your feet!" He paused, and almost simultaneously the assemblage arose. Some few were rather

tardy—among whom was Curdish—but all finally stood upon their feet.

"Be seated, gentlemen," resumed Ronald; "it is enough; you have all sworn, and it is now become a law; and a law let him break who dares!—for by all I hold sacred, I swear to you, whoever shall dare to violate it, I will slay, so help me God!"— and his close shut teeth, his compressed lips and flashing eyes, as he gazed on his audience, told them it was no idle threat.

"As I find, gentlemen," continued he, "in tending to my various business affairs, that I require some one to fill my place when absent, I have concluded to appoint me a lieutenant, whom you will all respect and obey as myself. He is one well known among you, well tried and proved to be worthy of the responsible office, and I trust you will approve my choice. Piketon," added he, turning to that individual, "henceforth you are second in command; let your duty be done faithfully!"

A prolonged cheer of satisfaction responded to this announcement. Piketon, much embarrassed, was about to reply, but Ronald stopped him with:

"Nay, no remarks;" and approaching, he put upon his finger a ring, adding: "This, Piketon, is your badge of office. Gentlemen, you will all remember it, there is but one other like it, and you will all respect either whenever seen." Turning to Piketon, in a low voice not heard by the others, he continued: "You will order Garrish, Riley and David under arrest, to meet here as soon as possible. If they dispute your authority, show them the ring. If they refuse then to comply, make their lives the penalty! If you choose, take with you some trusty followers."

"Your orders, captain, shall be obeyed to the letter," returned the lieutenant, respectfully.

Ronald again turned to the audience. "Gentlemen, the attack we have of late been planning on the Tennessee planter, I shall not touch upon to−night. It may be advantageous and it may not. I will think more upon it, and mayhap something better will take its place. Is there any other business before the meeting?"

Piketon whispered in his ear.

"Ah! true, true," he resumed, "I had forgotten; where is he?"

"He waits in a boat on the creek," answered Piketon.

"Gentlemen, John Webber wishes to become a member of our fraternity. You know him, some of you have tried him, know you ought why we should not admit him?"

"We do not," answered several voices.

"Enough! Moorehead, give Farrar the signal to admit Webber!"

The sentinel within made a low peculiar whistle, which was answered from without, and directly a figure stood in the entrance, gave the pass and countersign, and descended the ladder. He was very wet, for it still continued raining; and as he came forward, the torches threw their lurid glare upon features which a close observer might have seen were pale from excitement. Piketon stepped forward and conducted him to the stand. Bonardi addressed him:

"Webber, I understand you wish to join our fraternity. You of course are not ignorant that in doing so you are joining a band outlawed by society; that in doing so you become an outlaw also, and place yourself in a position not envied by those who have received from society proper treatment. What object may have induced you to this step, it is not my purpose to enquire; enough that you have desired to take it, knowing that you are becoming a brother with those whose deeds by the world are considered crimes—crimes too, which are punished with imprisonment and sometimes death. You are doubtless aware also, that in joining us you are binding yourself to us in a manner that makes your life no longer your own, but a property of the whole; ready to be sacrificed in defence of the whole, should necessity require it, at any moment. As you are bound to us, so are we bound to you; and if in difficulty, we are bound as a body, if possible, to rescue you, even at the peril of our own lives. In joining us you become a partner in all our spoils, in all our dangers, in all our triumphs, in all our troubles. These matters of course you understand?"

Webber bowed.

"It now only remains, then, for me to administer the oath. You will please hold up your right hand!"

Webber complied.

"By this token of assent, you, John Webber, in the presence of Almighty God, and these witnesses, solemnly swear that you will devote your life to us and our cause, so long as we remain a band; that you will abide by all our laws, stand ready to uphold them under all difficulties, under all circumstances whatever; in failure whereof, you ardently pray us to take your life as a sacrifice, and the Author of your being to condemn you to eternal

torments forever and ever!—in further confirmation of which, you will kneel, repeat this oath and sign our constitution."

These requisitions being complied with, Ronald continued: "You are now a brother;" and after a pause, added emphatically: "*Forget not your oath!* Piketon, you will read our laws and bylaws, that he may not plead ignorance should he transgress, which I pray God he may not do! for I have sworn to inflict the penalty set to each law, on him who breaks it; and I now again swear that I will keep my oath!—and, Piketon, you will add the law of this evening, regarding women, the innocent and defenceless."

After this had been gone through with—occupying some half hour more—Ronald said: "Gentlemen, for your attention this evening I thank you. Our business is now closed. What, ho! Cyntha!—the wine!" and as the slave came forth from the Chieftain's Chamber, he added: "Gentlemen, make yourselves happy; there is wine, and cards for those who wish to play; but I pray you be as quiet as possible, and no quarreling!— When through with your pastime, return peaceably to your homes, and when anything of importance occurs you shall be duly warned. I shall now retire. Piketon, you will preside in my place;" and with a graceful bow, Ronald entered the Chieftain's Chamber and joined his own beloved Inez, who was sitting expectant.

All passed off quietly, and ere daylight most of the party were on their way to their several places of abode, which were scattered throughout the adjoining country—many of them being regular settlers. Some few, however, remained—having partaken rather too freely of the wine; but with the exception of Curdish and four others retained as sentinels, all departed on the following day.

CHAPTER III.

THE CRISIS OF THE INVALID—THE STROLL—THE MEDITATION—THE LANDSCAPE—THE VILLAIN— THE TERRIBLE THREAT.

It may be said and with truth, that the heart in a great measure governs the vision, and gives to objects coming before the eye their light and dark phases. But few stop to reason and realize how much this is the case in our every day life. One day every thing we behold is bright and joyous, another day dark and gloomy,—and yet the same heavens are above us, the same earth at our feet, the same sounds of tuneful nature around us.— One day every person we meet wears a cheerful smile, another day all seem to frown; and we are apt to think, like the man, who, becoming intoxicated, regretted that all his friends were so, and wondered much the very trees should keep them company, while he walked perfectly sober; we are apt, we say, to think all others at fault, when in fact the whole change lies with ourself, and the discord arises from our own heart−strings being out of tune.

The transition from gloom to joy is oftentimes rapid; and when so, always exhilerating. It gives elasticity to all our movements, and we feel running through our whole being a thrill of indiscribable pleasure, almost amounting to intoxication. Such were the feelings pervading the different members, now constituting the family of Webber, some ten days from the preceding events.— The day was beautiful; one of those that ever seem to harmonize best with the upreaching poetry of a rejoicing heart. One of those days that seem to let Heaven down a little nearer to us— making us feel as though we could love every thing we see, rejoice in every sound we hear.— The sun rose in splendor and poured his bright beams through a deep blue sky, where not a cloud floated to intercept his rays even for a moment, like a young heart free from the cloud−spots of a yet untried world. The air was soft, and as it gently floated along, stirring the leaves and kissing the flowers, it stole the perfume of the latter and bore it on to refresh all who should inhale it. The little birds had not forgotten it was a joyous day, and their sweet songs went up in gentle chorus to their Maker, filling the air with melody.— In the cottage of Webber we have said there was cheerfulness on every countenance. Each moved with an elastic step and bounding heart, and each in their own way felt happy.

Perhaps we never experience happiness equal to that which succeeds a time of gloom and desponcy; and the reader will remember we left the family of Webber in gloom, caused by the sudden illness of one beloved by all. It is natural to infer then, that the change which had taken place in the feelings of all, sprung from the change for the better which had taken place in the sufferer. Such was the fact. For nine days Rufus had lain in a state so critical that life and death might be said to be in an equal contest for the mastery. Night and day a watcher had stood by his bedside, fearful to turn away for a moment, lest the slightest negligence should prove fatal. For several days and nights his mother never quitted his side—watching him with all the deep anguish a mother's heart can feel for one she loves, when beholding that one racked by pains she would give her own life to alleviate—and then leaving only because worn out nature forced her to repose.— But her place had been supplied by one, who, if she did not love him so deeply, at least loved him with a tender sister's love. Yes, the noble hearted, gentle Emily Nevance had stood by his side, like some angel of the Spirit Land awaiting to bear him to the abode of the blest; and what is strange too, he had ever seemed more at ease, had ever remained more quiet when she was present. He had been at times wild and delirious, and for hours would rave incoherently when she was absent, occasionally uttering a detached sentence so as to be understood: "God, it is my doom! Emily— never more: 'Tis past—tis past!"—from which those who heard him could glean nothing, save that there was some deep trouble on his mind, some inward working they could not fathom,—but strange, we say, it was, that when Emily was present, although he did not seem to recognise her, he ever remained quiet; and sometimes a wan smile would steal over his pale, thin features, like a faint ray of sunlight lingering upon some decaying structure. What was there in her presence that could so effect the invalid? Could it be that her gentle spirit had action upon his?—that there was a secret communion, unknown to either, between them? It had been noticed by Emily, had been noticed by others, and had been commented on by the different members of the household— among whom we must reckon our former acquaintances, Bernard and Tyrone, who still remained. It had been noticed too by the physician; but noticed only as a fact he could not account for. There was a cause for it undoubtedly; and perhaps

one, the father of the sick one, had vaguely divined that cause; but if so, he told it not, and with the rest, even with Emily herself, it yet remained a mystery.

The evening previous to the opening of this chapter had been an eventful one. Nine days of anxiety had passed wearily away, when the physician foresaw that a crisis was at hand which must terminate in life or death. He had, as before stated, marked the effect of Emily's presence on the invalid, and consequently gave orders that in this trial none should be present but herself—no, not even the mother. The order had been obeyed; but oh! who can tell that mother's feelings, when she knew that a few hours must decide the fate of her darling child—perhaps to terminate in death— and she not be with him to gaze upon his treasured features, nor press her lips again to his in life? Oh! what years of agony were in those few hours of suspense!

On the evening in question then,—the ninth from his attack—Emily took her position, alone, by the side of Rufus, and watched him with painful feelings. He had sunk into a deep sleep, a sleep almost like death itself, for scarcely was his breathing perceptible. She knew from that sleep he would never wake, or wake to life free from danger. All was silent, as though death were already there. A dim light, standing some distance back, gave a twilight shade to the whole apartment; and she could barely discern the outline of his pale, marble−like features, which she sometimes fancied were already stiffening in death. As she occasionally gazed upon him, an indescribable awe crept over her. Was he dead— had his bright spirit gone forever? she would sometimes question herself; and then the thought, if such was the case, what agony would be hers to witness in beholding the anguish of his mother,— who with the rest of the occupants were waiting in gloomy silence the signal from her to weep or rejoice—made her feel more gloomy and depressed.

Thus passed two hours—two long trying hours— and yet no change; the sufferer had moved not, and she began to fancy his spirit had passed quietly away. With a trembling hand she raised the light, approached, and held it near his features.— All was calm—he did not seem to breathe. She bent down her head, but could hear no sound indicating life. "He is gone," she thought, and tears of anguish filled her eyes; and as she raised her head, a drop fell on his cheek. It was nothing of itself, and yet, as it had been the Promethean spark, the invalid started, drew a long breath, opened his eyes, fixing them intently upon Emily, who stood perfectly motionless, fearful lest in his weak state a sudden move might prove fatal to him. He gazed upon her with a sign of recognition in his intelligent features, and then passed his hand across his eyes, as one assuring himself whether he be dreaming or not. Again he gazed upon her intently, and a bright flush mounted his cheek, as he said:

"Emily, is it you, or a spirit I behold?"

"Thank God, he is safe!" ejaculated Emily, clasping her hands and looking upward, while tears of joy stole down her sweet features; and bending over, she pressed her lips to his forehead.

"O, Emily, is this reality!" exclaimed Rufus, with a thrill of joy lighting up his countenance.— "O say it is not a dream!"

"It is no dream, Rufus," said she, looking tenderly upon him.

"Then I *have* been dreaming," returned he, gazing slowly around the apartment. "I must have slept long, and yet it is still dark. I do not remember coming into this room. How came I here, and why were you watching me?"

"You have been ill, Rufus, very ill. For nine days you have stood on the verge of the grave!"

"Ill—nine days!" repeated he, looking incredulously, and placing his hand to his head, as though to collect his thoughts: "I do feel weak." As he took his hand down, it caught his eye, and starting at the sight of its thin, bony appearance, he murmured: "I have indeed been ill. But where was I taken, Emily? I remember nothing."

"At the door here, just as you had returned from a search for me."

"Search for you, Emily!" repeated he, earnestly, partly raising himself in bed—"a search for you! Then it was no dream, Emily, it was no dream! Ha!" added he, pressing one hand to his forehead, while a look of mental anguish hovered on his features: "I—I remember now, it was no dream! Oh, God! that it were anything but reality!— Oh! Emily—" he paused and fell back on the pillow with a groan.

"Why, Rufus, what means this?" exclaimed Emily, in alarm.

"I must not tell you—it was nothing—it is over now," he replied, faintly.

"If you had fears for me, you perceive I have safely returned," said she, soothingly.

"But with *another!*" added he emphatically.

A sudden thought flashed across her brain, but instantly discarding it, she rejoined: "True, with another; but why should that trouble you, Rufus? I was with a friend, whom you know and esteem. I went forth with Edward

Merton and returned with him. What see you wrong in that, Rufus?"

Ero he could reply, the door opened and his mother softly entered. She had heard voices in conversation—his voice—and her heart would let her wait no longer.

"O, mother, dear mother!" cried Rufus, as he saw her approaching.

"God of mercy!—he lives! he lives!" shrieked she; and rushing forward, she clasped him to her bosom, raised her eyes to Heaven, and poured out her heart in a prayer of thanksgiving to the Supreme Ruler. Webber was next to enter, and with tearful eyes he pressed his lips to the pale cheek of Rufus and uttered: "God be praised!" The physician followed Webber, accompanied by Bernard and Tyrone; but all three paused as they entered the apartment—which we should have mentioned was the same from which Curdish escaped—and gazed upon the scene with heartfelt emotion.

We shall not dwell longer here; suffice, that that night was one of rejoicing, and the next morning one, as we have shown, well calculated to add to the joy of lightened hearts. Each rose refreshed in body and mind; and the invalid, as he gazed forth through the open windows, heard the song of birds, and felt the soft air upon his wasted features with a thrill of delight.

After paying Rufus a morning visit, and finding him gradually recovering, Emily,—who on his account had of late closely confined herself to the house—and as the morning was so fine too—could not resist the inclination of walking abroad to taste the fresh air, and view nature in all her loveliness; for she was one whose soul was ever open to such delights. Shortly after, she stole quietly away; and taking a path which led through the farm of Webber to the southward, she made her way with a light step toward a gentle eminence, some half a mile distant, which overlooked a beautiful portion of the country, and where she was wont to spend many a pleasant hour in meditating upon the handiwork of the Supreme Being. There was a deep, inward joy in her heart as she tripped along the winding path; now beside fields of grain, struggling up as though to regain what they had lost by the devastating tornado; now through tall, rank grass, where occasionally a flower might be seen peeping forth, like a modest maiden from her lattice bower; now through bushes rejoicing in beautiful foliage, where the little birds made their nests and sung their songs:—there was deep, inward joy in her heart, we say, as she tripped along; a sweet, dreamy sensation of delight, such as she had not felt before for a long time.

The mind of Emily was one of those deep, pure, earnest, sensitive ones, that in a measure take their coloring from those around them, as the chameleon from the objects with which it comes in contact. Not that she was fickle, vacilating, governed only by the opinions of those whose words fell last upon her ear: no, by no means; for in this respect she could be swayed only by the best of reasoning; but she was one of those who are full of soul and feeling, and she was acted upon by the feelings of others. Naturally of buoyant spirits, full of vivacity and cheerfulness, she delighted to see every one around her in the same mood—every one happy; and she could not rejoice, could not be gay, where she knew another was in grief, or any way in trouble. Her mind was quick, energetic, but full of sympathy; and the latter noble virtue was, perhaps, her ruling passion. Hence, while she knew that one of the family with whom she had been reared,—to whom, for their kindness, she felt she owed such a debt of gratitude, and one too whom she loved with all the earnest affection of a sister—was lying in such a critical state, with death staring him in the face, she could not feel happy—could not remove the weight of anguish that lay like lead upon her heart. But now the case was altered. With his return to reason and convalescence, returned her buoyant, joyous spirits,— rising just in proportion to their long and severe depression. It was a day too, above all others, that she loved, and every thing seemed to conspire to make her happy.

Thus, for a time, as we have said, she tripped along with a gay air—gazing with delight upon the scene around her,—occasionally stopping to pluck a flower that pleased her fancy, to be woven into a garland for the sick one, with whom as yet her gentle thoughts were mostly occupied. Suddenly her mind turned into another channel— a shade stole over her sweet features, and her step grew tardy. The cause was a natural and simple one. By one of those sudden flashes which an active temperament is subject to, the night of the storm and her capture rose up before her; and for a moment all the wild feelings of that terrible time came back with the vividness of reality; and what seems strange too, this had never occurred before. 'Tis true she had thought of it at times; but then her thoughts had been vague and transitory,—for grief was at her heart for the welfare of one she too much esteemed to think of herself. But now the case was different,— there were no strong emotions to throw aside those scenes of alarm and terror, and they came back with startling force. She saw again the old hut, where she and Merton had

remained during that terrific storm; she saw the old woman standing before her, with her wild looks, rapid gesticulations—heard her prophetic words of warning, and felt a kind of awe creeping over her. She remembered her feelings too, while going through that lonely pass—her seizure by Riley, and wild ride to the river—her interview with the old Jew—her despair, when pinioned in the grasp of his villainous subordinates; and, finnally, the sweet charm of her release by the one of all others whom she loved.

As her train of thoughts led Emily to think of Edward, she dwelt for a time upon his noble, generous nature—his winning ways, and deep, ardent love for her; love which she felt—might return—and both be happy, but for the disparity in their positions as viewed by the world. She saw him an only heir of a rich, aristocratic father, whom she had every reason to believe would oppose any other than a wealthy alliance for his son. She feared too, even if consent were gained to their union, the opposition Edward would have to encounter, in this respect, would tend to weaken those ties of affection which now bound him so strongly to her, and make him regret, in secret at least—for she believed him of too generous and noble a nature to show it openly—that he had ever sought her hand. Her mind was one of those intuitive ones that pierce below the polished surface and read the human heart as it is, with its good and bad parts commingled; and she felt, however much she might love him,—and love him she certainly did—she must, as a duty to him, in securing his happiness, discourage his suit. As these thoughts came up before her, with all the force of her good sense of propriety, her features grew sad, and her head drooped with a pensive air.

And then Emily's mind reverted to herself— her humble condition—a dependant upon the charity of others. Who was she? She had often heard Webber relate the story of how she became an inmate of his house—a member of his family— and there was a mystery about it which troubled her. Perhaps she was of low birth, an offspring of guilt, and consequently no mate for Edward Merton, even setting wealth aside; and this reflection but made her feelings more sad and painful. From this her mind again returned to her capture, and the conversation she had overheard between Riley and the Jew, regarding herself. She remembered Riley's assertion that there was some secret connected with her birth, and the answer of the Jew by asking him how he had found that out; and also Riley's remark that he would make money by marrying her, by which a ray of hope sprung up that she might be of good descent, perhaps one of a wealthy family. And then her wonder how the Jew, if such was the case, should know any thing of this; and if not, why he should wish to seize upon her person. Perhaps he had got hold of proofs—some paper or papers which would establish rights wrongfully wrested from her. She had heard of such things happening to others—might they not happen to herself? And then the mysterious note Webber had received some five years ago, accompanied with money, charging him to educate her for any station in society:—what did that mean? Was there not some connection between that and the knowledge possessed by the Jew? As these thoughts came to her, overwhelmed as they were by mystery, hope revived that some day this mystery would be cleared up, and she perhaps would then stand fair before the world. But then again, how was this to be done? What probability was there that such, even if her surmises were correct, would ever take place? She could not but admit to herself that, at the best, this was but a wild speculation—a vision of the brain—a sort of castle in the air affair, without form or substance; in fact, but little less than an impossibility; and again all hope of such a termination died away, leaving her if any thing more in the dark, more in gloom, for the faint gleam which had for a moment shone upon her.

Thus musing to herself upon the various matters recorded, Emily came to a rough fence, which shut in the field of culture, and ran along at the base of the hill or eminence previously mentioned. The slightest incident at times is enough to change the current of our thoughts; and as Emily looked up at this interruption to her progress, and marked the loveliness of every thing around, she felt a sweet thrill of pleasure steal through her veins, and all her gloomy feelings emerged into an intellectual enthusiasm for the beauties of nature. Crossing the fence, she moved at a quickened pace up the hill, whose brow was some hundred yards distant, and there paused to gaze with rapture upon the beautiful landscape spread out before her.

The scene now brought to her view was indeed a delightful one, and one worthy of a description. The summit of the hill itself was shaded by a pleasant grove of trees, underneath which were several large, flat rocks—forming to one weary of walking various tempting seats for repose. Beside one of these rocks was a large old oak, which, although now fast verging to decay, still bore on its aged limbs a goodly covering of foliage. This, of all others, was Emily's fa vorite spot; and after pausing for a moment, she approached and sprang lightly upon the stone. From this her range of vision was somewhat extended; for being on the farther line of the hill from her

approach, she could command a view of its base to the southward. The hill, in this direction, was unlike its northern aspect—being more rough and precipitous, and more densely shaded by a growth of shrubby trees; if, in fact, they might be allowed the appellation of trees at all. Directly at its base, however, were some of a larger kind, which had struggled up among rocks and bushes, like ambitious men to overlook their fellows. Rippling along at the roots of these, over a rough bed, was the Maramee—a glimpse and sound of whose limpid waters could both be seen and heard from where Emily stood. On the opposite side of this stream rose another hill to about the same height—being also similar in appearance to the one just described. Beyond this latter, to the southward, the land was lower for a considerable distance, so that the next object which met the eye was the dim outline of a range of mountains far away. To the left, or eastward, the eye could follow the bed of the river between these hills for something like a mile, when the view was again cut off by a sudden turn in its course—appearing to the observer as though the two ridges met and formed an oval termination. From this all trace of the opposite hill was lost; but the one on which Emily stood could be seen making an angle of some forty−five degrees, and shooting off in a serpentine manner to the northeast— forming, in fact, the same ridge, a part of which we described in the commencement of our story. About half way from where Emily stood to the angle mentioned, was a smaller elevation, bearing a few points west of north, running past Webber's cottage, some little distance to the east, and forming the hill from which was first descried the approach of Bernard and Tyrone.

Turning to the west and south, the scene presented was by far the most extended and beautiful. A few hundred yards to the westward, the hills or ridges we have been describing made a handsome curve to the left, leaving the vision free scope over rather a level country for a goodly number of miles—now touching on a strip of prairie, now upon a dark, heavy wood—relieved here and there by a glimpse of some cottage, whose light blue smoke curling slowly upward in the morning sun gave a pleasing sensation of domestic happiness, and whose clearings around told that settlement and civilization were slowly creeping into the late abodes of the savage and wild beast. To the north, passing over the farmer−like appearance of Webber's fields of grain, mowing lots, pasture grounds—his orchard, garden, dwelling, stabling—all of which caused the eye to linger awhile, and particularly Emily's, with a quiet sensation of pleasure,—passing over these, we say, in a northern direction, some eight or ten miles distant, the eye fell upon what appeared a long narrow strip of silver; but which a close examination would have proved to be neither more nor less than a small portion of the deep, dark, rapid, muddy Missouri. Occasionally, throughout the landscape, some smaller streams winding about here and there, appearing like silver threads thrown carelessly upon a carpet, added their little to the perfection of the whole. Such, reader, is but an imperfect sketch of the country in the vicinity of Emily's new home, and the scene which she now gazed upon with feelings known only to the lovers of nature and the beautiful.

If we have failed in attempting to bring to the view of the reader a picture of what Emily saw— and we feel we have—for what is description after all, but description; and how far short it falls of the reality—of those thousand little things which in themselves are nothing, but which are needful in making up the whole,—if we have failed, we say, in describing what she saw, we utterly despair of giving the sounds she heard— the rustling of the leaves, the murmur of the streamlet, the humming of the insects, the singing of the birds, the ten thousand, in fact, indescribable voices by which nature completes her inimitable song of harmony. But let these pass; suffice that she saw and heard enough to hold her too much enraptured to notice the approach of another—a tall dark figure—who, finding her attention so much occupied, came to a pause a few feet distant, and deliberately folding his arms on his breast, stood for some moments regarding her in silence, but evidently with no ordinary feelings.

We have said he was a tall dark figure; but in the latter adjective, dark, we have reference only to his complexion and the expression of his features, which were of a sinister cast. His eyes were black, but of that peculiar black which is most repulsive, and were shaded by thick, overhanging brows, that gave them at all times a look of sullen fierceness. There was nothing further remarkable in his countenance, unless a few singularly drawn lines near his mouth, indicative of a determination to carry out whatever design he might attempt, and a peculiar smile, sometimes seen, but a smile so devilish that those who saw never forgot it. He was young, or at least exceeded not twenty−four years, and in person well and even handsomely formed. His dress was rather careless, consisting of coarse pantaloons fastened around the waist by a leather belt—a coarse shirt, open about the neck—a sailor−like jacket—a light straw hat and heavy boots.

For some moments he stood regarding Emily with a strange look—the look of one who had resolved upon a

certain result, yet was almost undetermined how to proceed, should all not succeed to his hopes. There was also a look of tenderness mingled with a heavy frown, as though nature had roused to combat two opposite passions.

Meanwhile Emily stood gazing upon the landscape with a bright eye and pleasing smile; but whether her thoughts were now on what she saw, or appeared to see, or whether they had wandered away to the one she loved, we shall not stop to analyze; though we might, perhaps, true to nature, premise the latter. At length she started, as by some sudden thought, and turning a little, started again on beholding the person we have described. There seemed a sort of revulsion at once in her feelings; for the blood in her cheeks returned to her heart, leaving them pale, as though a presentiment of trouble had came over her, and in spite of herself she trembled. This was but momentary however, for the next instant she was calm; and as if half ashamed of thus betraying herself, and the more perfectly to regain her composure, or secrete her real thoughts, she said with laugh:

"Well, I declare, John, I hope you are more successful with the ladies generally, on your first appearance, for I must own you frightened me."

There was something in the tone of her voice and manner of speaking, notwithstanding her laugh and familiar language, that appeared forced and unnatural, which John Webber—for such the reader has doubtless divined him to be—noticed. He had noticed too her sudden start when she first beheld him—her paleness—her tremulous agitation—in fact, nothing had escaped him; but he had attributed to all these a very different cause from the real one, and he answered accordingly:

"I did not intend to frighten you, Emily; though I presume a pleasant surprise is not in the end a disagreeable fright?"

"True, it is not," answered Emily, who felt relieved that he had not seen her repugnance to him; for it was against her gentle disposition to wound the feelings of any; and although there ever had been in his nature something dark and uncongenial with her own, a something to make her feel reserved and oppressed in his presence, yet she had never forgotten he was the son of her benefactor, and had always striven to keep her feelings under, to appear if anything more happy than usual that he might not detect it. In this she had over acted, as is sometimes the case; or rather, we might say, overreached herself; for had she shown more of her real feelings, it had doubtless been better for her in the end—had saved her many a bitter pang. In a word, to make him think her not displeased in his company, she had, without intending it, forced him to think his company *more* agreeable to her than others. Perfectly reckless in all moral principles, careless about searching for cause, he stopped at effect, and looked upon everything as a matter of course. Without any distinct notions of love, congeniality of soul, and the like, he had formed a resolve in his own mind that Emily some day should become his wife. A resolve with him was almost the same thing as a certainty, for he never counted on a failure; and having once set it down as a fact, he rarely ever thought again upon it, until the time came round for its accomplishment. The resolve concerning Emily he had made some three months after her arrival from New York. Her manner and appearance had struck him then as belonging to no ordinary person, and from thinking of this a fancy had sprung up that she would suit him better than any woman he had ever seen. This with him was enough; and without intimating it to her, or ascertaining her feelings on the subject, he had dropped it, with the idea that all was settled.— Had he been of a different temperament, he would doubtless have felt uneasy at the attentions which he could not avoid seeing were paid her by Merton, and her apparent pleasure while in his company. But this with him was a matter of course affair, and he never gave it a thought; or, if he did, it was only to smile to himself, as much as to say, to use an old proverb, "you are reckoning without your host." Another than him, too, would have felt indignant at her capture, and would have revenged himself perhaps on the actors in that scene; but he never suffered a word to escape him concerning it. True, he did not know of it till after her release—having been out that evening, as was customary with him, till somewhat late. On his return he had found the family up in a state of agitation, occasioned by the events which had happened, and the sickness of his brother Rufus. He had heard the whole apparently unmoved; and learning that Curdish was a prisoner, and knowing that he belonged to the banditti, had watched his opportunity and set him at liberty. Nor was this done for any love he bore Curdish, but merely for a selfish motive, by which alone he was governed. To gratify self, or to get revenge, which is only another species of self, he would go to any extreme, do any act however devilish. Some months previous to this event, he had come in contact with several rough spirits like himself, and by an intuitive faculty and close observation, had divined that they were a part of a regular organised band; and so expressed himself to them, accompanied by a request to admit him as a member. This they would not do without putting him to the proof;

and consequently his liberation of Curdish, knowing him to be one of the band, was only another of the many good services he had done them.

Such is but an imperfect insight into the character and motives governing him who now stood before Emily Nevance; and although we may have digressed somewhat in imparting this information, yet as he is destined to bear a conspicuous part in our story, we felt it to be a matter with which the reader should at once be made acquainted.

With John Webber the time had now come wherein he had resolved to communicate to Emily his design of making her his partner for life.— For some days he had been absent from home, and was even that very morning returning, pondering this in his mind, and how best to proceed, when on looking up he was both surprised and rejoiced to behold the object of his musings before him. This was only so much in his favor, he thought, and too good an opportunity to pass unimproved. Accordingly he approached, as we have shown, and stood for some time regarding her in silence, with very curious feelings.— Her surprise and agitation on seeing him he attributed to the deep interest she took in his welfare; or what in another, who could have better comprehended the meaning of the word, would have been termed love; hence the answer he made in reply to her remark. But to resume the conversation from which we have digressed.

For a moment after Emily spoke, there was a silence, and feeling unless something was said it would become very embarrassing, and resolving to change the subject, she resumed:

"But you seem to absent yourself from us lately, John; I have not seen you for some days."

"Yes, Emily, for some days I have been absent," replied he, still drawing from this remark a favorable augury to the success of his design.

"Good news at home—have you learned it?"

"No, I was but now on my way there. Is Rufus dead?"

"Dead!" echoed Emily, with a start. "I trust you would not call that good news, John?"

"I beg your pardon," answered he, coloring at the manner in which he was betraying himself; "perhaps I did not understand you. Did you say *good* news?"

"I did. Your brother Rufus is free from danger and recovering rapidly."

"Ah! yes," returned he, in a careless tone; certainly— yes—free from danger—yes—that is good news."

Emily, notwitstanding she knew him to be a man of self, was both surprised and shocked at this unnatural tone of indifference at the welfare of an only brother; but by a mighty effort she managed to prevent her feelings from making themselves manifest, and continued:

"Yes, the crisis in his fever come last night, and thank God, he lives! By the orders of the physician I stood by his side and had the joy of seeing him return again to life, almost as one from the dead."

"Joy, Emily," replied John, with one of his devilish smiles, that made her involuntarily shudder; "was it then such joy to see him return to life, as you say?"

"Why, John, what mean you?" asked she, quickly. "You surprise me with such remarks!"

"Do I?" said John, drily.

"Indeed you do!" exclaimed she, with warmth. "I do not understand such expressions!"

"O, as to that," he returned, shrugging his shoulders, "it was merely a question,—that is all— let it pass!"

"But it was an unnatural question," rejoined Emily, with a flushed cheek; "and one I am surprised to hear one brother ask concerning another!"

"*Well!*" returned John, with emphasis, contracting his brows and speaking through his teeth, "I say let it pass! I might have my reasons for asking it, you know;" and he fastened his dark eyes keenly upon her. "But to the point. I came here to speak on a different subject, and one that, if truth must be told, interests me more."

"Say on, then!" replied Emily, evidently anxious to finish the conversation as soon as possible: "I listen."

"You know, Emily," resumed John, "I am a man of few words, and consequently you will pardon me for coming at once to the point."

"Proceed!" said Emily, as he paused.

"Well, then, to be brief, I came here to tell you I love you, and have resolved to make you my wife."

"Good God!" exclaimed Emily, staggering back at this sudden and altogether unexpected announcement: "You are not in earnest, John?"

"Certainly I am," replied he, coolly; "why not? I like you better than any woman I have ever seen."

"But—" gasped she.

"O, never mind," he continued, interrupting her; "spare your remarks—it is all settled. I know what you would say, maiden−like, that you are unworthy and all that: but I will spare your excuses; it is all settled; we will be married in a month, and then if you choose you know you can tell me afterward."

His cool impudent manner completely puzzled Emily, at the same time that it roused her indignation. She could not believe him in earnest, and yet a kind of presentiment whispered her he was so. If he was in earnest, she foresaw there was difficulty in embryo, and how to extricate herself was a matter of serious reflection. She saw at once, that in either case, whether he was trifling or not, her best course was to be firm and decided in her replies, and accordingly she answered:

"But, John, I do not love you."

"Ah! do not, eh? Well, that is a matter of small moment: such things are as likely to come after marriage as before."

"But, John, I could *never* love you!"

"May−be, though that can best be proven by the test."

"But, surely, you are not in earnest in this business, John?"

"Am I not!" cried he, somewhat fiercely, with a black look. "Have I not said I wasin earnest?"

"But you have not consulted my feelings!"

"O, that with me is of minor importance!"

"But not with me, sir!" replied Emily, reddening with vexation.

"Well, well," returned he, sharply, "on that point suit yourself. I say it is settled!"

"And I say it is settled—" rejoined Emily, firmly.

"Well, what more?" interrupted he.

"But not as you think," continued she, finishing the sentence.

"Not as I think!—what mean you?" asked he, glaring upon her with a fierce look, and knitting his brows.

"I will never marry you!" she replied.

"Never marry me?" repeated he.

"Never! I will give my hand only where I love."

"Ha!" exclaimed he, taking a step backward— his whole frame shaking with fierce passion—his voice trembling so he could scarcely command it, and hissing from between his clenched teeth:— "Are you in earnest?"

"I am!" replied she, firmly, though inwardly frightened at his fierce aspect.

For some time John did not speak, during which his features underwent contortions awful to behold and impossible to describe. All the wild demon of his nature was aroused, and every evil thought and passion seemed struggling for vent. His eyes grew fiery—his face grew livid—his veins swelled, marking out dark blue lines—his brows contracted, forming a black streak across his forehead— his nostrils expanded—his bosom heaved— his teeth closed tightly—his lips contracted, from which issued a frothy substance,—while over all, like an ignis−futuus in some dismal swamp, played that dark, sinister, devilish smile. Emily was frightened. Never before had she seen or dreamed of a look so awful. Pale and breathless she stood and gazed upon him, as one hanging over some mighty chasm might be supposed to gaze upon some teriffic monster about to spring and hurl both to destruction. She could not speak nor move. She was spell−bound to the rock.— For some moments both stood thus. At length he started, threw up both hands, and stamped with one foot fiercely on the ground; and then from between his teeth hissed these words, which made her blood curdle:

"You have said! you have rejected me! Let your fate save you if it can! Hear me: By every thing I hold most sacred, I swear you *shall* be mine!" and turning away he rushed like a madman down the hill toward the river, while Emily, whose nerves had been held rigid by fear, as soon as he was gone sank fainting upon the rock.

Poor girl! Her troubles had only begun.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONVERSATION—THE MYSTERY CANVASSED— THE PLAN TO UNRAVEL THE MYSTERY—THE PLOT THICKENS.

The evening succeeding the events just detailed, found Webber, Bernard and Tyrone seated in the room to the right of the entrance of the residence of the first named, engaged in close conversation. None of the other occupants of the house were present—Emily and Mrs. Webber both being in the apartment to the left with Rufus,— who by the way was considered gradually recovering—and John had not yet returned. The conversation of the trio referred to had been carried on for some time on various topics of little interest to the reader, but just at the moment we have chosen to again introduce them, it had taken another turn, which, as it has a bearing on our story, is necessary for us to relate.

"You ask me," remarked Webber, in reply to some previous question of Tyrone, "what I know of her history? I answer, but little; in fact, absolutely nothing, prior to her being left in my charge, the particulars of which you remember I gave you some day or two since. There is something very mysterious about the matter, and I would go to any expense within my power to have it cleared up. Poor girl! I often grieve for her; for although she in my presence ever appears cheerful and contented, yet I have watched her when she thought herself unseen, and I know it troubles her. She is a girl of thought—very sensitive withal—and I know the obscurity of her birth must give her painful feelings. Did you not notice how pale she appeared on her return from her walk in the morning?"

"I did," answered Tyrone. "She looked as one just recovered from a terrible fright."

"I was alarmed myself," continued Webber, "and thought something serious had taken place; but when I questioned her, she forced a smile upon her pale features and assured me it was nothing but a little dizziness in the head which would soon pass away. I said no more, but that she must take care of herself—thought in my own mind the disease is of a very different nature.— Such a look as she then had and has since worn, notwithstanding her effort to conceal it, is never produced by bodily suffering, when the mind is in the proper state, or all my observations have gone for nothing. As you remarked, she looked as a person who had been frightened; though what should occur to produce that I do not know, unless the recalling of the night of her kidnapping; and I scarcely know how that, at this time, should so effect her. No, no, it was not that; perhaps she saw one of the villains concerned in that business:—Gods! if that rascal Curdish had not escaped me!" (here Webber shut his teeth close, while his eyes flashed fiercely) "yet we may meet again!" he added; and then resuming the conversation where he had broken it off, continued:— "But if she had seen any of them she would have told me so. No! it must have been caused by her own serious reflections. Ha!" added he again, as if struck by some new thought, "perhaps Merton— but no, no! Merton is an honorable man. Perhaps—" he was about to say something concerning Rufus, but thinking better of it, paused.

"Speaking of that night, Webber," remarked Tyrone, "have you ever formed any idea of the design of those ruffians in seizing upon her person?"

"Why no, unless for sensual gratification."

"That warnt it," put in Bernard, who had for some time been a listener. "I've been a thinking the hull matter over myself, and I tell ye for sartain that warnt it. There's something plaguey mysterious about it; and since you've been a talking, an idea's popped into my head that that are scrape was brought about by a different cause from what you think."

"Ah!" said Webber; "and pray what cause de you assign for it, Harvey?"

At this moment the door opened and John Webber entered. His features were somewhat pale, but in other respects much as usual; though a close observer might have detected the previous workings of passion, as little marks in a forest tell of the storm that has just swept over it. With a simple nod of recognition to the occupants he took up a chair and seated himself some distance from them.

"Why, John," said his father, turning to him, "why do you absent yourself thus of late? and at a time too when you are most wanted at home? You know there is much labor needed on the farm, and I am not able to accomplish it alone.— Besides, too, your brother has been very sick, but by God's blessing is now better! though he might

have been dead and buried without you being the wiser for it. I have not seen you but twice during his illness. Where have you been?"

"I have had business to keep me absent," replied John, sullenly, evading a direct answer.

"Yes, you always have business!" rejoined Webber, rather sharply; "but I trust you will close your business soon, if you have not already done so, and be a little more at home!"

"I trust I am of age and can act for myself!" grumbled John.

Webber, who knew too well his son's morose disposition and evil temper to carry the matter farther at present, made no reply, but turning to Bernard, said: "I will now hear your answer with regard to what you suppose the cause."

"Wal, as I was saying," returned Bernard, "while you've been talking, I've been a thinking the matter over, and I remember hearing one o' them are rascals, in his conversation with the tother, say that the old feller what hired 'em, and the gal, and some other feller was all kind o' mixed up into a secret—at least he guessed so, from knowing the first old feller'd got hold o' some papers, and had been mighty anxious to git the gal ever since."

"Ah! true, true!" rejoined Tyrone; "I remember now hearing the same remark; but not knowing then to whom it referred, had quite forgotten it."

"Strange! strange!" said Webber, thoughtfully; "more mystery. Can it be possible there was some one at the bottom of that affair who knows her history? It may be. The more I think of it, the more mysterious everything concerning it appears. My mind has been so much occupied with the uncertain fate of my son since that event, that I have never till now thought of it so seriously; and have never even questioned Emily or Merton on the subject—what took place—how he found her—or how she was rescued; but I will do so now, and perhaps she will be able to throw some light upon the matter." As he spoke, he arose, passed out of the room, and presently returned with the object of their conversation.

The features of Emily as she entered were very pale, their expression very sad; and though she strove to look cheerful, it was evident to all she was undergoing severe mental suffering. As she came forward and took her seat, her eye fell upon John, and she gave an involuntary start, while every muscle of her face quivered.

"Good heavens, Emily, you are not well!" exclaimed Webber, as he noticed the change in her appearance. "Tell me, my child, truly, are you not ill?"

"I—I did feel a little unwell, just at this moment," replied Emily, by a mighty effort recover ing her composure; "but I am better now. Indeed," she added, seeing Webber looked at her doubtfully, "I feel quite well again."

Webber shook his head gravely; and then, as if fearful of agitating her, proceeded directly to the matter in point.

"We were talking, Emily, of the events of that night of your seizure by those ruffians, and have sent for you to give us the particulars of what you saw and heard."

Glad of anything that would for a moment relieve her mind of the painful thoughts now agitating her, Emily proceeded at once to give a full narration of what she had seen and heard herself, and also the particulars of Edward's adventures, as related by himself on that eventful night, all of which matters being familiar to the reader, we shall not again detail.

"Depend upon't, I's right!" said Bernard, triumphantly, as Emily concluded. "That are stingy old Jew warnt doing that are rascally business for nothing."

"True," rejoined Webber, thoughtfully, "there does appear a mysterious connection between that and what has gone before. And then that old woman's warning—her knowledge of what was taking place—the sudden entrance of the stranger, who gave his name as Barton—the ring and its wonderful effect upon the Jew, are matters which look very mysterious, and show a deep laid plot of some kind,—and then that conversation between the kidnapper and the Jew indicates that the latter has some, or at least thinks he has some, secret knowledge of Emily. This affair must be looked into at once. But then, again, that counter−plot of the ring—what had that to do with it? I do not understand it. Barton, too, Barton," continued he, musingly, "why I know one of that name—a gentleman that has been some time in these parts—a speculator in land—can it be that he is the same? But no—pshaw! what should he know of the Jew? What think you of the whole affair, Tyrone?"

"Why that is what I hardly know myself," answered the person addressed. "As you say, it appears like a deep laid scheme in the first instance; but then that counter−plot, or whatever it may be, perplexes me. Ha! an idea

strikes me: May it not be possible that these ruffians are a part of an organised band, who were acting without the knowledge of their leader, or carrying out some plan of his before it was fully ripe for execution, and so were interrupted by him?"

"Heavens!" exclaimed Webber, starting; "I think you are right. At least there has been a band of outlaws in this quarter; for when I first came here, it was almost a daily occurence to hear of horse−stealing, robbery, and even murder; and the name of Ronald Bonardi, the bold, reckless leader of this banditti, was passed from ear to ear, among the more timid, with feelings of superstitious awe and horror. In fact, to such an alarming extent were his depredations carried on, at one time, that the whole country became aroused, private meetings were held among the more peaceable citizens or settlers, and a heavy reward was offered to any one who should take him dead or alive; but he was never caught. It was supposed he got information of their proceedings and left this part of the country; for since that time, with but few exceptions, the settlers have remained undisturbed—though I have heard of some few exploits since, that smack of his, but for the most part they happened east of the Mississippi."

"I jest recollect hearing the same kind o' yarns told about that are chap when I's out this way afore," said Bernard; "and I told Mark here, when I seed that are harrycane coming up, and knowed we'd have to crawl into the cave, that like as not we'd get into a robber's nest, and it made Mark quite skeery like."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Tyrone, with an angry gesture, the color deepening in his face; "have done with such nonsense, Bernard!"

"Fact, I swow!" returned Bernard, looking slyly at Webber and giving him the wink. Webber smiled, but made no reply.

"What was the personal appearance of this bandit chief?" enquired Tyrone, not heeding the last remark.

"In size he was rather large and well formed," replied Webber; "at least that seems the most correct information on the subject; though some who saw him solemnly declared him to be a monster— a giant; but doubtless their fears made them exaggerate. His features I believe were never seen, as he always wore a mask. In some of his exploits—in fact I may say all—he exhibited a wild eccentricity of manner, that distinguished him from all his followers. He has been described by some as bloodthirsty and utterly ferocious; but then, again, others relate anecdotes which prove him, notwithstanding, to have been a man of feeling; for he has been known to rob an individual and then return him his money, when he saw he was likely to be distressed by the loss. Occasionally too, a poor man has been surprised at having a purse of money placed in his hand, by a masked stranger, accompanied with these words, uttered in a slow, solemn tone: `Remember in turn the needy, and in your prayers forget not Ronald Bonardi. ' "

"A singular being!" remarked Tyrone, musingly. "He had, decidedly, some fine redeeming traits. Do you think him still living?"

"As to that I am undecided," answered Webber. "But if he be living, he has either reformed or left this part of the country—for of late I have heard nothing of him. I am inclined to the opinion, however, that he is living, but has quit his former mode of life. Were he still in this vicinity, I should be strongly inclined to believe him the person who gave Merton the ring—it being somewhat characteristic of the man—were it not for one or two reasons to the contrary. In the first place, Bonardi would not have revealed his features. In the second place, this person gave his name as Barton, and Bonardi would have given his own."

"But when he gave his name as Bonardi, his features, by your account, were always masked," remarked Tyrone; "consequently, unmasked, no person would know him as Bonardi; and might he not, under such circumstances, give his name as Barton?"

"Such a thing might be, it is true," replied Webber, thoughtfully, "but I do not think it likely. In sooth, to me the whole affair looks improbable, from the fact that I do not believe Bonardi to be in this section, or we should ere this have heard of him. No, now that I think of it again, Tyrone, your suggestion that these ruffians are a part of an organised band, does not appear so plausible. I should rather judge them to be some low, desperate characters, employed for the occasion by the Jew, whose reputation as a cowardly villain is wide spread. The ring business, as I said before, I do not understand. It might have been that this was a signal, understood among themselves as indicating danger, and to forego their design, whatever it was, until a better opportunity should present itself. If this was the case, their cards were well played. But I must question Merton, when I see him, and get more of the particulars."

"Speaking of these matters, Webber, did you not feel unsafe here, with your family, when you first settled,

knowing that you were surrounded by such a band of desperadoes, and in a country too so thinly populated that you would be likely to get no assistance, even if attacked, with no laws of force sufficient to protect either property or person?" enquired Tyrone.

"Why, such matters did trouble me some at first," replied Webber; "and in consequence of this I built my cottage very strong, and secured me some dozen of good rifles and plenty of ammunition— which I still have on hand—though, thank Heaven! I have never been molested, nor had occasion to use them. The seizure of Emily is the first trouble of the kind that has ever happened with any of my family: and somehow I have never looked on this so seriously as I do now; for since all the circumstances have been explained, I think there will be more trouble. But do not be alarmed, Emily," continued he, addressing himself more directly to her; "you shall be protected; only do not venture out too far alone—at least not for the present."

"Rest assured I shall not!" said Emily, stealing a look at John, who sat perfectly unmoved, apparently heeding nothing that was said.

"What course do you intend to pursue, in regard to this matter?" enquired Tyrone.

"Can I depend upon you to assist me, Tyrone?"

"You can, to all that lies in my power."

"And you, Harvey, I know will stand by an old friend!"

"Wal I guess I will now," answered Bernard, his cheeks flushing and his eye brightening at this complimentary appeal to his courage: "I guess I will now; jest try me and see if I don't. Stand by ye, Bill Webber—you who I've known ever since I was a leetle boy—why, darn me for a sneaking coward, if I wont go it clean to the death, plum! I swow I will, and no backing!"

"Well, then," rejoined Webber, smiling at the enthusiasm of his friend, "my course is decided. We will arm ourselves and proceed at once to the hut of the old woman, who seems to know so much of the matter, and force her to reveal the full particulars, who were the instigators, actors, and also their whereabouts at the present time. We will then take her along with us, both as a guide and to prevent her communicating with any of the villains, and proceed next to the hut of the old Jew, whom I shall take into custody for further examination; and if he has any secret papers, concerning Emily, I will have them, and know how he obtained them. We will then return, and if it be necessary for more help, in order to secure the others, I will call upon neighbor Winslow—who has lately settled within a mile of me, and has five brave, hardy sons—and neighbor Mason, living some half a mile farther on, who has four more; and between the two families I think I can raise sufficient force to teach these ruffians better manners than meddling with me or mine! By heavens! and I will so teach them too, ere I have done with them, or my name is not William Webber!"

"Jest the same old grit in ye yit!" remarked Bernard, approvingly. "Jest the same Bill Webber you used to be! You always had a go−a−head−a−tiveness about ye, when there was any pluck needed. I haint forgot how you gin it to that are tarnal horse−thief, that was so plaguey desperate nobody else dared to touch him, and you only a boy then, as one may say."

"That was a hard fight," returned Webber. "Perhaps I could not handle myself so well now, as then; but still I think I could do something, if forced into a fight, even now."

"But when do you think of proceeding in this business?" asked Tyrone.

"Early on to−morrow," replied Webber. "It has been too long delayed already. Had it not been for the severe illness of Rufus, I should have enquired into the matter sooner, and long ere this would have been like a blood−hound on the track of the ruffians. Perhaps it is better though, as it is; for they would then, doubtless, have been on their guard—expecting, as they naturally would, a pursuit. Now I trust to take them unawares."

"But do you not think they have fled the country?" asked Tyrone.

"No! I do not; from the fact, as it appears, that the person of Emily is what they sought; and they will be likely to hover in the vicinity for a second trial."

"By the way, Webber, a thought strikes me!" said Tyrone, suddenly. "Have you ever been able to account for the escape of Curdish?"

"No!" answered Webber, "I have not. That was another very mysterious affair, which has perplexed me not a little. No one could have entered the house after John came home, for the door was bolted on the inside; and after that I looked into the room, and saw Curdish still there; otherwise I should have supposed he escaped by means of a false key; but had he done so, the outer door would not have remained bolted on the inside, as was the case in

the morning. What think you of it, John?"

"I know nothing about it"—muttered John— "only that I see nothing so very mysterious concerning it. As to the door being bolted on the inside, I can say, that having occasion to get up in the night, I found it standing open, and bolted it myself. Curdy, or Curdish, or whatever his name may be, might have had a false key for all I know to the contrary. Such things are too common, I think, to be *very* mysterious."

"Why, this explains it then!" rejoined Webber. "Why did you not mention this before, John?"

"Because I'm not very talkative," replied John, drily.

"Well," said Webber, with a stern look, "should I be so fortunate as to again have him in my power, it will require something more than false keys to save him!" A pause followed this last remark, and each individual appeared absorbed in thought. Webber at length resumed the conversation, by asking Bernard how long he intended to remain in the vicinity.

"Wal, as to that," replied Bernard, "it depends altogether on circumstances. I jest cum out with friend Mark, here, to look at the land in these ere diggins, and see what sort of a speculation I might make; but as you've got into a bit of a fuss here, I'll jest kind o' keep an eye in this ere quarter, and be ready to do all I can for ye."

"Thank you, Harvey!" returned Webber, warmly. "And you, Tyrone, how is it with you?"

"Why, as Bernard has just remarked, I came out here to examine the state of the country, and attend to some professional business in St. Louis. By profession, as you are aware, I am a lawyer— though but lately admitted to the bar. I had an opportunity some months since of purchasing a section of land—north of, but bordering on the Missouri—which I embraced. Some time after, I received a letter from a gentleman in St. Louis, offering me for it four times the amount I paid. This excited my curiosity to know what had induced the offer; and as I had a desire of seeing this western country—of which so much has been said of late—and as my friend Bernard was desirous of coming out here also, I concluded to be his companion for the journey. I had heard of you frequently, from various sources, and Bernard being an old schoolmate of yours, I determined on paying you a visit."

"I am right glad you have done so," returned Webber, cordially; "and there seems almost a Providence in your very conclusion, from the fact that you came so opportune; for without your timely assistance I know not what might have been the result of that knavish affair. I trust you will consider my house your home, so long as you choose to remain in the West; and for the invaluable service both you and Bernard have already rendered me and mine, accept my warmest thanks, and hold me ever gratful."

"As for myself, gentlemen," said Emily, rising, "I cannot express what I feel; but you may conceive it somewhat, when I say that to both of you, under God, I hold myself indebted—though perhaps indirectly—for the preservation of my honor, which of course is dearer to me than life;" and stepping gracefully forward, she frankly extended a hand to each, her eyes beaming with the grateful emotions of her heart.

Both Bernard and Tyrone were affected at this unexpected elucidation of feeling—this heart−touching frankness of Webber and Emily, the latter more especially—and in spite of themselves both felt their eyes growing moist.

"Hang it all!" returned Bernard, at length, drawing his hard, rough hand across his eyes, "you make a feller soft jest for nothing, Emily, I swow! Why we didn't du a tarnal thing for ye, hardly, and yit you're praising on us jest as if we'd done some great things. Take it all back, Emily, du, until we've done something worth talking about. I can stand fighting putty tolerable well, but a woman's soft talk clean upsets me altogether."

"I cannot but be affected at your noble frankness, Emily," said Tyrone, gazing tenderly upon her; "but as Bernard has just remarked, I would you had waited until we did something more deserving; though God knows, Emily, I will sacrifice my life for you if necessary!"

"Put me in that are scrape, Mark! put me in that are scrape, tu!" cried Bernard.

It was now Emily's turn to be affected; and without venturing a reply, she pressed their hands, turned away and abruptly left the room. A moment after, John arose and disappeared also—for what purpose will be seen anon. Half an hour later, a horse, bearing a rider, might have been heard going swiftly toward the east.

After some further conversation, not essential to our story, Webber, Bernard and Tyrone, together with Mrs. Webber and Emily, retired for the night, and the outer door was strongly bolted, though John had not returned.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

THE VILLAINS—THE GAME—THE PLAN—THE INTERRUPTION— THE OATH.

The detail of our story now calls us to the old hovel made somewhat conspicuous in the former part of it by the events which then transpired.— The same evening on which the foregoing conversation occurred—though perhaps at a later hour— a group of five rough, villainous looking fellows were assembled within the walls of the hut boasting Hetty Brogan for a hostess. Four of these ruffians were the same as seen at the cave on the night of the meeting of the banditti, then described as plotting among themselves some deed of wickedness. They were seated on rough benches, around a plain deal table, whereon lay a small pile of money, the owner of which was to be determined by the cards now held in their hands.— Near one corner of the table stood a feeble ligbt, seemingly struggling with the surrounding darkness, while opposite it was a bottle, evidently more for use than ornament, judging by the reddened eyes and swollen flushed faces of the party.

The fifth person—for there were five besides the hostess—was standing a little back, so much in the shade that his features were undiscernable, and engaged with the latter in conversation. The game at the table just at this point had become very interesting, if one were to judge by the earnest expression in each of their faces. Two of the party had thrown up their cards, and were watching with intense interest the proceedings of the other two, who were drawing their money preparatory to increasing the stakes.

"Here, Saxton"—said one of the two last mentioned, whose arm was confined in a sling, addressing one of the others, and placing at the same time a well filled purse on the table—"jest unloose that ar' a bit; I haint got the use of my fingers enough for such fine work." The other complied, and at his second request emptied the contents on the table. "Thar's the shiners for ye, Niles"—he continued—"jest go ahead, who's afeard?"

"I aint," answered Niles, the very picture of a ruffian and his opponent for the stakes; "I aint afeard, so here goes five shiners better;" and he added a handful of money to the stakes lying on the table.

"You want to brag, hey! do ye?" returned the other. "Ha, ha, ha!—hang me, but you shall brag for something, then! Thar's yer five and ten better;" and Curdish—for the reader has doubtless recognised him—threw down fifteen dollars.

"You don't blaff me that way, croney," said Niles, at the same time adding seven half eagles to the pile; "thar's twenty−five dollars better."

"Well," observed Curdish, "all or nothing— thems my sentiments!" and after counting what money still remained, he pushed the whole into the centre of the table.

"Well, what 've ye got?" asked Niles.

"I reckon it takes a cool ten yit, Mr. Niles, afore you'll be allowed to ask that ar' perticular question;" replied Curdish, rather sarcastically.

"I'm broke, Jack," rejoined the other; "jest draw out that ar' ten of yourn!"

"No, by Jupiter, I dont!" growled Curdish, sullenly.

"Then we'll jest fight for stakes!" cried Niles, grasping the money with one hand, and drawing a pistol with the other.

Curdish sprang to his feet with an oath, and the consequences might have been fatal to one or both, had not the others interfered and restrained them. The matter was finally settled by Saxton loaning Niles ten dollars, which made the stakes even, and a decision was called for.

"Three aces and a pair of kings!" said Niles, throwing down his hand with a triumphant look.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Curdish, throwing down a *flush*. "I reckon as how I'll take them ar' stakes, Mr. Niles!"

"Beat by —!" grumbled the other, uttering an oath, while Curdish with one hand commenced transferring the money to his pocket.

"Hurray, old woman! more of that ar' licher here, d'ye hear?" cried Curdish, whose success made him feel rather elated. "By Jupiter! we'll have a merry night—ha, ha, ha! Blast me, but we'll have a night on't—hey, Bill Riley!—ha, ha, ha!" and rising from his seat, he reached forth his brawny hand and gave Riley—whom we have noticed as the one standing apart in conversation with Hetty—a familiar slap on the shoulder.

"Hush! Jack," returned Riley; "don't go to bein' so boisterous now."

"Boisterous!"—ha, ha, ha!—who's a better right! plenty o' money, by Jupiter!" and Curdish brought his hand down with force on his pocket, making the contents jingle.

"Let him laugh as can laugh last, Jack Curdish!" said Niles, somewhat fiercely, who felt vexed and mortified both at his loss and the hilarity of the other. "Saxton, will ye jest lend me another five?"

"No!" answered Saxton; "no more playing to−night! We've got other business to look to."

"Right, thar', my trump!" cried Curdish, with an oath: "I'd like to have forgot it. Hurray! here comes Hetty with more licker. Blast me, but she's an ace o' trumps, is Hetty! Hurray, boys! take another pull all round—jest to steady nerves, you know, ha, ha, ha!— and then let's to business." As he spoke, Hetty, who according to Curdish's orders had taken the bottle to refill, returned and placed it on the table, saying:

"Thar's the rale genewine critter, gintlemen, for them as wants to drink: none better in the United States of Amerecay, although I sez it as shouldn't."

Whether the gentlemen thought so or not, they made no remark, but the bottle went round until its contents had disappeared. As Curdish, who was the last to drink, placed it again on the table, he turned to Riley, and in a low voice said:

"That ar' fifty of the old Jew told tolerable well to−night in the way of interest,—hey, Bill!—ha, ha, ha! So the old villain chuckled did he, to think as how I's dead, and warnt a goin' to pay over the chinkers? Hang me, but we'll have a settlement some day! I jest kind o' owe him a few"—here Curdish set his teeth hard, and uttered a horrible oath. "But I say, Bill, how d'ye come out with the cap'en?"

"O, I jest got a little severe talkin' to, and caution about the future, that's all," replied Riley.

"But what's the reason you warnt thar' the night of the meetin'?" asked Curdish.

"Why, ye see, arter I got my money of old David, I put off to St. Louis, got on a spree, and forgot all about it till the thing was all over with."

"Did the cap'en want to know anything about that ar' scrape with the gal?"

"Yes, he axed me very perticular about it, and then insiniwated that another such a scrape might be likely to injure my health."

"Used me jest the same way," said Curdish, with an oath. "Blast me, but he's gittin' a leetle too perticular! Wonder if he thinks us gentlemen ar' a goin' to be idle all our lives? Since he's got married, hang me if he does anything as he used to do it! He with a wife,—ha, ha, ha!— Why four year ago, I'd jest as soon thought of gittin' married myself. Me married hey! Bill— ha, ha, ha!—how'd I look with a woman tied to me?" Here Curdish, excited by the liquor he had drank, and what he conceived to be the ridiculousness of such an idea, burst into a hearty roar. "What's yer perticular opinion about it, gentlemen," said he at length, recovering his gravity, and turning to the rest of the party, who were conversing among themselves: "dont ye think the cap'en's gittin' a leetle too perticular lately?"

"Why that's my opinion," answered Saxton.

"Well them's my sentiments!" returned Curdish, with another oath; "and blast me if I don't—"

"Hush! be careful!" interposed Riley; "remember you're talkin' about our cap'en!"

"Well, 'sposin' I am?" growled Curdish, frowning; "he arnt no more than a man—and I'm a man—and blast me if I dont tell him so, and do jest I please! 'Sposin' he is cap'en, I say, he's no more than a man!—d'ye understand that, gentlemen, hey! d'ye understand that, I say?"

"Ay, ay!" answered a voice, "we understand, of course."

"Of course we do−does," hiccoughed another of the party, called Besley, on whom the liquor was taking effect. "Of course we−we does,— hur−ray!"

"Well, then, gentlemen," resumed Curdish— who also began to feel quarrelsome from the same canse—"it's all right, by St. Christopher! and blast me, but I'll blow his brains—"

"Hold, rash fool!" cried Riley, interrupting him. "You don't know what yer talkin' about! Do you perticularly want to get us all shot, hey? The cap'en's right about the gal! We hadn't no business to be meddling with innocent women."

"Hang me, but we've a right to meddle with jest who we please!" rejoined Curdish, with an oath; "and who says we haint, is a liar, and no gentleman!"

"Them's strong words, Jack!" returned Riley; "but I aint a−goin' to quarrel with ye to−night."

"Come, come," said Saxton, interposing, "we've enemies enough, without quarrelling among ourselves; and what's more, Jack, you ought to be the last one to raise a fight—seein' as how we come here at your request. You said you'd got a plan to lay afore us, and we'd jest like to know now what it is."

"Well, I reckon its putty soon got at," returned Curdish, with a savage look. "It's nothing more nor less than what we's talkin' about tother night. You see that ar' arm, don't ye? Well, that ar' arm was shot by a — Yankee, when him and another feller interfered in a scrape that perticularly belonged to me and Bill Riley; and what I want's revenge!—nothing more nor less than their heart's blood, by —!" and he closed with a terrible oath.

"But, Jack, you know that's a perticularly dangerous business!" remarked Riley, who not having been with the others on the night in question, now learned of the intentions of Curdish for the first time.

"'Sposing 'tis?—by St. Christopher! who's afeared?"

"The−them's it!" hiccoughed Besley—who was already too far gone to understand much of what was said, but who occasionally caught at a phrase and fancied he must say something in return: "The−them's it!—who's afeared? Hurhur−ray!"

"But," said Saxton, "what's the plan, and what's the pay if we succeed? Ye see the affair's an ugly one, the best way you can fix it, Jack, and the temptation must be good, you know, for us gentlemen—"

"The−them's it! I−I say the tem−temptation's good—hur−hurray!" interrupted Bosley, who fancied the temptation somehow referred to drinking.

"As to the plan," answered Curdish, "I don't know much about it. Ye see I haint no great head for plans, any how; though John Webber's offered to give me instruction how to manage, provided I'll jest help him in another scrape, consarnin' that 'ar' same gal what we had to do with afore. *He* want's to carry her off this time. Blast me, but she's gittin' quite pop'ler somehow— ha, ha, ha! But about the pay—that's all right. Ye see its 'spected they've got lots of chinkers about 'em, and them as helps me can divide 'em,—all I want's revenge!"

"I'm with ye!" cried Niles, with an oath.

"I'm in!" returned Saxton.

"The−them's it!" hiccoughed Besley: "Hurray!"

"Well, all as goes in this ere business, will have to help in tother; that's the perticular agreement 'tween me and John. What d'ye say, Bill?"

"I'll have nothin' to do with 't!" answered Riley. "That ar' other scrape did me; besides, you know the cap'en's orders—"

"Hang the cap'en!" interrupted Curdish, fiercesposin' "He needn't know any thing about it; and sposin' he did, it arnt none o' his business! I reckon we've got a right to make an honest livin'. without askin' him! If we haint, why blast me we'll make a right!"

"Well, I say I'll have nothin' to do with 'it!" rejoined Riley, firmly.

"Per'aps you wants to peach!" said Curdish, angrily. "You're gittin' altogether over nice, somehow, lately."

"You know me well enough on that score, Jack," answered Riley, "to know you're insiniwatin' what's base and ungentlemanly; and if I'd a notion to quarrel, you'd have to take back them ar' words, or one or both on us would be gittin' cold afore five minutes!"

"Some folks ar' perticularly wonderful smart in big talk," retorted Curdish;" but they don't skeer—"

"Come, come, Jack," interrupted Saxton; "I'll answer for Bill's honesty; and if he don't want to jine us, why jest let him stay away—the fewer the number the greater the spoil, you know."

"The−them's it!" hiccoughed Besley, again.

"Thar's enough on us, any how," put in Niles; "and I'm of Sax's opinion, that if Bill don't want to jine, we'd better jest let him stay away."

"But haint you got no plan how to go to work?" asked Saxton.

"Hist!" exclaimed Riley, suddenly, bending his head forward in a listening attitude: "Don't you hear a noise?"

"The others paused and listened also. "I hear the hoofs of a horse!" said Saxton, shortly.

"Comin' fast!" remarked Riley. "What's the game I wonder?"

The sound which at first was rumbling and distant, now came clear and distinct, and could not be mistaken. It was a horse urged to his greatest speed. A moment more the blow of the animal was audible to the listeners, and the clatter of his hoofs had paused at the door.

Curdish and Saxton turned a little pale. "I wonder what's in the wind!" said the latter. "Surely we haint been

betrayed?"

"I don't know," answered Curdish, "unless it's John Webber. Nobody else knew any thing about our comin' here, unless Hetty"—here he cast a fierce look on the hostess, who catching the expression, quickly made answer:

"D'ye spose I'd peach, Jack Curdish?"

"Not and live!" growled Curdish, with an oath.

"It's only one, any how," said Saxton, looking to the pistols in his belt.

At this moment a knock was heard on the door.

"Who's thar?" demanded Hetty, in a shrill voice.

"Ele lio!" was the answer.

"Blast me, but it's John Webber!" exclaimed Curdish. "I knows the voice. Ye needn't fear, Hetty; open the door!"

Hetty immediately complied, and true to the suggestion of Curdish, John Webber entered.— There was a lurking devil in his eye, if we may be allowed an old expression, as he scanned with a rapid glance both the apartment and its occupants. There was something in that eye too, that forbade familiarity, which each of the party—for all they knew him to be one of their band, and believed him as great a villian as themselves—felt; a something that awed them to a certain respect, (a sort of devilish mental superiority) which John— who was no novice in reading the thoughts of kindred spirits—perceived; and for a moment that dark smile lingered on his features.

"We's jest talkin' about you," remarked Curdish, who was the first to speak. "They say talk about the devil—"

"Well?" interupted John, sharply.

"O, nothing," added Curdish, who somehow fancied it would not be politic to finish the sentence.

"You were talking about me, then!" said John, with a stern look: "Well?"

"Yes, we's jest mentioning over that ar' business, you know, about how 'twas best to git at them ar' fellers, ye see."

"Yes, I know and see!" returned John, quickly; "and will add, that the chance you are looking for will come sooner and in a different manner than you expect."

Several of the party started with looks of surprise. "Ha!" exclaimed Curdish—"thar's some meaning in that!"

"I never speak without *meaning!*" returned John, emphasizing the last word.

"What's in the wind?" enquired Saxton.

"Hark ye, fellows!" answered John; "before I proceed farther, there must be an understanding. I am aware, and doubtless you are also—if not you should be—that there are no ties of friendship between us. We are drawn together and act together only so far as our separate interests make it necessary. Whatever those interests are, matters not; suffice that they are enough for our present union. To come to the point. I am willing to serve you, so far as lies in my power, but you must serve me in return! Is this the understanding?"

"Ay! ay!" answered Curdish, Saxton, Niles and Besley—the last of whom, by the way, owing doubtless to the turn matters had taken, had recovered sufficiently to understand what was going forward.

"But one of your party does not answer," remarked John, glancing at Riley.

"I've told 'em afore, I'd have nothin' to do with't!" said Riley.

John put his mouth to the ear of Curdish, and whispered: "Can he be trusted?"

"I'll answer for him!" replied Curdish, in a whisper also.

"And Hetty?"

"She's right!"

"Enough!" said John, aloud. "Those of you who are willing to enter into an agreement to serve me, when called upon, for the service I shall render you, will now swear to do so by kissing this dagger." As he spoke, he drew from his breast a long, polished weapon, of the kind named, and reached it to Curdish, who took and pressed it to his lips. Saxton, Niles, and Besley did the same.

"You have all now deliberately sworn!" resumed John, as he again took the weapon. "Now mark me, fellows!" continued he, with a cold, stern look, compressing his lips and speaking through his clenched teeth: "I never trifle myself, and will not be trifled with! Whoever among you shall dare wilfully, to break his oath, by that dread eternity before us! I swear he shall stain this steel with his heart's blood!" and giving it a flourish, so that it sparkled in the light, he returned it to its sheath, while the others gazed upon him in silence with an awe they had

seldom or never felt before in the presence of any human being. Villains though they were—dark, treacherous villains—they inwardly acknowledged John Webber their master. Nor did this escape his piercing eyes; and with that devilish smile playing for a moment on his features, he again resumed:

"I see you understand me. 'Tis well. Now to business. I accidentally overheard a conversation this evening which concerns you all. A project is under way to seize upon the person of Hetty, here, early to−morrow morning."

"What's that?" screamed Hetty, who had been listening attentively, while the others started with looks of alarm.

"Peace, woman!" said John, sternly, "and listen! Their object in seizing her is to force her to tell all she knows concerning that kidnapping affair, who were the instigators and actors in it, and also where they may be found, which mayhap concerns some of you especially—I know not but all."

"By St. Christopher!" exclaimed Curdish, springing to his feet: "I—"

"Hold!" cried John, fiercely; "I have no time to dally, so do not interrupt me again! The party for this business consists of three,—two of them are the men you seek, the third is my father. By knowing their intentions beforehand, you will be able to mature plans to your liking, with which I shall have nothing to do. This much, however, *must* be borne in mind! Of the two with my father, I have nothing to say—you will deal with them as you see proper; but with regard to my father himself, understand me:—Not a hair of his head must be harmed! Secure him if you can, from doing you violence, but raise not a weapon against him! Understand me further:—Should he be harmed, I will *know* who harmed him; and by that Heaven above, and that Hell beneath us! I swear, him will I pursue till his corse lies cold beneath my feet!" and the aspect of his features as he spoke, was terrible; so much so that those very ruffians, bred in crime, felt a sense of secret fear,—even as a wild, savage beast has been known to tremble before the awful majesty of the eye and mind of his superior, man.

For a moment after John spoke all was silent, when he again added: "I think our business for the present is settled. When your services are required, you will be informed. I have no time to tarry, and so good night!" Turning away, as he spoke, he abruptly disappeared, mounted his horse and rode swiftly away, but in an opposite direction whence he came.

"Blast me, what a look!" was the first exclamation after the departure of John, which proceeded from Curdish.

"Never saw the like on't!" remarked Niles.

"Nor I!" added Saxton.

"Nor I!" repeated Besley.

"'Twarnt human!" put in Hetty.

"Well, comrades," said Riley, who was the last to speak, "it was devilish enough, and no mistake; but if I arnt mistaken, you've got other matters to think on. I've said all along I'd have nothin' to do with't, when you talked about attacking others; but since we're agoin' to be attacked ourselves, I arnt one as will flinch; so you may jest put me down on the defence, though somehow I've got a presentiment it'll be my last undertakin'!"

"Good!" cried Curdish. "I jest knowed as how you'd come up trump, Bill. More licker, Hetty, and then by St. Christopher we'll lay our plans!"

Whatever those plans were, our story itself in its progress must alone develope.

CHAPTER II.

THE JEW—THE PLAN OF REVENGE—THE PAPERS— THE PRISONER—THE STRANGER—THE SPY.

On that same night old David the Jew sat alone in the hovel wherein we first introduced him to the reader. His features bore the same coarse, villainous, repulsive aspect as then, and the apartment the same dirty, gloomy appearance. The Jew, as then, sat by a sort of rough table, whereon stood a pale, sickly light of his own construction— his elbow inclined downward and resting on it so as to support his head with his hand.— The light stood some little distance before him, and its pale gleam fell on a countenance where all the worst passions of the human heart were manifesting themselves by sudden and sometimes awful contortions of the muscles. Now a heavy frown would gather over his features, like some black, portentous cloud over a dismal swamp, and his small black eyes would look cold and devilish, and his shrivelled bloodless lips would compress, and his lower jaw move as though he were endeavoring to grate his teeth. Now the expression would take a wilder, fiercer and more fiend−like aspect, and his eyes would sparkle with a strange and terrible gleam, and his thin, bony hand would clutch at the air, as though he felt it were at the throat of some victim of his undying hate. And thus he sat, for an hour, buried to the outer world in the gloom of his own dark, guilty thoughts, with his eyes fixed on vacancy—motionless, save the nervous agitations we have described—alone—an old, grey headed man—a sad and revolting picture of humanity. Oh! who would wish to enter to the depths of such a soul and see its awful workings, where no ray of God's sunshine ever entered? Better be in the dark, cold and cheerless charnal house, among the mouldering remnants of mortality!

Thus, as we have said, for an hour sat the Jew. At length he started to his feet, and with his old frame shaking with age and debility, commenced shuffling to and fro the apartment, with his head bent forward, and his trembling hands locked in each other behind him. Suddenly he paused, and reaching forth his clenched hand, shook it as it were at vacancy, while his countenance assumed that same fierce, terrible expression.

"Revenge!" hissed he, at last, through his pale quivering lips: "Revenge! dat ish it—dat ish mine nature—revenge! mine Gott! I vill haves revenge! Dey tinks de Jew ish old and feebles and can't hurtish dem, and dey dares to imposhe upon hims, dey dares to lies about hims, dey dares to spoils his plans for getting monish; and by Fader Abram! dey shall hangs, dey shall dies, dey shall rots, and old Ben Davids shall lives to shee it!"

Here he again commenced shuffling across the apartment, but shortly paused and again resumed:

"I got de gals, I paid mine monish for her, and den, mine Gott! just as I was to makes mine fortunes mid her, dey sends and takes her away, and mine monish gone too! Oh, mine Gott! mine Gott! And den dey gets up storish about de old Jew, and hash hims arresteds, and shays he ish going to betrays 'em; and den de captains shays he shalls pe watched, and if he finds he hash peen in any more scrapes he shalls pe shots, and dat vill pe de ends of de old Jew. Ah, mine Gott! mine Gott! dey doesent knows de old Jew—dey doesent knows de old Jew! Ben Davids shall outvits 'em yet! Ben Davids shall blows de whole partish; and den dey shall pe caughts, and Ben Davids shall gets de monish for telling, and den he vill haves revenge, and den he vill laughs!" Here the old Jew, as though the consummation of his design had already taken place, chuckled with a glee that partook more of the nature of a fiend than a human being. Again he resumed:

"Yish, to−morrows I shall takes mine monish and vill go to St. Louis, and dare I shall finds a magistrates, and shall tells him all about de partish, and den, mine Gott! ve shall shee who ish arresteds, and who shall get shots! Ha, ha! Captains Bonardies, den ve shall shee! Ha, ha! Mistoor Rileys, den ve shall shee! Ha, ha!—ha, ha! den ve shall shee who gets aheads of old Ben Davids! Yish, mine Gott! ha, ha! ve shall shee den!" and the old Jew rubbed together his hands, and chuckled merrily until a severe cough interrupted him.

"Vell, now I shall looks to mine monish," said he, as soon as he had recovered sufficiently to speak; "and mine papers too. Ha! mine Gott!" cried he, starting as though some new thought had come over him suddenly: "De papers! yish, de papers!—perhaps I cans sells de papers! Ha! yish, I knows de young mans as loves de gal, and he shall puy de papers, and I shall asks mush for de papers, and den I shall haves plenty of monish— ha, ha!—plenty of monish;" and again the old Jew rubbed his bony hands together and chuckled. Glancing cautiously around, as

though to assure himself no other being was present, although he knew the outer door was strongly bolted, and felt perfectly confident he was alone, (such by the way being the force of habit) he proceeded to the closet we have before had occasion to notice as occupying one corner of the apartment, and for a moment disappeared. It was but for a moment however; and when he returned, he bore in one hand a roll of papers, and in the other a bag of money. Approaching with a feeble step he deposited both on the table, and then reseated himself on the old stool. Untying the bag he poured forth its contents, and then for a few minutes sat and gazed upon the pile with the exulting, avaricious look of a miser. Perhaps this in a measure was excusable; for the pile, to say the truth, was by no means an invaluable one, and might have tempted others of a less avaricious nature than the Jew to eye it with delight. It was mostly of gold—old genuine coins—many of them Spanish doubloons, English guineas, and the like—occasionally interspersed with a few pieces of silver.

For some minutes, we say, the old Jew sat and gazed upon his treasure, and then commenced handling each piece separately, with a childish delight— placing each in the palm of his hand, or on the end of his fingers, and then moving his hand up and down as though to ascertain its weight. In this manner passed another hour—perhaps more—when he returned the money piece by piece to the bag, taking due note of the exact amount that none might be missing. This done, and the whole secured by the string, he laid it gently upon the table, took up the papers, unrolled and examined them attentively for some half hour more; when, as if satisfied with his scrutiny, he rolled them together, and gathering up his money returned again to the closet. Here, feeling along the side next to the wall, low down, he came to a kind of panel, when touching a secret spring it immediately flew open, disclosing a small iron door. Touching another spring, this door opened, leaving an aperture into a small iron safe, where the Jew quickly deposited his money and papers, and then reclosed both the safe door and panel. Scarcely was this completed, when a deep sepulchral groan seemed to issue from beneath him.

"Ha!" exclaimed he starting, "I had forgot mine prisoners. Vell, vot fors should I keeps him longers? Vot more use vill he pe now I vonders! No, he will pe no more use. I shall take mine papers, and mine monish, and shall come pack no mores. Vell, den he shall dies! Yish, mine Gott! he shall dies! and den he will tells no storish on de old Jew. Ha! yish, mine Gott! dat ish rights—he shall dies!" As he spoke, the old Jew tottered back to the table, with a savage look on his grim, ugly features—a hellish gleam in his small black eyes—and taking up the light returned once more to the closet. Here he paused, and taking from a narrow shelf a somewhat rusty dagger, he examined it attentively for a moment, with a fierce gleam of satisfaction. "Dat shall do mine pusiness," he muttered; and raising a trap−door near his feet, he slowly commenced his descent down a damp, mildewed ladder, into a slimy, nauseous vault, bearing the light with him.

The passage which the Jew descended was very narrow, and was walled up on either hand to prevent the earth from caving in. In depth it might have been some fifteen feet, and in extent some thirty more. The air was cold, for both the ground and walls were moist; and on the latter stood large drops, which glistened as the pale gleam of the light fell upon them, like the eyes of so many serpents. But this was by no means its worst feature. The air, though cold, was close and heavy; so much so as to be difficult of respiration; and was, besides, filled with a stench almost insupportable. At the bottom of the ladder the Jew for a moment paused—with his feet sliding upon what seemed greasy earth—and then turning slowly around, moved cautiously along the passage, with the light held before him in one hand, and the dagger in the other, occasionally resting an arm against the walls to prevent himself from falling, until he came to the terminus, where was revealed a spectacle of the most piteous, revolting, and inhuman nature.

On a bed of damp, filthy straw—ground into the earth until it was completely coated with a clayey loam, and chained to the wall—lay the thin, sickly, wasted figure of what had once been a powerful man, now passed the middle age of life. He was scarcely more than a skeleton. His once strongly marked countenance—now of a pale livid, ghastly hue—had wasted away until every bone stood prominent. His cheeks had fallen in; and his large, dark eyes,—as they rolled in their hollow, bony sockets, and gleamed out from between his long, grey, matted, dirty hair, which partly screened his features—were sepulchral and awful to behold. His limbs and body were but partially covered by rags of the most filthy description, while—as if to complete the foulest picture of human wretchedness imaginable—rusty iron chains, fastened around his ankles, clanked to the move of his feet.

Such was the prisoner of the Jew. Such was the awfully loathsome, heart sickening sight, which he now gazed upon with a savage joy.— Such was the scene before him; but worse—ay, worse—for we *dare* not describe it as it was in reality. It would shock the senses. And who was this man? and how came he there in the power of the

Jew? Let the sequel of our story answer. As the prisoner saw the Jew approaching, he partly raised himself on one arm and groaned. As the Jew paused before him, with a dagger in his hand, and murder in his eye, the prisoner groaned again; and then in a deep, hollow voice, said:

"Oh, or God−sake, give me food! I am dying— I am dying of starvation! Days I know have passed since I have seen you—since aught has passed these lips!" and the wretched man sunk back upon his wretched bed with a second groan.

For some time the Jew returned no answer, but stood and gazed upon him with a fiendish smile. Then he lookod at his dagger, and then he spoke:

"You shall shee me no more nevers. You shall gets no more foods. I shall kills you. You shall dies mid mine daggers. I am going avays. I shall needs you no mores. The gal vill not pe mines, and vot for should you lives? No, mine Gott! you shall dies!" The Jew spoke rapidly, in short sentences, and as he concluded he raised his weapon and bent forward in an attitude to strike.

"Oh, spare me! for God−sake, spare me! release me!" groaned the victim, glaring wildly upon him: "I am not ready to die now."

"He, he, he! chuckled the Jew, with a hideous grin. "Vot for you tinks I shall spares you?— You haves no monish. I can makes no monish mid you. Shall I spares you to tell storish on de old Jew, ha, ha? No, mine Gott! you shall dies! You shall dies now!" and placing one knee on the ground as he spoke, he again raised the dagger, bent himself forward, and with a rapid motion struck at the heart of his victim.

But he failed of his mark. The other, who had been watching him intently, gathered all his remaining strength for a final effort, marked the blow as it descended, caught his arm with one hand, and with the other wrenched the weapon from him. So sudden and so unexpected was this, that the Jew started to his feet and retreated some paces in absolute terror. Then, as he comprehended all, and saw how his victim had foiled him, he uttered a volley of curses at his own stupidity, stamped the earth with his foot, and beat his head with his clenched hand in a paroxysm of rage.

What might have been the result—what dark and inhuman revenge he might have taken on the unhappy object before him—had nothing occurred to interrupt and draw off his thoughts—we do not pretend to say; but just at this instant was heard a noise, like the quick tramp of a horse, and immediately followed a loud knocking at the door above. As the Jew heard this, he started, turned pale—that is as pale as his brown, dirt−begrimed features would permit—and trembled in every limb. Again the knocking was renewed, even louder than before, and not daring to pause longer he turned and made haste up the ladder. At the top he paused to reclose the door of the vault, and then tottering into the larger apartment placed the light upon the table. As he did so, he was still more startled by hearing a deep, heavy voice say:

"Open this door, or I will burst it from its fastenings!"

"Who ish dare?" cried the Jew, in a trembling voice.

"Ele lio!" was the answer.

The Jew, though still frightened, felt much re lieved by this, as it proved the person, whoever he was, to be one of the banditti; and shuffling to the door, he quickly withdrew the bolts and admitted a tall figure, whose features were completely concealed under a black mask. The stranger, without ceremony, walked directly into the middle of the apartment, and then drawing from his breast a long, polished dagger, turned quickly round and abruptly accosted the Jew, who stood with his hand still upon the door, a perfect picture of cowardly fright.

"Come forward, Jew; I have a few words to say, and but little time to say them in."

The Jew hesitated.

"Must I *force* you to obey me?" said the stranger, with a menacing gesture, stamping his foot fiercely on the ground.

The Jew, too frightened to speak, reluctantly complied.

"You are an old man, Jew," continued the stranger, "and a man of crime. The only thing that convinces me there is a Hell in the future world, is in gazing upon such a being as you—for who would suppose that you could ever inhabit Heaven? But enough of that: I am no moralist, and only preach what I practice. My business here is of a different nature, and quickly told.— You have in your possession certain papers, relating to a certain young lady, whom you know, but whose name it is unnecessary to mention. I have come for these papers."

"Me haves papers!" exclaimed the Jew, in pretended astonishment: "I haves no papers."

"You will oblige me by getting them as soon as possible," returned the stranger, cooly, not heeding the Jew's remark, "as I have but little time to tarry."

"But I tells you I haves no papers!" repeated the Jew.

"Sorry!" returned the other, carelessly feeling of the point of the dagger still held in his hand. "Sorry you have not got them, Jew, as I shall be much disappointed."

"Vell, I swears to you I haves not one papers at all!" said the Jew, feeling somewhat reassured at the mild tone in which the other spoke. "If I did haves papers I should gives thems to you mid pleasures."

"How far below the surface do you think the centre of an honest man's heart lies?" asked the stranger, abruptly.

"Vell, how you tinks I knows?" replied the Jew, in wonder. "Vot fors you shays dat?"

"Because I thought it likely you might know, having measured the distance often with your dagger!" rejoined the other, still toying with his own.

"You ish vons very strange beings!" remarked the Jew.

"As you do not know," resumed the stranger, "how far the distance to the centre of an honest man's heart, how far do you judge it to be to the centre of your own?"

"Eh! vot fors you shays dat?" repeated the Jew in alarm, who now began to fancy there was an under current to the other's interrogations.

"O, I merely enquired," replied the stranger, "that I might know how much of this bright steel it would be necessary for me to stain."

"Oh, mine Gott!" cried the Jew, shaking with fear: "you vills not kills me?"

"Why not?" said the stranger, sternly. "Have you not done such deeds often, and on younger men—men too whose lives were valuable to society? Why should I spare you? You are old, and have lived long enough; besides, would I not be benefitting society by sending you to your last account?"

"Oh! mine Gott! you vills not kills me?" repeated the Jew, sinking upon his knees, and extending his shrivelled old hands in supplication.

"Kill you!" cried the other fiercely, grasping him by the arm, and raising his long glittering steel: "Kill you! ay, as I would a copper snake."

"Oh, oh, oh!" shrieked the Jew, who now believed his last hour had come. "Spares me— spares me—spares me! and you shall haves monish— you shall haves gold! Oh, oh! mine Gott! mine Gott!"

"Money!" returned the stranger, contemptuously: "I do not seek your money: your blood stained coins I do not want, for a curse is on them. There is but one consideration for which I would spare your life, and that is not in your power to grant; at least so you have sworn, and of course you would not swear falsely."

"O, mine Gott! yish, de papers!" exclaimed the Jew, with a ray of hope breaking in upon him.— "O, yish, Mistoor Strangers, mine Gott! yish, you shall haves de papers."

"O, then you did swear falsely, eh? and you really have the papers?" said the other, releasing his hold of the Jew. "How lucky you thought of it in time. Up, then, and get them—for I am in haste."

"Oh, you vills not takes—"

"Up, I say!" interrupted the stranger, fiercely, stamping his foot violently. "Up I say, quickly! or by—! you rise no more. Quick now, the papers!" added he, as the Jew started to his feet.

David, who saw there was no middle course, turned away with a groan to obey the order.— Proceeding to the safe, he drew forth the papers, returned and gave them to the stranger, with a sigh and a mental curse. Turning to the light, the figure in the mask examined them for a moment with evident surprise.

"Ha!" he exclaimed: "there has been foul play here, Jew; but I have no time to enquire into it now—another time will do;" and rolling them together as he spoke, without another word he turned and quitted the apartment. A moment later the tramp of a horse was heard speeding westward.

That horse bore a rider—that rider was John Webber.

We shall not delay to picture the rage of the Jew, when he found he had again been imposed upon—again been foiled in another of his schemes; suffice that he cursed, raved, stamped, and beat his head like a madman. Thirsting for revenge on the banditti, whom he now looked upon as enemies, and thinking his movoments less likely to be observed if done in the night, he determined to start for St. Louis, and early on the morrow betray the band and seek for protection under the law. Accordingly he took his money, the only thing valuable he could carry with him, and within an hour from the departure of John, set forth on his treacherous mission. Engrossed by

his wild thoughts of revenge, his prisoner had been forgotten.

As the Jew quitted the hovel, a dark, crooked object came out from beneath the table—straightened itself into the tall figure of a man—opened the door softly, and disappeared after him.

Who was that figure? how came he there? and for what purpose? Did the Jew reach St. Louis that night? Did he ever reach St. Louis?

Who reads shall learn.

CHAPTER III.

THE HORSEMEN—THE ATTACK—THE FIGHT—THE DEATH—THE ESCAPE—THE SUSPICION—THE STORY— THE SURPRISE—THE SEARCH—THE PRISONER— THE RELEASE.

On the morning following that night of events, the sun rose in splendor, and as his golden rays rested upon the ridge where our story first opened, they occasionally, from between the branches of the surrounding trees, fell with a mellow gleam upon three figures, well mounted on three noble steeds. Two of the three were large, powerful men, while the third, well formed, full of grace and activity, was by no means an inferior individual. Each of the party was well armed, with two pistols, a long hunting knife, and a rifle slung behind him, across his shoulders, ready for immediate use when necessary. That they had ridden fast was evident from the expanded nostrils and foaming breasts of the animals beneath them; but at the moment introduced their speed was only a fast walk, and they were gazing in various directions upon the beautiful scenery around with seeming delight.

"This ere's a putty considerable kind o' a country of yourn, Bill Webber," remarked Bernard, at length—for the reader has doubtless recognised the three horsemen as Webber, Bernard and Tyrone:—"a putty considerable kind o' a country, I swow, and no mistake. Its wuth a feller's travel out here jest to look at it like, let alone the chance he has for gittin' intu a bit o' a fuss now and then. Why a look at the old Mississippi 'd pay the cost, I'm darned if twouldn't, that's a fact, don't you think so Mark? Howsomever, I seed it when I's out here afore"—continued he, without waiting for a reply from Tyrone— "so twasn't exactly new to me, though I looked on't with jest about the same satisfaction as I did at first. Mark, here, though, thought he'd got right on tu the ocean, kerslap."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Tyrone, who was not particularly fond of a joke; "you always exaggerate, Harvey. 'Tis true I thought it a great stream, and in that opinion I am borne out by geographical facts, which prove it one of the first in the world, but I did not mistake it for the ocean, nevertheless."

"O you needn't try to creep out on't now, Mark; it's all fact, I swow!" said Bernard, casting a side glance at Webber, who smiled and changed the conversation by saying:

"I suppose we are near the cave you mentioned, Harvey?"

"Right down there's the spot," he replied pointing to the right,—"where you see them are stones all jumbled up together, jest as if they didn't care 'bout how they looked."

"I remember the place now, very well," returned Webber; "for only a short time since a man was supposed to have been murdered there."

"Ah!" exclaimed Tyrone, with interest: "happened it very lately?"

"About four months since," answered Webber.

"Indeed! Why you did not mention this before, to my recollection."

"In fact I had forgotten it," said Webber, in reply; "such things being too common in this country to live long in memory, unless the individual be well known, and this one was a stranger. It is not known for a certainty that he was murdered, but circumstances place it beyond a doubt. A man somewhat past the middle age was seen in this vicinity during the day, and the night succeeding one of my neighbors heard a shriek and cry for help, proceeding as near as he could judge from yonder cave; but being unarmed and alone he dared not go to the rescue; the more so, as he believed there would be more than one to encounter. A search wasinstituted the day following, but save some marks of blood in and about the cave, nothing was discovered of importance. As the stranger has never been seen since, it is believed that he was attacked by ruffians, murdered for his money, and his body sunk in the Maramee. It was thought by many that the old Jew could tell something of the matter if so disposed; and now I think of it, doubtless these same kidnappers were concerned also."

"Such is my opinion from what I can gather by your narration," observed Tyrone.

"Well," returned Webber, compressing his lips, "a day of retribution is at hand, and an evenger on their trail—let them beware!"

The party had by this time reached the foot of the hill. "Right here's the place where I had the satisfaction of trying my science on that are scoundrel, Curdish!" said Bernard, as they rode past where the attack had been made on Edward and Emily.

"Well chosen for their design," returned Webber; "but I trust, Harvey, when you display your science again, you will make a better shot than before."

"I'd jest like to git another chance to display it like," rejoined Bernard.

"Doubtless you will have one ere long," said Webber; "but come, we waste time; let us to the spur."

Accordingly at the word they set forward at a rapid gallop, through the ravine previously mentioned, nor did they loose rein again until they neared the old hut occupied by Hetty Brogan, when turning aside into some bushes they came to a halt, and Webber said:

"Look well to your weapons, comrades; for somehow I have a presentiment we shall have difficulty ere we have done here. The door is closed however, and the hut has the appearance of being deserted; nevertheless we are on an ugly mission, and there is nothing lost by being cautious. It is possible Hetty may not have arisen, though the sun is already over the hill; and it is possible too there may be some of the rascals within, as they doubtless, at times, make this place a rendezvous; but I will soon ascertain;" saying which he dismounted and threw his reins to Bernard.

"Look a here, Bill Webber," returned the latter, "afore you go to work in this ere business, jest listen a minute. Ye see, Bill, you're putty considerable kind o' apt to have every thing jest your own way, but in this ere perticular case I want mine."

"Well, Harvey, what is it?" asked Webber.

"Why to say it right out and out it's jest this:— You're somewhat older than I am, and per'aps aint quite so strong, though you're a putty strong man, that's a fact; but then you've got a family and I haint, and what's more, never expect to have; though I did love a gal Down East, as the saying is, but then she kind o' took to another feller, and so I jest let her go it, and concluded to punish the hull race by never gitting married at all."

"Well, well, Harvey, but what has that to do with this affair?" asked Webber, a little impatiently.

"Why jest this: that you'll stay out here with the horses, and let me and Mark venter in; 'cause per'aps there'll be trouble, and like enough somebody'll git hurt; and if its me, ye see, why I haint no family depending on me, and twont matter much."

"Noble, generous fellow!" exclaimed Webber, warmly, approaching and grasping his hand, while a tear glistened in his eye. "I know you well, Bernard, and I know that you would give your life for a friend at any moment; still I do not think that I have any more claims on your life because it would be freely given, nor that I should stand back and let you run all the risks because you are single. 'Tis true I have a family, who would mourn my loss should I meet with a fatal accident; but then I have no right to sacrifice a friend on this account, neither will I do it."

"O, as to that," replied Bernard, "you aint a going to sacrifice any body in that way, so you needn't be afeard; but one thing I'm jest a going to tell you, and that is, if you don't want to quarrel with me, you'll jest stay here with these ere animals, and let me and Mark go ahead." As Bernard spoke, both himself and Tyrone dismounted.

"I shall add my voice," said the latter, "that you take Bernard's advice."

"Well, comrades," answered Webber, "since you are both determined on this point, why of course I must acquiesce; but do not be too venturesome, and bear in mind I hold the horses here, ready for instant mounting if necessary."

"All right," returned Bernard, drawing his pistols and looking to their priming, while Tyrone did the same. "All right, I say; and now Mark, we'll jest go ahead;" and at the word both started forward.

The hut was only some hundred yards distant, and but little time elapsed ere Bernard was knocking on the door. Not receiving an answer to this, he pressed with considerable force against it, when somewhat to his surprise it quietly swung back on its hinges.

"I guess the bird's flew," Tyrone, said he, in a low voice, as pistol in hand he entered, followed in like manner by his companion.

"One thing is certain," returned Tyrone, as having entered he glanced around the gloomy apartment, "and that is that nobody is here but ourselves."

"True's preaching, Mark," rejoined Bernard; "but I can tell you one thing more, they haint been gone long, and there's been a number on 'em here too. Don't you see them ere cards scattered all about, and that are bottle on the table, and these ere wet spots, where they've spilt their licker; and don't you smell old stinking tobacker smoke too?"

"Right!" answered Tyrone; "these certainly are sure indications of a party having been here quite lately, and perhaps even now are not far off−Who knows —"

His speech was here cut short by the sudden entrance of three figures, whose faces were concealed by black masks.

"Ha! by St. Christopher, we've got you now!" cried the foremost, whose left arm was bandaged, and whom of course the reader will at once recognise as Curdish. "You don't 'scape this ar' perticular time, you — Yankee!" and rushing forward, he fired a pistol directly at the head of Bernard, who, though taken by surprise, and but a moment left for thought, still had sufficient presence of mind to cast his head aside, just at the instant of the discharge, by which means the ball slightly grazed his cheek, carried away a small portion of his ear, and lodged in the wall beyond.

"There's such a thing as being mistaken in this ere world, Mr. Jack Curdish," returned Bernard, cooly, following his example, and sending a ball through the fleshy portion of the wounded arm of his antagonist, near the shoulder, who staggered back with a howl of rage and pain, and gnashed his teeth together in terrible fury.

Instantly recovering himself, and drawing a long knife from his belt, Curdish again sprang forward, with a horrible oath, and aimed a rapid blow at the heart of the other. But here again Bernard's coolness and dexterity saved him; for watching the movement with a keen, sure eye, he sprang suddenly aside—the blow missed its object—and Curdish, who had thrown his whole force into it, fell heavily against him. Quick as thought Bernard again started back, and ere the other had time to regain his balance, with a tremendous blow he drove the breech of the discharged pistol full in his face, destroying his mask, and he fell backward upon the ground−−senseless−−his features besmeared with blood. This, Bernard was on the point of following up with severer measures, when a cry, and a glance at Tyrone, arresting him, he sprang quickly to his relief—fortunately just in time to save his life.

Whether the manner of attack on Bernard and Tyrone was preconcerted, or whether the ruffians were governed by circumstances after their entrance, we do not pretend to say; but certain it is, in either case, there was a grand oversight in their proceedings; for had two attacked Beruard, instead of Tyrone, the result might have been more to their liking. Doubtless, Curdish, thirsting for revenge, and feeling sure of his man, had chosen Bernard for himself—alone—expecting to give him a sudden quietus, while the other two should as easily despatch his companion. Be this as it may, however, no sooner did Curdish rush towards Bernard—who was standing near the centre of the room, and the farthest from the door—than his two followers, Saxton and Riley, turned upon Tyrone. Saxton being the foremost of the two, instantly snapped a pistol at the breast of Tyrone, which fortunately missed fire, when Tyrone, seeing how matters stood, and knowing his life depended upon his greatest exertions, discharged each of his pistols in quick succession, but with no other effect than that of slightly wounding Riley in the head. Perceiving his failure—owing to his haste—and knowing there was not a moment to be lost, as his enemies were close upon him, he took one step backward, and then suddenly bounding into the air, planted both feet against the breast of Saxton with such tremendous force that he fell back upon Riley, who, not being prepared for the shock, was thrown to the ground. Following up this slight advantage, Tyrone instantly drew his knife and made a pass at Saxton's throat, who caught his arm with a mighty grasp, as the blow was in progress, and then closing in with, endeavored to wrench the weapon from him, or get an opportunity to draw his own. Saxton, although a powerful man, and far superior to Tyrone in size and strength, was yet greatly his inferior in supleness and science; and taking advantage of his knowledge of wrestling, Tyrone had no sooner fairly closed in with him, than by a dexterous movement he coiled his legs around the other's, took a sudden lock, and threw him upon his back with tremendous violence— himself falling uppermost. Ere he could make use of this advantage, Saxton seized upon the rifle which was still attached to Tyrone's shoulder—one hand on either side—and by this means drew him down with so close a hug, that his breath was completely suspended, and all power of action. Riley had by this time regained his feet; and on a call from Saxton to release him by killing Tyrone, and somewhat enraged at his own wound and fall, he drew a pistol, cocked, presented it to his head, and his finger was already pulling upon the trigger, when Bernard, who had seen the movement in time to reach him, suddenly hurled him backward, by which means the muzzle was elevated sufficiently, as it went off, to clear the head of Tyrone, and bury the ball in the earth a few feet beyond.

"You wont try that are motion again soon, I guess," remarked Bernard, cooly, as he deliberately drew his other pistol, pointed it at the head of Riley, and glanced steadily along the barrel. "Take that for your pains!" he added,

and with the word came a sharp report. Riley bounded from the earth, with a shriek, and fell dead at his feet—his forehead pierced by a ball.

His presentiment had proved too true.

At this moment came the report of a rifle, and a cry from without. Bernard started in alarm.— Webber was evidently attacked—perhaps killed. No time was to be lost. Unslinging his rifle with the rapidity of thought, he dealt Saxton so powerful a blow with the breech, that his hold instantly relaxed, leaving Tyrone free.

"Up, Mark!" cried Bernard; "I guess there's more work on hand out o' doors;" and without pausing longer he rushed forth, followed by Tyrone, both of whom made all haste possible to where Webber had been left with the horses.— Here, much to their joy, they found Webber, rifle in hand, in company with Edward Merton, who had just arrived and dismounted from his horse, which he still held by the bridle.

"Thank God, friends, you are safe!" exclaimed Webber, joyfully, as they approached, extending a hand to each, while Merton did the same: "I feared you were killed, as I heard the report of several pistols."

"Why we've had a putty considerable rough time on't," said Bernard in reply; "but I guess as how them are chaps have had a rougher— though one on 'em I don't believe knows much about it now, or ever will know again either."

"Have you killed one, Harvey?" asked Webber, quickly.

"Wal I rather guess as how one on 'em 'll be gitting cold afore long," he answered; "at least that's my candid opinion about it; but I thought there was a fuss out here, for I heerd a gun go off, and heerd somebody holler like too, or my ears deceived me."

"Why yes," returned Webber, "there was some trouble here a few minutes since; but thanks to the timely arrival of friend Edward, here, nothing serious has happened on our part, though whether the other side escaped as scatheless is somewhat doubtful."

"Then you were attacked also?" said Tyrone.

"I was," answered Webber. "Scarcely had you entered the hut, and while I was anxiously looking in that direction, anticipating difficulty for you, two men crept stealthily behind and instantaneously seized me, one hold of either arm, which they crossed upon my back. I made a sudden spring forward, but I am not what I once was I find, and they were both strong men and held me firmly. At that moment I saw three ruffians enter the hut, and immediately heard several reports of firearms in quick succession, and believed that all was over with both of you; for taken as you were by surprise, I did not deem it possible for you to escape. I made another attempt to free myself, but in vain; and thinking my own time had now come, I resigned myself to my fate, expecting every moment to be shot or stabbed in the back. But much to my surpise however, instead of such severe measures, I only felt my captors securing my hands with a cord, and hope revived that they were not perhaps seeking my life. Why they used no other violence is yet a mystery. At this moment a horseman dashed suddenly into the bushes, and with a thrill of joy I recognised in the rider the familiar face of friend Merton. At sight of him a panic seemed to seize upon my captors, who instantly let go their hold and fled. Determined not to let them part without a token of remembrance, I unslung my rifle, which they had left untouched, and with a hasty aim fired at the nearest, just as he was leaving my sight by entering some thick shrubbery. What was the result of the shot I know not; but he appeared to stumble forward, and uttered a piercing cry as of pain—which were, I presume, the sounds you heard. I had just time to grasp Edward by the hand, tell him of your supposed fates, and the necessity, if living, of our coming speedidy to your assistance, when, to my astonishment, and I need not add joy, I saw you both issue forth, and awaited your approach. But come, we have already talked too long in a time when decided action is so necessary. Let us reload as speedily as possible, and follow up our so far good fortune."

"Right!" said Bernard and Tyrone in a breath; and all four instantly commenced carrying out Webber's suggestion. We wish the reader to bear in mind here, that though we have been somewhat long in describing the events as they took place—owing to our relating each one separately— the whole time occupied, from the entrance of Curdish, Riley and Saxton, to the meeting of Webber, Bernard and Tyrone, did not exceed three minutes.

But a short time elapsed ere our party were again ready for action; and nothing daunted by what had taken place, on a second suggestion from Webber, they made the bridles of their horses fast to some of the shrubbery, and all four set forward to the old hut, to secure the ruffians— not doubting they were still there. But in this they were mistaken; for on arriving at the place, not a trace of either, with the exception of some red spots of blood,

could be found,—Curdish and Saxton having recovered in their absence and left, bearing the corpse of Riley with them.

"Well," remarked Webber, as he glanced around the late scene of strife, "they have escaped us I perceive; and perhaps it is better that it is so, as we still have other very important matters on our hands, which they might have prevented us from attending to in season."

"To what do you allude?" asked Tyrone.

"Have you forgotten the Jew and those papers— that is if he has any in his possession?"

"Ah! true," rejoined Tyrone:—"But do you think of proceeding upon that business at once?"

"I do," answered Webber, "as soon as may be; for if he is connected with these fellows, as I doubt not he is, he will be likely to receive from them information of what has happened; and perhaps, expecting a like visit from us, will decamp— at least for the time being; and by the way too, the more so, as these fellows doubtless—though I cannot for the life of me imagine where they got it−−had knowledge of our present design; for you see they had their plans all laid to attack us, while Hetty herself, whom we came to seek, is absent."

"It does certainly appear singular," observed Tyrone, thoughtfully, after a short pause; "but still I do not see how they could have been informed; for it was only last evening we talked the matter over, and it has been communicated to no one since."

Webber suddenly started, as though some disagreeable thought had flashed through his mind, and his cheeks grew pale and red, and he hung his head thoughtfully for some time, but made no answer. Perhaps a vague suspicion of his son John— whose disposition he knew too well—troubled him. But whatever it was, as we have said, he returned no answer Bernard was the next to speak.

"I've been a thinking it all over, Mark," said he, "and I rather guess I can 'splain it away without making any witchery on't. Ye see its been tarnal hot weather lately, and all the winders has been hysted 'bout our house, so that if any feller was about as chose to listen, he could hear all that was said easy enough. Now this ere was the case last night, when we's talking it all over, and like as not one of these ere same chaps come along, and played the spy, and got hold of all twas said; and like as not too he's done it all along afore, jest to know like how things was a going on."

"True," rejoined Tyrone, "I did not think of this before; but now it strikes me very forcibly as being correct. What is your opinion on the subject, Webber?"

"It may be so," answered the latter; "I hope it is;" and then turning abruptly to Merton, he continued:—"By the way, Edward, you are the very person I wished to see, to question concerning that stranger whom you met here, and who gave his name as Barton—the particulars of which I got from Emily." At the mention of the name of Emily, there was a brighter glow on the cheeks of Edward, which Webber apparently heeded not as he continued:—"I wish you to describe the personal appearance of this Barton."

Merton did so.

"Do you think Barton is his real name?" asked Webber, as the other concluded his description.

"I have no reason to doubt it," answered Merton.

"Did he tell you his occupation?"

"Not at our first interview, but he has since done so."

"Ah! then you have seen him again?"

"I have. I rode in company with him awhile this morning—he overtaking me shortly after my leaving St. Louis, while the day was yet grey, and parting from me some three miles back, to go and look at some land, which he stated he had lately been purchasing."

"He is then a land speculator?"

"Such he told me was his business."

"'Tis the same then," said Webber. "But what does he know of the Jew, and how did he explain that matter of the ring?"

"O, simply as thus," answered Merton. "He stated that some months since he had purchased a large tract of land, at a very low price, from the fact that the titles to it were considered very doubtful, on account of a supposed prior claim; that afterward, examining the land, he had found it of great value, by reason of its lead mines; that determining, if possible, to find whether there was a prior claim—and, if so, to purchase it, ere his discovery leaked out—he had advertised the same in the papers, and posted bills in different sections of the country—the

result of which had been his receiving a call from the Jew, who held the papers of prior right, and who offered to sell, but on high terms:—that on asking the Jew to produce his documents, he had done so; but to his utter astonishment had found that the deed—though drawn up in proper form—lacked the signatures of two persons necessary to make it valid,—said persons names having once been there, to all appearance, but since faded out, owing, doubtless, to their having been written with a villainous ink, to render the instrument valueless:—that at this discovery the rage and disappointment of the Jew had been great: and he had declared in piteous tones that he was a ruined man—having exhausted all his funds in the purchase of this now worthless paper: that thinking perhaps the Jew had been duped, and taking pity on his grey hairs, he had agreed to pay him a fair price for his papers, notwithstanding, but on condition that he should grant him any favor in his power, at any moment, upon his presenting a curious ring, which he wore on his finger, or on its being presented by any one he might see proper to deputise:—that to this the Jew had sworn most solemnly, by his religion, and by everything he held sacred—and that the first trial of his oath had been made by myself, in the release of Emily. Such was his story."

"And a singular one," added Webber, in reply; "though perhaps a true one."

"Wal now, Bill, I jest don't believe a darned word on't," said Bernard. "If all the stories 'bout that are tarnal old Jew be true, he aint the feller that would mind anything 'bout an oath."

"Unless for his interest to do so," rejoined Webber. "You overlook, Harvey, that it might, for that time, have been more to his interest to let the girl go than to detain her. Doubtless his intentions were, and still are, to recapture her. He is a cunning knave. But whether true or false, it is the best and only explanation we have of the matter at present; and so we will take it for what it is and let it drop—for time wears fast, and we should even now be on the road;" saying which, he turned and led the way from the cottage.

"Do you need my services?" enquired Merton, as the party retraced their steps to their horses.

"No!" answered Webber: "I trust our force is sufficient; and as I presume you were on your way to see Emily, you had better ride on; and doubtless your presence will cheer her, for she seems exceedingly low spirited."

"Ah!" ejaculated Merton, with a flushed countenance; "I will see her then, and quickly."

By this time they had reached the bushes, where the animals were standing, and each selecting his own, all four were presently mounted. As they rode out into the path and separated— Merton to go on to Webber's, and the other three to the river—Webber turned in his saddle, and said:

"Do not mention this little skirmish, Edward, to any of my family, as it would only alarm them needlessly;" and spurring his horse as he spoke, he started off in full gallop, while the others imitated his example.

A good ride of two hours brought the party of Webber to the river, and a few minutes more served to discover the residence of the Jew; for although neither of them had seen it before, the exact location had been clearly pointed out.

Dismounting at a little distance, and fastening their horses, they together proceeded to the old hovel. As they neared the entrance, they were somewhat surprised to see the figure of a man—a little distance below them, near the water's edge— his face turned from them, apparently in a meditative mood. At sight of him all three made a halt, and Bernard and Tyrone laid their hands on their pistols, thinking perhaps it was another of the gang with whom they had been contending. Webber thought differently, however, and bidding them stand where they were, he started cautiously forward to ascertain. At the same time the figure turned his head to the right and left—as though examining the exact location of the banks and stream—by which means Webber caught a side view of his features, and at once recognised him as Barton. Turning to his friends, heinformed them who he was, and all three proceeded at once towards him. Hearing footsteps behind him, Barton started, drew a pistol from a wampum belt around his waist, and suddenly confronted them; when, perceiving the familiar face of Webber, and nothing in the looks of his companions of a hostile nature, he quickly replaced the weapon, and, stepping forward, frankly extended his hand, saying at the same time, in an easy, cordial tone:

"I give you good morning, friend Webber; and you also, gentlemen," politely bowing to the others; "and a beautiful morning it is, truly."

As we have heretofore, on his first introduction to the reader, taken much pains in describing the personal appearance and singular dress of Barton, we shall not do so now, but refer the curious to that; merely stating, by the way, that his look and dress were now almost exactly as then—save perhaps a more bland expression of countenance, and a change from his then strange cap to one of silk velvet, from which hung a silver corded tassel.

After the usual salutations were over, Barton said: "I trust you to excuse me, gentlemen, for drawing an

offensive weapon; but I knew not who were approaching, and this part of the country is not entirely free, as you are aware, from dangerous individuals."

"You may well say as we are aware," returned Webber; "for scarcely two hours since we were contending for our lives with a party of villains."

"Ah!" exclaimed Barton, with a start, his dark eye brightening; "pray, and who were they?"

"I know not," answered Webber, "unless the same gang that kidnapped my ward Emily, who through your interference was rescued again, for which service hold me ever indebted."

"Nay, that was but my duty!" replied Barton, hastily. "But are you sure that any of these persons are the same as were concerned in that affair?" asked he, with interest.

"I could not tell, for their faces were concealed by masks," answered Webber; "though I doubt not two of them are the same—in fact, I have never seen but one myself."

"And that are one was there," said Bernard, "for sartin; for when I knocked him down with the butt of one o' my shooting irons, his tarnal black thing come off, so as I could see his face; and, besides, I knowed his voice."

"His name?" demanded Barton, quickly.

"Jack Curdish!"

"Ha!" ejaculated Barton, mentally, with a start: "So, so, as I feared!" and then turning to Webber, while his features exhibited great severity of expression, he continued: "But how did the fight commence, and how terminate?"

Webber in a few words explained all—telling him of their design of taking Hetty and the Jew prisones, and how it was supposed the party of Curdish got wind of it, and so laid in wait.

Barton mused for a few moments, with a troubled expression, and then said: "And so one was killed, and three others wounded? Truly, you fought well, gentlemen! And so Hetty was away? Well, and the Jew is also away."

"How!" exclaimed Webber; "the Jew gone too?"

"So you will find, when you enter you hovel.— I had but just quitted it when you came hither."

"Then our plan has certainly been divulged," returned Webber, gravely, placing his hand to his brow, while a look of mental anguish swept over his features. "He has got news of our design upon him and fled; and all hope of obtaining the papers, should he have any, is lost."

"To what papers do you allude?" asked Baton.

Webber here informed him of his suspicion in regard to the Jew's seizure of Emily, and why he supposed the latter held proofs of her parentage.

"Ha! then there is a mystery about her birth?" rejoined Barton, enquiringly.

"There is!" answered Webber; and then in a few words he related the most prominent events of her life.

Barton again reflected some time, seriously, and then said abruptly: "I must see her. If I can assist you in this matter I will. For the present adieu!"

"Whither now?" enquired Webber, as he turned to depart; "and why such haste?"

"I must immediately to St. Louis," replied Barton, "as I have business of importance there that will not brook delay. I will see you anon and talk this matter over."

"By the way, Barton," said Webber, as he again turned to go, "you are much about the country, in various sections, and I wish to enquire if you have heard of late any thing of that strange bandit leader, Ronald Bonardi, who created so much excitement here a few years ago?"

At the mention of Bonardi, there was a perceptible start in Barton, a little palor in his cheek, and a slight quiver of some of the muscles around his mouth; but all passed instantly—was noticed by Bernard only—and when he replied, all was again calm.

"I have not," he said, in answer to Webber's question; "but wherefore do you ask?"

"Merely to satisfy a curiosity," replied Webber. "I was relating some anecdotes of him last evening. He was a strange, singular being; but I do not think myself he was so bad as he has been represented. Doubtless you have heard much of him in your travels?"

For a moment Barton looked Webber steadily in the eye, and then replied: "I *have* heard of him; but I have no time to talk of him now: I will, as I said before, see you again. A happy morning to you all, gentlemen;" and turning away, he strode forward a few yards to where his horse was standing concealed amid some thick shrubbery, when hastily mounting, he touched him with his spurs, and was quickly out of sight.

"Barton aint his name!" muttered Bernard, as he watched him disappear.

"Come," said Webber, "if the Jew has gone, we will search his house, at all events;" and retracing their steps up the hill, all three entered the hovel. "A place just fit for such an old villain!" remarked Webber, as he glanced around the dirty apartment. "Ha!" continued he, as he noticed the closet at the farther end, "what have we here?" and passing through the door, he examined every part of it minutely; but, save an old pistol−lock lying on the shelf, with a broken, rusty dagger beside it, he found nothing; and he was just on the point of leaving, when his foot struck against a ring in the floor. Stooping down, he took hold of it, and pulling gently, was surprised to find it raised a trap−door. "Ho, comrades," cried he, "here is a discovery! Ugh, what a stench!" he added, as having thrown open the door, he attempted to peer into the darkness below.

"What means this?" asked Tyrone, as he entered and strove also to look down.

"Some of the old Jew's villainy, I presume," replied Webber; "but we must explore it, at all events, for I see a ladder leading down. But then," he added, "we have no light, and it were useless to go down without one. Ugh! it smells like a charnal house."

"There is a sort of candle on the table that would serve us," returned Tyrone, "if we only had the means of lighting it."

"O, that is easily done," rejoined Webber; and stepping into the larger apartment, he drew one of his pistols, applied some fine paper to the pan, and fired the charge into the ground. The flash ignited the paper, and lighting the candle, he shortly returned to the mouth of the vault. "You had better stay without, by the horses, Bernard," continued he, "as we should not leave our watch too long in a place so every way villainous! Will you descend with me, Tyrone?"

"I will!" replied the latter.

Webber carefully placed his feet upon the ladder, and about half of his body had disappeared, when there issued from below a deep, sepulchral groan. Webber was a brave man, and so was his companion; but there was something awful in that sound, and both turned pale.

"Heavens!" exclaimed the former, after listening a moment, "what was that, Tyrone?" Ere the other could reply, that same hollow sound came up again. "God of Heaven!" cried Webber, "it is some human being—probably one stabbed by the Jew and thrown down here to die! Follow me!" and quickly descending the ladder, he was immediately joined by Tyrone. Holding the light before them, they slowly groped their way along the passage to where the prisoner lay starving to death in his rusty chains.

"Oh, my God, what a sight!" exclaimed Webber, turning pale, as the light gleamed full upon the loathsome spectacle before him, while Tyrone was too deeply affected to speak.

"Food—food!" ejaculated the prisoner, in an unearthly voice, unable to rise for his weakness. "Oh, for God−sake give me food, or kill me! Oh, oh! I am dying for food!"

"Great Heaven, and starving to death in this land of plenty!" said Webber, turning away, and wiping a tear from his eye. "Be quiet, poor man!" resumed he, turning to the prisoner; "be quiet—you shall have food."

"Ha!" cried the other wildly, partly rising and gazing upon Webber; "who speaks in that kind tone?"

"A friend," replied Webber, "come to release you."

"Friend!" screamed the prisoner; "friend—release— yes, yes—I know you,—ha, ha, ha!" and so overpowered was he with joy, at the thought of escape from his dungeon, that he fainted and fell back.

"Let us raise him," said Webber, bending down. "Ho! chains here, and no means to cut them—what is to be done?"

"One of us had better speed instantly to St. Louis," replied Tyrone, "and get tools."

"And food, and a blanket to wrap around him, and a physician also," rejoined Webber, hastily. "Yes, yes; and I will go, for I know where every thing can be found. Stay you here, Tyrone, stay you here, and cheer him when he revives. I will be back presently. My God, what a sight— what misery! Oh, Jew, Jew, your cup of iniquity is full! God forgive you, for I cannot!" saying which, he gave Tyrone the light, darted along the passage, up the ladder, and was soon standing by Bernard. Hurriedly explaining what he had seen, Webber mounted the fleetest horse, and, burying the spurs in his flanks, away bounded the noble animal in the direction of St. Louis, distant some eight or ten miles.

We shall not dwell longer here, for other and more important matters are pressing hard upon us. Suffice, that in a couple of hours Webber returned— his horse dripping water—bringing the necessary articles, and a physician

with him:— that the prisoner was somewhat restored, his chains cut, and, wrapped in a blanket, was placed upon a horse in front of Bernard; and that about noon the whole party—with the exception of the physician, who returned to St. Louis—set out for Webber's, where they arrived a little after nightfall, only to feel more deeply the thrusts of villainy, and pass a sleepless night of activity and anguish.

PART IV.

CHAPTER I.

LOVE—THE INVALID—THE CONVERSATION—THE PRESENTIMENT—THE WARNING—THE DEPARTURE.

Love—mighty love—deep, pure, inward, soul−stirring love! Who in journeying through life has not at sometime felt its rapturous pleasures— its mental torturing pains?—for love has pleasures, and love has pains:—pleasures the most deeply thrilling—pains of the deepest anguish. What a powerful thing is love! How it stirs up all the secret springs of our being—rouses into action energies and passions that we knew not were in us—neutralizing, at the same time, and sometimes almost completely destroying, others that we deemed were all powerful. All potent love! Monarch of the mental realm; to which all—high or low, rich or poor,—are forced to bow! Confined to no grade or clime, it sweeps through the universe, and is felt in the soft airs of Italy—in the frozen regions of Lapland. It stalks through the palaces of the mighty ones of earth— it lingers in the hovel of the peasant and the outcast. It softens the hearts of emperors and kings, and bends them to its will—it elevates, tranquilizes, and makes contentment often in the souls of the lowly born. It abounds in savage, as in civilized life; and the untutored outpourings of the artless Indian of the forest are as sweet to the ear of the savage maiden, as the most refined and flowery phrases of the courtly lover to her who is polished by the arts of civilization. All conquering love! Who can withstand it? It warms into new life the heart of the stoic—it destroys the seeming eternal reason raised fallacies of the great philosopher; and as one by one his self−conquering theories melt away before him, he sighs to own that love is his master, and thus prove himself a frail piece of mortality. All pervading love! Who has not felt its presence?

O, it is sweet to love—to gaze upon some gentle or noble being, and feel all the deep emotions, all the secret sympathies of our nature centered there, as it were a nucleus to our own vitality.— And then to feel that that love is returned; to know, to realize there is a spontaneous unity, a sympathetic yearning of soul for soul; that there is in this cold and selfish world at least one heart in which we may place confidence—one being on whom we can rely, to stand by us, let good or ill betide—one kindred soul that will ever smile when we rejoice, weep when we do mourn−−O, this, this is sweet—ay, sweet indeed! And who hath not at some time of his or her life felt this? and who that hath felt, hath not sighed a rejoicing sigh that there was such a thing as love?

But love without hope—love without a reciprocity of feeling—to love one that you know can never be yours; one that you know loves *another;* as Shakspeare says:

"Ay, there's the rub."

Oh, love without hope is terrible—terrible! To feel your whole life and soul centred in a being— a being every way worthy, but one who is in turn fixed upon another, and sees you not, knows you not, save as a friend—a friend in the cold, worldly meaning of the term, and perhaps not even that, or, what is worse, loves you as a sister or a brother, and, dreaming not of a warmer feeling in your own breast, makes you perchance a repository of confidence, and paints in glowing colors your rival to your face—oh, how this can wring the heart!—how make it heave, and palpitate, and burn, and ache; and the brain too, grow hot, and seeth, and wither, and strain, and reel with this one mighty, terrible truth—sapping at length all the foundations of an otherwise noble intellect—destroying the system, and ending in the cold and silent grave! But few, comparatively speaking, feel this, thank God! but oh, to those few, how terrible the feeling! We may talk of the rack, and the dumnable inventions of torture for the physical man; but oh! what are they when compared with the rack that rends the soul?

But, says the reader, on with the story! Ay, and on with the story say we.

It was a beautiful morning−−the same with which we opened the chapter preceeding—and the sun, as he rose in a reddened halo, and peered gently over the eastern hill, poured his soft mild rays through the doorway and open casements of Webber's cottage, traced out bright spots upon the curtains and floor, and seemed striving to give every thing around, animate and inanimate, a look of gladness to welcome his approach. All nature without wore a cheerful smile; and every little zephyr that passed went loaded with perfume and song; but with these bright things our task is not; ah, no! ours to peer into the depths of that strange thing, the human heart, to decipher the characters on its tablets, and thus trace the cause of outward effects.

Let us now enter the apartment of the invalid, some half hour after the departure of Webber, Bernard and Tyrone. But two persons were there—Emily and Rufus−−Mrs. Webber being employed with the morning labor of the house−wife in the other apartment. Emily was seated by a table—a few feet from the bed on which reclined Rufus—with one soft pearly hand resting upon it, and her now pale, sad, but still sweet face inclined downwards, and her deep blue eyes gazing upon the floor, with that peculiar expression which tells the mind is absent. Sad though she was, and with that touching sadness which goes at once to the heart, yet one in gazing upon her could scarcely wish her otherwise, she looked so exceedingly lovely. She was dressed plain, but neat; while her bright auburn hair was arranged with that negligent grace which gives even to beauty another charm; and as the rays of the sun, occasionally, from the swaying of the curtains, streamed in upon it, and deepened its golden hue, one could easily fancy hers the head of an angel encircled by a golden halo.

On the bed, with his head slightly raised and supported by his hand—with his pale, wan, but still handsome features turned towards Emily, and his full blue eyes fastened tenderly but sadly upon her—lay the gentle Rufus, a prey to a disease— a disease of the mind—that was destined ere long to bear him to that silent home,

"That undiscovered country. From whose bourne no traveler returns." And what was that disease—that strange disease of the mind—that was wearing away one just ripening into the bloom of manhood, with apparently everything before him to make life happy? What secret trouble in one so young could be draining the fountains of life and making the fertile spot a desert? It is time the reader should know, if he or she (as we doubt not) have not already divined. *He was dying of hopeless love!* Ay, and before him sat the being in whom his vitality, as it were, was centered—totally unconscious of his consuming passion. And well was it for her she knew it not; for it would have been another pang—ay, and a terrible one—to a gentle heart already too full of anguish! She could not have returned his passion, for her own heart was set upon another; and to know him daily wasting away—and to know, too, that she was the cause— would have been a grief almost insupportable. This he knew, from what he had seen and heard, and had resolved to carry his secret with him to the grave, which he now felt was not far distant.

Thrown together in childhood, from a child up Rufus had loved Emily—deeply, purely loved her— and his was a soul to love but one, and that one with an intensity of passion more powerful than life itself. His playmate in youth, he had dreamed bright dreams of coming years—had painted beautiful and happy pictures from the fancy wrought scenes of the shaded future; dreams which had proved but dreams—pictures in which there was no reality. His first pang had been on their first separation some years before; but he had been buoyed up and soothed by the charmer Hope. He had thought of her daily, almost hourly, during her absence—had longed for, and yet almost dreaded the meeting with her again. That meeting had at last taken place, and he had seen her, after a long absence, blooming in all the graces of a refined, noble, intellectual woman! He had seen her more polished and beautiful than even an ardent fancy had painted her, and with his own mind more expanded and matured, he had felt his passion more intense; which, like the pent up waters of a spring, he knew must find vent, or, pressed back into its source, the heart, undermine, and finally destroy the clayey casement around it.

But alas for him! too soon he discovered another had at least fixed her attention, if not already won her affections, and a strong presentiment had told him the result. Still the presentiment had not proved a certainty, and the sweet voice of the charmer Hope had occasionally whispered, "All may yet be well."

Thus six months had rolled away, with him al most wearily; for although near the gentle being of his secret love, yet he daily had seen new evidences to prove him farther from her heart than ever; and doubts, and fears, with occasionally a ray of hope, and sleepless nights, and days of anguish, had already done their work on a constitution never at any time the strongest. Thus, we say, six months had rolled away, which brings us to the opening of our story—the night of the storm, and of Emily's capture—in which the reader will remember his introduction and singular conduct. And yet that conduct and result, when we know the motive power—the state of his constitution, and temperament—appears perfectly simple and natural. And so it is, we may add, with every thing in nature—everything around us, that to our limited vision appears mysterious for the time,—no sooner do we learn the cause, than we admit the effect could not have been otherwise, without violating some law of nature.

On the day in question, then, when he had seen Emily ride forth with Edward, a presentiment had come over him of trouble, and sorrow to come; and his steps had been slow, his brow clouded, and his heart heavy; and hence the cause of his wild manner, which had so surprised his father, when it became evident some accident had occurred to prevent their return. Having paused, as the reader will remember, a moment on the hill, he had learned from Tyrone the whole state of the case, and again dashed on with a wildness bordering on insanity.

Instinctively—for reason could scarcely be deemed paramount with him then—he had shaped his course directly for the Mississippi; but ere he could reach it, his quick ear had caught the sound of her sweet voice; and at the same time, by the light of the moon, he had descried both Edward and Emily approaching. Being completely in the shade, they had not observed him; and instantly reining his horse to one side, he had waited in a thicket for them to pass. And then and there, in that lonely place, with his mind torn on the rack of terrible excitement, he had heard soft words from her own sweet lips that went like daggers to his heart, and extinguished the last faint gleam of hope.

For a few minutes after that magical voice had died away in the distance, Rufus had sat his horse more like a statue than a human being. And then and there a terrible feeling had swept over him; a feeling of despair and death—a consciousness of life, but life with heated irons on his brain, and poisoned arrows in his heart—while reason, like a candle consumed to the stick, was flickering in the socket. For a few minutes he had sat thus; and then, with reason and instinct combined, had come a desire to reach home. Mechauically he had urged his high−spirited beast onward, and taking a circuitous route, had come into the road ahead of Edward and Emily, who, in consequence, had never seen him. Thus he reached home, as we have previously shown, long in advance of the others; but the excitement only had supported him; and when the foaming steed paused at the door, and he had announced their safety, his nerves relaxed, reason for the time fled, and he had been borne into the house in a high state of fever, placed upon a bed, from which he was destined never to rise. That there were other causes, besides these we have mentioned, combined to produce his sickness, we do not deny; but that these were the only preventatives to his recovery, we assert. Having thus laid bare the secrets of his heart, and the causes of what might otherwise seem mysterious actions, let us new turn to him again.

For a few minutes Rufus gazed upon Emily Nevance—who still sat as we have described her—with a look of intense sadness; and then with a deep drawn sigh, he said:

"Why do you look so sad, Emily? I fear something has gone wrong with you!"

At the sound of his voice, which was low and musical, Emily started, raised her face—now somewhat flushed—and turning to Rufus, looked at him earnestly a moment, and then replied:

"Sad, Rufus; do I then look sad?"

"Indeed you do, Emily; very, very sad. I noticed it yesterday, after your return from a walk; and I have noticed, too, that you have not smiled since, as you used to do. I fear something troubles you, Emily!"

Emily's face grew a shade paler. "You are right, Rufus," she answered; "something does trouble me—though I did not intend to betray it by my looks."

"Will you not tell me what it is?" asked he, tenderly.

Emily shook her head sadly, and said: "No, I must not reveal it to you, Rufus!"

"True," he returned, while a look of anguish swept ever his pale, thin, but still handsome features: "I should have remembered, ere I asked, that I am not your confident."

"Nor is any one my confident in this matter, Rufus," rejoined Emily, quickly, a little touched at his remark, while the color again tinged her fair features: "I would tell you as soon as another, Rufus!"

"Forgive me, Emily, forgive me!" returned he, sinking back upon the pillow, and placing his hand to his head as though in pain. "I was too hasty, and wronged you. I know you would tell me if it was proper for me to know."

Emily was affected; and approaching the bed, she took one of his thin hands in hers, while a tear glistened in her eye. "Oh, you are so sensitive!" she said; "but do not be troubled so, dear Rufus, or I shall grow more sad myself. You ask me to forgive you. I would gladly do so, had I any thing to forgive; but the fault was all my own. I should not have spoken so hastily, knowing your almost too sensitive nature."

For a moment Rufus made no reply, while Emily stood by him, one of his hands pressed in hers, and the other upon his eyes; and then, with a great effort at composure, in a voice slightly trembling, he enquired:

"Have you seen Edward, of late?"

"But once since that terrible night," answered Emily, casting down her eyes, while an involuntary sigh escape I her, which Rufus noted. "He came once, about a week since, while you were lying in that dangerous state, but made only a short stay, as we were all too much engaged to talk with him."

"Doubtless ere long he will be here again?" said Rufus, enquiringly.

"He mentioned to−day, when he departed," returned Emily, with her eyes still bent downward. "But you are agitated, Rufus," continued she, suddenly looking up, as she felt his hand tremble in hers: "What troubles you

thus, Rufus?"

"It is passed," he answered, after a moment's silence. "I am somewhat subject to nervous agitations, and this was one."

"But what is the cause of these?" asked Emily. "I have often noticed such before at different periods during your illness."

"Nay, Emily," returned he sadly, "I cannot answer you."

"I fear something lies heavy on your mind," rejoined Emily, soothingly. "Oh, that I had the power to alleviate, and restore you to health and cheerfulness!"

Rufus withdrew his hand from his eyes as Emily spoke, and gazed upon her long and earnestly, with an expression which one of Emily's perception, but less occupied than she with painful thoughts, would never have mistaken. "Do not think of me," he said, at length. "You have, it I divine rightly, trouble enough of your own. As to health and cheerfulness, I shall see them no more."

"Oh, do not—do not talk thus!" returned Emily, quickly. "Banish, Rufus, banish all such gloomy thoughts! You are young, and I see no reason why you should not have before you a long life of happiness."

Rufus shook his head sadly. "Ah, you do not see," he answered, "because you cannot see, Emily; but he not deceived. I have a presentiment that speaks to me in a voice you cannot hear, by which I feel certain I shall never recover."

"But why should you think thus, Rufus?— Your physician has pronounced you out of danger, and says that in a few days you will be entirely well again."

"Ah, Emily, I repeat, be not deceived. My physician, doubtless, is a very good and skilful one, but in this he is mistaken, as time will shortly prove. Yes, I feel that I am upon a bed of death. But a little while and I shall pass from among the living—missed and mourned by a few only— and quickly be forgotten."

"Oh no, no—not forgotten, Rufus," exclaimed Emily, vehemently; "not forgotten, while Emily Nevance lives! But come, come," added she, "do not talk of such things; they make me more and more sad!"

"Well, well," rejoined Rufus, gently, "we will talk of them no more then, Emily; for Heaven knows you are sad enough with matters of your own, without being burdened with an additional weight from me! We will strive to be more cheerful, Emily; we will talk of the past. You shall tell me of your life in the city, and how you first became acquainted with the noble Edward Merton."

At the mention of the name of Edward, Rufus perceived a gentle glow suffuse the cheeks of Emily; and a brightening of the eye, with a look of pleasure, told plainly that the task he had assigned her was by no means a hard one. And such was the fact. Oppressed by a weight of gloomy thoughts of impending evil, since her interview with John the day previous, Emily felt glad of anything that would for the time relieve her; and seating herself by the side of Rufus, she immediately complied with his request; and began by telling him her first sensations when she arrived in the great metropolis—spoke of the manners and customs of the citizens—of the different grades of society—and, finally, touched upon Edward— their first interview—gradually launching out upon his noble appearance, manly qualities, and generous nature. As she did so, her very soul appeared to run in her voice, her eyes sparkled, her features became animated, and she seemed for the time completely carried away by a noble enthusiasm. Alas, little did she know that every word she uttered went like pointed steel to the heart of Rufus! Little did she dream that her narration was placing him upon a rack of mental torture! But Rufus knew before the state of her feelings; and he had asked her to speak of the past, and of Edward, merely to relieve her of the gloomy thoughts which he knew must be occupying her mind, to cause her so much sadness. This he did, regardless of the pain it occasioned himself, which he bore with a sort of melancholy or saddened gladness—if the reader will allow us an expression so paradoxical.

Thus passed two hours, when the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Edward himself. Emily started up with an expression of joy, and sprang to the door to meet him, while Rufus turned his head away, for a few moments, ere his entrance, with a look of deep anguish. When Edward did enter, however, all was calm again, and Rufus turned to him with a smile, and friendly greeting. Nor was this forced for appearance sake as one might suppose; for in his heart Rufus cherished for his rival the most friendly feelings— believing him to be a warm hearted, noble fellow— and the cause of his anguish, when Emily spoke of Edward, might be attributed to grief at his own hopeless fate, rather than to envy or jealousy of the other.

After passing the usual salutations of the day, and some little conversation on other matters had occurred,

Merton proceeded to look to the condition of his horse; which done, he returned to the house, and passed the morning in a social way, in company with Emily and Rufus, occasionally joined for a few minutes by Mrs. Webber herself.

After dinner, as the day was so fine, Edward proposed to Emily to take a short ride through the country. "You seem to be somewhat depressed in spirits," he said, "and I think a little healthy exercise in the open air will prove highly beneficial to you."

Emily hesitated some moments, ere making a reply, while a heavy foreboding of coming ill depressed her even more. At length she answered. "I somehow do not think it advisable to go forth to−day; and besides, did I wish to, my Fanny is absent, on an expedition of a different nature, so you percieve I have no animal to ride."

"Well, you shall take mine then," returned Edward, "while I will content myself to walk.— But go you must, most certainly, Emily; for I know it will be for your good—otherwise I would not urge you."

After some farther gentle persuasion, Emily consented, on condition they should not go far, and return ere nightfall.

"Your distance and time shall be mine," answered Merton; and proceeding at once to the stable, he shifted the saddle, and directly led forth his noble beast, which seemed to walk as though already conscious of the lovely burden he was about to bear. Emily in the meantime had put on her riding dress, velvet cap, and stood in the door awaiting his return—with her green veil thrown back from her fair features, which now looked more beautiful than ever. As Merton led forth the graceful animal, Emily marked with an experienced eye his stately step, his full breast, his handsomely curved neck, and, as she did so, a smile of pride lingered around the corners of her mouth, giving an animation to her whole face— pride for the animal of which she was soon to become, as 'twere, a part.

While standing thus, and when Edward had approached within a few paces, she heard the voice of Rufus, and turned back to know what was required.

"Come hither, Emily," he said, in a low tone, as she entered the room, partly raising himself in bed; "come hither; I have a few words to say to you." As Emily approached, she perceived he was a good deal agitated, and once or twice he pressed his hand to his temples as though in pain.

"You seem troubled, Rufus," remarked she, gently. "Are you more ill than usual?"

"I am far from being well," he replied, taking her hand, and gazing upon her with a sad, carnest expression, which she could not account for. "I am far from being well, Emily; but I did not call you back to tell you of my ailings."

"What then, Rufus?" asked she mildly, with a tender look, as he paused; "what then?"

"Perhaps you will laugh at me, Emily, for what I am going to say," replied he solemnly; "yet I beg of you to heed it well!"

"I shall not laugh, Rufus, say on!" rejoined Emily.

"I see by your dress," he continued; "you are going forth for a ride. Do not ride far, and make sure of your return ere the shadows stretch their full length toward the east!"

"Such was my intention, Rufus," returned Emily, surprised at his carnest look and tone; "but why this caution from you?"

"I know not why, Emily," answered he sadly, "but something tells me if we do not meet again ere the sun has sunk to rest, we meet no more in time."

"Why this is strange imagining, Rufus—very strange!" said Emily, quickly and solemnly, her own foreboding recurring to her. "What reason have you for thinking thus, Rufus?"

"I can give no reason, Emily, save that God, who orders all things for the best, sees proper at times, to warn us of approaching danger and dissolution, by what is called a presentiment; which, in my opinion, is but the spirit acting for a short period without the physical taking cognizance thereof—and thus pierces and shows us what is directly impending behind the veil of the future."

"I too have had some strange forebodings of late," said Emily, thoughtfully; "though I scarcely know to what they tend."

"Ah, that accounts for your sadness, then!" rejoined Rufus; "but if you feel any hesitation now, Emily, I beg of you not to go—for I cannot shake off the idea, that if you do, we part for the last time!"

"Oh, do not think and say thus!" exclaimed Emily, with emotion, who in spite of herself felt a feeling of awe creeping over her. "Do not say thus, Rufus! You have long years before you yet."

Rufus shook his head with a wan smile.— "You do not know," he said, "what I know, or you would not say that. I repeat what I have told you before, that from this bed I shall never rise!"

"Are you nearly ready?" enquired the voice of Merton from without.

"I must go, dear Rufus, for I have promised him I would; otherwise I would not;" said Emily, hastily. "But I will not go far, Rufus, and will return ere sunset; this I promise you."

"Well," returned Rufus, sadly, his eyes filling with tears, "God enable you to keep your promise, Emily! but for fear of the worst I bid you farewell!" and he pressed her hand respectfully to his lips. "If we do not meet again on earth," he added, in a trembling voice, "I trust we shall in Heaven! Farewell."

"But you unnerve me, Rufus," said Emily, bursting into tears. "Surely you are making a too solemn affair of this—or are you in reality dying, Rufus?" and the very thought seemed to startle her.

"I do not feel myself to be dying in the literal sense of the term," answered Rufus. "I may live weeks, even months to come; and I may scarcely live days—so uncertain do I look upon the time allotted me."

"Nay, then, Rufus," returned Emily, hastily drying her tears, "do not give way to such gloomy thoughts. I will return again presently; but I see Edward is getting impatient, and I must not keep him longer waiting. There, good bye!" and bending down as she spoke, she pressed a kiss upon his forehead, and turned quickly away.

"Farewell!" uttered he again, in a low, trembling voice. "If we should never meet again, Emily, remember I—I cannot tell you," he said, as she paused near the door—"so farewell!" and he sunk back upon his pillow, and turned his head away; while Emily, her heart beating with strange emotions, quickly joined Edward.

As Emily approached, Edward could not but perceive that she had been weeping; but wisely choosing to make no comment thereon, he assisted her to mount, and merely saying, "To the north, Emily," he led her horse forward in that direction a short distance, and then yielding the guidance wholly to her, walked along by her side.

Their departure had been marked with an eager look, by a tall figure, standing a little distance in the rear of the cottage—on whose features, as they passed from his sight, played a strange, dark smile; and muttering, "Now is my time!" he turned quickly round, and abruptly disappeared.

Who was that figure? and what was the meaning of those singular words?

CHAPTER II.

THE MEDITATION—THE INTERRUPTION—THE CONVERSATION— THE ARBOR OF LOVE—THE DECLARATION— THE STORM—THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE— THE SEARCH.

For some time Edward and Emily pursued their way slowly and in silence, for in the hearts of both were deep and powerful feelings. With Emily herself, circumstances had combined to depress her spirits with a gloominess seldom or never felt before; for each thing that had transpired of late, seemed to rush in upon her now, as if to overwhelm and crush her beneath the gathering weight. A thousand thoughts, black and portentous as the clouds that herald a terrible storm, came flitting like evil spirits through her mind—each bearing its own dark and cheerless aspect— enlivened by no ray of hope, no sunshine of gladness. Even the temporary relief she had found while talking with Rufus of the past and of Edward, had, from her after thoughts, and the contrast, served to produce only a painful reaction; and although the one she loved—the one she had extolled in such glowing language—was now by her side, yet that very fact itself, instead of making her joyful, only added to her grief. And wherefore this?

We have, on a previous occasion, attempted to give the reader an insight into the character of Emily, which, if fully borne in mind, will be sufficient to show why she was thus actuated. It will be remembered we described her as very sensitive, and self−sacrificing, and one incapable of wounding the feelings of another, when it was possible for her to avoid doing so without in the end making matters still worse. It will be remembered, too, we described her feelings in regard to herself, and her doubtful parentage, as being very painful; and also her attachment for Edward—which, on this account, she deemed herself compelled by a sense of duty to break off—as being no less so. These were enough to have made her sad, if not gloomy, even now; for she knew the result of her decision must be very painful both to Edward and herself; but the events which had since transpired, had added their sombre coloring to the already dark picture, until not one bright spot remained. The strange and awful appearance of John—as he stood like a demon before her, overpowered by rage—was still present to her vision; and his dark and terrible words of threatening were still ringing in her ears. What might be the result of that interview— to what act of villainy on his part it might tend—was impossible for her to foresee; but, as we have shown, a heavy foreboding of coming ill had settled on her spirit—a foreboding she had found impossible to shake off. Had he been a stranger who thus accosted her—or any one not directly in the family with whom she had been reared, and to whom, for a thousand little acts of kindness, she felt herself so much indebted— she would have related at once the whole occurrence, that proper precautions might be taken to secure her against violence. But as the case stood, in the present instance, she did not feel herself at liberty to do so—from the fact that, knowing the strong temperaments of both father and son, she foresaw consequences of a disagreeable nature must naturally ensue, and that she, however indirectly, would be the moving cause of a rupture, and perhaps a disunion in the family; and besides, too, she vaguely trusted the whole affair would terminate in simply a threat; that John might have uttered it, while in passion, merely to intimidate her; and that when he should come to himself, he would see his folly and let it pass. This we say she hoped; but in truth she doubted, and feared, and it troubled her much notwithstanding. She longed to make some one her confidant, and take advice regarding the proper course for her to pursue; but she knew of none in whose keeping the secret would be safe—no, not even with Edward himself; for in his earnest regard for her welfare, she knew he would feel himself justified in at once laying the matter before Webber, and even confronting John himself, when probably a quarrel, and a duel, perhaps, would be the result. No, she must keep it locked in her own breast, and bear her painful thoughts in silence. All these things, together with the grief she felt for Rufus, and the recollection of their solemn parting, and his seeming prophetic words, were sufficient, as we have said, to cloud Emily's naturally bright spirit with a gloom she had never known before; and pondering these all over in her mind, as she rode along, she allowed her head to droop, and gazed upon the ground with an abstracted air.

Edward, as he walked along by her side, was also busy with thoughts of his own; and his eyes, too, were bent on the ground, while the expression of his features, if not sad, was at least solemn. And what was there to cause this? We answer, many things.

As the reader is aware, Edward's first interview with Emily had been while a student in the city of New York; and from that moment he had felt that his future happiness or misery rested with her; and, in consequence, he had studiously sought to win her affections. In this, as the reader is also aware, he had succeeded; and twice he had offered her his hand; but although not exactly refused, he had been put off with the plea that both were yet too young, and that she could not think of wedding him until he had asked and obtained the consent of his parents. This with him had been a severe drawback; for although he felt he might succeed in gaining the consent of his mother, yet he knew his father—who was a wealthy merchant in St. Louis, and whose soul was centered on gold—had, for years, in his own mind, destined him to marry, so soon as both parties were of the proper age, a distant relation— an heiress of great wealth. That in this alliance, money was all his father sought or cared for, he believed; and the very thought that he should thus give his hand for gold, was, to one of his proud, noble spirit, repugnant in the extreme; and he had fully determined in his own mind such an event should never take place; and to such an extreme will prejudice of this kind sometimes carry a person of his temperament, that it is a questionable point whether, had Emily herself been the heiress, and he known it previously, he had not on this account refused even her.

Convinced, at length, that though Emily ardently loved him, she on this one point would remain firm in her first decision, he had resolved— after his interview with her on the night of the opening of our story—to lay the whole affair before his father, tell him exactly how matters were in every particular, the hopelessness of his expecting him to form another attachment, and thus endeavor to win his consent. This he had done, or rather had attempted to do; for scarcely had he broached the subject, so that his father understood the drift of it, ere the latter, in a terrible passion, bade him begone, and never speak to him of the like again—telling him he should never marry one poorer than himself with his consent, and that should he dare to marry without his consent, he would both disown and disinherit him.

Although Edward had been in part prepared for this, from knowing his father's worldly motives and hasty temper, yet the result had been to cause him great pain and despondency. But though he might despond, Edward was not one to despair, while there was even the faintest gleam of hope remaining; and he had determined, as a last resource, to see Emily, tell her all, offer her his hand once more, and abide her decision.— With this intent he had called upon her once since that night; but owing to the severe illness of Rufus, no opportunity had presented itself for conversation on the subject, and he had resolved upon to−day for his next meeting—which meeting, as the reader knows, has already taken place. Not being sufficiently in private in the cottage for his purpose Edward, on this account, partly, and partly on account of her gloomy appearance, had been strenuous in urging Emily to ride forth. Occupied in thinking on this subject, and how best to introduce it, for a goodly distance kept Edward silent, while Emily, as we have shown, was, from various causes, silent also.

The longest soliloquy or meditation must come to an end; and both Edward and Emily found themselves suddenly aroused from their reveries by a rather ludicrous circumstance. So intently had their minds been fixed upon the matters just recorded, that no attention whatever had been paid by either to the course of the beast; which having been left entirely free, thought, doubtless, he had a perfect right to choose for himself, and accordingly had quitted the path they supposed themselves pursuing, and was, at this moment, quietly endeavoring to force his way through some dense shrubbery—the limbs of which coming in rather severe contact with his more reasoning companions, and some what startled them.

What a strange, vacillating creature is a human being! How changeable, and what an embodied medley of inconsistencies! No sooner did Edward and Emily look up at this interruption, see the predicament in which they were placed, and fully comprehend the ridiculous appearance of their situation, than, in spite of their gloomy thoughts, their dark forebodings, both were forced into a gay laugh.

"Truly, Emily," said Edward, with a smile, as they turned back to retrace their steps, "this little incident should prove warning sufficient that we have both been too gloomy for a day so beautiful. Look—how bright shines the sun! Listen— how sweet and merrily sing the birds!"

"Right, Edward!" exclaimed Emily, with animation, as she cast her eye over the scene, and felt the poetry in her heart giving a warm glow to her features. "Right, Edward! We have no right to mar so joyful a scene as this by gloomy thoughts! We, human beings, the noblest creatures of Him who created all!—creatures endowed with reason, and knowledge to comprehend the beauty and magnificence of His works! alone, as 'twere, too, with great Nature herself! should *we* not be as happy as these sweet warblers that comprehend nothing, and yet sing for very

joy? Oh," she continued, with a sparkling eye, and a deeper glow on her sweet features, while her very form seemed to expand with the upreachings of a full, a noble soul, "Oh, how these very songsters rebuke me with their silvery tones, for being east down, and seeing nothing but what is black and cheerless, when God has placed me in a world so bright and lovely, and given me too an immortal spirit, to soar when done with these into a brighter and more glorious realm of light, where one sad thought can never come, nor pain, nor aught but joy eternal!"

"Ah, now, now I see my Emily again!" cried Edward, joyfully, whose eyes, bent on hers, were sparkling with enthusiams, and whose features were radiant with delight. "Go on, dear Emily, go on! I could listen to those sweet tones forever!"

"Do you not think, Edward," resumed Emily, "that we make at least one−half of our misery by letting imagination paint dark pictures instead of bright ones?"

"Ay, and in many cases all," answered Merton; "for how often are we prone to imagine dire events that never happen, and in that imagination undergo more real misery than we would even in the reality itself. And even when we are actually suffering, if we look closely into ourselves, we shall find, as a general thing, that that very suffering rests almost entirely in the manner we look upon it. Take as a proof of this, the terrible fate of the ancient martyrs—who, when hooted and reviled at by a barbarous crowd, and dragged in chains to the stake, and there burnt alive, sung psalms and smiled, until the red flames, more mereiful than the inhuman monsters around, released them. Did they not feel the pains of corporeal punishment? They were flesh and blood like ourselves, and just as sensitive to the touch; but still they believed they were dying in a holy cause, and hope taught them to look beyond the present, and, aided by their imagination, they already stood on the very threshold of Heaven and felt happy. Let us then, Emily, if the present seem dark, take a lesson from those martyrs, look forward with bright hope to the future, and thus meet our troubles with a smile!"

"Bright hope to the future," repeated Emily, with a sigh, as again the events of the last few days came crowding upon her; "the future in spite of me looks dark."

"Again gloomy, Emily," returned Merton, with an earnest, tender look; "you who were wont to be so buoyant and cheerful; there is some deep cause for this, Emily, and I would fain know what it is! But," he added hastily, "I have somewhat to tell you first, and on your answer perhaps will depend my right to question you."

A slight paleness overspread the features of Emily, as though she already divined the nature of the communication, her hand grasped the rein tightly, and there was a slight nervous agitation apparent in her features. Recovering herself by a strong effort, she at length articulated calmly, "Go on, Edward!"

"Not here," said Edward. "Some half mile, in this direction, is a beautiful spot, you remember, near a murmuring stream, where we once whiled away two of the sweetest hours of my life. I will tell you there, Emily, for no other place seems so appropriate."

Emily bowed her head in token of assent, and for some time rode on in silence, while Edward kept his place by her side, but was silent also.— About a quarter of a mile further on, they ascended a slight elevation, which commanded a fair prospect of the surrounding country, for a goodly distance to the north and west—a prospect every way delightful, variegated with woods and plains, all clothed in the soft green robes of summer, with here and there some sparkling stream winding along with a laughing murmur, like the first outpourings of a young, free heart. The day was hot and somewhat sultry, yet as their course had been mostly through a deep wood, it had not been particularly oppressive; but as they gazed over the scene described, each thing seemed fairly reeling in the heat, while the sun now shone bright and clear upon them.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Edward, shading his face with his hand, to let his eye rest for a moment upon the landscape.

"Very, very beautiful!" returned Emily, drawing rein, and pausing to gaze upon it.

"Come, Emily," said Edward, turning to her, "do not tarry here—the heat is too excessive!— Yonder I see the spot, which, since I rested there with you, has ever lingered in my memory, and often comes up in my dreams, like a something too bright for reality. I would fain be there again with you, even though for the last time."

There was a tender melancholy in the voice of Edward as he spoke, that touched the heart of his fair hearer, and caused her to turn her head away with a sad expression—but she returned no answer. Again moving onward, a few minutes served to bring them to the place mentioned, which was a delightful one truly, and seemed just fitted for an arbor of love. It was a flat piece of ground, sloping gently to the north, shaded by tall, wide−branching trees, and free from underbrush, through the centre of which glided with a soothing melody, a

clear, sparkling streamlet, by whose side lay the trunk of an old tree, fast crumbling back to that dust from which it sprang— a gentle warning, as 'twere, to those young beings now approaching, that at the longest but a little time could elapse ere a similar fate would be theirs. The ground was smooth, and carpeted with rank grass, interspersed with various kinds of wild flowers, which added a beauty to what must even otherwise have been accounted beautiful.— Occasionally throughout the grove might be seen some gay squirrel, bounding merrily away with a ringing chirup, while handsome plumed birds fluttered and sung in the branches of the trees.— It was not Paradise, and yet Paradise need scarcely have been more lovely.

"Yonder, Emily," said Edward, as they entered the grove, "by that sweet singing streamlet, is the old tree which served us for a seat when here before—let us try it again;" and he assisted Emily to dismount, who immediately advanced towards it with a trembling step and a palpitating heart, for she felt she was about to experience the most trying period of her life. Securing his horse to a neighboring tree, Merton quickly joined her.

"Here," he resumed, in a voice slightly trembling, after pausing a few moments to collect his thoughts, and, if truth must be said, gain courage for the undertaking; "here, Emily, where we are alone—with Nature around and God above—in a spot that is lovely enough to be consecrated to love and all things holy—where the voice of man but seldom intrudes—here, where there are no ears to listen but our own—here have I led you to harken to my tale and decide my fate."

Emily bent down her eyes, her features grew pale, and her hands trembled—but she answered not; and Edward, after gazing upon her a moment in silence, again resumed.

"Two years since, Emily, as you are aware, we met for the first time, in the city of New York. It is almost needless to repeat what I long ere this have told you, and more than once, that then, for the first time, I knew what it was to love. To praise each particular grace or charm that captivated me, would be too much like the idle flattery of the world; suffice, that I saw enough in you to win my affections, and I loved you—loved you purely—as I never more can love another. I fancied too, and not without cause, that my passion was returned; and waiting a suitable time and opportunity, I declared my feelings, and offered you my hand. You did not refuse me, or I should certainly never have troubled you again; but you asked if my parents were aware of this; and on my replying in the negative, said that perchance they would refuse their consent, because you were poor; that we were both too young to fully know our own minds; that in an undertaking like this, the journeying through life as companions, we should be well assured that nothing hereafter would cause us to regret having chosen hastily; that time would be the proper test to prove whether in sincerity we both loved, or whether it was merely a fancy. This was your reply; and although I was then fully satisfied that for one I should never so love another, yet I felt the force of your answer, and acquiesced. That, Emily, was fifteen months ago; and though with you after that, almost daily, until my return to the West, wherein you accompanied me—and very often in your society since—yet never did I directly speak on this subject again, till the evening of your capture, when I again asked you to be mine—again offered you my hand. You did not refuse me then—no, you even told me you loved me; which, although I fully believed before, yet hearing from your own sweet lips, made my heart bound with rapture; but at the same time you stated you were poor, and consequently were not my equal in this; and that you could not consent, unless assured of the consent of my parents.

"'Tis true, Emily, that in many things we should consult and take the advice of those who have reared us from infancy—but it does not follow we should in all, particularly in matters of the heart; and when, too, a person like myself has arrived at the age of discretion, and knows what is the most conducive to his own happiness.

"Think, dear Emily, think even for a moment seriously upon it, and your kind heart will tell you it is wrong—very, very wrong—for those who have passed, or are passing, into the decline of life, and have lost in part, or by a rude contact with a selfish world benumbed, those fine and holy feelings of love, which entwining around the heart of youth, soften and make it green, even as the ivy around the oak adds beauty and gentleness to its appearance; wrong, I say, for those to dictate to the young—who are full of the joys and poetry of the morning of life—where they shall give their hand; and this, too, when mercenary considerations are their ruling motives for so doing; and by this make them unhappy, and destroy all the sweets of existence—forcing them to sigh for the final rest of the cold and silent grave. Think upon it, Emily, and how inconsistent does it appear. What has money to do with the heart? Can it ease one pang? Can it still one pulsation? Can it make us forget to think upon the past—upon those we have loved? Can it make us escape ourselves? Can it procure us a higher seat in Heaven? Can it add to our devotions to an all−seeing God? Can it purchase one really happy moment? No, dear Emily, it

can do none of these. Then wherefore should we make ourselves miserable—wherefore throw away the happiness already in our grasp, for its weight of misery, even though a mine of gold be put in the balance? And then, too, how inconsistent that we should be forced into these measures by those who should seek our happiness?— who, as I said before, are rapidly approaching old age and dissolution, and whom we have a right to suppose, by the regular order of events, will long precede us to the tomb,—how inconsistent that we should be made wretched to please them, who will soon leave us alone, to drink deep of sorrow, and entail it upon our posterity. No, no, dear Emily, this should not be! Parents may advise in such matters, but they have no right, by the laws of either God or man, to usurp authority, and become dictators and tyrants! So soon as they do this, they overstep their proper limits, and sever the tie of consanguinity."

Edward spoke gently, in a calm, earnest, musical tone, with his head turned towards Emily, and his dark hazel eye resting tenderly upon her while she, as he went on, becoming deeply interested, gradually raised her head, and now sat with her soft blue eyes looking with a mournful sweetness into his, with that peculiar expression which can never be mistaken for other than one of love. Edward noticed these changes with a beating heart—for he fancied in them were favorable augeries to his fondest hopes—and with a cheek slightly flushed, and a voice perhaps a little more passionate, he still went on.

"Such, dear Emily, as I have pointed out as most reprehensible in parents, are, I grieve to say, the ruling motives of mine. I would not say aught to wrong those who gave me birth—who watched over me in infancy, and reared me in affluence—no, far be it from me to do this, or willingly wound their feelings; yet as much as I may love and respect them, I must respect myself, nor allow myself to be sold for gold. Nay, interrupt me not—I see you do not understand, so listen!

"My father is wealthy—very wealthy—and might, were he so disposed, do much good, and make many a poor being around him, as well as his own son, happy. But alas and alas, dear Emily, he has made money his God—at whose shrine he sacrifices all those high and noble feelings, which, rightly exercised, almost make a god of man! Without seeking to know my feelings on the subject, he has, in his ambitious dreams, bestowed my hand where my heart is not, upon one whose sufficient merit in his eyes, is, that she can more than balance the scale with him in gold.— You grow pale, Emily—but fear not, sweet one, and listen!

"When I parted with you on that eventful night, I did so with the determination of telling my father all, and gaining, if possible, his consent to our union. To this end I seized upon the first opportunity, when in private, and began my story. But alas, Emily, all hope of that was soon over! He heard me but a few moments, and then in rage spurned me from his presence, and said that did I marry without his consent, he would both disown and disinherit me, and that his consent should never be given to my union with one poorer than himself. I forgot not he was my father, and quitted his sight without reply—never to speak with him on the like again. And now, dear Emily, my fate rests with you. I have sought you to tell you all, and offer you once more my hand. I am sorry, for your sweet sake, I have not wealth to offer—for my own I care not. I am young, and strong, and thank God, I have a good education, which, with proper energy, will enable me to go through the world with ease, if I but have one sweet being to cheer me on! Wealth I do not seek—I may add, do not want. If you are willing to share with me the struggles of life—the good and ill—'tis all I ask to make me happy; and to make you so, dear Emily, I will toil early and late—will be ambitious, and seek to win a name you shall be proud of.

"Ponder well, dear Emily, ere you decide— and let no false notions of the world, what it will think or say, sway you now—for by your answer I shall abide. Remember on the words which you are about to utter hang the destiny of both; and once said, are registered in God's book in Heaven, and beyond recall! You have had time sufficient ere this, to know your own mind, and whether you will be content to be mine, even while dark clouds are lowering around me. If you are poor, remember so am I, and therefore in this shall be your equal; but above all, dear Emily, if you have any hesitation, I charge you think well—think well—ere you pronounce the sentence which shall sever us forever!—for if you reject me now, in this world we shall never, never meet again; and whatever my unhappy fate may be, it shall be yours to bear with you, even to your bed of death, the solemn reflection that it was *once* in your power to have elevated and made me happy! I have done, dear Emily, and tremblingly listen for your reply."

During the latter part of his remarks, Emily's head had sunk upon her breast, her eyes were bent down, while her cheeks paled and flushed alternately. For some time after the mournful cadence of his loved voice had ceased to sound in her ear, she sat mute, and, save now and then a slight tremor, immovable; while Edward, with his eyes

intently fastened upon her, gazed as one who awaits an answer of life or death. At length Emily, in a low voice, without raising her head, articulated:

"Have you considered, Edward, that I am almost a homeless wanderer, who knows nothing of my parentage?"

"I have considered all, dear Emily—everything— for this with me has been no hasty undertaking."

"Then take me, Edward!" cried Emily, impulsively, suddenly looking up, and turning her soft blue eyes, moist with tears, sweetly upon him:— "Take me, dear Edward, I am thine, thine forever!"

"Bless you, bless you, my own, dearest Emily, for those sweet, sweet words!" and bounding forward, Edward caught her in his arms, strained her for a few moments to his heart in silence, and then bending down, impressed upon her soft lips the first rapturous, hely kiss of love. It was a moment of bliss to be felt, but never to be described.

"When I came here, dear Edward," said Emily, at length, gazing up into his face with a look of love, while she still reclined against his breast, "it was to tell you we must part; but you have conquered, and henceforth and forever I am thine."

Edward, his soul too full to vent itself in idle words, again strained her to his heart in silence, while the soft voice of the bright streamlet that colled sweetly along at their feet, sent up a quiet melody that found an echo in the hearts of both.

Seating themselves once more upon the fallen tree, Edward and Emily, fresh in the mutual and holy confidence of two hearts pledged to one destiny, passed two bright hours unheeded, in the interchange of the thoughts and feelings awakened in the breasts of each. We say two bright hours unheeded—for when did love take note of time? Had the two hours been four, to them it had been the same, and would have seemed but as many minutes. At the end of the time mentioned, however, they were aroused to a consciousness of the outer world, by hearing the booming sound of heavy thunder; and on looking up with a start, from a conversation the most happy, they were surprised to find it already growing dark, from the black heavy clouds of an approaching storm having already obscured the rays of the sun. Owing to the density of a wood covering a hill on the opposite side of the streamlet, our lovers were unable to obtain a view of the shower, which was approaching from that direction.

"Ha, that is near!" exclaimed Merton, starting to his feet, as following not long after a bright flash, came the heavy booming of another peal of thunder. "We must make all haste home, Emily, or we shall be caught in the rain. Ha!" cried he again, pointing to the west, "I see the point of an angry cloud just rising over the brow of yon hill. The storm is nearer than I thought. Come, dear Emily, let us haste—let us haste;" and seizing her by the hand as he spoke, both sprang quickly towards the horse, which stood some twenty paces distant, with his bridle−rein made fast to the limb of a tree.

Whether their sudden movements startled him, or whether he was just at this instant stung by some insect, matters not; but scarcely had our lovers advanced to within ten paces of the animal, when he threw himself suddenly back, and pulled with all his force upon the bridle. Merton instantly darted forward, but was too late. The rein broke, and with a roguish shake of the head, and a slight neigh, Sir Harry bounded gaily away.

"How unfortunate!" exclaimed Merton; "just at this moment too when time is so precious. But be not alarmed, Emily, he will not go far, and I will soon overtake him. Stay you here. In five minutes I will be with you; and then we must both ride, and ride hard!"

"Be sure you be not long," returned Emily, in a voice that trembled from a sudden fear she could not account for, while her cheeks grew pale from the same cause; "be sure you be not long, Edward!"

As the latter predicted, the beast did not go far; for from the gallop in which he set off, he shortly slackened to a trot, finally paused altogether, and amused himself by cropping some herbage until his master came up, which, notwithstanding, occupied some minutes. Hastily tying together the broken reins, Edward threw them over Sir Harry's neck, bounded upon the saddle, and rode quickly back to where he had left Emily; but, strange to say, she was nowhere to be seen.

At first astonishment siezed upon Merton that she should absent herself at such a critical time; but astonishment soon gave way to alarm—alarm to horror—when on calling her name loudly several times no answer was returned but the gloomy echo of his own voice. What could it mean— where had she gone, and what terrible fate had befallen her, that she did not return? were questions which he asked himself with a wildness bordering upon insanity, while he rode up and down and through the grove, still calling at the extent of his voice her dearly loved name. Could she have been seized by some wild beast? Edward thought, and shuddered, and felt

his brain reel. He sprang from his horse and examined the ground around where she had stood—but no, there were no marks of blood or violence; besides, had this been the case, he would have heard her screams. What could it mean? Springing upon his horse again, for some three quarters of an hour he rode wildly to and fro, calling upon her sweet name—but, alas! in vain—she answered not.

In the meantime the shower had been steadily approaching, and already now a few large drops, precursors of what was to follow, fell with a rattling sound upon the trees. Night advancing also, had already began to robe objects in her sombre mantle, while the lightning flashed fiercely, and the thunder followed quickly, crash on crash. Merton, forced into the belief that a longer search was useless, and hurried away by the storm and a faint hope that she might, fearing delay while he was absent, have started for home, alone, now buried the rowels in the animal's sides; and although the distance was three good miles, in less than fifteen minutes his horse stood panting at Webber's door. By this time it had become very dark, and the rain was falling in torrents, while the lightning flashed and the thunder roared as incessantly as ever. The party had just returned, and their horses were still standing in front of the cottage, where they had been left until the storm should abate. Webber was standing in the door.

"Has Emily arrived?" cried Edward, breathlessly.

"Good heavens! Edward," exclaimed he, "is she not with you? Speak—speak!"

"Oh God!" ejaculated Merton, wringing his hands in agony, "she is lost—she is lost!"

"Lost!" screamed Webber, rushing forth; "great God! what mean you?" In a few hurried words Merton explained what had chanced, while Bernard, Tyrone and Mrs. Webber, hearing the exclamations, reached the door in time to learn all.

"Mount—mount!" cried Webber, springing upon one of the horses, while Bernard and Tyrone quickly followed his example. "Mount and away, for we *must* find her!" A minute later, all four were riding as if for life—Merton in advance. A groan drew Mrs. Webber's attention to her son. On entering the room she found Rufus had fainted. He had heard enough to know that Emily was lost, and that, as he had predicted, they would never meet again on earth.

The search of the party proved fruitless, and towards morning they returned. It was renewed the next day, and the next, and the next; and yet on the third night they had found no traces— gleaned no tidings of Emily. It was a severe blow to all—to Webber and Merton in particular.

Leaving them to their search, however, in ignorance of her fate, we will turn to the cause of our fair heroine's sudden and mysterious disappearance, and the wherefore she did not return.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTURE—THE VILLAINS—THE RIDE—THE HOVEL−CAVE—THE INTERVIEW—THE THREAT— THE REPENTANT—THE CONSEQUENCES.

Scarcely had Edward departed, and while Emily stood gazing on his retreating form, with a secret fear, the cause of which she was unable to divine, when two figures, their faces concealed by masks, approached her stealthily from behind, threw a bandage over her mouth to prevent her cries for help, raised her in their brawny arms, and, without a word, bore her speedily away—directly past the fallen tree, where she had but a few minutes before in a happy confidence plighted herself to him she loved—across the silvery stream that had the while sung its seeming song of love—up into the dark wood of the hill beyond. Here for a moment they paused to rest, and then, without speaking, again bore her onward some three hundred yards, still deeper into the wood, and farther from him who should have been there to protect her. When they paused again, it was beside two powerful horses, on one of which she was instantly mounted in front of one of her captors, while his companion, springing into the sad dle, led the way, as fast as the ground would permit, in a westerly direction. At this moment Emily heard in the distance the voice of Edward calling upon her name, and a keen pang shot through her soul. Her captors heard it also, but with very different feelings; for the one in advance, turning to his companion, said:

"We's jest in time Saxton, for if we'd a been a little sooner or a little later, we'd a have to put a veto on the tune of that ar' gentleman—and you know that was strictly agin orders."

"Right, Niles, we jest hit the proper moment; but isn't that the feller what frightened you off in the morning, afore you'd got the old gentleman fairly tied?"

"Why that's the chap that rode up, it's true; but I don't like the idea of your callin' it frightened off—for if it hadn't a bin you know, that we wasn't to hurt him, I'd a made a different business on't altogether. As 'twas, I thought I'd run."

"And git shot?"

"Yes, so it turned out it seems—though I only lost two fingers by the operation, and by—! I'll be even for them yit, if I live long enough.— But you didn't do anything to brag on, in lettin them ar' two fellers whip three on ye, and kill one at that!"

The other replied only by uttering a terrible oath, and setting his teeth hard.

"Well," resumed Niles, "it was an ugly business, take it all round, and we got the worst on'tBill was killed—Jack had his face badly battered, and another ball through his arm, which may be 'll do him too—you got a sore head, and I lost two fingers; while Besley, whose legs was a leetle the longest, got off clear. But I say, Sax., jest tie a handkerchief over that ar' gal's eyes, so she can't examine directions, you know that's orders, and then let's ride—for ye see its gittin' dark in these ere woods, and a big shower to back it."

In a moment Emily found her eyes bandaged, and then she could feel the horses urged on to greater speed, while peal on peal, each nearer than the last, came to her ear the thunder of the approaching storm. Poor girl! she felt it was useless to struggle against her destiny, whatever it might be, and commending herself to the care of Him who watches alike over the powerful and defenceless, she resigned herself to her fate. Her captors had again become silent, and on, on they rode for some half hour, as fast as the beasts could carry them. At the end of the time mentioned, they came to a halt by some dwelling, and Emily could hear the low murmur of several other voices in hurried conversation. At length one more loud, and in dictation, struck her ear with a familiar sound, and fairly made her blood run cold. It was the voice of John Webber.

"You will stop here and refresh until this storm has passed, which it will have done in less than two hours, and then you must mount and on again till you reach the point designated, for this side of there it will not do to remain. I must return this night, or I may be suspected. Jack is too badly wounded to be your company. Between ourselves, I fear his day is over. Hetty will go with you, and in her charge you can trust her. You know the route, so that you can follow it in the night, do you not?"

"We do," answered the voice of Niles.

"'Tis well. Thus far your parts have been admirably performed. Complete as well, and you shall have a suitable

reward. I do not ask your services for nothing. But come, come, dismount and enter, for already the rain I see approaching. Feed well your horses. I must this moment away." As the voice concluded, Emily heard the tramping of another horse, fast growing distant, and felt herself seized and borne under some shelter, on which, a few moments after, the rain dashed violently, while she was almost stunned by the oft repeated crashing of the thunder.

The storm raged for upwards of an hour, and then ceased. In the course of two hours, Emily was again mounted, and borne away, while she became aware of the party being increased by an additional member—a woman—which was at all events some consolation, although she could neither speak nor see, owing to the bandages being still kept around her mouth and eyes. On, on the party dashed; now up some steep bluff; now down into some deep dingle; now through a forest and tangled brushwood; now over a barren, sandy, open plain; now through streams whose waters swollen by the late rain rolled on with a sullen murmur—on, on they went, heeding no obstruction, rarely ever speaking to each other; on, on—still on—while hour after hour went by, and yet no pause. At length they halted once more to gain some refreshment, and Emily felt herself removed from the horse she had ridden to another, and again they went on. At last, wearied by excitement and travel, Emily, in spite of her struggles to the contrary, gradually sunk into the arms of Morpheus, and for the time her trials and troubles were forgotten.

As when we fall asleep in some quiet spot with no sounds near, a gentle shake or noise will wake us, so when we sink into slumber amid confusion, silence will produce the same effect—and Emily was awakened by the party again coming to a halt. On opening her eyes—for during the latter part of her ride the bandage around them had fallen off—she found herself in a wild, mountainous region, with nothing cheering around, no habitation and no human beings near—save, in the first instance, a kind of half cave and hovel in the side of a steep mountain, formed of wood, rocks and clay; and, in the last, the rough, ugly visages of her two captors, and the face of Hetty Brogan, whom she recognised with a thrill of joy, from the fact that she was a woman, and that her face was familiar, although she had never seen it but once before, and then under circumstances by no means pleasant; still it was at least the face of a woman, one too she had seen before, and it gave her joy.

"Well, we're here at last, Saxton," said Niles; "though we've had a tolerable tough night on't."

"Ay, we've had all o' that, Niles, and I reckon as how he'll have to pay well for't. See, the sun already shines on yonder hill, and we've traveled all night. Our poor horses, as well as us, are confoundedly tired, although we've changed once on the way. Well, let's in with the gal and be off— that's all o' our part, you know, for Hetty'll have to tend to the rest. About five miles from here's a good place for feedin' and restin', so let's be a movin';" and dismounting while speaking, Saxton assisted Emily to do the same, while Hetty, following his example, threw her bridle rein to Niles, who still remained in the saddle. "Thar', Hetty," continued Saxton, turning to her, and pointing to Emily, "you'll be responsible for the rest; so good bye, old woman;" and springing upon his horse again, he turned away and rode slowly down the hill, followed by Niles, who also led the beast which had borne Hetty hither.

"I'm glad you're gone," said Hetty, gazing after them with no very amiable expression; "for I can al'ays breathe a great deal easier when you don't breathe the same air. Come, lady, you've had a hard ride for one of your tender breeding;" and Hetty turned to Emily with a compassionate look, "and you're pale and troubled, gal; so come, come, let's in; but stop, they shan't keep that ar' thing round your jaws no longer;" and Hetty removed the bandage from Emily's mouth.

"Oh, Hetty, good Hetty," cried Emily, in an entreating tone, as soon as she could speak, "Oh, good Hetty, where am I, and why was I brought hither? Oh, speak, speak, and tell me, good Hetty!"

"Thar', thar', jest stop now, and don't go to calling me good Hetty, 'cause I arn't no such a thing. I haint did nothin' good for more'n sixteen year, so don't call me good! But come, gal, come, let's in;" and taking Emily by the hand, she led the way into the hovel−cave just mentioned, without giving her a word of explanation.

It was a gloomy place—part natural, part artificial— in one of the wildest and most dismal spots to be found on the mountains lining the banks of the Osage. It had evidently but just been constructed or refitted, for the earth within—the only floor it could boast—was soft and fresh, as though lately placed there by the spade. The roof was formed of a large projecting rock, partly embedded in the mountain, and the sides and front of stones, brush and earth thrown compactly together. It could boast a rude door, which was, with the exception of two loop holes, the only place to admit light and air. Within was a rough table, whereon lay a tinder box and candle—one or two

rough benches made of logs—and a rude pen at one end, filled with straw, which was to answer the purpose of a bed. Such was the apartment into which Hetty and Emily now entered—the latter with feelings of horror and disgust.

"Oh, Hetty," exclaimed Emily, as she glanced around, "I beseech you tell me what this means, and why I have been stolen from home and brought hither!"

"'Pon my soul, lady," answered Hetty, "I don't know no more'n you do! We poor womens has to obey orders sometimes without asking questions; and all I knows is, that I've got to tend 'pon ye till he comes."

"Who comes?" cried Emily.

"Why that ar' young man as had you stolen."

"Was it John Webber?" asked Emily, breathlessly.

"Why ye see I arn't to mention names, 'cause its agin orders. You might guess worse, though, I reckon."

"Oh Heaven, 'tis he!" exclaimed Emily, clasping her hands. "I feared, I feared 'twas so!— Base, base man, he designs to work my ruin! Oh God, Father of the innocent and defenceless, I pray thee protect me in this trying hour, and deliver me from the hands of those who would do me wrong!"

"I don't think as how he means to hurt you, lady," said Hetty; "though 'twixt us I think he's a bad man."

"If he did not wish to do me wrong, why did he tear me away from those I love, and bear me beyond the reach of friends?" asked Emily.

"Well, I can't answer ye," replied Hetty; "and besides, I've broke orders in what I've done already— so you musn't ask me no more questions, gal, 'cause I'll have to refuse to speak to ye!"

"Heaven help me!" groaned Emily; and casting herself upon one of the benches, she bowed her face in her hands and wept bitterly.

"I hate to see ye cry, lady," said Hetty, in a softened tone; "I do indeed!" and as she gazed upon Emily, her brown, ugly, weather−beaten features assumed an expression of tender compassion. "Give me your hand, gal! I sometimes tell fortins."

Emily mechanically obeyed, and Hetty, after looking on the palm of it a moment, continued:— "Thar's trouble here, gal, and no mistake. I see the lines is crossed and cut up badly; but thar's one, the line of life, as runs out on't smoothly— so don't be afeard, cause it'll all turn out right in the end, depend on't!"

"But when is he to come?" enquired Emily, not heeding the last remarks of Hetty.

"Thar', I shan't answer ye no more!" returned Hetty, who felt offended that her fortune telling powers had been thus slighted. "I'll not answer ye agin, so don't speak to me!" and true to her word, from that moment Emily could get nothing out of her. Left to herself and her own gloomy reflections—apprehending something terrible to come—with Emily, the day, as might be conjectured, wore wearily away. And what was to happen? What was to be her fate—away from home and friends, and no voice to whisper in her ear a single word of consolation and hope? And John—a man she believed capable of any act however devilish—what was his design upon her? She remembered his dark, mysterious words of threatening, and shuddered. Oh! why had she not made them known, and been saved this terrible result? And Edward, what must be his feelings to find her gone so suddenly, and no trace left whereby he could glean an inkling of her fate? And her guardian too, how must he feel?—and Rufus, whose prophetic words were sounding like a death−knell in her ear? She might in truth never see him again on earth. Alas—alas—poor girl! as one by one such thoughts as these came rushing through her brain, she felt her head throb and ache, and deemed but little more would drive her mad. Thus passed one of the longest days of her life.

Towards night Hetty placed some refreshments on the table, which she had found in a basket; but Emily refused to eat, and early retired to her rude bed, only to pass a horrible night of feverish anxiety, and to dream, whenever she slept, strange fantastic dreams, that awoke her with a shuddering start. The next morning she arose with red, swollen eyes, and a pale, sickly look. She endeavored to eat a little to support nature, for she felt herself growing weak, but her stomach refused food; and faint, and exhausted, she retired again to her pallet of straw. From time to time Hetty glanced at her with an uneasy, anxious look, but still said nothing. As the day wore on, Emily began to feel more and more the horrors of her situation—her brain was pressed to bewilderment. What was to be her fate? This silent suspense was terrible—terrible! It was taking away her reason!—and she felt that any fate, even death itself, would be preferable to this brain−wrought torture. Noon came, but brought no relief; and as the afternoon waned away, Emily felt she was growing mad. At length she started up and listened. She

fancied she heard a distant footfall. A few moments of anxiety confirmed it, and she could hear distinctly the tramp of a horse. Then it paused, and Emily's heart beat fast. Presently she heard a rustling of the bushes. The sound came nearer and nearer.— It was a joyful sound, let what would follow. It was a relief from that dull, death−like weariness of suspense. Nearer and nearer it came, till at length the tall, dark figure of John Webber filled the entrance. Emily sunk back upon her pallet with strange, deep feelings. It was the one she wished, yet dreaded to see. He might relieve her from suspense, only to plunge her into more fearful reality. Without ceremony, without even noticing Hetty, John strode directly towards Emily, and when within a few feet of her paused.— As he caught a full view of her features, there was a slight start of surprise apparent in his own. He could scarcely credit so great a change, in so short a time.

"Well, Emily, and so we meet here!" were the first words he uttered, in a tone somewhat stern.

"Oh, John," said Emily, casting upon him a look of imploring anguish, that would have moved to tears of pity any heart less hard than his:— "Oh, John, how could you be so cruel—to take me, who have been reared in your father's family, taught to look upon you as a brother, and treat you at all times as a friend—how could you take me away from home, and all I love, by the hands of ruffians, and bring me to this wild, uninhabited region? Oh, what have I ever done, that I should receive such treatment at your hands?"

"Refused me!" replied John, contracting his brows.

"Refused you, because I did not, could not love you," returned Emily, "and because I would not perjure myself before God and man, by accepting your hand, and swearing to love and cherish you. But is this to excuse you before high Heaven for an act so base?"

"I seek no excuse for my acts!" answered John, smiling with one of his devilish smiles. "Rail on, Emily—rail on!—but when you have done, please inform me why you think you were brought hither by my commands!" and he turned his dark eye upon Hetty, who trembled and grew pale.

"I myself heard you giving directions, at the place where my captors first paused," replied Emily, noticing his glance and the agitation of Hetty. "Blame her not for this—for if your commands to her were silence, I can answer that you have been strictly obeyed. Since yesterday morning, not three words has she spoken; and to all my entreaties to the contrary has turned a deaf ear."

"'Tis well," said John, "that she has not forgotten her duty. And so it seems you recognised my voice. Well, since you know all, perhaps 'tis better. I will not disguise that it is by my will and acts you are here. I saw you when you departed with that fellow Merton, and I judged by the course you took where you might be found. I knew, too, where were some bold spirits, who would not fail to obey my commands, even were those commands to murder; and I immediately informed them of your whereabouts, and what they must perform for me. Their task has been well executed, for you are here in my power.— What you are here for, I presume you know; but lest you should feign ignorance, I will inform you. You will remember an interview we had a short time since, during which I offered, and you refused my hand. I then swore you should be mine, and you are here to fulfil that oath. The matter you perceive is simple, and easily understood."

"But, John, I told you then I could not love you!"

"And I told you then, Emily, it mattered not. Love—pshaw!—what is it? A mere fancy of a brain disordered, or intoxicated—whichever you like−−by the silly romance of youth, ere the mind has fully settled upon the realities of life. A strange something that afflicts some people in the head, as the nightmare does others in the body. Thank Heaven, I was never troubled with either complaint!"

"Even were I to set love aside, I could not be yours!" rejoined Emily.

"Wherefore?"

"My hand is pledged to another."

"Ha! is it so? Well, then, you must break that pledge."

"But surely, John, there must be some pity in your heart! Oh, do not−−do not drive me to hate one I have ever been taught to look upon as a brother! Oh, I beg of you, release me—return me to my home, and I will bless you! I know you are a child of passion, and one who in moments of excitement would be likely to err; but oh! bring calm reflection to your aid, and retrieve ere too late the wrong you have done me! Do this, John, do this, and you shall never have cause to repent it! I will do all in my power to make you happy; and I solemnly swear to you, from my lips shall never pass an accusation or reproach! I will strictly conceal, as I have concealed your threat, that aught of anything but kind regards ever passed between us. Oh, will you not do this, and make me happy, and

others, and yourself happy also?"

"On one condition, Emily, I will release you."

"Name it!" cried Emily, breathlessly.

"That you will swear to be mine at the altar."

"Oh, you know I cannot do this, John, so wherefore urge me?"

"I know you *must* do this, or worse!" returned John, with a dark look.

"No, no, no!" cried Emily; "you cannot, cannot be so cruel, John!"

"I see you do not *know* me!" said John, with another devilish smile.

"But what motive can induce you to destroy the happiness of a poor, nameless, I might add, homeless girl, who never did you wrong? No, no! you cannot—I will believe you cannot be so cruel!"

"I see you do not know me!" repeated John; "no—nor even know yourself. You say you are a nameless girl—but therein you err. Listen! Six months ago, when you came on from New York, I was struck with your appearance; and thinking much on you, your kindness to me in days gone by, and your affability then, I felt for you what some enthusiastic youth would probably term love; but which I, in a more matter of fact way, simply termed a fancy, or an attachment. Thinking much on this, I finally resolved you should be mine at a no distant day. A resolve with me is but the precursor of a result— as I do not like to break one, for fear of setting myself a bad example. Well, to cut matters short, I saw you a few days since—alone—told you of my intention, and you refused me. That, even that of itself, Emily, had been enough to tempt me to almost any extreme, rather than fail in my design—but to that was shortly added another and more important inducement. You of course remember the conversation in my father's house on the evening of that day. You will remember, too, it was then suggested that the Jew might have in his possession proofs of your parentage. The suggestion seemed to me a good one, as I had other reasons for thinking the same. Well, on that same night—while you were probably sleeping and dreaming of love, or some other foolish thing−−I saw the Jew and obtained those proofs."

"Ah, then he had proofs!" cried Emily, suddenly, a gleam of joy passing over her pale, careworn features.

"Ay, he had proofs," answered John, "which proofs are now in my possession, and I trust are sufficient to establish you an heiress of noble birth."

"O joy—joy!" exclaimed Emily, with a radiant smile upon her countenance. "At least then I am not of mean parentage. O, have you the papers with you?"

"They are here;" and John placed his hand upon his breast.

"O, let me behold them, and learn who I am!"

"On the one condition you shall have the full benefit of them—without complying with that, you shall never see them. It is now in your power to choose, wealth and a name, or poverty and disgrace. If you accept my hand, you shall be rich—refuse, and you shall see of what deeds I am capable! I do not ask your decision now— you shall have a few hours to deliberate. I have business which calls me away; but ere to−morrow's dawn I shall be here again, and then you must decide! Ponder well upon it, girl, and do not force me to extremes! Remember you are here, in my power, and beyond the reach of assistance. If you decide to accept my hand, all shall be well; but if you persist in your obstinacy, then know, girl"−−and his dark eyes fastened upon her gleamed strangely—"then know, girl, there *is* a way to make even one as proud and high−born as you, *glad* to accept the hand even of a man as base and low−born as I. I pray you drive me not to extremes! Mine you *must* be, by fair means or foul!"

"Oh, God!" groaned Emily, burying her face in her hands, while a cold shudder passed over her.

"Remember your decision!" and John turned upon his heel to depart. As he did so, his eye fell upon Hetty, and with a start he advanced rapidly to her, caught her by the wrist, while she trembled and grew white with fear.

"You have heard what you should not!" he said, in a low, hurried tone, his eyes glaring upon her with an awful expression. "My secret is in your possession. Secrets of desperate men are sometimes dangerous. Beware—beware! Breathe but a word, be it never so light, of what you have here seen and heard, or shall see and hear henceforth, and this bright steel (partly drawing a dagger) shall revel in your heart's blood! Remember—remember!" and with this he strode to the door and disappeared.

For some moments Hetty remained in the position he had left her, pale and trembling; and then proceeding to the door herself, she gazed down the hill, and saw him mount his horse and ride away, with feelings that boded him no good. When fully assured he was gone, she glanced cautiously around,—as if to be certain no person was lurking about the premises—and then closing the door, with a trembling step she hurriedly returned to Emily,

whom she found sobbing bitterly.

"Lady," said she, touching her on the arm, casting upon her a wild glance, and speaking in a quick, fearful tone, scarcely above her breath: "Lady, we're in danger, both on us!"

Emily looked up with a start.

"We're in danger, gal," repeated Hetty; "for 'mong all the villains I've ever known, I've never seed the like of him as has just left us!"

"We are indeed in danger!" replied Emily, earnestly, grasping Hetty by the hand. "There is no dark deed of which John Webber, to gain his ends, is incapable."

"I know it, I know it, gal!" returned Hetty, quickly. "I've watched him while he were a talkin' to you; I've heard it all—all he's said, and your sweet replies, that moved me, hard as I am, to tears—and I know his heart's a rock. Lady, for more'n sixteen year I've been mixed with bad men. My husband was a robber himself, and got shot in his business. I've seen men robbed and murdered without crying a bit; but looking on you, somehow's made me a child agin, and made me think on my innocent days—for once, gal, I were as innocent as you be. Oh, lady, believe me, I pities you!"

"Oh then, dear, kind Hetty, assist me to escape!" rejoined Emily, springing from her pallet— where during her interview with John she had remained—and kneeling at the other's feet. "Oh, assist me to escape, and you shall be rewarded— richly rewarded! You will by so doing save me from a fate worse than death itself; and the good God, who sees all things, will reward you for it!"

"My will's good enough, gal, but what can I do? You're a great many miles from home, and you couldn't never reach thar' without being discovered, and then my life wouldn't be worth a button."

"Oh, God! and is it so?" cried Emily, hiding her face in her hands.

"Come, come, lady, don't cry now, don't— cause it makes me feel bad. Rise, gal, rise! It's I that ought to be kneeling to you, that is so good and pure. Rise, gal, and I promise you all as can be done I'll do, though it costs me my life. Thar's only one way to save you, gal, and that may fail."

"Ha! one way!" cried Emily, starting to her feet. "One way!—well, well!—speak, speak!"

"It's dangerous, gal—pre'aps it 'll fail—but it's the only one as I thinks on now."

"Well, well—speak!—what is it?"

"Did ye ever here gal"—and Hetty glanced cautiously around, as if fearful of listeners—"did ye ever hear o' Ronald Bonardi, the great bandit cap'en?"

"I have!" replied Emily, with a shudder.

"He lives in this ere quarter."

"Lives in this quarter!" repeated Emily, in astonishment. "What mean you, Hetty? Surely, Bonardi and his band are not in this country now! You mean he *did* live here?"

"Hush, gal, hush—not so loud!" said Hetty, trembling with fear at the course she was taking. "If we're heerd, it's all up with me. The great cap'en does live here, and it's to him I'll have to go to git you rescued."

"Ha!" exclaimed Emily, with a start. "Hetty, you must be insane! Rescue me by appealing to that terrible man?"

"It's the only way," returned Hetty. "It's your only chance of escape, gal; besides, he aint so terrible towards women; cause I knows him, and knows as how he's made a law too, for I've hearn 'em talk about it, as makes it death for any of his band to touch womens. It was he that— but 'll you swear to keep it secret, and all I've said?"

"Most solemnly!" replied Emily.

"It was he then, gal, that—" the conclusion of the sentence was whispered in Emily's ear.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Emily, pausing thoughtfully. "This is strange—most strange! But why do you think he will interfere in this instance?"

"To punish them as has broke his law."

"Ha! then my captors were of his band?"

"Yes, and him as holds you!"

"How! what mean you?"

"Hist! John Webber."

"Great Heaven!" cried Emily, throwing up her hands, starting back, and gazing upon Hetty in astonishment. "Can this be true! John Webber a bandit?"

"It's true, lady—most true," said Hetty; "though if 'twas known as how I told, it 'nd cost me my life!"

"Fear not, Hetty; you will find your confidence not misplaced; but now how do you intend to proceed?"

"Why's, I said, it's dangerous business," answered Hetty, "and pre'aps 'll cost me my life; but for your sweet sake I'll risk it; and if I die, I'll at least have the intention of one good deed to balance agin my wicked acts. I'll hunt out the cave where the great cap'en lives, for I knows it's somewhere in this ere quarter, and if I can only jest find it, and see him, then all's safe. But pre'aps John 'll come back, and miss me, and then hunt me out and murder me. Pre'aps I'll not be able to find it, and git lost, and git torn to death by wild beasts. Thar's a great deal o' danger about it, lady—but for your sweet sake I'll risk it; and if I don't never come back, and you don't never hear nothin' more o' Hetty Brogan, and you happen to 'scape some other way, you'll sometimes think on her, wont you, lady?"

"Indeed, indeed I will!" cried Emily, throwing her arms around Hetty, and bursting into tears. "Indeed I will, Hetty. God bless you! Whatever your errors may have been, you have a kind heart, and God will forgive you! I cannot but love you, although you have been my jailor; and if we both escape, you shall evermore find a true friend in Emily Nevance!"

"Thar', thar'," said Hetty, wiping her eyes; "don't say no more, don't, 'cause I can't stand so much goodness! I'll go—I'll go—for it'll be sweet to die for ye anyhow. Keep up your sperets, gal, 'cause I'm in a good cause, and think I'll succeed. Thar', good bye!" and Hetty turned away.

"Good bye, and may God protect you!" said Emily, fervently; and as Hetty disappeared, she bent her knees in a prayer of supplication to Him who holds the destinies of the weakest and the most mighty in his hands.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BANDIT AND HIS WIFE—THE MEETING OF THE BANDITTI—THE TRIAL—THE SENTENCE—THE EXECUTION— THE SECRET DESIGN—THE EXTRA SIGNAL.

On the same day of the events immediately preceding, and at the hour of twilight, Ronald Bonardi was seated by the richly carved table in the gorgeous apartment known as the Chieftain's Chamber. His head was uncovered, and his long, black, curling hair, thrown back from his high, broad, pale forehead, in rough disorder, seemed indicative of a mind disturbed and ill at ease. This was signally apparent in his features. His brows were knit together, and there was a combination of the sad and sullen in his eyes, as though by one thing he was grieved, and by another roused to a severe, unshaken determination, the terminus of which would be far from pleasant. There was great severity also exhibited around his mouth, the lips of which were compressed and drawn slightly apart, leaving visible a small portion of his front teeth. He was seated, as we have said, by the table, and his eyes were resting with the expression we have described, upon some two or three letters which were lying open thereon. At a little distance in front, on a sofa, sat his wife, the beautiful Inez, her large dark eyes fastened tenderly upon him, with a look of sorrow, while the smile we have previously described around her mouth, was mournful. Her features were pale, exhibiting tokens of much anxiety, and one would easily be led to fancy she had been weeping. Behind Inez stood the slave Cyntha, gazing also upon the bandit captain, with an expression little less sad than that of her mistress.

For some five minutes Bonardi sat in the same position, during which time not a muscle of his features changed, as though made fast by the spell of some deep revery, while the other two, immoveable as himself, gazed on in silence. At length he started, and with a deep drawn sigh relaxed his rigidity of expression, and his eyes wandered to those of Inez with a softer glance. No sooner did Inez notice the change, than with an airy bound she sprang forward, threw her soft arms around his neck, buried her head upon his shoulder, while her dark curls mingled playfully with his.

"My Inez, my own dear Inez," said Ronald, in a low, tender voice, far sweeter to her ear than the softest notes of music, "my own dear Inez, you at least are true!" As he spoke, he threw one arm around her waist, drew her fondly to him, and, as she turned her eyes towards him, now moist with tears, pressed a kiss of love upon her rosy lips. "Yes, my own dear Inez, you at least are true!"

"True, Ronald," murmured Inez, "ay, true, true, forever, ever true!" and she bowed her head upon his breast and wept. "But why do you say thus, dear Ronald, and why do you look so grieved and angered to−day?" enquired she at length, looking up with a sigh. "Are not all true, dear Ronald?"

"No, dearest," replied he, compressing his lips, "all are not true: I would to Heaven they were! But they at least shall find *me* true to what I have sworn."

"There is trouble then, dear Ronald, and danger perhaps," said Inez, quickly.

"There is trouble, Inez, much trouble; but I apprehend no danger as yet. I have a few treacherous spirits to deal with, and then I trust all will be well. My letters from abroad bring me bad news. Three of my best men, whom I sent forth as spies, are dead, through their own imprudence. One shot in a street fight in Cincinnati; one killed in a duel in New Orleans; and the third, in New York, for shooting a man on a slight provocation, has been tried and executed. This is sad news to receive by one post, for they were all tried men and true. Each had in his possession private papers of great moment, from two of whom they were recovered by their comrades, immediately after their death; but with regard to the third, the one executed in New York, it has not turned out so well—his papers having been seized upon by the authorities. I have some fears how it may terminate; for in those so lost, was a secret plan of extending our band in that quarter; in fact, of establishing a league, the head quarters of which should be here, throughout different sections of the United States. However, the secret correspondence was written in an invisible ink, which will only show when the paper is heated, while in ordinary ink was written something entirely foreign to the subject. I do not think it probable they will warm the papers—if not, all is safe; and even should they do so, I fancy the contents, by reason of the characters introduced, will prevent them from making any thing of them that will lead to our detection: still I would they had them not. In the neighborhood of

Cincinnati we have already found a few bold hearts who are ready and willing to join us. But enough of this, dear Inez, for it is matter that scarcely concerns, and of course cannot interest you."

"Any thing that concerns or interests you, dear Ronald, I always listen to with delight," said Inez, sweetly.

"Ah, what would life be without you, sweet one;" and again Ronald, bending down, pressed his lips to hers. "But, dear Inez, I must no longer here, for I have deep matters on my hands. To−night our band meets on a special purpose, and already I hear them assembling in the Outer Cave. There, there, dear Inez, I must go;" and pressing his lips again to hers, he arose and gathered up the letters on the table. "Ho! Cyntha," continued he, turning to the slave, "bring wine!" and as the latter obeyed, he took the cup from her hand and drained it. "Again!" he added, reaching it forth. Again it was filled, and again he emptied it. "Once more, Cyntha," said he, with a wild light in his eyes; "once more!" The slave obeyed, and the third cup was drained.

"Oh, Ronald, dear Ronald, what means this?" cried Inez, who had been gazing upon him with a look of astonishment. "You are not yourself, dear Ronald! Something terrible is going to take place! You, who seldom taste liquor, have drank three cups, and there is an awful look in your eye. Oh, dear Ronald, tell me, tell me what is about to happen!" and she threw her arms around, as though to detain him.

"Nay," said he, gently disengaging himself, "there are things, dear Inez, of which one like you should know nothing. Question not, but remember you are a bandit's wife!"

"But one who loves him to whom she pledged her hand no less for that," returned Inez, sweetly. "I fear you are about to encounter danger, dear Ronald, and if — and if —"

"Nay, nay," interrupted he, "fear not. I apprehend no danger. But hark! there is the signal for me. I must be detained no longer;" and turning hastily away, without further ceremony, he drew aside the crimson curtains concealing the passage, and entered the Outer Cave, while Inez, with a sad expression, gazed long upon the spot where she had seen him disappear.

As Ronald had said, a special meeting of the band had been called for this evening, and already a large number had assembled when he appeared among them, with an expression on his features but few had ever seen before. With a quick, firm step he mounted the stand, where the lieutenant already was before him.

"Has the roll been called?" demanded he of the latter.

"It has not, captain," answered Piketon. "The time set for the meeting has not yet expired."

"You may as well call it, however, for I see most of our band are here; and should the others arrive in due time, they shall be exempted from disobedience."

As the lieutenant proceeded to obey his command, Bonardi stepped down and closed the door of the Inner Cave. It was a massive stone, some ten inches in thickness, and swung on heavy iron hinges. Many an eye of that reckless band of outlaws, was fastened with an enquiring look upon their leader as he did this, for it was a something done only on rare occasions, and when matters were of a too private nature for the ears of women.

"Give me the roll!" said Bonardi, as the lieutenant concluded the call; and taking it in his hand, his eye ran over it hastily, but with a keen, sure glance. "They are all here," he continued in a low tone to Piketon, "that I expected, with the exception of Saxton, Curdish and Niles. You will proceed, as soon as circumstances will admit, to find and order them under arrest, to meet here; and, mark you! put spies upon them, that they may not escape. I have my doubts of their fidelity; but not a word of this to any one—you understand?"

Piketon bowed.

"Gentlemen," said Bonardi, in a louder tone, addressing the assemblage, "you are here met for a special purpose, as of course you are aware, being notified out of your regular time. For your promptness in responding to the call, I thank you! and by it feel assured that though I may govern *some* traitors, most of my band are true. I perceive surprise on your countenances, by which I know that most of you do not understand me. I shall not detain you with any long explanation, but rather let actions speak. In short, gentlemen, you are here met to witness the trial of a traitor!"

At the last words, a sudden start was visible with most of the party present, while with some few it was accompanied with a slight paleness.— Bonardi noticed all, with a quick, searching glance, and turning to Piketon, added: "Bring up the prisoner."

Raising a trap door at the far end of the platform— which by the way was some fifteen feet in length—Piketon immediately disappeared, while every eye was bent in that direction, with a look of anxious wonder, to learn who was the one suspected of a crime in their eyes so degrading, and which, if followed by conviction, must end in a

manner the most tragical. They were not long kept in suspense, for Piketon shortly reappeared; and low curses, deep imprecations, horrible oaths, and fierce, angry gestures succeeded, as they recognised in his companion, the ugly, quivering, coward'y features, and the stooped, aged, trembling form of David the Jew. As Piketon led him forward in front of the stand, his small black eyes turned with a rapid, sickly glance from one to the other of the party; but he saw nothing, save such dark, stern, angry looks, as made his very heart shrink within him.

"Oh, good shentlemens —"

"Silence, Jew!" interrupted Bonardi, in a voice of thunder. "You are here to speak only when called upon!"

"Oh, good Mistoor Captains —"

"Silence, I say!" cried Bonardi, with an angry gesture. "This insolence in the face of my commands is unbearable! Piketon, place a pistol to his head; and if he speak again ere spoken to, send a bullet through his brain!" Piketon instantly obeyed, and the Jew, knowing the command would be promptly executed to the letter, stood mute and trembling.

"You remember, gentlemen," said Ronald, "that when we met here last, one of our party, Curdish—who I am sorry to say is now absent— insinuated in rather strong terms that the Jew intended to betray us—or to that effect—but at the same time was not willing to swear to it.— You will also recollect that I ordered him under arrest, and told you the matter should be looked to. I questioned him in private, and learned enough to be satisfied that for the present our safety might depend upon having the Jew closely watched. However, as I wished also to give the latter a fair opportunity to forego any wicked design he might have in contemplation, and to talk with him on some other matters, I ordered him under arrest likewise. During my examination of him, I became more than ever convinced that he was meditating treachery; and my last words to him were, `go Jew, but beware, for a sleepless eye will be upon you!' He made no reply, but there was in his countenance a look of savage cunning, which seemed to say, `I shall outwit and betray you.' So I interpreted it; and as soon as he was gone, I called one of my sentinels—a man in whom I had implicit confidence, both as to being trusted, and possessing sufficient cunning to overreach the Jew—related the whole matter, bade him dog his steps, and take whatever measures he might see proper to learn if my suspicious were correct; and, if so, so soon as he could gather proof sufficient, to bring him hither—which latter you perceive, gentlemen, has been done. Now for the proof. Hendrick, you will stand forth, so as to confront the prisoner!"

At the word, a tall, thin faced, intellectual, cunning looking man, with grey eyes, came forward to the stand.

"I suppose you are aware, Hendrick," continued the captain, addressing him, "of the penalty of giving false evidence?"

"I am!" replied Hendrick, calmly.

"Enough! Now let us hear your testimony in regard to David."

"Shall I relate everything that occurred, captain?"

"No, it is unnecessary for us to waste time.— Relate only that which bears directly on his treasonable design."

"Well, then," began Hendrick, "after following the Jew through all his crooks and turns, until he reached his place of abode, on the banks of the Mississippi, which he did about dusk on the third day from his leaving here—having traveled the whole distance on foot—I determined, if possible, to secrete myself within his hovel, where I judged I should be the better able to learn of his private intentions. Fortunately his own imprudence favored me in the first, as his tongue afterwards did in the last. By great adroitness I managed to keep him within sight the whole distance, and remain myself unseen. As I have said, he reached his hovel about dusk of the third day; and the shadows of the coming night favoring me, I was enabled to be close upon him when he entered.

"To my surprise he did not close and bolt his door immediately, and availing myself of this, a moment or two after, I noiselessly followed him across the threshold, and found him engaged with flint and steel in striking a light. The flash from the steel enabled me to perceive a table, which I succeeded in reaching, and concealing myself under, without alarming him. After having lit a candle, he proceeded to bolt his door, and then, as if he felt himself entirely free from danger, let off a volley of curses and all manner of imprecations on the banditti, its captain especially, which he finished by swearing to have revenge on the whole party. After this, for a time, he became more quiet, and proceeding to a kind of closet, regaled himself with food. This done, he seated himself by the table, underneath which I was lying, and for some two hours was silent. At length he began again, by uttering the word revenge, and swearing he would have it on those who had foiled him in a matter concerning some girl; that to get this revenge, he would, on the following day, proceed to St. Louis, betray the band, and secure the

reward offered for our captain's head."

As Hendrick said this, several of the party present, unable longer to smother their wrath, burst into a yell of rage, with cries of, "Death— death! Away with him! Enough proof! Wretch! Villian!"—while knives and pistols flashed in the light of the torches, and some few moved forward as if to seize the Jew, who, ghastly and breathless, was nearly fainting with terror.

"Hold!" exclaimed Bonardi, waiving his hand with dignity. "Justice shall be done, gentlemen, fear not." In an instant that rough sea of passion was calm as a still lake, when Ronald again added, "Go on, Hendrick, but be brief as possible."

"Railing in this manner for awhile," resumed Hendrick, "he finally touched upon his money, some papers in his possession, and how best he might dispose of the latter."

"Yes, papers!" said Bonardi, quickly, interrupting the speaker. "Yes, well, what of the papers?"

"Why, as I did not understand the allusion," answered Hendrick, "I paid but little regard to his remarks; though I remember his muttering something about disposing of them to some one who loved the girl, probably meaning the same one he had alluded to before."

"The same, doubtless, but continue."

"After going on in this manner sometime, he proceeded to the closet, and brought forth a bag and some papers. The bag contained money, as I could tell by hearing him empty it on the table; and for a full hour he amused himself, as nigh as I could judge, in counting and handling it, and some half hour more in examining the papers, when he returned them to the closet. While there, I heard him mutter something about killing some one; then he came for the light, and seemed much agitated. Soon after he went back, the light disappeared, and curiosity prompting me, I crept forth to learn what had become of him. I entered the closet carefully, and, to my surprise, found a trap−door raised, leading down into a vault, from which issued a stench so disagreeable, that I immediately retired, but not until I had heard some words passed with one below, whom the Jew, as I judged, had gone down to murder."

"Indeed!" remarked Ronald, with interest, "here is mystery, truly. I would I had known of this before. Speak, Jew, who had you there?" But the Jew, in his fright and astonishment at hearing all these things, which he believed known only to himself, so correctly narrated, had lost all power of speech, and Ronald nodded to Hendrick to proceed.

"How it terminated below, I do not know," continued the witness; "but just at this moment I was astonished by hearing the approach of a horse, and, following immediately, a knocking on the door, with a demand for admittance, and I crept under the table, wondering what I was to behold next. The Jew shortly appeared, evidently much alarmed, for he enquired in a trembling voice who was there. The answer was in our phrase, `Ele lio.' "

"Ha!" exclaimed Bonardi: "Well?"

"The Jew, out of fear, then opened the door, when a tall figure walked in, and, after some prevar ication, told him (the Jew) that he had papers concerning a young girl, for which he (the stranger) had come expressly. This the Jew stoutly denied, when the stranger took another method, and frightened him into owning the truth. The result was that the Jew brought forward the papers, and gave them to the other, who immediately departed."

"And do you know that stranger?" asked Ronald.

"I do not, for his face was concealed by a mask."

"That he is one of our band, is evident from his reply to the Jew," said Ronald. "See you in any person present a figure corresponding with his?"

Hendrick glanced slowly around upon the assemblage, who were listening with breathless interest, until his eye fell upon John Webber, where it rested for a moment, while the latter grew deadly pale. Hendrick noticed this, and replied:

"I see none, captain, that *better* corresponds than the person of Webber."

"Ha! how is this, sir?" asked Ronald, quickly, fastening his eyes keenly upon John, and marking the change in his countenance. "How is this, sir?"

"I know nothing of it," replied John, firmly, immediately recovering himself.

"The voice tallies well," remarked Hendrick.

"Would you insinuate, sir!" began John, with a flashing eye, and fierce expression.

"Hold!" exclaimed Ronald, interrupting him; "this is no place to quarrel. You say you know nothing of it—so

let it pass. If I find you have deceived me, however,—beware, sir, beware! Hendrick, you will proceed with your evidence concerning the Jew."

"After the stranger had departed," again resumed Hendrick, "the Jew seemed beside himself with rage; and instead of waiting for the morrow, as was his first intention, he swore he would instantly set off for St. Louis, betray the band, and at once seek security from the law. With this intent he started, and with a very different one I followed. When he had reached some half way, I touched him on the shoulder, and told him I arrested him in the name of Ronald Bonardi. He trembled violently, and offered me his bag of gold to let him go. I answered I was not to be bought, and brought him hither. Thus ends my testimony, which, according to our laws, I affirm before God and man is true, and stake my life upon the oath!"

"You have done well, Hendrick," said Ronald, as the other concluded, "and deserve great praise, with a suitable reward."

"The praise is sufficient, noble captain," returned Hendrick. "The reward I wish not. I have done but my duty."

"Nevertheless you shall not be forgotten. Promptly to reward, as promptly to punish, shall henceforth be the justice motto of Ronald Bonardi. Gentlemen, you have heard the testimony against the Jew. If there is one or more among you, who doubts the evidence just given, or who believes the Jew guiltless of the crime with which he is charged—namely, intentional perjury, and treason against us as a body—he or they will now come forward and make known the same."

Silence reigned throughout the cave. Not a man moved.

"Jew," continued Bonardi, solemnly, with compressed lips, "before this body, in the hearts of each, you stand condemned as a traitor. When you joined us, you took a solemn oath, which in your heart you have broken, as you would have broken by your deeds, had not our interference prevented. Your minutes are numbered. You are an old, grey−headed, grey−bearded man, and your soul is black with crimes, which, if not repented of now, will go with you to another world. You present a spectacle at once pitiable and revolting; and base as you are, I cannot but regret that it falls to my lot to fulfil the letter of our law, and make you an example to others; but I have sworn to do my duty faithfully; and were you my own brother, my bosom friend, I would keep my oath. Although appearances were much against you when here before, I deemed it my duty to warn you, so that if in reality you meditated treachery, you might have a chance to repent of your base design in season. You heeded not my warning, and now with you rest the consequences. Your sentence is death! Have you any request to make ere the fatal moment? If so, speak! we listen."

"Oh, oh! mine Gott! mercys—mercys!" gasped the Jew, sinking upon his knees.

"Coward!" cried Ronald, fiercely; "base, paltry coward!—you were unworthyto belong to us! I'll hear no more! Piketon, you will put a bandage around his eyes, and lead him forward. If he attempt to cry out, gag him!" But this latter injunction was unnecessary, for the Jew in his fright had actually fainted.

Piketon instantly passed a kerchief around the Jew's eyes; and then, placing his hands under his armpits, raised and drew him forward, with his feet trailing on the ground, to within a short distance of where paced the sentinel, while every eye followed the movement, and every heart felt a pressure of awe upon it. As long as they had been a band, an execution they had never yet witnessed.

"It only remains now," said Bonardi, in a deep, solemn voice, "for me to read the law, that I may not be accused hereafter of acting illegally;" and taking from a desk before him a roll of parchment, he opened it and read as follows:

"*Sec. II, Art. X*. If any member shall at any time be accused of treasonable intentions, he shall be duly tried before the captain, and such members as the latter may deem advisable to be present, and if found guilty of betraying the band, or even of an attempt to betray the same, he shall suffer death within an hour from his conviction, as provided under the Black Law, in Article XV of Section I." Taking up another roll he continued:

"*Black Law, Sec. I, Art. XV*. Any member sentenced to punishment under this law, shall be shot in the head, unto death, by the hand of the chief, and his body be cast forth in the open air, to be devoured by wild beasts."

"And now, gentlemen," continued Bonardi, laying down the roll, "am I not fully justified in all that I have done, and am about to do, in executing yonder traitor?"

"You are, you are!" cried a dozen voices.

"Enough!"

Drawing a pistol from his belt, Ronald descended from the stand, and with a firm step, and compressed lips,

walked forward to the Jew, while each member rose to his feet, to look on with an expression peculiar to himself. And strange and varying were those expressions. Some frowned heavily; some smiled darkly; some looked pale, and shut their teeth hard; and some gazed on with seeming indifference. Bonardi himself seemed composed and calm, with a look of unshaken determination; but there was, notwithstanding, a slight paleness in his features, an unusual compression of the lips, as though requiring an effort to keep them firm. As he approached the Jew, who was lying on the ground, the latter appeared suddenly to recover his senses, and with one hand raised himself into a sitting posture, while with the other he removed from his eyes the bandage, and with a horror stricken look glared round upon the assembly.

" 'Tis well, Jew!" said Ronald, as he paused by his side, while the cave was as silent as the chamber of death. "You would see once more the faces of those you would have betrayed. 'Tis well, Jew, 'tis well! Look well on each, and bear the impression with you to eternity, for on earth you will behold them no more. Brothers of you they were—who would have risked life for you, many of them, if necessary—but they are your brothers no more."

The Jew turned his old eyes upon the speaker, with a strange, bewildered expression. For a moment Ronald ceased, and then said solemnly:

"Justice waits. Your time, Jew, has come.— Farewell!" Raising his pistol as he spoke, with the last words came a sharp report—a shudder passed through the assembly—and the Jew, with a ghastly contortion of visage, fell back without a groan.

His soul was with his God.

"So die all traitors!" spoke the voice of Ronald Bonardi, after a moment's pause, in a tone so deep and solemn almost sepulchral, that it thrilled the bosom of every one present. "Comrades," and he moved his eyes slowly over each, in a most impressive manner, "comrades, whose turn among you next? 'Tis the first blood upon my hands;" and he held them forth, and gazed sadly upon them; "whose blood is destined to cover the foul stain? Be warned, be warned in time!" and turning away, he slowly retraced his steps to the farther end of the cave, and again mounted the stand. "Bear the corpse without the cave until you depart," he continued, "when some of you will take it in a boat to the Osage, row a short distance up the stream, and cast it upon the bank, far above high water mark. So ends the career of the Jew."

As he spoke, four men laid hold of the body and bore it up the ladder. In a moment they returned, when Bonardi resumed:

"Here," he said, taking up a well filled bag, "is the money which belonged to the deceased.— This will be divided among you, when our other business for the evening is closed. Piketon will make the division. By our law, I am entitled to one−tenth. Hendrick, besides your share, you will accept mine."

"But, captain—"

"Nay, Hendrick, no remark: I would have it so. And now, comrades, I have something important to communicate. Listen! You will remember that for some time past we have held in contemplation an attack on a rich planter living in Tennessee. To speak candidly my own mind, I must say the design never suited me; and in its place I have one to offer, which I trust will meet your approbation. Some two or three days since, I received a letter from one of my secret agents in New Orleans, which informs me that of late there has been a great run on the banks there for specie; and that to supply the demand, they will be forced to borrow, for a time, from neighboring cities; and that he believed an order had already been sent to St. Louis for a large sum, which doubtless would shortly pass down on one of the steamers, and which, should we be fortunate enough to capture, would in all probability make our fortunes. As soon as I had read this, I set to work to learn the truth of it; and as I am well known among the merchants and men of wealth in St. Louis, as a speculator in land, under a different cognomen, I was not long in finding it fully corroborated. By dint of perseverence, I have been enabled to learn that a boat, which leaves within a few days, will carry this money; of the amount I am yet ignorant, though without question the sum will be large. My plan is this: I will ascertain to a certainty the day of her leaving, and also the hour. I will learn, too, the speed of the boat, and calculate the distance, so that we may find a good point to station ourselves, where the current hugs the western shore, and where she will pass about dark. In the meantime I will procure several skiffs, and have them floated down to the rendezvous. These must be manned, and lie concealed under cover of the bank until the given signal. As the steamer heaves in sight, some two or three of our party must hail her from the bank, when she, under the impression that they wish to take passage, will lay to and send out a boat. As the latter touches the shore, the oarsman must be seized, gagged and bound, quickly

and quietly, while some three of our party will instantly leap into the boat and row back. Instead of approaching the larger boat direct, they will cross her bows, and when on the other side, will seemingly get into a fight, and discharge several pistols. This of course will attract the attention of all on board the steamer, and be the signal for the concealed boats to shoot out and approach her on the larboard side—her head being up stream—which must be done with lightning speed, but without noise. These, however, will be commanded by Piketon and myself. The moment we come along side, some of the boldest and most agile of our party will follow me in leaping on board, where will be found three of our band, who have come down from St. Louis, ready to show us where the money is stowed, and assist us in getting it into our boats. The money will be found in small casks, which can be easily handled, and, to succeed, must be handled expeditiously. It is not probable that we can remove it all; but in the confusion that will ensue, doubtless enough to enrich us. If we are pressed hard, we must discharge some of our pistols, not with the intention of wounding, but merely to frighten, and thicken the confusion, while at the same time we will add the old cry, which I trust is not yet forgotten: `Yield to the attack of Ronald Bonardi! ' We must keep a plenty of undischarged pistols by us, however, to be used only in cases of extreme necessity, and then not to take life if it can be avoided. As soon as we have accomplished our design, I will give the signal by a shrill whistle, when each man must spring for his boat, and row as for life to the shore. We will then knock out the heads of the casks, empty the money into bags, throw them across our saddles, (for our horses must be in waiting, close at hand) mount and away, in various directions, to rendezvous here as soon as possible. Such is my plan."

As he concluded, the cave echoed with three tremendous cheers, and "Long live Ronald Bonardi," when he immediately responded:

"I am pleased, gentlemen, to know that my project finds with you so much favor; but I will not disguise from you, what I cannot from myself, that my plan may fail; and at the best, will be attended with a great deal of danger, perhaps loss of life; and, furthermore, that it will in all probability rouse up the country against us, as was done heretofore. In the latter case, each must make his way out of it as quietly as possible, and remain until the storm has blown over.— And now, a word or two more, and I have done. You will each and all of you hold yourselves in readiness for a moment's warning, with horses well fed and rested for a long journey. When you hear the signal of three blasts on a bugle, be it night or day, you will mount and ride to the river. The rendezvous is the hut of the traitor Jew, where you will learn more. And now, so soon as Piketon has made a division of the money, you will quietly disperse to your several homes, and hold yourselves, as I said before, prepared for any event. For your kind attention, I thank you! Adieu."

Descending from the stand, Bonardi opened the stone door and entered the Chieftain's Chamber, with a clouded brow and heavy heart; for he felt there was blood upon his hands. An hour later, he was seated by the table, on which rested his arms, with his head bowed upon them, while Inez, standing by his side, was playing upon her guitar, and singing a tender strain. Suddenly he raised his head.

"Ha!" said he; "there is the signal for me again! What can it mean at this hour?" and rising as he spoke, he entered the larger cave, where he found the sentinel alone, the remainder of the party having departed.

"A woman awaits you in a boat without, captain," said the sentinel, bowing respectfully.— "She could not give the pass and countersign, and so I could not admit her."

"A woman!" exclaimed Ronald, in astonishment. "To see me—a woman!—what wants she here?" and with a quick step, he moved forward and mounted the ladder. In a few minutes he returned, and seemed much agitated.

"Inez," said he, entering the Inner Cave, "it is necessary for me to be absent now. Ere morning I will return;" and without waiting a reply, he seized upon a brace of pistols lying on the ta ble and withdrew. "Did Piketon leave word where he should rest to−night?" asked he of the sentinel, as he again mounted the ladder.

"Ay, captain; he mentioned the Hollow."

" 'Tis well!" and Ronald disappeared.

PART V.

CHAPTER I.

THE CAPTIVE—THE TRAITOR—THE AWFUL DESIGN— THE ARREST—THE SUSPICION AND CONFIRMATION— THE MURDER AND ESCAPE—THE MESSENGER— THE RESULT.

Never had Emily experienced such loneliness, such utter desolation, as she did after the disappearance of Hetty, as recorded in a previous chapter. On her she fancied now hung her destiny, life or death. Would she succeed? The very thought of a failure made her shudder with horror. She had felt lonely and desolate while Hetty was with her, but now she felt doubly so. Then at least she was in the presence of a human being—one of her own sex—but now she was alone,—alone, too, in a wild, mountainous region; not only far from friends, but, for aught she knew to the contrary, far from civilization, with a dark and awful cloud resting upon her mental sight, and weighing down her spirits. She threw herself upon her pallet and tried to be composed; but she only rolled to and fro with the more feverish anxiety. She tried to hope for the best, and in her imagination draw bright pictures of the future; but dark, shadowy forms, like evil phantoms, would come between, and the sunny spots go out in gloom. Thus hour on hour went by— each increasing, rather than diminishing, her soul−torturing anxiety—while night crept gradually on, to add its horrors, until Emily felt herself drawn to the very verge of despair. At last, some two hours later, she heard steps approaching; and then she could almost hear too the beatings of her own heart, so wildly it palpitated. Were they steps of friend or foe? A few moments served to decide; for the voice of him she feared−too soon heard—was of itself sufficient to announce the worst. John Webber had entered.

"How is this, Hetty?" said he, pausing in the doorway: "No light!—what means it?"

"Hetty is not here," replied Emily, in a faltering voice; "but I am anxiously looking for her return."

"Ha! has she been *long* gone?" enquired John, as a suspicion of the cause of her absence flitted through his mind.

"She has been gone some minutes," answered Emily, without adding the whole truth, that those minutes had already run into hours; but she knew, for Hetty's safety and her own, it was necessary to dissemble somewhat—though she would not have been guilty of a direct falsehood, even to have prevented the worst.

"I will teach her better when she returns," said John, angrily, proceeding to the table and striking a light. "'Tis as well though, perhaps," he added, a few moments after, "for our conversation will not require the ears of a third. You remember, I presume, the conditions imposed, when last I quitted you?"

"Too well I remember them," answered Emily, in a trembling voice.

"Well, I have come for my answer!"

"But give me more time, John, to deliberate!"

"Time! good heavens! how much time do you women require to answer a simple question?"

"But I have been so distracted since you left, that my mind could settle steadily upon nothing."

"Settle it now, then! You have only to decide whether you will be mine by your own free will or no. Mine I have said you *must* be!—but of course I prefer your free consent. Upon this point, Emily, I am determined; and to show you something of the strength of my determination, I now swear to you, that I would sacrifice every living thing that should stand in my way—ay, even my soul's salvation—rather than be foiled in my purpose. Emily, I am a desperate man, and I beg of you, for your own sake, force me not to extremes!"

"I cannot answer you now, John," said Emily, anxious to prolong the time as much as possible, in the hope of receiving assistance: "Give me till to−morrow."

"And to−morrow you will say, give me till to−morrow," returned John, "and so forth, and so on, until you by some means effect your escape. No, by heavens, girl, this *shall* not be!—your answer *must* be now!" and John grasped her by the arm, and gazed upon her with a wicked look.

"Let go your hold, sir!" cried Emily, her indignation fully aroused at this; and springing from a sitting posture to her feet, she threw off his grasp. "Shame on you!" continued she, with a flashing eye; "shame on you, for a villain and coward! Brave deeds these, truly, for a man of your strength, to attack an unprotected female! Go, get you hence, and repent of your acts! Go, go, for shame on you, go!"

"When you have done," hissed John, through his clenched teeth, his face livid with passion, "when you have

done, girl, let me know your decision!"

"You will have it, then!" replied Emily, firmly, fixing her eye unquailingly upon his. "Then hear me! Ere I would wed you, I would suffer my limbs to be torn from me one by one! Rather than embrace you, I would go into some old charnel house, and clasp to my bosom the loathsome tenant of a half century! Sooner than endure your hateful presence, I would seek the wildest spot on these mountains, and make my bed with serpents! You are answered."

Astonishment and rage for a time kept John silent; and after a moment's pause, Emily went on.

"I have entreated you in vain to restore me to my friends and home. You have mocked me by your replies of cowardly threats. You have sought to intimidate me; but know, sir, I have a spirit, when roused, as unbending as your own! Now hear me! Let me go in peace, and the past shall be forgotten, and with this adventure your name shall never be coupled. Place but your hand upon me, with foul intent, and if I escape, I will expose, and bring you to that justice you deserve for your crimes!"

"Brave girl!" cried John, bursting into a wild, fiendish laugh, that in spite of her, made Emily's blood run cold, and her heart seem to shrink within her. "You talk well, girl, well; but do you know"—and again that awful smile lingered upon his features—"do you know, my pretty one, that I think you will never escape to put your threat in execution. You think, then, that my threats were made to intimidate you? Ha, ha, ha! *I said you did not know me!* Let me see: You said ere you would wed me, you would be torn limb from limb. Ha, ha, ha!—that was well said—very well. Again: Rather than embrace me, you would clasp to your innocent bosom some mouldy tenant of a charnel house—ha, ha, ha! Once more: Sooner than endure my hateful presence, you would make a bed among serpents. So, so—ha, ha!— all very good in theory; but I presume you were somewhat excited when you spoke, and did not think of putting them in practice. And then your spirit, when roused, is as unbending as my own. Ha, ha, ha! Well, well, we shall see. If it prove so, girl, there will be rare sport—rare sport. But why do you tremble so? Why do you look so pale? Is this the unbending spirit of the one who boasts so boldly about dying? I trust you will not falter now. I would not have you for the world. Why this is not even a commeneement. Now, girl, you must know that I care as little about life as yourself. Why should I seek to prolong existence?—it will be death at last; and it is, besides, sweet to die to get revenge; and it will be doubly sweet to die in your sweet company, girl!"

"Great God!" gasped Emily, sinking with fright upon a bench, as, having listened to the words of John, she marked the awful light in his dark, snake−like eyes. "What fearful utterances are these?"

"I was simply talking about dying," answered John; "and thinking how pleasantly we could die together. I regret, on your account, there is no charnel house near, so that you could have the pleasure of hugging a corpse; but as to the snakes, I think you can be well accommodated in these mountains!"

"For God−sake speak the worst! what do you mean?" shrieked Emily, who felt the expressions of John were dethroning her reason.

"Why simply this," replied John. "You have decided to put me to extremes. Extremes with me go far—farther, perhaps, than with many others—for they are bounded only by death. I had you stolen and brought hither, it is true; but no violence was offered you. All I required of you, to regain your liberty, was merely a pledge, to the effect that you would be mine at the altar. This I am sure was honorable, though you saw proper to think otherwise. Well, I waited patiently for your answer, and at length received it in the negative. In that answer you decided the fates of both. It now remains for me to fulfil my oath; which was, you remember, that you should be mine; whereby I implicitly meant you should be mine unto death. Were I to dishonor and leave you here, you would escape and inform on me. Were I to murder you, doubtless it would leak out, and I should, sooner or later, have to suffer the consequence. Therefore, be it known to you, my dear girl, that as I have resolved upon what the world would term your dishonor and death, I have concluded also to die with you; and as you think a nest of serpents an agreeable place of rest, compared to my hateful presence, why I have concluded to find one, and rest there with you, until death shall rid us of each other, or bind us more strongly together in another state."

Emily gasped for breath, and placed her hands before her eyes, as if to shut out the horrid sight imagination had already conjured up.

"To show you I am in earnest," continued John, "my first act shall be one of justice to a certain rich English gentleman, now probably living in splendor in England. These papers, dearest"—and John drew forth the roll he had received from the Jew—"these papers speak of you expressly, tell who you are, who were your parents, and how you came to be stolen away from England and brought to this country. They are very interesting documents

to peruse, I assure you, and are signed by the gentleman who had the honor of conducting you over here, and leaving you at my father's, some fifteen years ago. They speak well of you, and seem to insinuate your birth is noble. Had you consented to marry me, I should have taken great pleasure in reading them to you; but as matters now stand, I do not like to waste the time; besides, as you and I are not long for this world, it were better not to set our minds too much upon worldly things; therefore you will excuse me for putting such temptations out of the way;" and as he concluded, John deliberately tore the papers into a thousand pieces, and cast the fragments upon the ground.

"Oh God! John, wherefore this torture?" groaned Emily, in an agony of mind almost insupportable. "Why not murder me at once— for death to this is a thousand times preferable!"

"Do you think so? Well, come then and let us seek it!" and approaching, John grasped her by the arm. "Let us forth, girl, ere Hetty's return, into these wild woods; and if we are not devoured by wild beasts ere morning, we will in company, on the morrow, seek out a reptile nest, and there die quietly together. Come, girl, come!" and quick as thought John raised her in his arms. Emily uttered one wild, thrilling scream, and fainted away. "Screams, girl, will avail you nothing here," said John, with another fiendish laugh. As he spoke, he started, and Emily slid from his embrace to the ground, in a state of insensibility. A deep voice sounded in his ear:

"Ho! villain and traitor!" and the next moment a heavy hand laid upon his shoulder, sent him reeling to the farther side of the apartment. "So, sir, then you are caught in the act!"

John looked up in astonishment and rage, and saw before him the powerful and commanding form of Ronald Bonardi. By his side stood the lieutenant, and between himself and the door, five more of the band, all powerful men, all well armed, with pistols and hunting knives in their hands. John ran his dark eye rapidly over the group, and for a moment seemed to waver—but his resolution was quickly taken. His first impulse was to shoot down Bonardi, and trust the rest to chance. A second thought altered his purpose. Resistance now would be followed by instant death—duplicity might save him; and although but a few minutes before he had seemed so willing to die, yet now he felt differently; and had it been necessary, would even have stooped to beg his life, were it only to get revenge. As we have said, John's resolution was quickly taken; and that resolution was to effect by duplicity what he could not by resistance. In a moment all traces of anger had passed from his features, and in a calm voice he said:

"Captain, you have surprised me; and to you, and these gentlemen, I yield myself a prisoner.— Circumstances, I will admit, are against me; but all I ask is a fair trial, and no violence. You have disturbed me in an affair of love; and who of you, gentlemen, has not at sometime had one of his own. I know our laws, captain, and am willing to abide by them. Let this lady bear witness, and I am content. I crave only justice."

"And that, John Webber, you shall have," replied Ronald, sternly. "Justice you shall have— be it liberty or death. On the evidence of this lady, and another, shall rest your fate. Have you any thing further?"

"Only, most noble captain, that I may be treated as an honorable prisoner."

"Be it so. Piketon, you will conduct him, guarded by these men, to the cave, and there await me. Unless he offer resistance, touch him not. Should he do so, shoot him on the spot!"

"Beware on him, beware on him!" cried Hetty, rushing in, who thus far had deemed it the most prudent to remain without.

"Silence, woman!" exclaimed Bonardi, sternly: "But one commands here! Piketon, conduct him hence!"

"Ha! treachery, treachery!" ejaculated John, mentally. "Fool,—fool that I was to trust in woman!" and surrounded by Piketon, and his five followers, he disappeared through the doorway.

"Poor girl! she has fainted," said Ronald, turning to Emily, who still lay upon the ground; and carefully raising her in his arms, he laid her gently upon the rude bed. "Hetty, bring the light hither, and some water, quick!" Hetty instantly obeyed, and as the light gleamed full upon her fair, pale, marble−like features, Ronald started, and his brow became clouded. "Ha!" exclaimed he; "that face—so like! I must think my suspicions correct. Hetty, sprinkle the water on her face. There, there, that is sufficient. See! she revives. How is she called, Hetty?"

"She's called Emily Nevance," answered Hetty; "but I hearn John Webber say as how that warn't her name, and that she were a great lady."

"By heavens! 'tis so. How strange—how strange, that we should meet thus, for the first time! Look to her—look to her!" and Ronald turned away, and walked to and fro the apartment in much agitation.

In the meantime Emily revived, opened her eyes with a shudder, and fastened them upon Hetty, who was

bending over her with a compassionate look. For a moment Emily seemed bewildered; and then, with a scream of joy, she sprang up and clasped Hetty around the neck, crying, "God bless you, Hetty! God bless you! You have saved me, good woman, you have saved me from a fate a thousand times worse than death!" and overcome by her feelings, she sunk back completely exhausted.

"'Taint me that's done it, gal; it's him!" and Hetty pointed to Ronald, who was still pacing to and fro.

"But how, Hetty?" enquired Emily, as soon as she could recover strength to speak. "I remember nothing. Where is John Webber?"

"O, they've took him away—they've got him—"

At this moment came the sharp report of two pistols, followed instantly by two distinct cries of distress, and then, in quick succession, several other sharp reports, and louder cries of a different nature. Emily sprang up and grasped Hetty in terror, while Ronald bounded to the door, and rushed forth down the hill.

"What ho!" he shouted. "Piketon, what ho!" A couple of minutes and he was joined by his lieutenant, who came running to him out of breath.

"What means this, Piketon?—has he dared to resist?"

"He has escaped, captain!"

"Escaped!" echoed Bonardi, in astonishment, grasping the other by the arm.

"Ay, captain; he shot down the two guards nearest him and fled. We fired several shots after him, but unluckily all missed."

"What ho! men," shouted Ronald, at the top of his lungs; "fifty guineas to him who takes John Webber. ere morning, dead or alive!"

"The offer is in vain, captain," said the lieutenant.

"How, vain?"

"We are all on foot. His horse it seems was in waiting below, which he reached in advance of us, and mounted ere we came up. Ere we can get to our horses, he will have full twenty miles between us."

"Oh, the treacherous villain!" ejaculated Bonardi, with a terrible oath. "He will betray, and have the country roused up against us! But by my mother's soul, he shall not escape punishment— even should it cost me my own life! Piketon, he should have been disarmed!"

"True, captain."

"It was a foolish oversight in me. Well, well, experience is a good teacher. The smooth−tongued hypocrite! I did not think he would venture to resist—least of all, escape. Well, well, it is useless whining now. Call in your men, Piketon, and look to your wounded comrades.— When done, report matters, and I will give you farther orders. So, so—dark deeds thicken;" and with his hand pressed upon his temples, Ronald slowly retraced his steps up the hill, while Piketon sounded the recall, by applying a piece of ivory to his lips, that gave out a shrill whistle; and being shortly joined by three of his party, proceeded to look after the two who were wounded. In the meantime Ronald had returned and entered the apartment where were Emily and Hetty, both pale and much frightened.

"Be not alarmed," said he, in a mild tone; "no harm shall come to you."

"What has happened, kind sir?" enquired Emily, anxiously.

"John Webber has escaped, after shooting two of my men," answered Ronald, biting his nether lip.

"I knowed it, I knowed it!" cried Hetty.— "He's the greatest villain as ever run! I told you beware on him!"

"And I should have heeded your warning," returned Ronald; "but it is useless to repent it now."

"You have much to fear from him," said Emily, respeetfully.

"So I doubt not; and you, Emily—for such I am told is your name—have had much to fear," rejoined Ronald, approaching her.

"Kind sir," returned Emily, casting upon him a grateful look, and shuddering at the thought of her late narrow escape, "to you, and this good woman, I owe my life—ay, more than life—and I lack for words to express to you both the deep thanks I feel;" and her eyes filled with tears.

"Your look, Emily, is thanks sufficient," replied Ronald, affected by her earnest manner. "In my heart I already feel more than repaid for what little I have done; and besides, there is another chord touched, Emily, that you dream not of. I regret that it is impossible for me to restore you to your anxious friends, immediately—and to one, the dearest friend of all—but I will do so as soon as practicable. In the meantime I beg of you to put yourself

under my guidance, and accept of my hospitality. My wife will be delighted to serve you."

"You are then, married?" said Emily.

"I am," replied Ronald, sadly, "to a lovely being, far too good and gentle for one like me, and of my calling. But let that pass; you shall see her and judge for yourself. I presume Hetty has already informed you who I am. Doubtless my name is familiar to your ear, coupled with every thing that is wicked and base?"

"I have heard somewhat of you that should have been otherwise," answered Emily; "though I have also heard of many acts of your generosity, which go to prove you possess, notwithstanding, a kind heart."

"Thank you!" returned Ronald, deeply affected. "I am a man of circumstances, Emily, and circumstances have made me what I am. You little dream how closely you are connected with those circumstances."

"Me!" exclaimed Emily, in astonishment.

"Ay! but let it pass now. Anon I will explain all. As in coming here, and by what will follow, I have in a measure placed myself and others—or at least the secret of our existence and rendezvous— in your power, you will, I trust, think nothing hard of me, if I exact from you a sacred pledge, that what you have learned, seen and heard, or shall learn, see and hear, you will never—under any circumstances whatever—divulge while I am living."

"To this most solemnly I pledge me," returned Emily, "and call God to witness the vow! What you have done, has been to save me from an awful fate; and were I to take advantage of this against you, I should truly be the most ungrateful of my sex—ay, unworthy the name of woman. You have nothing to fear from me, kind sir."

"Enough, enough!—your simple word is enough— I ask nothing further. And now, so soon as my lieutenant returns, you will with me to the cave. But, ha! what have we here, torn into so many fragments?" added he, enquiringly, as his eye fell upon the papers destroyed by John a few minutes before.

"Alas! sir, I suppose them to be proofs of my parentage," answered Emily, sadly.

"And this too was the work of John Webber?"

"It was."

"The villain! But we shall meet again, ere long; and then there will be a reckoning—a squaring of accounts," said Ronald, with quivering lips, while a dark shade rested on his counte nance. "Do you know what was written thereon?"

"I do not."

"Did he mention the names of your parents?"

"He did not; and said unless I would consent to marry him, I should never learn them."

"In that he was mistaken—for I will inform you."

"You, sir!" exclaimed Emily, starting in surprise.

"Ay! yet hold a moment! Possibly I may myself be mistaken;" and gathering up several of the pieces, Ronald examined them by the light a few moments, attentively. "Yes, yes," continued he, at length; "I am right; my suspicions were correct."

"Oh then, sir," cried Emily, breathlessly, "I beseech you inform me!"

"I will. You are the legitimate daughter, only living child, and truly legal heir of—"

"Fenton is dead!" cried Piketon, at this moment rushing in and interrupting him.

"Dead!" echoed Bonardi, staggering back.

"Ay, captain. Webber's ball entered the left breast, near the heart, and he has just this moment expired."

"A thousand curses on the villain! And the other?"

"Is not mortally wounded. His shoulder−blade is broken."

Bonardi pressed his hands hard against his temples, and tried to look calm; but there came, notwithstanding, a dark and terrible expression upon his features.

"This, Piketon," said he, at length, in a deep, heavy voice, "is too much—too much! You will return and see to the burial of Fenton, poor fellow, and that the other is well attended to. Better leave him at Mosley's, as he is something of a surgeon himself. As soon as all is complete, meet me at the cave, with as many of our band as you can easily collect. Webber *must* be punished!— Send hither Kelly."

"Ay, captain!"

As Piketon departed, Bonardi strode to and fro the apartment, in great agitation, until the arrival of Kelly, when turning to Emily, he said:

"Pardon me, Emily, I am too much agitated, just at present, to continue the subject on which we were speaking. I will resume it anon, and tell you all. If you are ready now, we will hence as soon as possible. I regret my gallant steed is not with me, as I fear the distance will fatigue you—it being some seven miles, and for the most part over a rough country."

"Thank you," returned Emily, "for the generous regard you are pleased to express in my behalf; but I doubt not I can easily walk it; I have sometimes done as much, and felt it not."

"We will then set forth. Kelly, you will accompany us;" and in a few minutes the party were on their way to the cave.

Emily, however, had counted too strongly on her own powers; for worn out with excitement, and weakened by loss of rest and food, she soon found her limbs failing her; and ere they had reached a mile, she sunk down completely exhausted. Ronald immediately raised her in his arms, without apparent effort, and the party again proceeded. Kelly occasionally relieved him, and in this manner they reached their destination, in something over two hours from their time of starting.

The sentinel looked much surprised, on seeing Ronald descend the ladder with a lady in his arms, but as it was no business of his, he made no remark. As he entered the Chieftain's Chamber, Inez and Cyntha were no less surprised; nor was their surprise lessened by the manner of Ronald, who was laboring under great mental excitement. Placing Emily carefully upon one of the sofas, he turned abruptly to his wife, and said:

"Inez, as you love me, look well to this lady; for she has been foully dealt with, and has need of your most tender care."

Inez looked at him steadily a moment, and her features assumed a strange expression. Ronald noticed it, and immediately added:

"Nay, love, no jealousy. This woman will explain all;" and he turned to Hetty, who, having followed him in, now stood gazing around upon the splendor of the apartment, with a surprised and bewildered look.

"O yes," returned Hetty, who had heard the allusion to herself; "I'll tell this ar' beautiful lady all as I knows."

"But why, dear Ronald, do you leave me?" enquired Inez, sadly, as he turned to depart.

"I have weighty matters to which I must attend immediately," answered Ronald, drawing her fondly to him, and pressing his lips to hers. "Be not uneasy, dear Inez, I shall pass the night in the Outer Cave. But look to that young lady, for she is faint and sick;" and as Inez turned to Emily, Ronald withdrew, and closed the stone door behind him.

When in the larger cave, and with the exception of the sentinel entirely alone, Bonardi paced to and fro in an excited mood, while the muscles of his face underwent various changes, and his hands clenched and unclenched, as one in deep agony of mind. In this manner he continued some hour and a half, when he was interrupted by the arrival of Piketon, with some twenty of the band, whom he had found in the Retreat, as it was called—a kind of hostlery, some half mile distant, kept by one of the party, where, on the nights of their meetings, the members who had ridden from a distance, generally left their horses to be fed, and not unfrequently spent the night themselves, in drinking, card playing, and the like; and where the sentinels boarded and slept, and, when not on duty, could generally be found. This Retreat was kept by one Mosley, who was the one designated by Bonardi, in his directions to Piketon concerning leaving his wounded comrade. The Hollow, where Bonardi had found Piketon, and the five who accompanied him, was another place of a similar character, some half mile farther on.

"Captain," said Piketon, approaching Bonardi, "I have obeyed your orders."

"'Tis well. Do these fellows know what has taken place?"

"They know that John Webber has proved treacherous, and shot Fenton and Allen."

"And what say they?"

"They have but one voice: `Death to the traitor!' '

"Ay, and by — he shall not escape it!" cried Bonardi, fiercely, uttering an oath. "To−morrow he or I must die!"

"I trust not you, captain."

"I do not know," said Ronald, gravely. "A something tells me I am not long for this world.— It may be only a foolish fancy—but let it pass.— At dawn to−morrow we must mount and follow him. Doubtless we shall find him at his father's. No matter where, however, when found he must die! I hope we may meet him ere he has betrayed us fully, but I fear not. Ten of these fellows must remain here, to guard the cave—the others will with us. You will divide them, and leave the truest and most courageous here. How now! what means this?" This last remark

was occasioned by the sudden appearance of a new comer, who, having descended the ladder, approached Bonardi direct. "What news, Ellis?"

"The steamer leaves to−morrow, captain, between the hours of five and seven in the evening."

"Indeed! Are you sure, Ellis?"

"I had it from the officers of the boat."

"So soon! this is unlucky. When got you the information?"

"At noon of yesterday. I started out of St. Louis late last night, and have scarcely been out of my saddle since. I have fatigued two horses, and am now rather fatigued myself."

"You have done well, Ellis, for 'tis a hard ride— a very hard ride. To−morrow night—how unlucky! What could have induced them to alter their time?—for when I saw them, they positively asserted they would not leave within a week.— Piketon, what can be done? It is almost impossible for us to reach the rendezvous in time—certainly we cannot without a relay. How unlucky this news did not arrive sooner, ere the meeting had broken up! Well, well, we must do our best under the circumstances. For the present we must let Webber pass—at least this other business must be attended to first. Ellis, have the small boats been dropped down to old Davids?"

"Ay, captain, that was done last night."

"'Tis well. Piketon, leave ten men here to guard the cave, withdraw the others, and have them mount and singly ride for the rendezvous. Tell them they must reach there ere sunset to−morrow, or the prize will be lost. By going singly, and separate routes, they will be enabled to get relays among the settlers, without exciting suspicion. 'Tis a long fatiguing ride of a hundred miles, and I do not count on our band being there in full—still I trust there will be enough to capture the money. You had better yourself give the signal, as soon as possible. Doubtless you will be enabled to overtake some of the band on their way home. In every case, tell them they *must* reach there ere sunset to−morrow! Where is Hendrick?"

"He has gone with four comrades to arrest Saxton and Niles, who I have learned are in this vicinity."

"Right! Tell the men that remain, to have both strictly guarded when brought hither. And now to spend an hour with Inez, and then for action. I have a noble steed at the Retreat, and relays on the route, so that doubtless I shall be there in advance of you all. By the by, tell those who remain here as guards, that if we are successful, they shall share equally with us. And now, Piketon, speed! speed! for there is not a moment to be lost!" saying which, Bonardi turned abruptly on his heel, and entered the Inner Cave; while the lieutenant, with great rapidity and precision, set about obeying his commands.

CHAPTER II.

THE RENDEZVOUS—THE ATTACK—THE TERRIBLE FIGHT—THE AWFUL EXPLOSION—THE FLIGHT AND PURSUIT.

In something less than an hour from the close of the events detailed in the preceding chapter, a single horseman was riding swiftly through that range of country lying between the Osage and the great "Father of Waters"—as it is sometimes called—and extending south of the Missouri some thirty miles. Ever and anon this horseman would pause beside some peace−looking cottage, and sound three clear distinct blasts on a bugle; and then a dark figure or two would be seen to glide forth from his covert, a few hurried words would be said in a low voice; and then again the single horseman would dash on, as though riding for life, while shortly after, from the place he had just quitted, another horseman—sometimes two or three—would ride forth with speed, as though in hot pursuit of the one who had gone before.

When the grey dawn of morning had begun to trace the outline of hills, and trees, and streams, in a soft, hazy relief, it revealed too the dim outline of that same horseman, far to the eastward of where he had been seen at the hour of midnight, still speeding on as before, yet ever and anon pausing to sound three musical blasts on a bugle, which he bore in his hand. As the sun rose in beauty over the eastern hills, and poured his gentle rays into deep green woods, into pleasant valleys, on to sparkling streams, they occasionally cast back the shadow of that horseman, still speeding on, and the shadows too of various other horsemen—some directly in his trail, some in different points of compass from him—all speeding eastward. As the day wore on, he was seen mounted on a different horse, still urging on the noble animal, which at every step and bound neared him to the great Mississippi. When the sun had far declined toward the western horizon, that horseman drew rein beside an old hovel, which stood on the west bank of the great river, and but a short time since inhabited by old David the Jew. Scarcely had he paused, when a tall figure darted out of the hovel, and Ronald Bonardi stood beside him.

"Welcome, Piketon, welcome!" cried the latter, joyfully. "I feared you would be too late. I said I should be here before you; but your task has been much the hardest, as I can perceive by your wearied looks; and your horse too hangs his head sadly, and drips water like rain. But what news of the others? Will the main body of them be here in time?"

"I trust it will, captain. They cannot be far behind."

"By the way, Piketon, ten of them have already arrived, and are concealed—horses and all— in the bushes just below here. As the boat leaves St. Louis at an hour so late, I think this will be our best point of attack; and by heavens! since we are here, the attack shall be made, whether the others arrive or not. But come, go in, go in and refresh yourself. You will find wine and food on the table; for the one who came down with the small boats, had the good foresight to provide both, as well as plenty of grain for the horses. Go in, Piketon, while I lead your horse into the covert below, when I will immediately join you."

"Thank you, captain! I feel that wine and food are every thing to me now;" and Piketon entered the hovel. In a few minutes Bonardi was with him.

"I hear the tramp of more horses," said the latter, as he entered, "so that doubtless our party will soon be increased; and in fact it needs be soon, to be of any service to us, for the sun al ready dips in the trees of the western mountains, and the boat will probably pass here at early dark, though I hope not till a later hour. Hark! they come;" and Bonardi turned back to the door, just as three horseman rode up from different points of compass—their horses dripping water, and themselves looking much fatigued.

Scarcely had Bonardi given them directions how to dispose of themselves, when up rode two more—and then another, and another. In fact they were now gathering fast; and in less time than an hour, the party of twelve had swelled to upwards of forty, all strong and well armed men. The sun, in the meantime, had gone down, and grey twilight was already deepening into night, when Bonardi, thinking that longer delay might prove fatal to his design, now ordered his men to take up their positions, and be in readiness for action. Some five or six boats, lying concealed in the water below, were instantly manned, while four of the party were stationed above, at different points, as look−outs or sentinels, ready to give warning in case of danger, and likewise directions to the

new comers, as fast as they should arrive, which they were continually doing. Three others were to hail the steamer, and, should she send out a small boat, which was probable, six more were to be in attendance to seize and gag the oarsmen. In fact the attack was to be made precisely according to the plan given out by Bonardi, as detailed in a previous chapter.

Having seen his men disposed of according to his directions, Bonardi went to each of the sentinels, and charged them to be vigilant, as it was not impossible that Webber, in a spirit of revenge, had already blown the scheme, and, by being sharply on the look−out, been enabled to learn of their sudden movements, the time of the steamer's departure, and also to collect a force sufficient to attack them. Should they see or hear any thing they might judge indicative of danger, without being positive, they were to give the signal by a shrill whistle—if positive, by discharging a pistol. In case of an attack, they were to fight in any manner they might see proper; but in case they heard a blast from the bugle, they were to make their way, quickly as possible, to the spot whence it proceeded. Having given these directions to the sentinels, Bonardi repaired to the members whose duty it was to act on land—told them his suspicions—his orders to the sentinels regarding signals, and an attack—the latter of which referred equally to themselves. This done, he returned to the boats, repeated all he had said, and took his station in one of them, ready to lead them on when the proper moment should arrive.

All now gradually sunk into deep silence, for each one of that band of outlaws was busy with thoughts of his own. They were awaiting, under cover of darkness, to make an attack, where, in all probability, more or less lives would be lost; and doubtless many a one felt a secret foreboding that this might be his last night on earth. Although Bonardi, after giving his orders, said nothing, yet he appeared very restless, and seemed greatly disturbed by some inward trouble. In this manner passed some fifteen minutes, when he leaped suddenly ashore, and merely saying he would be with them again presently, strode directly up the hill, and entered the hovel. Here he found a bottle, which he applied to his lips, and, judging by the time he held it there, drank much. He then returned to the boats with a heavy step.

"Strange," said he, as he approached, "that I hear nothing of her! Piketon, it is possible Ellis may have been mistaken in the time."

"It is possible, captain," answered Piketon, "though but now I fancied I heard her."

"Hark!" exclaimed Bonardi, suddenly. "You are right, Piketon, you are right; by heavens she comes! Be ready, men, be ready—then be silent!"

A few minutes fully confirmed the approach of a steamer; for although not in sight, yet the puffing sound produced by the escape of steam, was clearly audible to the anxious listeners. Ere she rounded the point just above, it became evident by the change of sound, that she was effecting a landing; but presently she was again in motion; and then on she came, like some terrific monster, with great red eyes of fire, and smoke and flame issuing from its nostrils. On, on she came, bearing down apparently directly towards those dark spirits, who were impatiently waiting their time for action. Soon she was within speaking distance, when she was immediately hailed from the shore, which was answered by the ringing of a bell. The steam was next thrown off, and she commenced rounding to, apparently with much difficulty.

"We cannot land," said a voice from on board, "and our boat has been stove. If you have no boat, we shall be obliged to leave you."

"Ha! this looks suspicious!" ejaculated Ronald, mentally. "But the trial must be made. Quick, Jeffrey," cried he, leaping ashore, and running up to the group of three, who stood as though awaiting further orders, "cry back there is a boat here, and a man who will row you to them! and then hie to it, and do not forget your instructions. You," continued he, turning to another group of twelve, standing a few feet distant, six of whom had but lately arrived, "will remain here to cover us. I am suspicious, from various slight causes, that we shall be attacked. If we are, fight, men, fight like devils, and we will soon join you!"— Saying this in a low, rapid tone, Bonardi hurried back and sprang into his boat.

In the meantime, Jeffrey had done the captain's bidding, with great rapidity, and was even now, with his two comrades, shoving off from the shore. It was by this time so dark, that a small boat on the water could be seen only at a short distance, save when it crossed the lights gleaming out from the larger one; consequently the other boats remained in close obscurity. Scarcely a minute elapsed, ere a boat, containing three individuals, was seen crossing the bow of the steamer.

"Stand to your oars, men!" said Bonardi, rapidly. "You will hear the signal in a moment; and then, as you love

money, forget not to row! Ha! there it is!" As he spoke, there came several reports of firearms, and the next instant five boats shot out into the stream, with lightning rapidity. But a few seconds elapsed ere they were alongside the steamer, when, just as Bonardi was on the point of leaping aboard, the engineer suddenly let on a full head of steam, the wheels turned quickly, the boat shot forwad instantly, crushing one of the smaller ones, and at the same time a murderous fire was directed among the bandits, from a hitherto concealed enemy, doing terrible execution. Several of them sprang up and fell back dead, against their comrades, or into the water, while others sank down wounded, amid shrieks, groans, and direful imprecations. To add to the consternation and horror of Ronald and his men, the pistols of the sentinels on the hill were now heard in quick succession, followed by a roar of musketry, rapid discharge of pistols, fierce yells and groans, and the noise of a hand−to−hand combat. By the light of the discharges, Ronald saw the men he had left on shore, hemmed in by overwhelming numbers, fighting desperately.

"By all the holy saints!" cried he, "we are betrayed! To shore! To horse!"

Scarcely were the words uttered, ere every boat seemed almost to leap from the water—so powerfully were the oars applied by desperate men. But a landing was not to be effected without trouble. As the boats touched the shore, a party in waiting poured a destructive fire among them, and numbers fell.

"Onward!" shouted Bonardi; and leaping on to the bank, pistols in hand, he shot down the two nearest him—dashed out the brains of a third with one of his discharged weapons—seized the fourth as though he were a child, and threw him over his head into the Mississippi—drew his knife, and literally cut his way through them, unharmed, followed by Piketon, and some twenty of his band—all fighting like fiends, neither giving nor asking quarter.

"Sound the bugle, and to horse!" shouted Bonardi.

Instantly a loud, clear blast, rang out upon the air; and following their brave leader, the bandits rushed down the stream some thirty yards, to where their horses stood in waiting—not having as yet been discovered by the attacking party.— Bounding into their saddles, with the agility of men well trained to horsemanship, with their knives still in their hands, reeking with blood, they cut the reins that attached them to the small trees of the thicket, in which they were concealed, and, plunging their spurs into their sides, rode wildly out, with a fierce yell of triumph, just as their pursuers were coming up.

"Charge, comrades, charge!" again shouted, in thunder tones, the voice of Bonardi. "Down in your saddles, and knives to their hearts!"

Never was a terrible order obeyed more rapidly. At the word, each wheeled into a line with his leader—threw himself forward, until his head touched his horse's neck—extended his arm, until the blade of his knife reached beyond the nostrils of the animal he rode—and then, like a sweeping avalanche, the whole party spurred down upon the main body of their opponents, whom they stabbed and rode over, with a havoc that, in honorable warfare, would have rendered the charge immortal. But all was in vain. The bandits had been surprised and taken at too great a disadvantage to themselves, by nearly double their numbers, to cope successfully with their adversaries now; and the more so, as the latter had discovered the remaining horses, and were already mounting them. In the charge just made, five more of his party had gone down; so that out of all his stout, hardy followers, Bonardi found, on sounding the bugle again, only some fifteen who answered to the summons. The remainder he supposed either killed, wounded, or taken prisoners, as the firing and noise of combat had ceased.

"We are lost!" said he, sadly, reining in his horse, some hundred yards from the scene of action. "Comrades, our day is over. All that men could do, under the circumstances, we have done. You, comrades, have fought like men—most bravely—but, alas! to what avail? Oh, treachery, treachery! But, comrades, you may yet escape. If you wish to go, I give you freedom.— For myself, I shall back to the cave, and, if necessary, die defending it. My time I feel is near.— Forty brave fellows—all lost—all lost! Oh God, what a thought! What say you, comrades; will you leave or follow me?"

"Follow, to the death!" shouted all.

"'Tis well. Let us away then, ere these hellhounds get too close upon our track; for they have mounted our own horses, and are now on the move. Ha!—the steamer—look! Great God, what a sight!"

What a sight indeed! for just as Bonardi spoke, there came a tremendous explosion, and the heads, legs and arms of some fifty human beings—but a moment before in all the vigor and passion of life— were now hissing and whizzing through the air, in every direction, while shrieks and groans were heard, of the most agonizing

description. To add to the awful spectacle, the boat immediately took fire, and lay perfectly unmanageable—floating down with the current—while some few, who had escaped the explosion, could be seen running to and fro, calling for help, or plunging into the watery element, and thus avoiding one terrible death only to meet with another. The light from the burning wreck now gleamed across the dark, rolling waters of the Mississippi, upon the banks and trees, with a sickly effect—displaying the outlines of a hundred dark figures, on foot and on horse, some standing, some running to the small boats, and pushing out from the shore, to the assistance of their fellow creatures, while others were lying scattered here and there on the ground, mangled and bloody, dying and dead. It was a sight to be seen but once; but once seen, never to be forgotten. Had we time and space, we might call up the picture to the reader's eye far more vividly; but it would only be a sad, heart rending, bloody picture—and 'twere better that it pass.

"So," said Ronald, musingly, gazing upon the scene, with a melancholy air: "So, then; in attempting our destruction, they have sent themselves to eternity. Well, one God sees all—overrules all—orders all—at least my mother taught me so when a child Oh, that I were a child again!" and he drew his hand across his eyes, and turned his head away. Suddenly he started, and the whole aspect of his features changed, from the sad and mild, to the fierce and terrible. "Look!" cried he, rising in his stirrups, and grasping the arm of Piketon, who was sitting his horse along side him.— "Look! Piketon—look! comrades—yonder, yonder! Gods! do you see nothing?"

"I see nothing but men on horseback, quietly gazing on the burning vessel," answered Piketon.

"But one of those—a tall figure—a little separated from the rest—is the accursed traitor, John Webber!" hissed Ronald, rapidly. "He does not see us, and thinks, doubtless, with the others, that we are all taken, killed, or fled." Let us remark here, that Ronald and his men were now occupying a position on the hill−−in a thicket—where they could observe all that was taking place below, and remain themselves concealed. "Now, then, comrades," continued Bonardi, "for one more act ere we die. Draw your knives, men, and swear by the mangled corses of your dead comrades, that unto death you will follow yon traitor, so long as a man of you remain alive!"

"We swear!" cried all, vehemently, touching the blades of their knives to their lips.

"Enough! Now, Piketon, to cut him off, ere he joins the main body. You, with six men, will defile carefully down on this side; but slowly, so as not to attract attention. I, with the rest, will ride around and suddenly come in before him, when, to save his life, he will be forced to turn and fly.— If he do so, follow; and Heaven save him if he escape us!"

In a moment the party of Bonardi was in motion. In a few more, his manoeuvre was successfully executed; and John—who supposed Bonardi either killed or taken, and was now quietly gazing upon the awful sight on the river— suddenly found himself confronted by the only man he feared, and cut off by his followers from joining those who might render him assistance.— His only safety was now in flight; and with a yell of despair, he turned and fled. That yell was echoed by some fifteen sturdy horsemen, who immediately joined in pursuit, all eager for his heart's blood.

The cries of John, and his pursuers, were heard far around—ringing out upon the night air like those of so many fiends; but they were quickly drowned by still louder shouts of, "The bandits, the bandits!—Bonardi, Bonardi!" and suddenly wheeling their animals, some twenty horsemen dashed madly forward, to join in the wild chase. Ere we follow them, however, let us briefly glance at the causes which led to these results, take one more look at the scene before us, and then close it forever.

After the escape of John, from Piketon and his companions—as related in the chapter preceding— he had ridden directly for home, with dark thoughts of revenge uppermost in his mind. He knew if taken, death would assuredly follow, as he had that evening had ample witness in the case of the Jew. His only safety he now felt was in the total overthrow of Bonardi and the banditti; and to effect this as soon as possible, was his only theme, as he spurred rapidly on. In doing this, he would not only secure his own life, but obtain the revenge he sought on those who had dared to come between him and his victim. But how to effect this suddenly, was the main object. At first he thought of seeking his father, and acquainting him of the whereabouts of Emily, and the rendezvous of the bandits—stating that she had been seized, carried off, and was now held in durance by them. This he knew would rouse the ire of his father—who was as yet ignorant of Bonardi being in the vicinity—and that as soon as possible, he would raise a large company from the surrounding country, go forth to rescue Emily, and exterminate the band. But this, even at the best, would consume much time, and doubtless prove of no avail; from the fact that most of the bandits themselves were known as settlers, and so scattered through the country, that the least stir of this kind

would be known to them in season to effect an escape, or, what was more probable, rally themselves into a body, ambush, and slaughter their opponents. This project, therefore, was a hazardous one; the more so, as in the meantime they might seek him out and kill him; and he knew sufficient of Ronald Bonardi, to render this thought a not improbable, and, consequently, a startling one. They might even now be on his trail—such a thing was not unlikely— and he urged his beast up hill and down, over hollow and plain, through forest, thicket and stream, at his greatest speed.

At length he found, to his regret and consternation, that the noble animal was beginning to falter. There was but one course—his place must be supplied by another; and in this, chance favored him; for shortly after, he rode past a cottage, where he perceived several horses lying down. Immediately reining in, he alighted, selected the best, transferred bridle and saddle, and, in less than five minutes, was again speeding on, leaving his own horse behind him. When the sun rose, he was within twenty miles of his father's cottage; and for the first time he slackened his speed, to meditate upon the wisest course for him to pursue. A thought struck him! He would ride at once to St. Louis, learn at what time the steamer was to leave, and possibly he might hear of something advantageous to his foul design.

When he reached home, some two hours later, he found that the party—consisting of his father, Merton, Bernard and Tyrone—had just started on a third day's search for Emily, and that Rufus was lying in a very critical state. This latter, however, troubled him not; and without heeding anything further, he changed his horse, and immediately set off for St. Louis, where he arrived about two o'clock the same day. He knew from Bonardi's plan, that three of the band were to be on board when the boat should leave; and accordingly he at once repaired hither, to learn if anything new had occurred. Two of them he found without difficulty, and learned, to his surprise and joy, that the boat was to leave that evening; that the third had been gone some thirty−six hours to inform Bonardi of the fact; and that it was supposed the latter would get the information in time, by hard riding, to be at the general rendezvous, where the boat, owing to some slight delays, would probably pass at early dark.

Than this information, nothing could have suited John's purpose better; and he immediately hastened to a magistrate informed him of the whole affair, and, to give it an air of truth, stated that he himself was a member of the band, whose conscience had forced him to betray the wicked course his fraternity were pursuing. This information of course was of the most startling character to the magistrate—who believed Bonardi and his men had quitted the country some three years before—and instantly making out warrants, he sent off and had the two men on the boat arrested. On confronting them with John, one of them became much alarmed, and, on the promise of a pardon, immediately corroborated his statement.— The affair resulted in the whole matter being speedily made known to the governor, who promptly ordered two companies of militia, consisting of over a hundred men, several of whom had served in the late war, to act as a posse to the Sheriff, in arresting or exterminating the outlaws.

The Sheriff himself was a man of extreme measures, who cared little for the sacrifice of life, so his ends were by such means accomplished. His plan was, to have the boat start at the given time, as though nothing had been discovered, and, with his posse, to go down on her himself; that ere fully in sight of the rendezvous, some seventy−five should land, and proceed thence on foot; that the steamer, when hailed, should round to, but manage to avoid sending out a boat— well judging, if the banditti were there concealed, they would not allow their scheme to be frustrated by a circumstance so trifling,—that the steam should be compressed until the boats came along side, so that the steamer might start suddenly, and by this means throw them into confusion; that at the same time the party concealed on board, should pour among them a well directed fire, which was also to be a signal to those on shore to be ready to intercept their landing. In fact, the attack was carried out exactly as planned, and the reader has already seen the result. The grand oversight was in compressing the steam, and then throwing it suddenly upon the engine, which shortly after produced the terrible explosion we have recorded.

Having thus briefly explained the matters most directly connected with our story, and trusting the reader is as anxious to quit this scene of wholesale slaughter as ourself, we shall, after giving a slight summary of what followed, leave it at once and forever.

But few of those poor beings on board the ill fated steamer at the time of her explosion, were saved; and these mostly by the aid of the boats, which had been brought hither by the orders of Bonardi, for a very different purpose. Some two or three of the number who leaped into the stream, swam to the shore—the rest were drowned. In less than an hour, the boat burned to the water's edge and sunk−−bearing down with her the gold and silver

coin, the primary cause of the dire mishap and loss of life. In the meantime a messenger was despatched, post haste, to St. Louis; which resulted in the arrival, some three hours later, of another steamer. This, ere morning, bore back a strange medley of citizens, soldiers, and bandits; some well, some wounded, some dying, some dead. Of the party of Bonardi, some few were taken prisoners; but these, generally speaking, consisted of those who were too severely wounded to fight or escape, and who afterwards, with but few exceptions, died of their wounds—the main body having either fled or been killed. Of the soldiers, a number were killed in the fight, and many wounded. The prisoners who survived their injuries, together with some three or four others, captured unharmed, were afterwards tried by the authorities, and disposed of according to the evidence found against them.

On that same night, a steamer, chartered for the purpose, having on board a large body of armed men, and two six−pound cannon, departed for the Osage; the object of the expedition being to find the grand rendezvous of the banditti, arrest or exterminate the remainder of the band, and, particularly to secure, living or dead, the body of Ronald Bonardi.

CHAPTER III.

THE RETURN—THE DEATH OF THE INVALID—THE ALARM—THE DEATH OF THE TRAITOR—THE FIGHT AND FLIGHT—THE RALLY AND EXPEDITION.

An hour later than that in which the attack was made on the bandits, through the treachery of John, the party of his father returned from a third days search for Emily, fatigued in body and depressed in spirits. Three days had they traversed the country in every direction, making diligent enquiries of every person they met, and yet, of what had become of her, not the slightest cue had they gained; and consequently, as we have said, they returned most sadly depressed in spirits, and worn out in body. In fact, hope of ever beholding her again had almost become extinct; for to them it was probable she had been seized by the Jew and his accomplices, and taken out of the country. And this latter seemed the more probable, from their having been at the residence of the Jew, on the day she disappeared, and knew him to have been absent.

On Webber and Merton the sad truth fell with a crushing effect; and men though they were, both wept for grief. In fact, the latter, when he found all search had been in vain, knew it would have to be relinquished, and felt the sweet being of his soul's adoration—she whose heart and hand in the holy confidence of love, had been pledged to him—was now gone, forever gone, pressed his hands to his burning temples, and strove, as a man, but vainly strove to be calm. Life to him now seemed a lonely path, through a barren waste, where not one bright flower by the wayside grew, to relieve it of utter desolation; where no ray of sunlight came, to dispel, even for a moment, the oppressive gloom.

Slowly, sadly, and in silence, the party referred to, reined in their horses on the night in question, at the cottage of Webber—litttle dreaming that beneath that humble roof, the ingrate, the black hearted villain, the cause of their present trouble, had been sheltered, and fed; and that there too, their sorrow was soon to find an additional weight. At the door they were met by Mrs. Webber, who was pale and trembling with intense grief and excitement.

"Oh, you have come—you have come, thank God!" uttered she, in the low, rapid accents of heart touching misery. "I feared, oh God! I feared you would be too late. Quick! quick!"

"Sarah, Sarah," gasped Webber, "what, what has happened? Speak, Sarah! for Heaven−sake speak!"

"Alas! William, Rufus —"

"Well, Sarah!"

"Is dying."

"Great Heaven!" and staggering back, Webber would have fallen, had not the arms of Bernard, who was close behind, supported him.

Like the sudden shock of an earthquake, this startling announcement came upon those who heard it; for they believed Rufus free of danger, and slowly, yet gradually recovering. He had been pronounced convalescent by his physician, and the events of the last few days had so engrossed their attention, that by them he had in a measure been forgotten. From the moment of his fainting, on hearing of the disappearance of Emily, as previously mentioned, he had gradually declined. His mother—whose very existence, as we have before stated, seemed bound up in his— noticed the change, with all a fond mother's feelings of grief and alarm. Night and day since, had she remained almost constantly by his side; and on the evening previous, when the party returned, she had made known to her husband her fears. Wearied by a hard day's ride, and thinking her fears had made her exaggerate, Webber, contrary to his usual custom, had seemed almost indifferent to his wife's remarks; and merely saying, "He will be better anon," retired early to rest, to be in readiness to pursue his search for Emily on the following day. Several times during the day on which we have again introduced him, his conscience had reproved him for neglecting his son; and it was not without considerable anxiety, that he once more approached home; consequently the powerful effect produced by the sudden and alarming announcement of his wife.

Recovering, somewhat, from the first terrible shock, Webber sprang forward, and in a moment stood by his son, followed by his wife, Merton, Bernard and Tyrone. A light, standing on the table by the bed, cast a mournful gleam—if we may so be allowed the expression—on to the pale, calm features of the dying youth, who, save an unnatural breathing, seemed like one asleep.

"Rufus!" gasped his father, grasping his thin hand. "Rufus, my son!"

Slowly the invalid unclosed his eyes, and for a moment looked up with a vacant stare.

"Rufus, my son! Oh, God! do you not know me?"

"Father," said Rufus, calmly, a look of recognition lighting up his thin features, at the same time raising himself on his elbow, and glancing slowly around: "Father—mother—Edward—yes, yes, I know you all; but I am weak, father," and he sunk back on his pillow. Suddenly he started, and a bright flush passed over his wan features. "Emily!" cried he, quickly: "Emily! what of her? have you found her?" and he gazed with an intense look on his father's tearful eye.

"Alas! my son, we have not."

"Too well—too well I knew it," he murmured, clasping his hands, and gazing upward with a solemn, devout look. "We *shall* meet again, but it will be there;" and stretching forth his wasted, bony arm, he pointed above: "It will be there— in Heaven!"

"Oh! dear, dear Rufus," cried his mother, springing forward, unable to control herself longer, and bending on him a look of the most intense anguish, while every eye in the room filled with water: "Oh! dear, dear Rufus, say you will meet again on earth!"

Rufus gazed upon her a moment, and shook his head sadly. "Mother, dear mother, speak not thus! My minutes are all numbered. I—I am dying, mother."

"Oh God, support me!" returned she, sinking into a chair, and covering her face with her hands.

"Nay, mother—nay, father—nay, friends"— continued he, "weep not! We must all die, sooner or later, and death is only terrible when we are not prepared to meet it. It is only parting for a time, to meet again in the bright and glorious land of spirits. I feel I shall be happy when my spirit has thrown off this clayey tenement, and entered upon its second existence. Oh, my dear parents and friends, I beseech you, weep not for me! for I was not, could not be happy here. Edward, come hither; I have somewhat to say to you, ere I set out upon my long journey."

Edward approached with tearful eyes, and took his hand.

"You, my noble friend," continued Rufus, "are sad—almost heart−broken—for the sweet being you love is gone; but be not cast down—be not disheartened—for you will meet again, and see many happy days on earth. Nay, shake not your head with that despairing look, for what I tell you is true. My spirit is already on the verge of eternity, and looks with a prophetic eye into the future. But now I had a dream; and in that dream I saw you and Emily meet. There was sadness in the hearts of both; but it gradually rolled away, as mist from the mountain tops, and joy, like sunlight, shone in your faces. *Mark these words! they are prophetic*. You will see her, you will love her, you will cherish and guard her, with all the pure, deep devotion of a holy love, emanating from a high minded, noble, manly heart. Ere that time, however, these frail limbs will have stiffened in death—this soul will have flown to the presence of its God; therefore shall I give you my secret, and request that you bear to her my dying words. Tell her, Edward, that one who is gone, loved her no less deeply, no less purely, no less sacredly than yourself. Tell her that from youth up she was the sole ideal of his longings, the angel visitant of his dreams. Tell her that Hope, like a star, once rose and shone brightly on the broad field of his future imaginings, but that its light went out in the Hope of another. Tell her to think sometimes on this, and sometimes cast a glance upon the lowly grave of Rufus Webber. You will tell her this, Edward?"

"Should we meet again, my gentle friend, I will," replied Edward, pressing the hand of Rufus.

"*You will meet again, Edward*, and in that thought I die happy."

"And you loved her so," said Edward, deeply affected; "and I knew it not."

"And she knew it not," returned Rufus. "I saw she loved another, and I would not pain her with the story. But that is now past, and so forget it. Ah! I—I feel my voice is going: I feel myself growing fainter; and so, dear Edward, farewell!"

Edward pressed his hand, and turned away with a burst of grief.

"Father?"

"My son!"

"I am going fast. Where is John?"

"Alas! he is not here."

"Then bid him farewell for me, and tell him it was the dying request of his brother, that he shun bad company.

Father, farewell!" and he pressed his hand—a hand that shook with the agonies of a father's heart. "Mother," and the voice of Rufus faltered.

"Oh! my child—my son—my own dear Rufus!" cried she, throwing her arms around his neck, and pressing kiss after kiss upon his bloodless, quivering lips: "Oh! my son—my son—I cannot, cannot part with you!"

"Mother, dear mother," returned he, in faltering accents: "Mother, be calm—be calm! Remember it is the will of God, who orders all things for the best. We shall soon meet again in another, in a better world. Ah! ah! death is coming. Mother, fare—fare−well! Friends—all—all— fare—farewell! In—in Heaven!" and with these words the lips of the gentle Rufus were sealed forever.

For an hour life remained in his body; but from that moment Rufus spoke no more, nor seemed he conscious of anything that transpired afterward, although his mother still clung to, and entreated him in the most heart−rending tones to speak to her again. At the expiration of the time mentioned, his gentle spirit passed away, as one sinking into a quiet sleep.

His mother, when fully convinced that he was gone—that in sad truth his dearly loved voice she would never hear again—slowly unclasped her arms from his neck, and, with her eyes fixed steadfastly upon him, sank into a seat by his side, seemingly unconscious of everything around. His father stood and gazed upon him for a few moments with folded arms, while his features writhed in agony, his chest heaved, and his heart beat fast and almost audibly. In silence, in sorrow, stood Merton, Bernard and Tyrone, near the foot of the bed, gazing upon the corpse—forming a most impressive group for a mournful picture. Suddenly each started, and gazed into each others faces enquiringly. A shrill cry came borne upon the air, and with it a sound like the rushing of waters. Another, and another cry, and nearer and louder came the rushing sound. What could it mean? All sprang to the door; and although it was dark, yet dashing over the hill to the right, they could trace the dim outline of a horseman; and, following close, another—another— and still, and still another—and more behind.

"There must be something alarming!" said Webber, quickly. "What can it mean?"

Scarcely were the words uttered, ere the foremost horseman dashed up to the door, leaped from his steed, and rushed in in breathless haste.

"John!" cried Webber, in astonishment.

"Quick! quick! father—close the door—or I shall be murdered! I am pursued by Ronald Bonardi and his men!"

"Ronald Bonardi!" echoed all, in a breath; and springing back, the door was bolted just as the other horsemen were beginning to come up.

"Ay, Ronald Bonardi," answered John, rapidly. "He and his band are the kidnappers of Emiily. I know their secret retreat, and for this they would murder me!"

"Emily!" cried Merton, breathlessly, "Emily! speak—speak!—where is she?"

"In Bonardi's cave, on the Osage river."

"Oh, John, you give me new life!"

"Then use it defending mine, by killing these ruffians, and I will restore her to you."

"Quick! quick!" said a deep voice from without, "for our time is most precious."

The next moment there came a tremendous crash, making the whole house tremble—the door, bolts, bars and all, were splintered and broken into a hundred pieces—while a tall, muscular figure leaped forward, into the centre of the astonished group, and the same deep voice shouted:

"Ho, traitor!"

"'Tis he!" shrieked John, turning to fly.

"Ay, 'tis he!" shouted back the figure; and then there came a flash—a crack—and with a yell of pain John sank to the floor.

"How!—Barton!" gasped Webber, in astonishment, as he caught a glimpse of the intruder's features.

"*Barton and Bonardi are one!*"

As he spoke, the figure seized upon the body of John, with the strength of a giant, and, turning, bounded into the midst of his followers, who stood crowded around the doorway to cover his retreat.

"To horse! to horse!" he shouted; and darting away at the word, in a moment more each man was in his saddle.

So rapidly was this whole movement executed— for it occupied far less time in action, than we have in description—that neither Webber himself, Merton, Bernard nor Tyrone, recovered from the torpor of a sudden astonishment, ere the bandits had escaped them—actually shooting, seizing, and bearing John from their midst.

"Good God!" exclaimed Webber, "is my house to be broken into, my son murdered and borne away, without a hand being raised to rescue or avenge him? Follow, men!" and rushing forth, he was quickly joined by his three companions.

By this time the bandits were all mounted, and Bonardi, still supporting John, was just balancing himself in his saddle, when he observed Webber rushing towards him.

"Away!" he shouted to his men; and burying his own spurs in his horse's flanks, he darted off.

Webber instantly drew a pistol, and taking aim as well as the darkness would permit, pulled the trigger. A flash—a report—a groan succeeded— and he could perceive Bonardi waver in his saddle; but still he sat his horse—the animal slackened not his speed—and in a few seconds both horse and rider disappeared, while Webber's attention was suddenly called to another quarter, where the bandits were being attacked by another party of horsemen that had just come up.

From the flight of John from the river, the chase had been a desperate, and an equal one; with the exception, that in the hard run of thirty miles, the bandits had succeeded in distancing their pursuers some quarter of a mile, so that they had just sufficient time, after John entered the cottage, to seize upon a huge stick of timber, break open the door, capture the traitor and mount, before the others were upon them. As their design was now accomplished, they turned upon their pursuers, headed by Piketon—for Bonardi still kept upon his course—and a terrible fight ensued. Webber and his companions not knowing friend from foe, retreated into the house, to be ready to defend it in case of necessity.

"I guess they're having a putty hard tussle, by the way them are shooting irons are going off," remarked Bernard. "Hadn't we better assist them are fellers that come up last, eh, Bill?"

"Gladly, if we could assist them; but to attempt it now would be fool−hardy," answered Webber. "As soon as this fight is over, we must rally as large a company as possible, and start immediately for the Osage, to rescue Emily, and punish the murderers of my son Oh, God! am I to be made childless in one night!" and Webber leaned against the wall of his cottage for support. "And to think, too," continued he, after a moment's pause, "how basely I have been deceived! I can scarcely realize my having been, more or less, for three years past, the companion of that notorious bandit, Ronald Bonardi, under the assumed name of Barton!"

"Wal, when I seed him at the river, and you was a talking to him about himself, I guessed then his name wasn't Barton," said Bernard.

"Well, well, he shall not escape again!" replied Webber, sternly. "He shall be brought to justice, unless he die defending himself; for I will follow him to the world's end myself, sooner than suffer him to go unpunished. Fool that I was, to let him shoot down my son before my own eyes! And then to actually bear him off! What unheard of daring!"

"The whole affair transpired so suddenly," remarked Tyrone, "that for one I really knew not what was taking place, until he had fled."

"The same with myself," said Edward. "But I am much mistaken, or he suffers now; for when Webber fired, I heard him groan, and fancied I saw him reel in the saddle."

"I kind o' thought as how that are shot did him too," rejoined Bernard. "But if it didn't, there's more where that come from, I guess, as will."

"Ay," rejoined Webber, fiercely, "there is!— But hist! The fighting seems to have ceased, and there is a horseman approaching."

"House, ho!" shouted a voice from without.

"What would you?" answered Webber, interrogatively.

"Rest and food for the night, for our horses and ourselves," replied the voice.

"Who are you?" demanded Webber.

"An officer of justice, at the head of a party of soldiers, sent out to arrest or exterminate these accursed bandits, who, with the exception of three killed, have again escaped us. We would tarry here until daylight, ere we pursue them further; for our horses are fatigued, two of our men are killed, and three or four others wounded. If you can accommodate us, I will see that you are remunerated, and will also give you the full particulars of what has occurred."

"I am in a sad condition to do so," answered Webber, gloomily; "for one son lies a corpse in the house, another has just been shot and borne away, my wife sits buried in grief, and I am nearly distracted myself; but still, such

accommodation as I have, you are most welcome to; and we will endeavor, ere morning, to increase your party for the pursuit."

As further detail seems unnecessary here, we trust the reader will allow us to substitute a brief summary of what followed. The party in question remained at Webber's through the night—all resting, with the exception of the wounded, in the out−houses. The latter were cared for, as well as circumstances would permit, and their wounds not being of a very serious nature, they departed the next morning for St. Louis, bearing their two dead comrades with them. During the night a search was made, in the direction taken by Bonardi, for the body of John; it being thought probable, the former, if wounded, might drop him on the way, and possibly with life remaining−−though for the latter there was little hope;—but the expedition proved fruitless, and the party returned some three hours later, not having discovered the least trace.

Merton, anxious to start early on the morrow to the rescue of her he loved, rode most of the night from farm to farm, among the settlers, giving each a brief account of what had happened, and beseeching them to join in ridding the country of the outlaws; the result of which was, the additional force of some twenty−five, able bodied, determined men, well mounted and armed, who, with the party at Webber's, set out at daylight on a journey to the Osage, to search for the grand rendezvous, apprehend, disperse, or annihilate the banditti.

In this expedition, Webber and Tyrone did not join; the former, because he did not consider it prudent to leave his house in a totally unguarded state, with the corpse of his son within, and his wife in a very feeble condition, but little better than a stupid insanity, caused from her overwhelming grief; and the latter, because it was deemed advisable that one at least should remain as a companion for the former. Moreover, Webber had learned, in course of conversation with the officer mentioned, the astounding particulars of what had occurred at the river, and the cause of hate against his son, from his having been a member and betrayed the band, the which had served to completely unnerve, and almost render him insane also.

Besides Webber, his wife and Tyrone, there was another individual within that house of mourning, whom we have, during the excitement of the past few days, lost sight of altogether; but whom we shall bring once more before the reader, ere we close our now nearly completed story.— We allude to the prisoner of the Jew, who, under the treatment he had of late received, was fast regaining health and strength. But leaving each and all for the present, let us precede the party just departed, to the cave on the Osage.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAVE—THE BANDIT'S WIFE AND HER GUEST— THE BANDIT'S ARRIVAL—THE LAST PARTING—THE AMBUSH—THE ATTACK—THE FAREWELL VOLLEY— THE AWFUL CATASTROPHE—THE MEETING OF THE LOVERS—THE RETURN.

On the afternoon of the day succeeding the fight, and the second from the departure of Bonardi, a rough group of some fifteen outlaws were lounging about the Outer Cave—some talking, some polishing their weapons, and some playing cards. These consisted of the ten left as guards, with the addition of Hendrick and his four companions, who returned the day previous, bringing in Saxton and Niles prisoners, both of whom were now confined in the dungeon below, the place whence Piketon led forth the Jew on the night of his trial and execution.

In the Inner Cave were four females—consisting of Emily, Inez, Hetty and Cyntha; and to these we shall, for the present, direct our attention. Inez and Emily, at the moment introduced, were reclining on sofas, but a little distance apart, while the other two, Hetty and Cyntha, were occupying one corner of the apartment, conversing together in a low tone.

Since the departure of Ronald, Inez had lavished upon Emily the most tender care, anticipating her every wish, and doing all in her power to restore her strength, and contribute to her happiness. Partly from Ronald, ere his departure, and afterwards from Hetty and Emily herself, she had learned the story of the wrongs of the latter, and all the gentle sympathies of the woman had been elicited in her behalf. From Ronald, too, she had learned a secret, of which Emily and Hetty were as yet ignorant, accompanied by a request that she would not reveal it, unless some unforeseen accident should prevent his return.

The parting between Ronald and Inez had been affecting and solemn. He had not revealed to Inez his design, but she could perceive by his pale features, and an agitation which he vainly strove to conceal, that he was about setting forth on an unusual, if not dangerous mission. Hence, as we have said, the parting had been affecting and solemn; and since that time, Inez, although she strove to be cheerful, and paid the most tender regards to the wants of Emily, could not banish from her mind thoughts dark and painful; and in consequence an air of gloomy abstraction would not unfrequently take possession of her. On the day we again introduce her, these painful reveries had become more frequent than before—more prolonged—and in one of them we now find her. And here, had we space to devote it, we might moralize upon the causes producing these results.

It is thought the spirit, in many cases, when approaching the confines of that vast eternity before it, grows brighter, more etherial, and is less allied to the corporeal substance around it—consequently, is more sensitive to events about to happen−−and by its elevation or depression, prognosticates, many times, the good or evil that will shortly follow: moreover, too, that with an intuitive sense, it sometimes communicates to the body what and whom this good or evil will effect, and what will be the result. Hence the spiritual, or second sight. We believe, too, the spirit is not unfrequently acted upon, when far from death ourselves, with regard to the fate of some dearly beloved friend, (but not so clearly as in the former instance) which is to influence our seeming destiny; and hence our gloomy forebodings, or presentiments.

But as we presume the reader—who is doubtless anxious for the conclusion of our story—will not thank us for stopping to moralize or philosophize here, we shall pass on, and leave a subject we might otherwise be tempted to investigate farther.

Inez, as we have said, was reclining on a sofa, in a mood of gloomy abstraction. Her eyes were bent upon the ground, her features were pale and very sad in expression, and there was a slight quiver of some of the delicate muscles, as though the mind was laboring with painful thought.— She had been sitting thus some quarter of an hour, motionless and mute. Emily was also reclining upon a sofa, but a little distance from her. Her features, too, were pale, and somewhat care−worn; but there was, notwithstanding, a more animated and hopeful look than when we saw her last—and yet, withal, the expression was sad. Under the kind treatment received from Inez, Emily had gradually recovered from the hardships she had undergone, and although still weak, was fast regaining health and strength. At the moment introduced, her eyes were resting enquiringly, but sadly, upon Inez, as though she sympathized with, and wished, yet almost feared to question her of her sorrows. At length the strong

promptings of her gentle and grateful heart got the better of her reserve, and approaching, she bent down, and gently taking the soft, delicate hand of Inez in her own, in a sweet, touching, musical voice, she said:

"You are sad, dear Inez?"

There are words, and ways of saying them, which at times, with a sudden and resistless impulse, will stir up all the finer emotions of the heart, and make the eye grow moist and dim.— Such was the effect of Emily's words upon Inez. She started, a flush mantled her pale features, and she looked up into the sweet countenance of Emily, with tearful eyes. The next moment these two gentle beings were locked in each other's embrace, and the tears of both mingled.

"Oh, will you not open your heart, dear Inez, and tell me what makes you so sorrowful?" asked Emily, as, with an arm thrown around the others waist, she seated herself by her side.

"I hardly know myself, Emily," answered Inez, with a sigh; "but I feel as though there were a weight upon my heart. I fear something has happened to him−−to Ronald−−though why I cannot tell; for he has often been away, sometimes for a week, and yet I felt not so depressed as now. I fear that dark man you spoke of will betray him, perhaps has done so already, and he may now be in prison, or dead. Oh, God! if such should be the case, what, oh! what would become of me?" and Inez shuddered, and hid her face in her hands.

"Do not borrow trouble, dear Inez," said Emily, gently, and soothingly. "All will turn out for the best, rest assured. We are all in the hands of a holy, omnipresent God, whose actions cannot err."

"But is not that God a God of justice?" asked Inez, solemnly. "And will he not punish man for his misdeeds, his—his—" Inez' voice faltered— "his crimes?"

"Man will doubtless suffer for his misdoings," answered Emily; "but God will look into the heart and judge him by the motive."

"Oh, Emily, dear Emily," returned Inez, weeping, "to you I will say what I have never yet said to human being—for you seem so gentle and pure, my heart yearns for your sympathy. You know the occupation of my husband, and that it is criminal in the eyes of the law. His heart is good and noble; and yet, for his outward acts, I have a long time feared, and of late more than ever, that some terrible calamity, sooner or later, will befal him."

"It is strange," replied Emily, musingly, "that one who possesses so many good and generous qualities as he, should lead such a wild, daring life— should associate with men so far inferior to himself, both in intellect and education."

"Yet judge him not too harshly, dear Emily," returned Inez, sorrowfully, "for circumstances have made him what he is. He has told me his early history; how he wept over the death of a beloved mother—a mother who was foully, most foully wronged;—how your—how his own father disowned, treated him with contempt, and spurned him from his presence, while society could do nought less than point at him with the finger of shame, because he was a bastard son. Oh, you know not how such things can try a proud, restless spirit like his—a spirit that, turned into a different channel, had led him to honor and renown— and make him turn with venomed tooth upon that society, as the viper upon the foot that tramples it."

"I doubt not there have been strong causes for his deeds," rejoined Emily; "yet methinks a nature like his should have paused, ere he brought one so gentle and innocent as you seem to be, into a career the laws of the land will hold most criminal."

"You do him wrong there, dear Emily. It is of my own doing. He frankly and nobly told me all; that we must never meet again; and yet I married him, and gave up name and wealth, knowing him to be an outlaw."

"This is strange, very strange, Inez," remarked Emily, in surprise.

"Does it seem strange to you?—to me it is simple. I *loved* him; and had it been to the gallows direct he would have led me, I cheerfully had gone to die with him."

"I understand," replied Emily. "Oh, woman's love! what will it not do? where can its bounds be set? But strange that he did not then, does not now, give up this wild, terrible life, and retire to some quiet, though humble spot, where you would both be happy."

"Alas!" sighed Inez, "his oath bound him then—his oath binds him yet."

"Alas, indeed!" sighed Emily; and for some minutes both sat silent, buried in thought. Suddenly Inez started to her feet, and her but now gloomy countenance became radiant with joy.

"He comes!" she cried, "he comes! I hear his step. I would know it from a million—and now his voice!" and tears of joy streamed from her eyes.

The remark of Inez was correct; for Ronald had already entered the Outer Cave, and was now giving orders in a low, rapid tone.

"Quick!" he said, "quick! All—all is lost. If there are any here afraid to die, they may now escape. We shall soon be attacked. Those of you who are willing to stand the brunt of the peril, will join Piketon, quickly as possible. You will find him at the Entrance. He already has his orders. You will obey to the letter his commands. Go, men! I am wounded and faint. Should we never meet again, farewell!" and Ronald extended a hand to each of those bold outlaws, who grasped it in silence, with tearful eyes. Then seizing their weapons, they rushed forth, while Bonardi immediately entered the Chieftain's Chamber, where the bright light, as it fell upon his features and form, exhibited a sight most sad to behold, and where he was greeted with a wiid, universal shriek of alarm.

His face was pale—in fact bloody, bloodless, and ghastly. His features exhibited the expression of great mental and bodily suffering. His eyes were wild and blood−shot—his hair dishevelled, matted, and in some places stained with blood. His dress was disordered, torn, and bloody also. One hand, bloody likewise, was pressed upon his side, where appeared to be a wound.

"Ronald! My God, Ronald!" screamed Inez, who was springing forward to meet him; and throwing up her hands, she staggered back and fell to the ground.

"Oh, sir, you are wounded—are killed, perhaps!" cried Emily, in alarm.

"I have my death wound, Emily, but heed it not. You, Inez, Hetty and Cyntha, must escape! We shall ere long be attacked. I have time to explain nothing. I shall die here. How is Inez, Cyntha?" enquired he, turning to the latter, who with Hetty had rushed to her on her fall, and was now placing her on a sofa.

"Missus dying! She jus gasp um once, massa!" answered the terrified Cyntha.

"Inez, dear Inez!" cried Ronald, darting forward, placing his arm under her head, and supporting her against his breast.

Inez opened her eyes, and looked up into his face. Then she uttered a wild scream, and threw her arms around his neck, where she clung as if fearful of being torn away.

"Oh, God!" groaned Ronald, "this is the most trying moment of all. Inez, Inez,—dear Inez— for God−sake, Inez, look up!—awake!—look up!—you must escape!"

"Escape!" shrieked Inez, starting back her head, and gazing into his face in terror.

"Ay, escape! We shall soon be attacked, and you must not be here to fall into the hands of those accursed minions of the law!"

"And you, Ronald?"

"I cannot escape: I am wounded."

"And could you think your Inez would leave you thus, Ronald? Never, never, never! No, no, no! if you die, Inez will die with you!" and again she threw her arms around his neck, and clung to him wildly. Suddenly she started. "Oh, you are wounded!" she cried. "Oh, let me see it! I will staunch the blood! It shall not, shall not kill you, dear, dear Ronald!"

"'Tis vain, Inez, 'tis vain!" groaned he, straining her to his heart. "I know the wound is mortal. But come, Inez, you must fly! If I know you are safe, I can die content."

"Never, never, never, Ronald! I will not leave you!"

"But, Inez"—and Ronald whispered the conclusion of the sentence in her ear.

Inez trembled, and grew a shade more pale; but still she answered firmly, "I will remain."

"Enough!" and Ronald strained her to his heart again in silence. Then easing her upon the sofa, he sprang to his feet. "Emily," he exclaimed, "you must fly this moment! Hetty and Cyntha will go with you!" and turning to the latter, he placed in her hand a purse of gold. "There, my faithful Cyntha, go! and may you escape and be happy."

"And leave missus?"

"I will tend on her, Cyntha, so no more. Emily, here," and he drew forth a letter. "In this you will find the explanation I promised you, regarding your parents. Do not open it until you hear of my death, which will not be long. It is brief, but comprehensive. I wrote it in haste, since I saw you, for I feared we should never meet again. At the mouth of the cave, a boat awaits you, manned by three trusty followers, who will conduct you to a place of safety. And now, Emily," and his voice faltered, "it only remains to bid you farewell!" and taking her hand, he pressed it to his lips, respectfully.

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Emily, weeping bitterly, "how can I thank you for your generosity?"

"Nay, I need no thanks, Emily. You were a woman, in the hands of a black−hearted villain, and I did but my duty. You are saved, and that villain has paid the penalty."

"Then John is —"

"Dead!" said Ronald, solemnly, concluding the sentence. "But question no farther; you will learn all in time. Oh haste, Emily, and away, ere any thing happens to endanger you!"

"Inez!" exclaimed Emily; and the next moment they were in each others arms, both sobbing bitterly. "Inez, sweet lady, it wrings my heart to leave you; but I will not urge you to go, for I can understand your feelings. While Emily Nevance lives, Inez and Ronald Bonardi will never be forgotten. Farewell, dear Inez; farewell, farewell!" and straining her once more to her heart, she pressed a kiss upon her lips, sprang away, and disappeared into the Outer Cave. Hetty and Cyntha took an affectionate leave, and disappeared also, both weeping. In a few minutes all three were seated in a boat without the cave.

"Farewell," uttered Bonardi, who had followed them to the top of the ladder, waiving his hand solemnly: "Farewell!" The next moment the boat shot away, and turning, Bonardi descended the ladder with a quick step. Drawing forth a key, attached to his person by a small gold chain, he glided behind the ladder, and opened an iron door, which concealed an aperture in the solid rock.

It was the door of a powder magazine.

Hastily taking thence some eight or ten casks, he gazed on them a moment, with a singular smile, and then proceeded to arrange them along the wall, at certain distances from each other, until the two last came within the Inner Cave. He then uncorked, and attached a train of towe, soaked in turpentine, to each. This done, he returned to Inez, clasped her in his arms, cast himself upon a sofa, and whispered in her ear:

"Now, dear Inez, let them come."

In the meantime, the boat, bearing Emily, Hetty and Cyntha, reached the Entrance, which was the juncture of the creek and river Osage, and so called from its being the only point whence the cave could be approached. On either hand was a high bluff, which gave the channel running back to the cave an appearance of being artificial. The bluff on the eastern bank of the Osage, and immediately around the Entrance, was very steep and rocky, covered with a stunted growth of trees and underbrush, so that a large party might be there concealed in ambush. It was here that Emily, and the two females with her, were landed, and then immediately conducted up the steep. As she went up the winding path, she could occasionally perceive, on either hand, a dark figure, crouched in the bushes, with a rifle either resting against his shoulder, or poised and pointed toward the river, whom she rightly conjectured to be of Bonardi's band, and that—but why she knew not—they expected an attack from below. When she reached the brow of the hill, she could perceive the sun shining upon a beautiful and variegated landscape, through a crimson mellow haze, within an hour of the horizon.— At another time perhaps, she would have paused to admire the scenery, and contemplate the rich beauty of light and shade, as, striking some high point, with a golden sheen, the rays of Sol threw a long line of shadow into the quiet valley at its base, or glanced off from the smooth surface of many a stream—not excepting the Osage, and the great Missouri, the latter some several miles distant— as from a polished mirror; but now her thoughts were sad and painful; and she turned from this to her conductor—who here come to a halt, and was looking eagerly in every direction— with an enquiring gaze.

"You'll have to mount and fly, gal," said he, at length, turning to her; "for if I arn't mistaken, it'll be no place for you here shortly. Thar's a body of men coming by land, and another by water;" and he pointed to where the smoke of a steamer indicated its advance up the Osage, some three miles distant. It was this latter, by the way, which Bonardi had discovered from one of the bluffs, that had made him so apprehensive of a sudden attack. "Right round this ere rock," continued the man, "is four blooded horses; but as thar' aint but three o' ye, I suppose the cap'en overrated the number as was to ride 'em, or else his wife 'scapes another way." As he spoke, the party turned the angle of a huge rock, where were found four fine horses, well caparisoned for riders. "Mount, gal, and ride hard to the east, and you'll soon be out o' the way of a scrimmage."

In a few minutes all three were mounted, and thanking him kindly for his services, Emily led the way down the hill, with feelings better imagined than described, while her conductor, turning short around, speedily rejoined his companions.

The party in ambush was commanded by Piketon, who had orders from Bonardi to annoy the party attacking as much as possible, without sacrificing his own men; and, if pressed hard, to escape as best they might, and leave the rest to him; but, under no consideration, to allow a man of them to return to the cave. As soon as the

individual who conducted Emily up the hill returned, he immediately sought the lieutenant, whom he found leaning against a tree, rifle in hand—for since their return, the party, in addition to their other weapons, had armed themselves with rifles and short swords—and gazing down upon the dark waters of the Osage, with a gloomy look and clouded brow.

"How!" exclaimed the lieutenant, suddenly starting at a remark the other now whispered in his ear. "By land, too? Are you sure?"

"Sure!" answered the other.

"What distance from us?"

"About five miles, as near as I could reckon.— I jest catched a glimpse on 'em going behind a hill."

"I feared so, I feared so!" returned the lieutenant, biting his nether lip. "There will be time to give these others one good round, however, and then we must escape. What ho!" he shouted: "Listen all! Comrades, there are two parties approaching to attack us. One comes by water, the other by land. The one by water will shortly be here. We must manage to give the latter one deadly round, and then fly to the Retreat, where are horses in waiting, and thence along the banks of the Osage, following the course of the stream, far back into the country; by which means we shall avoid the others, with whom our numbers are too few to engage in conflict, and where we will remain until the excitement has died away, when those who have wives and children can return for them, and then quietly leave this accursed country forever. Such are the orders of our noble captain, Ronald Bonardi, who is mortally wounded; and who, for his own design, chooses to remain in the cave."

After this, Piketon proceeded to dispose of his men, so as for each to lie in perfect concealment to those below, with orders that so soon as practicable, each was to select his man, and, at the word, to pour a terrible volley of death among them, and then rush up the hill and escape. This being done, all relapsed into silence—a silence to be shortly broken by the awful mandate of death.

The steamer which left St. Louis during the night, was, in the meantime, slowly approaching. The rendezvous of the banditti had been so accurately described by the traitor John, that there was but little danger of those in command mistaking the place; still it required a careful examination of the shore, as they approached, and this examination they were now making. In about twenty minutes she hove full in sight of the concealed bandits, who clasped their rifles with the nervous grasp of determined and desperate men. In ten more she had thrown off her steam, and lay floating,

"Like a thing of life," on the dark bosom of the Osage below them.

"This must be the place," said a deep voice on board. "Yonder is the inlet. Man the boats!"

Instantly a dozen boats suspended to the steamer for the purpose, were lowered into the water, and quickly filled with armed men. And here, ere we proceed, let us give a word or two in explanation.

From the information conveyed by John, it was gathered that the outlaws, who might chance to escape the attack on the Mississippi, would here rally as their stronghold, and doubtless here make their last desperate resistance,—particularly Bonardi, who, he stated, would return hither to seek his wife, and, from his character, be little likely to fly,—consequently this was the place to be immediately sought, to give the final blow of extermination to the banditti. On this information the authorities had acted, and hence the arrival of the steamer for this purpose.

As soon as the boats were manned, a stout figure sprang into the forward one, and stood erect in the bow.

"Six of you," he said, in a low, quick tone, "will remain behind to cover us, and prevent an attack in the rear. The six with myself will now forward to the cave, which we must enter at all hazards. Row, men, row! Fifty dollars to him who first enters the cave! An hundred to him who captures the body of Barton—alias Bonardi—living or dead!"

The words were scarcely out of the speaker's mouth, when six boats shot out from the rest, and entered the channel, each straining as for life to be first at the cave.

"Now then, comrades," whispered Piketon, "pick your men on the river, and do not waste powder! One farewell volley, and then for our horses, as the others must be near."

"But our captain?" said one, enquiringly.

"Fear not for him," answered Piketon. "He has some deep design in view, doubtless, as this was to me his last solemn injunction. Now then, comrades,—ready—fire!"

The last word was drowned in a roar of musketry, that rolled heavily across the Osage, and reverberated from

cliff to cliff, echoing far away into the solitary retreat of many a wild beast, startling him from his lair, while groans, shrieks, and curses, immediately resounded from the boats, where all was consternation and confusion—not less than twenty having fallen under the fire, most of them dead, and the others, with but three exceptions, mortally wounded.

"Ho! pursue them!" shouted a hoarse voice, from one of the boats; and the speaker pointed up the hill, where the bandits were seen making their escape.

Scarcely a minute elapsed, ere the dead and wounded were placed on the deck of the steamer, and the boats touched the store. Leaping at once upon the bank, they darted up the steep acelivity, and some of them had reached within a few yards of the summit, when suddenly all paused, as by common consent, and their faces blanched with absolute terror. The ground beneath them trembled, as by the throes of an earthquake; and then there came a tremendous, heavy, booming sound, seemingly from the bowels of the earth below. For a moment a dead silence ensued; and then wild shrieks, from distant voices, rent the air.

"The cave!—the cave!—they have blown up the cave!"

Horror stricken at this awful announcement, they turned and rushed back to their boats, in wild dismay, only to find, shortly after, this terrible intelligence confirmed by their own observation. Of the party that entered the channel, upwards of fifty in number, some thirty had reached the cave and disappeared, while the others were eagerly pressing forward, when Bonardi, with Inez clasped to his heart, fired the train, and himself, with every soul within, was, in the twinkling of an eye, launched into eternity. As the explosion took place, and the cries ascended from those in the creek, who had escaped, announcing the awful calamity, a voice from the brow of the hill shrieked:

"Oh God! oh God! she is lost!" and Edward Merton reeled to and fro, and finally sank to the earth; while the tall, gaunt figure of Harvey Bernard stood over him, with a look of the most intense anguish depicted on his honest, open features.

"Poor youth!" he murmured. "Alas! poor Emily;" and kneeling by Edward, he wrung his horny hands, and gave vent to his grief in choking sobs, that made his strong, muscular frame quiver. A quick rustling among the bushes startled him. On looking up, he instantly sprang to his feet, staggered back several paces, and uttered a shout of joy.

"Emily!" he shrieked, "alive?"

At the word Emily, Edward bounded to his feet, and saw her, but a few paces distant, rushing toward him.

"Emily!" he gasped, scarcely crediting his senses.

"Edward!" and the next moment they were locked in each others embrace, and so overcome with joy, that for a time all power of utterance was lost; while Bernard, in a delirium of ecstacy, fairly danced about them, and actually so far forgot himself as to kick several stones down the hill, to the no small annoyance of some of the party hurrying up from below.

It was a strange wild meeting, that of the lovers, in that wild region, and at a moment too so awfully terrible, when not less than forty human beings, without a second's warning, had just been ushered into the presence of their Maker; when groans and shrieks from the dying, on the deck of the steamer, were mingling with the hoarse shouts and cries of those who had escaped their untimely fate. It was a strange wild meeting, that of the lovers, and one that by them would never be forgotten.

As the reader is aware, Merton and Bernard had set out in the morning, with a party rising of forty men, to seek the rendezvous of the banditti, rescue Emily, and punish the offenders. We shall not attempt to describe the thoughts and emotions, the hopes and fears, agitating the breast of the former, during that eventful day, (when his mind ran on the perils seemingly surrounding her he loved,) but leave these to the imagination of the reader, for our space is already limited. Suffice, that a hard day's ride of bodily fatigue and mental anxiety, had brought him to the spot where we now find him. When within three miles of the place, Edward had descried the steamer; and divining at once her purpose, had become very much alarmed, lest there should be a fight, wherein, as he thought, Emily must necessarily become involved. Whispering his fears to his companion Bernard, both instantly drove their spurs into their horses' sides, and set rapidly forward, in advance of the others. When they arrived at the foot of the hill, whereon they now stood, they found it too steep for a speedy ascent with their horses, which were already very much blown, and leaping from their backs, they darted up on foot. They had proceeded but a few paces, when they heard the report of a volley of fire−arms, which caused them to redouble their speed. On their

way, they caught a glimpse of the flying bandits, some distance to the left; but heeding them not, they still pressed on, and at length, pale with excitement, and breathless with bodily exertion, they reached the summit. As they came in full view of the steamer, the awful explosion at the cave took place; and Edward, thinking Emily was within, and now lost to him for ever, uttered the words recorded, and sank to the earth.

As to Emily herself, she had ridden, in company with Hetty and Cyntha, some two miles, when she perceived a body of men, about a mile to the right of her, rapidly advancing toward the spot she had but lately quitted, and where she knew the bandits were lying in ambush. Some little distance in advance of the main body, she descried two horsemen, whom her eyes and heart at once told her were Edward and Bernard, Fearful lest the one she loved, with his compan ion, might heedlessly run into an ambush, that would cost both of them their lives, she suddenly wheeled her animal, and, without a word to the others, darted away to intercept them. But in laying out her line of interception, the angle was too abruptly formed, and, in consequence, she had fallen somewhat in the rear. Had they even for a moment glanced to the right, they must have seen her; but with their eyes intent upon one point, she had escaped their observation. When they sprang from their horses, at the base of the hill, she was but a few rods distant. Ere they arrived half way to the summit, she had dismounted and was struggling up after them, but too much exhausted to gain their ears with her voice. Their meeting the reader has already seen.

And now, leaving Edward and Emily to the holy commune of love, and the relation of such other matters as are already familiar to the reader, with a few brief remarks we shall close this chapter.

The party of which Merton and Bernard formed a portion, on seeing them ride forward in such haste, increased their speed, and presently joined them on the hill, where they received the sad intelligence of what had taken place, and also learned that the bandits had effected their escape, without the loss of a man Of those who were in the cave at the time of the explosion, not one could be recognised—so mangled were they, and torn, and blackened with powder. The cave itself, though not utterly demolished, was so rent and shattered—both apartments being blown into one—that those who may chance to view it at the present day, will fail, doubtless, to recognise that almost classic beauty belonging to it prior to and at the date of our story; or, what is more, may even fail to recognise the cave at all. For the benefit of the curious, however, and lest some may deem it a fabulous one, we will here assert that the cave is still in existence, and can be seen by those who may be disposed to seek it.

As the party just arrived soon discovered their presence was no longer necessary, and as the sun was already near the line of the western horizon, they immediately set out upon their return, accompanied by Bernard, Edward and Emily. Hetty and Cyntha soon after joined them, both of whom, to their no small surprise and terror, were immediately taken into custody, to be conveyed to St. Louis for examination; and particularly the latter, who had no papers to show that she was free. About five miles from the Osage, the party found a convenient place, and quartered for the night, during which Cyntha effected her escape, and was never afterwards heard from,—she probably having again joined the escaped outlaws.

At daylight on the following morning, each resumed their journey, much refreshed by a good night's rest, and for some thirty miles traveled in company, when they gradually began to separate, as here and there one after another turned off to seek their nearest course home. Some three hours after nightfall, Bernard, Edward and Emily arrived at Webber's, having traveled the last five miles entirely by themselves.

The party on the steamer remained at the cave during the night, and on the day following, after having interred the remains of all those found in the cave, started upon their return, with what feelings we leave the reader to imagine.

Of the party of Piketon, we can only say they were never again heard of in that country.— What became of them is unknown. Probably they sought some remote place, and perhaps settled down, many of them, into peaceable citizens— who shall say? No little wonderment was created among some of the oldest settlers, to find that here and there an old neighbor had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared—in many cases whole families also—and for a long time it was a difficult matter to reconcile their minds to the fact, that in the persons of those neighbors had existed many of the most formidable members of the dread banditti.

On the night following the one in which Bonardi blew up the cave—wherein Saxton and Niles perished—in a miserable hoved, unfriended and alone, the wretched outcast Curdish breathed his last. The wound in his shoulder, given by Bernard, having mortified, produced his death.

So perish the guilty.

Thus, one after one, in various ways, have we seen our characters disappear, until but a few remain. Well, like to them, one after one, shall we also disappear, and perchance without a friendly hand being raised to record that we have been.

Let us now turn once more to the living of our drama of life, take a farewell view, and then let the curtain descend and shut them from our sight forever.

CHAPTER V.

THE LOVERS—THE MYSTERY UNRAVELLED—THE LETTER— THE FINALE.

It was a beautiful morning, about a week from the return of Emily, and every thing in nature looked bright and animated. A gentle rain had fallen during the night, and the drops were still lingering on leaf and blade and flower, and sparkling in the morning sunlight, like so many diamonds. The air was clear, soft and invigorating; and the light−footed Zephyrs sighed through the forests, rustled the leaves, kissed the beautiful flowers, and caught a thousand sweet sounds of melody to bear away to their frolicsome meetings in Fairy Land.

Before Webber's cottage, on the morning in question, stood a gallant steed, foaming and panting from hard riding; while the rider himself, having entered the cottage, was now standing in the apartment where the gentle Rufus had breathed his last, with one arm thrown lightly around the waist of the graceful Emily Nevance, who, with her soft blue eyes turned sweetly upon him, was gazing with a look of joy, somewhat saddened by grief.

"Oh, Edward," she exclaimed, with animation, "I joy that you have come! I have been watching for you since the first streak of morning gilded the east; for I knew you would select the cool of the day, and ride long ere daylight. Oh, I have been so sad since we buried poor Rufus!" and Emily turned away her head to conceal a tear.

"Well, well, dearest," answered Edward, drawing her fondly to him, and pressing a kiss upon her lips, "let us not forget, while we grieve, that Rufus is happy now. It is a fact that we are prone to grieve too much for departed friends, and thereby oppose our selfishness to the Divine Will. Instead of grieving for the death of a friend, we should rather rejoice that all his troubles are at an end, and that he is now singing immortal songs in the bright regions of glory. We know that all must die, sooner or late—that we are all wending to the Spirit Land—then wherefore grieve that one we love has reached the bright goal before us?"

"I admit your philosophy is good," rejoined Emily, "but still you will allow philosophy has but little to do with the heart, with the affections. Philosophy is the cold emanation of the brain—love the warm offspring of the heart; and the latter, as a general thing, will triumph over the former."

"Your remarks are true," returned Edward, "for such are the selfish propensities of human nature. The heart will for a time gain ascendency over the head: love will triumph over philosophy: such are facts; and yet, as I said before, we should strive to give the latter the asceudency, when we find the former can avail us nothing.— To this end I would fain bring philosophy to my aid here; and yet withal I deeply, most deeply grieve, that one so gentle, so noble as Rufus, should be taken from among us, just in the bright flower of manhood. For himself I deeply grieve, and for his almost heart−broken parents, my heart bleeds in sympathy;" and Edward's voice trembled, and tears filled his eyes.

"Alas!" sighed Emily; "his mother, poor woman, I fear will never recover from the shock."

"Is she then no better?" asked Edward.

Emily shook her head mournfully. "No," she sighed. "As you saw her on the day of the funeral, as you saw her on your departure, three days since, you will find her now. She sits in a state of torpor, twirling her fingers, but takes no heed of what is said, or what is passing around her.— Alas! I fear she will soon follow him."

"And Webber?" asked Edward, with a sigh.

"He bears up as well as can be expected under the circumstances; but it was a hard blow, a very hard blow, to be made childless in one night, and one son, too, to be murdered before his own eyes, in his own house, and then borne away no one knows whither."

"It was indeed," said Merton, solemnly. "And the body of John has never been found?"

"It has not. It is supposed to have been devoured by wild beasts, or thrown into some stream."

"Well," said Merton, somewhat sternly, "he at least deserved his fate. What a black hearted villain!"

"Hush!" exclaimed Emily; "upbraid not the dead! He is gone to be judged for the deeds done in the body. He has suffered the penalty of his misdeeds, has paid the last great debt of nature, and so let us be charitable, and say, `*Requiescat in pace*.' But come, I am detaining you, and you must be faint with your long ride. Let us enter the other apartment, where breakfast awaits us."

"A moment," returned Edward, taking her hand. "I have some news, both good and bad.— With the steamer

which exploded and went down on the night of that terrible fight on the Mississippi, went my father's fortune. He had borrowed on securities, a large amount of specie to send to New Orleans. It was lost, and he is now a ruined man. This is the bad news. The good is, that he has given his consent to our union, which I trust will ere long be consummated."— As he spoke, Emily bent down her eyes, and a modest blush suffused her features.

"It lightens my heart much, dear Edward," she replied at length, "to know that his consent is gained; for somehow I have felt as though I were doing wrong, in accepting your hand contrary to his wishes. For his sake, dear Edward, I regret the loss of his wealth; as it must be a severe blow to one who has labored so long and steadfastly to acquire it."

"The lesson will be a hard, but doubtless beneficial one," returned Edward, "by showing him the mutability of the fabric on which he has concentrated time and talents that might have been used more worthily, not only to the elevation of himself, but of those around him. No one, dear Emily, should set their heart upon gold. Man has nobler duties to perform than the hoarding of wealth. Wealth, properly used, I will admit is a blessing, because by it so many poor human beings can be made comfortable and happy; and yet how few of the wealthy think of this, or act upon it, but, on the contrary, use their gold to oppress, to grind the faces of those who are dependent upon them, and by such means make their wealth a curse."

"Too true—too true," said Emily, musingly; and then looking up into Edward's face, after a moment's pause, with a sweet expression, she added: "By your father's consent, dear Edward, I feel the only barrier to our union removed—for I have already learned who were my parents!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Edward: And pray who are you? and how got you the information?"

"The latter I received from Ronald Bonardi."

"Ronald Bonardi, Emily? you astonish me!"

"You will doubtless be more astonished, when you peruse the letter he gave me. But come, to breakfast now, and then you shall know all. By the way, you remember the stranger you saw here, whom my guardian found in the last stages of starvation, in the vault of the Jew."

"I do."

"He stated to my guardian, on last evening, that he had something important to communicate; and wished all, but myself in particular, to be present. As I had retired to rest, it was deferred until this morning. And now, dear Edward," said Emily, playfully, "who knows but what that communication concerns me very particularly?"

"Who knows?" returned Edward, and they passed into the other apartment.

Some two hours from the foregoing conversation, a group of six individuals were seated in the same apartment where this conversation took place. These consisted of Webber, Bernard and Tyrone, Edward, Emily and the stranger—Mrs. Webber not being present. The expressions on the faces of each, were solemn, even mournful; for the events of the last few days had been of a nature to give a gloomy cast to their countenances, not easily to be erased. The features of Webber himself were pale, sad, and full of the furrows of intense grief and care. Those of the stranger were thin and pale also, but exhibited nothing of that ghastliness so apparent on his first introduction to the reader as the prisoner of the Jew. The expression of his countenance was naturally stern, and there were a few lines in it of a sinister cast. He appeared like one who, to use an old familiar phrase, had seen better days; but one whose constitution had been somewhat broken by irregular habits and dissipation. He was a little turned the middle age of life, and his hair was somewhat grey. After the party had become seated, and a momentary silence elapsed, the stranger, in a voice deep, clear, but slightly faltering, said:

"To do an act of justice, and thereby make a partial atonement for my past crimes, I have requested each and all of you to be present, and listen to my tale."

Every eye was turned upon him, with an enquiring gaze. The stranger noticed this, and seemed for a moment not a little embarrassed; but summoning all his resolution to his aid, he proceeded:

"My story I shall make as brief as possible, for one likes not to dwell on ones misdeeds. My name is Charles Walton—the place of my nativity, England. I was born rich—entered college at a proper age, with bright prospects—fell into bad company—gambled much—drank much— and was finally expelled. My parents shortly after died, and I was left a wealthy heir. In horse−racing, drinking, and petty gambling, I squandered my property; and at the age of thirty, found myself a beggar, a vagabond, and a villain— ready to do almost any deed for money. In this situation I was discovered by one who had known me in better days—a villain who had helped to fleece me—and knowing my character, habits, and desperate situation, he opened to me his devilish heart, offered

me a large sum to carry out a design he had in view, which I accepted, and became his tool. This design was no less than the murder of the only daughter of Sir Walter Langdon, for which I received in advance the sum of ten thousand pounds."

At the mention of the name of Langdon, Emily started and grew pale, while her eyes, fastened upon Walton, and her head bent a little forward, exhibited the most intense eagerness for what was to follow.

"The girl," continued Walton, "by bribing the nurse, I managed to get in my possession. She was a sweet little creature, of three years—my conscience smote me—I could not murder her— and I fled the country, bearing her with me. I took passage for America, and fifteen years ago landed in Boston. I immediately set forth on a tour through the States, taking the child with me, determined to abandon her, so soon as a suitable opportunity presented, whereby she would be bettered by the change. Chance favored me. I tarried one night at a farmer's house, the inmates of which pleased me, and in the morning I departed, leaving the child in their care, but stating I would return in a few days. That farmer's name was William Webber—the child bore that of Emily Nevance."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Webber, while Merton sprang to his feet, and there was a look of surprise on the faces of Bernard and Tyrone. Emily, pale and trembling with excitement, leaned back in her chair, unable to speak. "Go on— go on!" said Webber, quickly; "for I perceive the deep mystery of fifteen years is being unravelled."

"After leaving your house," resumed Walton, addressing Webber, "I came to the West, and for ten years led a dissolute life. My conscience, meantime, often upbraided me for the crime I had been guilty of, and at length I resolved to make at least some slight reparation. My money was now nearly exhausted, but still I had some few thousand dollars remaining, and I returned to the East, with the intent of seeking Emily, proceeding to England, and restoring her to her rights; for I had learned, withal, that her family were all dead, and that the villain who employed me to murder her, being next akin, was now reveling in the halls of her father, rioting upon his own ill−gotten gains. For this purpose, I say, I returned to the East; but alas! when there, my good resolution failed me, and I faltered in my purpose.

"It is hard, gentlemen, for one who has made himself a villain, to come forward and acknowledge it to the world, and be the by−word of jeer in the mouths of his associates. It was this which deterred me, as it has deterred many a wretched being before me, from returning to the paths of honesty. It is a false pride, I will admit, but it is human nature, nevertheless.

"Determined, however, that my journey should not be all in vain—that some good at least should accrue from it—I employed a trusty messenger to convey you a package, (wherein was enclosed the sum of one thousand dollars, and a note explanatory,) with positive instructions to the bearer, that it should be placed in no hands but yours, that he should learn if the child was still living and doing well, that he should answer no questions, and return as speedily as possible."

"Ha!" ejaculated Webber, "this clears up another mysterious event. But go on—go on!"

"My main object in this was the education of Emily; for still it was my intent at some future day to do her justice. Again I returned to the West, and during the four years following, squandered or made way with most of my money. At the end of this period I found my health failing rapidly; and fearful lest death might overtake me, ere the grand error of my life should be repaired, I sought a magistrate, in Cincinnati, and had papers drawn up, stating the full particulars concerning the abduction of the girl, how to prove her identity—in fact, everything essential to the establishing of her in her rights—which I swore to and signed, in the presence of two respectable witnesses, who, together with the magistrate, signed the papers also. These I carried about my person, superscribed to both Emily Nevance and yourself—so that in the event of my dying suddenly, you would probably receive them. After this, I somewhat recovered, and made another tour to the East, with the full determination, if my life was spared long enough, to return with Emily to England. To my surprise and regret, I found you not, and learned you were now living in the Far West. Resolved to see you at all events, I returned again to the West—after having received a full description of the part of the country where you were located—and had actually reached within a few miles of your residence, when, it being just at dark, I was set upon by some three or four ruffians, who seized, stabbed me twice, and drew me aside into a rough cave, where they proceeded to rifle my person; while another—no less a villain than that accursed Jew, from whom you rescued me—perceiving I was still alive, deliberately, in cold blood, grinning upon me the while, stabbed me twice himself, and I knew no more."

"Ha!" ejaculated Webber, breaking in upon the speaker, "this happened some four or five months since?"

"As near as I am able to judge," answered Walton, "it did."

"Then you were the stranger supposed to have been murdered, and whose body had been sunk in the Maramee—the case alluded to in my remarks a few mornings since, Tyrone. But proceed, proceed, for I am anxious for the sequel."

"What followed this," resumed Walton, "I am unable to say; for when consciousness returned, I was in that loathsome dungeon, where you found me, with the Jew standing over me, grinning horribly, more like a thing of hell than earth. Why my life had been spared, and wounds dressed, I knew not then; but afterwards gathered, from different remarks dropped, and hints thrown out by the Jew, that, after his perusal of those papers, the strange and absurd idea of some day marrying Emily, had taken possession of him; and that my life was preserved to be a living witness in enabling him to recover her property and rights. In this insane design I encouraged him, in the hope of some day being released. What I suffered until that release, is beyond the power of language to describe. I shall not attempt it. For some days ere you found me, I had not tasted food, nor seen a living being, save the hideous Jew, who came down but a few hours before to murder me, which something interrupted, and saved my life. Such, friends," concluded Walton, "for you all seem like tried friends to me, is my sad, eventful tale; and I throw myself entirely upon your generosity to pardon me the past, by pledging myself to make all the atonement in my power for the future."

"Your punishment in my opinion, has exceeded your crimes," replied Webber, mildly; "and were this not the case, I am not one of those selfish beings that can withold the right hand of fellowship from him who repents and seeks to atone for his past errors. Charles Walton, there is my hand;" and as he spoke, Webber arose and extended his hand, which the other grasped with warmth, while a tear sparkled in his eye.

"And there is mine," said Tyrone, coming forward.

"And mine," said Merton, following his example.

"Wal, old feller," said Bernard, approaching also, "I guess as how I'll have to gin ye a grip on't tu; for darn me, if I don't think there's some good streaks about ye anyhow, if they be a little mixed up."

"And Emily?" asked Walton, deeply affected.

"O, sir," answered Emily, with a sweet smile, "I am too happy in the present, to bewail the past. If you have done me wrong, from my heart I forgive you, and trust that He who reigns above will do likewise."

"This is too much," said Walton, drawing his hand across his eyes. "I did at least expect rebuke from some of you."

"He who can rebuke a repentant man, himself needs a rebuke," rejoined Merton; "for there must be something wrong, if not base and cowardly in his own heart."

"Them's jest my sentiments!" cried Bernard; "for the man that wont forgive a feller when he up and acknowledges he's done wrong, aint no man at all, whether he's dressed up in broadcloth finery and talks pious or not."

"How incomprehensible, how inscrutable are the ways of Providence!" remarked Webber, musingly, after a pause. "How intricately our web of fate is woven with that of others; between whom and ourselves, many times, there seems not the slightest connection, until a strange order of events reveals to us perhaps, that years agone, and miles apart, unknown to each, each was secretly exercising an influence upon the destiny of the other."

"Most true, dear guardian," said Emily, in reply; "and in my own case, how strangely and strongly this is verified! Read that, dear guardian;" and she placed in his hands the letter given her by Bonardi.

Webber glanced over it hastily, and, as he did so, there was a perceptible start of surprise on his features. "Strange—strange!" said he, "can it be possible this is so?" and he proceeded to read aloud as follows:

"*Dear Emily:*—Pardon the liberty I take in thus addressing you, for it is perhaps the only favor I shall ever ask at the hands of one whom the ties of consanguinity bid me hold most dear. I fancy I see you start with surprise, at the idea of the same blood flowing in the veins of both of us. Such is the fact. Your father and mine were one; but fortune placed a wide disparity between us. You were born to wealth and honor— I to poverty and disgrace. You were born to be the courted of society—I to be the outcast. And if we both had one father, what, you ask, made this disparity? I answer, you were born legally— I illegally. Or, in other words, your mother was married by the laws of the land, in the presence of earthly witnesses—mine, by the laws of honor, in the presence of God only. But enough of this, for my minutes are all numbered. Emily, I am dying of a wound received from the hands of

the father of him whom I have punished for turning traitor to us, and attempting to wrong you. John Webber is dead. But ha! I am wandering from my subject—my thoughts are almost distracted, and so pardon me.

"Some days since, in a conversation with the father of John, I learned of you, and that your birth was involved in mystery. Having learned the whole particulars, and some slight coincidences recurring to my mind, a vague suspicion crossed me that you might be the daughter of Sir Walter Langdon,—who, if living, must be of the same age with yourself; and who, fifteen years ago—about the period when you were brought to Webber's—mysteriously disappeared.

"When I saw you first, in that wild retreat on the mountains of the Osage, I felt my suspicion at once made reality, from your strong resemblance to your father. Gods! Emily, what feelings came over me then! when I thought how that father had spurned me, his own son, from his presence, and was thus the indirect instrument in making me the outlaw I am! But a terrible retribution followed, Emily. Your mother soon after died—your brother was murdered—you were stolen away, and your father and mine died a childless maniac, and his estates passed into the hands of a villain. By those papers destroyed by John, doubtless you might have proven your identity, and gained possession of what is lawfully your own. As matters are now, I fear this cannot be done—still I think it worth the trial; but, at least, you may rest assured your birth is noble and honorable; and this, to one as sensitive as yourself on the subject, cannot but be joyful tidings.

"And now, dear Emily, my sister, I must bid you farewell,—for time presses, and my wound grows painful. I write this a few miles from the cave, which I shall endeavor to reach alive, and see my own loved Inez once again. If I succeed, I shall probably hand you this myself,—if not, you will get it from the hands of another. There are many things of which I wish to speak with you,—but it is now too late, too late. You will doubtless hear my name a by−word of terror, and my memory cursed; but you at least will be char itable and not curse me; you at least will take into consideration the circumstances that have made me what I am; you at least may feel the poor despised outlaw was not so bad as he seemed. If you never behold me again, and Inez survives the loss, I pray you, dear Emily, be to her a friend and sister—for she at least is innocent of crime.

Farewell, farewell!

Ronald Bonardi."

CHAPTER VI.

"How strangely wonderful!" remarked Webber, thoughtfully, as he concluded the letter.— "Were facts like these detailed in a novel, they would be considered wild fancies of the author's brain. But reality often exceeds romance."

"Well," said Tyrone, "all at least seems tending to prove the hitherto unknown Emily Nevance, is henceforth to be known as Lady Langdon; this I am sure is a sweet romance of reality;" and he glanced at Emily, with a smile.

"At least," returned Walton, "if God spares my life, I shall endeavor to make it so."

"Nay, gentlemen," said Emily, archly, smiling sweetly, rising and extending her hand to Edward: "*Not* Lady *Langdon*, and so please you all."

"Ah!" exclaimed Edward, rapturously, pressing her hand in his, "have you forgotton, Emily, that when I was rich you were about to refuse me, because you were poor; and now that the tables are turned, I —"

"Hush!" interrupted Emily, placing her hand upon his mouth.

"That's right, Emily, that's right!" cried Bernard, rubbing his hands and smiling "Don't let him make a fool o' himself now, jest at the windup like."

Edward made no reply, but drawing the blushing Emily aside, whispered something in her ear, stole a kiss, and both were happy.

Six months from the foregoing events produced a great change in the positions of our characters. Mrs. Webber had followed her son to the grave. Bernard had returned to settle in the East−−where he afterwards married and lived a happy life. Tyrone had set up in his profession of lawyer, in St. Louis—a profession in which he afterwards distinguished himself. Edward had been united to the lovely Emily; and accompanied by Webber,—who, after the death of his family, had disposed of his property—and by Hetty, who had been released, and who begged to accompany Emily in the capacity of a servant—and by Walton, who, true to his promise, determined to restore Emily to her rights,—they had set sail for England, where the latter soon after obtained possession of what was rightfully her own, and where she and Edward lived in happy affluence, to tell their children many a wild story of the Backwoods of America, and of their own singular connection with the Bandits of the Osage. The End.